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THE EPOCH TIMES

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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.

- ◆ Gynecological diseases: Infertility, Ovarian Cysts, Menopause, Irregular menstruation, Underlying disease, Breast disease, and Postpartum disease.
- ◆ Pediatrics: Respiratory diseases, Digestive diseases, Urinary diseases, Pseudomyopia.
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CANCER UP CLOSE

My Experience With Short-Term Disability, Out-of-Network Hospital

The final stage of life-saving cancer treatment includes paperwork and waiting for the bill

MICHELE GONCALVES

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

When I was diagnosed with stage 3 rectal cancer two years ago (almost to the day), I really didn't think about the consequences such a serious illness could have on my job, my finances, or what my disability benefits were.

The only thing I cared about at that moment was finding a team of doctors I felt comfortable with who could help me with the difficult journey ahead. While this approach ended up working out favorably for me, in hindsight, I wish I had been more informed of the benefits and insurance coverage I was entitled to.

I remember sobbing as I typed the devastating email to my boss telling him I had advanced-stage cancer and was going to be seeking medical leave. I was totally helpless and didn't even know what to do. He was kind and gave me the telephone number to initiate the short-term disability application with the third party to which my company had outsourced this.

The process was a bit overwhelming. I cried as I spoke to the customer service reps, trying to answer their detailed questions about my situation, after being diagnosed only a week earlier. I recall filling out many different forms, and there being one document that had to be faxed back within 24 hours. Although it was a bit of pressure, I managed to get everything done in time. Within a week, I was assigned a case manager who then followed me during the entire time I was out on disability.

Something I didn't know going in was that my job would only be legally protected for 12 weeks under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), although I would be eligible for short-term disability for 26 weeks. After 12 weeks, any employer technically has the right by law to post out your job if they want. That did make me feel a bit unsettled. So, during my months of treatment, I sent periodic emails to my boss asking him if my job was secure. Thankfully, I had worked with him for 20 years, and he reassured me that there were no plans that my job would be given to someone else.

On a more positive note, another thing I wasn't aware of is that you can file for short-term disability more than once in a year. In my situation, my cancer treatment was being done in phases, with some periods of rest in between. My case manager explained that if I went back to work for at least 31 calendar days after my first leave expired, I could apply for another 26 weeks of short-term disability when the next set of treatments began, so that's what I did. The first 26 weeks covered my radiation and first surgery, while the second 26 weeks covered chemotherapy and my second surgery. My

boss was very generous and allowed me to work from home for about three months until I was ready to reapply.

The last point about short-term disability I didn't realize is that your income coverage during this period can vary, and depends on the deal that your employer has with the insurance company. In my case, I was again very lucky and received my full paycheck during my entire leave. From what I have heard, most short-term disability plans offer only a portion of your salary. That's something very important to be aware of.

Speaking of money, I recall having a conversation with my insurance carrier after I made the decision to get treated at an out-of-network hospital. I was trying to understand the impact of this choice, and asked the customer service representative, "Am I going to get a bill for \$200,000 after my treatments are done?"

Her advice was simple. She said, "You need to have a conversation with your hospital and find out how they are going to bill you. It has nothing to do with us. If it is an automatic balance bill, meaning whatever we as the insurance carrier do not cover, they will invoice you the difference, and it could add up."

In hindsight, I wish I had been more informed of the benefits and insurance coverage I was entitled to.

That advice stuck with me, and led me to request a meeting with the cancer center about their invoicing practices when I attended a three-day orientation, although that wasn't part of my original itinerary. I felt more at ease when they explained that they would be offering me "financial support" by removing certain percentages of the uncovered costs before invoicing me, and also offered monthly installment plans to help me pay back the bills if I needed it.

So far, I feel that the amount of money I have paid out of pocket for my treatment has been reasonable. I just hope that continues, as the medical billing is about one year behind.

This concludes my cancer series. It's been an honor sharing my experiences over these past 24 articles. I hope that I was able to help inform and better prepare those embarking on the long and difficult journey of cancer treatment. Even though the path may look overwhelming, just remember that God is with you, and you can make it to the other side.

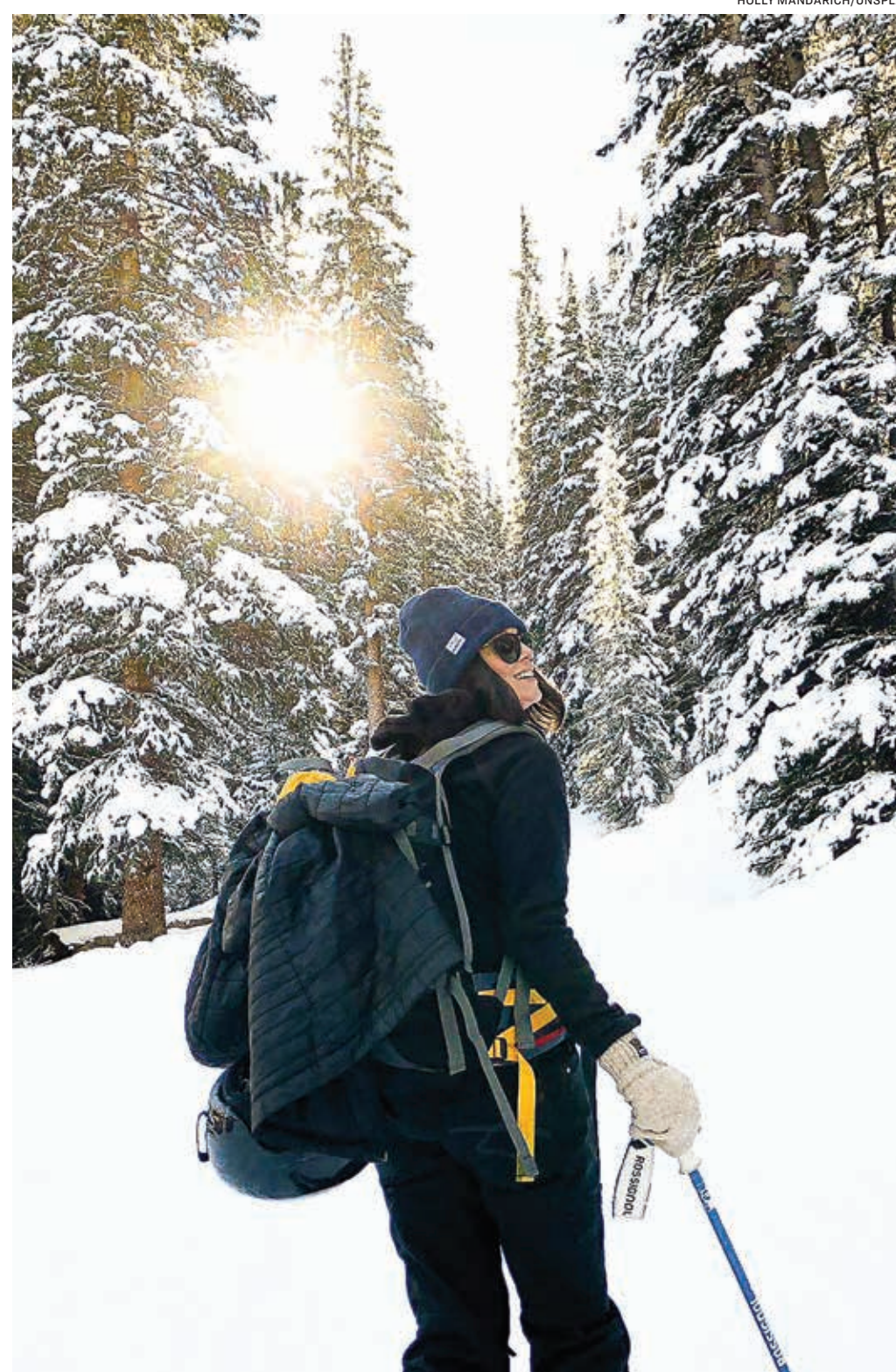
Until then, breathe deep, be kind, and take it one day at a time.

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

FIZKES/SHUTTERSTOCK



Many employees may not be aware of supports available to them as they face a cancer diagnosis, including being able to apply for short-term disability more than once in a year.



HOLLY MANDARICH/UNSPASH



EBERHARD GROSSGASTEGER/UNSPASH

Take in the rays and you'll do more than feel warmed, you'll be feeding your body a critical nutrient.

THE ROOT CAUSE

Vitamin D: You Need It for Much More Than Your Bones

This crucial nutrient can be tough to get enough of if you aren't spending time in sunshine

ARMEN NIKOGOSIAN

Vitamin D plays a greater role in our health than many of us realize. Its importance in maintaining strong bones has been known for nearly a century, but what else does it do?

Vitamin D, or cholecalciferol, was 1 of 13 essential vitamins discovered by researchers in the early 20th century. After a long search, its discovery culminated in a cure for rickets, a painful childhood bone disease. Due to this medical victory over a bone disease, there's been a strong association between vitamin D and bone health ever since.

While vitamin D is essential for health and firmly entrenched as one of the four fat-soluble vitamins (along with vitamins A, E, and K), it isn't technically a vitamin. It's generated by the human body with sunlight exposure and is found only in a few natural foods, such as fish and egg yolks. It behaves more like a sunlight-dependent hormone than a vitamin, but that doesn't change its important position in our health. Interestingly, as we have transitioned from an active outdoor lifestyle to a more sedentary indoor lifestyle, we have become more and more dependent on fortified foods and supplementation to maintain adequate vitamin D levels.

This nutrient is so important to our continued health that varying skin tones throughout the world have been modified to ensure adequate intake. While there are many reasons for these variations in our skin color, a primary driver for lighter skin color, as humans migrated away from the equator into colder climates,

was the need for adequate vitamin D levels as the sun's rays became weaker.

Knowing the conservatism and practicality of human physiology, there must be more benefit from all this effort than just strong bones. Vitamin D is important to our health because it allows us to use calcium in an efficient manner. Calcium is critically important to how our bodies work, with hundreds of functions that require it. Calcium is one of the elemental building blocks of life on our planet with its uses including muscle contraction, blood clotting, blood pressure regulation, normal brain function, insulin utilization, and reproduction to name only a few.

Today, there is little debate in the medical community on the importance of vitamin D. Unfortunately, the actual blood level needed to achieve minimal, adequate, or optimal vitamin D levels isn't so clear. These are definitions that are still evolving and there is still no consensus on what an optimal level of vitamin D is. Vitamin D testing has been one of the top Medicare labs ordered by doctors for many years now, so we know doctors are ordering and looking at these levels. Are their vitamin D targets effective for optimal or even adequate calcium delivery and function?

Most conventional doctors view a level of less than 20 ng/mL of 25 dihydroxyvitamin D (the active form of vitamin D in the body) as a deficiency and will supplement to raise it. A level of between 20 and 30 ng/mL is considered borderline and will be supplemented in certain cases, such as osteoporotic women. A normal vitamin D level is considered anywhere within the broad range of 30–100 ng/mL.

Getting back to the origins of vitamin D discovery, these levels were established primarily with bone health in mind. Maintaining a level of 30 or higher, with adequate calcium intake, should give most of us strong and healthy bones. What about all the other functions of calcium in the body? Would a vitamin D level of 32 be enough to ensure proper

Vitamin D is generated by the human body with sunlight exposure and is found only in a few natural foods, such as fish and egg yolks.

immune function? A growing body of research points to levels of 60 or greater for optimal immune function.

From a functional medicine viewpoint, vitamin D is a critical component in optimal immune system response. There's a large variety of immune cells that perform a broad range of functions, including turning on and off inflammation and they all require calcium to work properly. These connections with the inflammatory response are likely responsible for vitamin D's diversity of effects, such as decreased rates of cancer and cardiovascular disease.

A functional medicine workup requires optimal vitamin D levels. This is essential when treating any disease involving inflammation and the immune system. We target blood levels between 60 and 80 ng/mL. For a person who lives in a mild climate and spends the majority of their day outside, these levels may not be terribly difficult to obtain. However, in today's world, the majority of people don't meet this criteria and spend most of their day indoors. This can be further compounded in the winter months by shorter days and colder weather at higher latitudes.

For these people (i.e. most of us), we need to go beyond the conservative recommendations of 600 IU per day from The Institute of Medicine (IOM). By dosing vitamin D at 5000 IU per day, we can usually achieve optimal levels in most individuals.

Some individuals, particularly those with dark skin, obesity, advanced age, chronic gut issues, and chronic inflammation may require higher doses. While vitamin D toxicity is an extremely rare but real occurrence, higher doses can pose a more real danger with hypercalcemia or increased blood calcium levels. If dosing beyond 5000 IU is necessary, then pairing vitamin D with vitamin K2 can decrease the chance of this adverse event. Vitamin K2, or menaquinone, is a bacterial by-product produced by our gut bacteria or from fermented foods such as natto and some cheeses. Vitamin K2 improves calcium absorp-

tion in the gut and therefore reduces the risk for hypercalcemia when using high doses of vitamin D.

While fears of vitamin D toxicity are overblown in my opinion, the piece about elevated levels of calcium in the blood is real and years of high dose supplementation could contribute to calcification of the arteries, joints, and other soft tissues. If you think you need more than 5000 IU daily, enlist the aid of a professional to guide your supplementation in the safest and efficient manner possible.

Don't forget sun exposure. This is still the most efficient and healthiest way to maintain optimal vitamin D levels. It has been shown that as little as 13 minutes of sun exposure per day around noon in the United Kingdom during the summer months can maintain a normal vitamin D level. Thirty minutes of sun exposure in these conditions is equivalent to about 10,000–20,000 IU of vitamin D per day. Weather permitting, always start with sun exposure, keeping in mind the negatives side of sun exposure such as burns, skin aging, and increased skin cancer risk.

Many studies over the years have established increased energy, improved mood, and lower rates of cancer and cardiovascular disease when optimal vitamin D levels between 60 and 80 ng/mL were achieved. In my practice, this is the first step. Lower levels of vitamin D will place a ceiling on the effect of other treatments targeting inflammation and the immune system.

Achieving vitamin D levels of 60–80 ng/mL can be an easy and safe starting point in your journey for optimal health.

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



SHUTTERSTOCK



How to Age-Proof Your Life

Experts weigh in on protecting your health and wealth for years to come

CONAN MILNER

The ancient world is full of stories about quests for immortality. We've never managed to transcend death, but we have developed various means of postponing it.

Modern technology (especially indoor plumbing) has made strides toward allowing more of us to live longer. At the dawn of the 20th century, the average U.S. lifespan was less than 50 years old. Today, the average is close to 80, with a growing number of Americans living into their 90s and beyond.

But for some, these extra decades may feel like more of a burden than a blessing. In the 1960s, people could expect to live only about a decade after retirement. Now, many live three decades past retirement, leaving many seniors fearful their resources could give out before they do.

In the book "AgeProof: Living Longer Without Running Out of Money or Breaking a Hip," the authors look at the

parallels between health and wealth, and how to better preserve both as we age. Written by the Today Show's financial expert Jean Chatzky and Cleveland Clinic chief wellness officer Dr. Michael Roizen, "AgeProof" confronts the harsh realities of growing old, with proven strategies for maximizing our physical and financial resources.

Where Health and Wealth Meet

The most conspicuous place that money and well-being coincide is in health care expenses. The more chronic conditions you have to manage, the more your money goes out the window. In addition to paying more for insurance, your out-of-pocket health care costs eat away at your retirement savings. That's assuming you have savings to draw from.

A 2016 report from the Insured Retirement Institute found that nearly half of American baby boomers have nothing stashed away for retirement and expect to primarily live on their Social Security payments. Throw into the mix several thousand dollars' worth of credit card debt and a handful of chronic health conditions, and you can see why a growing number of seniors face a bleak financial future.

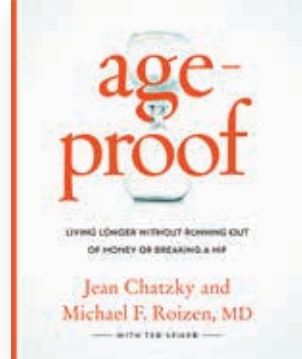
However, according to "AgeProof," we can take simple steps to lessen the burden of growing old with small lifestyle changes today. In fact, 85 percent of U.S. health care costs stem from managing chronic diseases, mostly caused by factors we can control: ingesting toxins (such as tobacco), making poor food choices, lacking in physical activity, and not managing stress. "Genetics do play a role, but they are much less important than your lifestyle choices," said Roizen.

We all know we should eat better, exercise more, and save money for a rainy day, but why is it so hard to put into practice? According to Chatzky, we fail to see the big picture. Instead, we live for the moment and lack empathy for our future selves.

“Genetics do play a role, but they are much less important than your lifestyle choices.”

Dr. Michael Roizen, Cleveland Clinic chief wellness officer

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85 percent of U.S. health care costs stem from managing chronic diseases, mostly caused by factors we can control.

"Human beings are not wired to make good decisions when it comes to our health and wealth," she said. "One of the big reasons is that we're so involved in the present. We want it now."

Delaying gratification may not come easy, but research shows that cultivating this skill is a sign of future success. Chatzky points to the famous Stanford marshmallow experiment from the 1960s and '70s. In these studies, children were asked to choose between an immediate, small reward (a marshmallow, a cookie, or a pretzel) and a larger reward, if they were willing to wait. Researchers found that the children who were able to hold out for the larger payoff were more successful later in life: They received better SAT scores, obtained higher education levels, and maintained a leaner body mass index.

Humans have long been seduced by the live-for-the-moment mentality, but today, there are more ways to enable it than ever before. Why eat healthy when junk food is tasty, convenient, and cheap? Why exercise when you can camp out on the couch and binge-watch Netflix? Why save for an extravagant purchase when you can buy it now with a credit card or a high-interest loan?

Everyone indulges once in a while, but succumbing to instant gratification as a life strategy has taken a huge toll. Two-thirds of the U.S. population are overweight or obese, and nearly half don't pay off their credit cards every month. According to a recent survey from the Federal Reserve, the average U.S. household owes more than \$15,000 in credit card debt, at an average interest rate of 15 percent. That means just carrying this debt costs about \$2,250 per year.

The sooner you take steps to preserve your health and wealth, the less struggle you'll likely experience in your golden years. But Chatzky and Roizen agree: It's never too late to start.

Fighting Stress With Strategy

According to a 2015 survey by the American Psychological Association, 72 percent of Americans reported being stressed about money at least some of the time in the past month, and 22 percent reported experiencing extreme stress.

Many of these financial woes were related to health care. About 15 million people under age 65 will wind up spending all of their savings on medical bills. Even with insurance, about 10 million will face medical bills they can't pay.

If your health and finances are suffering, you probably don't want to think about it. Who can plan for the future while living paycheck-to-paycheck with no time to fix healthy meals and no energy for exercise? These subjects are painful to address, and



the stress they cause can be a major source of illness, leading to a vicious downward spiral. Chronic stress leads to a weaker immune system and symptoms like back pain, headaches, anxiety, and depression. It may eventually contribute to heart disease, strokes, cancer, and more.

Because the stresses of health and wealth are such a sore spot, we often choose flight over fight when dealing with them. "The leading stress relievers in America are alcohol and TV. They're useful for getting you through the moment, but when you're through, the stress is still there," said Roizen. "With financial stress, you have to deal with the issue and get rid of it for the stress to go away."

"The same with health stress," said Chatzky. "You can't take a bubble bath and expect it to make it all better."

The authors say meditation can be a good start at tackling a stressful situation (because you make better decisions when your thinking is clear). But in order to resolve your health or financial stress for good, you have to tackle the problem head-on.

The first step is looking at the data. Painful as it may be, you have to face the

music, and the sooner the better. What do you earn? What do you owe? Are you spending more than you make? What debt holes do you need to plug to keep your financial ship afloat?

"AgeProof" also offers simple metrics for assessing health. For example, if your waist measurement is more than half your height, it's an indication of too much abdominal fat. This is dangerous because the fat secretes inflammatory chemicals and puts pressure on the internal organs, leading to chronic illness. Can you get out of a chair without pushing yourself up with your hands? That's a sign of core strength.

We live for the moment and lack empathy for our future selves.

"These are important measures of where you're starting," said Chatzky. "Once you've got that, then you can figure out what steps you need to take in order to get to where you want to be."

For many of us, just the thought of contemplating these numbers means more stress. Yet stress isn't all bad; it can serve as motivation for change. Once you take a sober look at your health and finances, you're more likely to adjust your habits.

"Any help we can give to ourselves to do the right thing is really valuable," said Chatzky.

Success by Default

Once you're ready for change, how do you make a lifestyle leap that will stick? Chatzky and Roizen say the secret is not will power, but automation.

For example, if you are set up to have part of your paycheck automatically deposited into a 401(k) or health savings account, you don't have to think about saving money for retirement. Likewise, if you make healthy breakfasts and lunches ahead of time, you'll be less tempted by junk when hunger strikes.

"All of these things enable us to default to better habits. That serves us really well in the long term," Chatzky said.

Much of what you do is already an automated process. Research from Duke

University finds that 40 percent of our day is guided by habits, not conscious decisions. So rather than quitting each of your bad habits cold turkey, "AgeProof" advises finding replacement habits for each one. This strategy involves fewer struggles because it's more in line with how our brain works.

"There's a lot of research that shows that if you can come up with a substitute habit and figure out a way to incorporate that into your life, you're going to be better off and more successful in getting it done," Chatzky said.

For example, Roizen says that among his patients, those who replaced the couch in front of their TV with a stationary bike were the most successful at reversing Type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, or heart disease.

You don't have to change everything at once. In fact, Chatzky and Roizen advise taking it slowly. Pick one habit you want to change, and give it a few weeks to take hold. The authors say the strategies you develop from one example will give you the strength and stamina to overcome the next health or financial hurdle.

HEALTHY HABITS

Why New Year's Resolutions Fail and How to Make Them Work

Starting with an enjoyable new goal will give you the momentum and energy for tougher new habits



ROMANOVA ANNA/SHUTTERSTOCK

JAYA JAYA MYRA

Many people see the new year as a great time to set goals. It's a "new year, new you" mentality but research from US News and World Report shows that only 20 percent of us succeed with our goals. In other words, 80 percent of us are likely to fail. Yikes, why is this?

The main reason that New Year's resolutions fail, in my opinion, is due to two compounding factors. The first is that many people don't know how to create new habits. Creating habits is hard work. It requires consistency in a new routine and working towards your goal every day. Consistency is the only way to create new neural connections in the brain that support what you're working towards. Once new neural connections are formed your new routine will become a habit and will be much easier to maintain, but getting there is the challenge.

If you've moved beyond this hurdle, kudos to you, but you still may not succeed unless you've tackled the second problem: most

people don't have a daily routine doing something enjoyable.

How can you expect yourself to keep a New Year's resolution regarding something that you've struggled with when you don't even do something daily that you're good at and you enjoy? Think of it as low energy output vs. high energy output. It takes much less effort to do fun things or relaxing things than it does to do challenging ones, right? Right. No matter how mindful you are, we all have limited time and energy to get everything done: how much energy is realistic to put towards a new difficult goal, vs. keeping up with everything already on your plate?

If you create a daily routine doing something you enjoy before you set any other kind of resolution, you'll have given yourself some momentum. This will support the kind of confidence and commitment you need to take on a tougher goal.

Cultivating happiness through this new daily habit also gives you more energy to accomplish the rest of your goals. People who are happier are healthier and have a more positive outlook on life. People with a consistent daily routine also feel more confident in themselves, because the mind craves consistency in order to be healthy.

Now let's look at the low energy output vs. high energy output paradigm. When you acclimate yourself to constantly putting a low amount of energy into something new, it's relatively easy to increase that to a high energy output; more-so than it would be to go from nothing to everything

all at once. It's much harder to get a sitting stone to roll than to speed up a stone that's already rolling. In other words, small mindful habits turn into bigger ones, giving you the ability to make difficult changes.

If you create a daily routine doing something you enjoy before you set any other kind of resolution, you'll have given yourself some momentum.

I have a few mindful things I do daily that help me stay positive, focused and happy. One is to start each day with a cup of tea. Another daily habit is to go for a long walk. I do both of these things because I enjoy them, not because I feel obligated to. Both of these things give me the support I need to tackle my bigger goals. What will it be for you? What can you commit to each day that makes you happy?

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

AGE WELL

Body Fat May Hamper Your Thinking as You Age

New study reveals link between BMI and certain type of intelligence

WHITNEY BAXTER

Having less muscle and more body fat may affect how flexible our thinking becomes as we get older, according to a new study.

Researchers also found that changes in parts of the immune system could be responsible for the effect.

These findings could lead to new treatments that help maintain mental flexibility in aging adults with obesity, sedentary lifestyles, or muscle loss that naturally happens with aging.

Aging, Muscle, and Body Fat

The study looked at data from more than 4,000 middle-aged to older UK Biobank participants, both men and women. The researchers examined direct measurements of lean muscle mass, abdominal fat, and subcutaneous fat, and how they were related to changes in fluid intelligence over six years.

According to one theory of intelligence, general intelligence is divided into fluid intelligence and crystallized intelligence. Fluid intelligence is the ability to solve novel reasoning problems, while crystallized intelligence is the ability to deduce secondary relational abstractions.

Fluid intelligence is inductive

or synergetic. Its conclusions don't automatically follow from their premises. Crystallized intelligence is deductive or asynergetic. Its conclusions do follow automatically from their premises.

The researchers discovered that people mostly in their 40s and 50s who had higher amounts of fat in their mid-section had worse fluid intelligence as they got older. Greater muscle mass, by contrast, appeared to be a protective factor. These relationships stayed the same even after taking into account chronological age, level of education, and socioeconomic status.



VGS/STOCKSTUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK

"Chronological age doesn't seem to be a factor in fluid intelligence decreasing over time," co-author Auriel Willette said, assistant professor of food science and human nutrition at Iowa State University. "It appears to be biological age, which here is the amount of fat and muscle."

Generally, people begin to gain fat and lose lean muscle once they hit middle age, a trend that continues as they get older. To overcome this, implementing exercise routines to maintain lean muscle becomes more important. Co-author Brandon Klinedinst, a doctor-

ate student in neuroscience, said that exercising, especially resistance training, is essential for middle-aged women, who naturally tend to have less muscle mass than men.

Immune System Changes

The study also looked at whether changes in immune system activity could explain links between fat or muscle and fluid intelligence. Previous studies have shown that people with a higher body mass index (BMI) have more immune system activity in their blood, which activates the immune system in the brain and causes problems with cognition. BMI only takes into account total body mass, so it has not been clear whether fat, muscle, or both jump-start the immune system.

In this study, in women, changes in two types of white blood cells, lymphocytes and eosinophils, explained the entire link between more abdominal fat and worse fluid intelligence. In men, a completely different type of white blood cell, basophils,

Greater muscle mass, by contrast, appears to be a protective factor.

explained roughly half of the fat and fluid intelligence link. While muscle mass was protective, the immune system didn't seem to play a role.

While the study found correlations between body fat and decreased fluid intelligence, it is unknown at this time if it could increase the risk of Alzheimer's disease.

"Further studies would be needed to see if people with less muscle mass and more fat mass are more likely to develop Alzheimer's disease, and what the role of the immune system is," Klinedinst said.

Starting a New Year's resolution now to work out more and eat healthier may be a good idea, not only for your overall health, but to maintain healthy brain function.

"If you eat all right and do at least brisk walking some of the time, it might help you with mentally staying quick on your feet," Willette said.

This article was originally published by Iowa State. Republished via Futurity.org.

Researchers have found a link between fluid intelligence, which is used in novel reasoning, and reduced lean muscle mass compared to abdominal fat and subcutaneous fat.

Harmful Ideas That Weaken Generation Z

Today's young people live in an age of unprecedented prosperity but suffer mood disorders that sap their ability to thrive.

Being immersed in paranoid concerns undermines one's ability to function and thrive

TYLER BRANDT

It's a tough time for Generation Z. Mental health problems, specifically mood disorders like depression and anxiety, are skyrocketing. Gen Z is the least likely to report good or excellent mental health and the most likely to report poor or fair mental health. Suicide rates for U.S. teens and young adults are the highest ever.

As a 23-year-old Gen-Zer who has dealt with these issues personally and has seen the impact on friends and loved ones, it breaks my heart.

On the path of bettering my mental health and trying to help others, I sought explanations on why things have gotten so bad and found a compelling hypothesis in the work of social psychologist Jonathan Haidt and legal scholar Greg Lukianoff.

In their co-authored book, "The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure," Haidt and Lukianoff examine Gen Z's mental health problem. They argue that young people have been immersed in a world characterized by paranoid concerns of safety, which distorts their thinking and is detrimental to their mental well-being.

"Many university students are learning to think in distorted ways, and this increases their likelihood of becoming fragile, anxious, and easily hurt," they say.

Haidt and Lukianoff claim "three Great Untruths" negatively impact the mental well-being of today's youth. They also propose ways to counteract those untruths, which in turn, will produce a happier and more well-adjusted life. These great untruths are:

- 1. The Untruth of Fragility:** What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Weaker
- 2. The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning:** Always Trust Your Feelings
- 3. The Untruth of Us Versus Them:** Life Is a Battle Between Good People and Evil People

And in order to qualify as a Great Untruth, it has to meet three criteria:

1. It contradicts ancient wisdom (ideas found widely in the wisdom works of literature of many cultures)
2. It contradicts modern psychological research on well-being
3. It harms the individuals and communities who embrace it

The Untruth of Fragility:

What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Weaker

It was philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who said, "That which does not kill us, makes us stronger." Nietzsche's words could be the antithesis of the current sentiment.

To give a biological example of what doesn't kill us makes us stronger, Haidt and Lukianoff discuss the rising rates of peanut allergies. Until the mid-1990s, peanut allergies were very rare (only four out of 1,000 kids under the age of 8 had one). But by 2008, the rate had tripled. Why? Haidt and Lukianoff claim that "peanut allergies were surging precisely because parents and teachers had started protecting children from exposure to peanuts back in the 1990s."

In 2015, a study of 640 allergy-prone infants was conducted, wherein half of the group was exposed to peanuts until the age of five and the remaining half was protected. Only three percent of the exposed group developed an allergy whereas 17 percent of the protected group developed one.

So in an attempt to protect kids from harm, we might actually cause them more harm. This isn't only true of biological systems but is also true of economic and political systems, as well as our own lives. Nassim Nicholas Taleb, the author of the book "Antifragile," puts it this way:

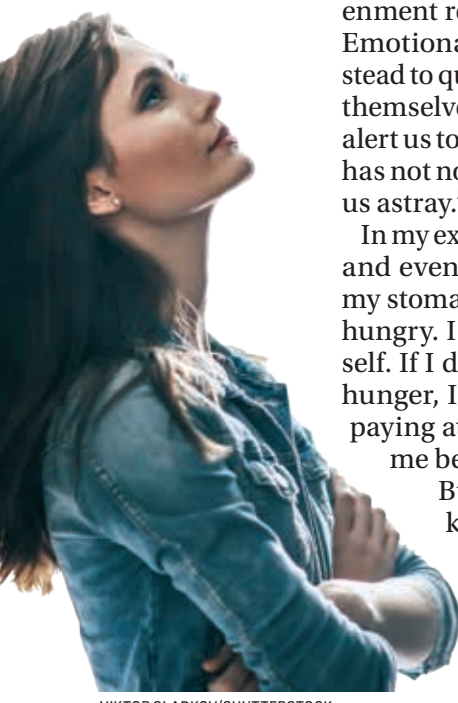
"We have been fragilizing the economy, our health, political life, education, almost everything ... by suppressing randomness and volatility. Just as spending a month in bed ... leads to muscle atrophy, complex systems are weakened, even killed, when deprived of stressors. Much of our modern, structured world has been harming us with top-down policies and contraptions which do precisely this: an insult to the antifragility of systems. This is the tragedy of modernity: as with the neurotically overprotective parents, those trying to help are often hurting us the most."

Haidt and Lukianoff connect this desire to avoid threats to the rise of "safetyism," which is characterized by safe spaces, trigger warnings, microaggressions, bias response teams, "matrices of oppression," and call-out culture. Within this

“Many university students are learning to think in distorted ways, and this increases their likelihood of becoming fragile, anxious, and easily hurt.”

"The Coddling of the American Mind"

Gen Z is the least likely to report good or excellent mental health and the most likely to report poor or fair mental health.



VIKTOR GLADKOV/SHUTTERSTOCK

culture, many are led to believe that they are fragile and need constant protection from the outside world. This has caused many young people to develop overcautious and neurotic tendencies, wherein they avoid challenging circumstances to avoid harm.

So just as avoiding peanuts at an early age can harm us in the long run, avoiding "unsafe" opinions and conversations can harm us by making us oversensitive to everything. It is easy to see how a climate like this can contribute to anxiety. Young people are taught to see harm and danger where there is none.

To counteract the fragility trend, Haidt and Lukianoff encourage us to "[seek] out challenges (rather than eliminating or avoiding everything that 'feels unsafe.')

The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning:

Always Trust Your Feelings

The second Great Untruth has been the triumph of emotional reasoning, wherein subjective feelings are heralded above objective truth. While it could be good that today's youth are more in touch with their emotions than previous generations, the authors contend there's been an overcorrection. We've actually de-emphasized the power of objectivity and rationality, and have lauded the mistrust of always trusting our feelings.

Haidt and Lukianoff explain it this way: "Sages in many societies have converged on the insight that feelings are always compelling, but not always reliable. Often they distort reality, deprive us of insight, and needlessly damage our relationships. Happiness, maturity, and even enlightenment require rejecting the Untruth of Emotional Reasoning and learning instead to question our feelings. The feelings themselves are real, and sometimes they alert us to truths that our conscious mind has not noticed, but sometimes they lead us astray."

In my experience, feelings are important and even essential. For example, when my stomach grumbles, it's a cue that I'm hungry. I decide to eat and nourish myself. If I didn't heed my body's feeling of hunger, I would lose energy. Therefore, paying attention to a bad feeling makes me better off.

But sometimes, feelings are just kind of there and aren't reflective of reality. When having a bout of anxiety, my feelings tell me, "Something is wrong! Pay attention now! Make sure you're not having

a heart attack!" In reality, I'm not going to die, it's just my fight-or-flight mechanism activated at an improper time. If I trusted my anxiety all the time, I would believe myself to be in constant danger. That is not the case.

Unfortunately, it's becoming more commonplace for young people to think that they are in constant danger. Lukianoff specifically noticed this after he checked himself into cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and had a realization that the thought patterns he was taught to avoid were affecting society at large. He learned that irrational and persistent thoughts can cause negative beliefs and emotions. But by practicing CBT, one can be trained to think in more productive ways to overcome negative feelings.

Some specific negative thought patterns include, but aren't limited to, the following:

Emotional Reasoning: Letting your feelings guide your interpretation of reality. "I feel anxious, therefore this environment is dangerous."

Catastrophizing: Focusing on the worst possible outcome and seeing it as most likely. "If I fail this test, I'll never get a job."

Overgeneralizing: Perceiving a global pattern of negatives on the basis of a single incident. "I always fail at everything I try."

Dichotomous Thinking: Viewing events or people in all-or-nothing terms. "Nobody ever wants to hang out with me."

We've de-emphasized the power of objectivity and rationality, and have lauded the mistruth of always trusting our feelings.

Mind Reading: Assuming you know what people think without having sufficient evidence of their thoughts. "My boss probably thinks I'm incompetent."

So imagine if a person exhibited these distorted thought patterns. You could easily see how that would make them more anxious and depressed. Perhaps you might notice some distortions you exhibit. I certainly do.

To counteract the emotional reasoning trend, Haidt and Lukianoff encourage us

to "[free ourselves] from cognitive distortions (rather than always trusting [our] initial feelings)."

The Untruth of Us Versus Them:

Life Is a Battle Between Good People and Evil People

Just as we might be living opposite of Nietzsche's "what doesn't kill you" aphorism, we might also be living opposite of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's proclamation: "The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts."

This last great untruth hearkens back to one of the distorted modes of thought—dichotomous thinking—that CBT tries to correct. Could it be true that Gen Z has worse mental health because they view people (and events) in stark terms? To answer that question, Haidt and Lukianoff analyzed the rise of identity politics and the resurgence of tribalistic thinking.

Rather than thinking in terms of "common-humanity" identity politics, which humanizes people of different groups, Haidt and Lukianoff argue that there's been an increase in "common-enemy" identity politics, which identifies a common enemy in order to enlarge and motivate one's tribe. (Think Hitler's demonization of Jews to expand the Third Reich.)

To show how common-enemy identity politics currently operates, Haidt and Lukianoff provide an essay written by a Latino student at Texas State University that ran in the school's newspaper, wherein the author states:

"Ontologically speaking, white death will mean liberation for all ... Until then, remember this: I hate you because you shouldn't exist. You are both the dominant apparatus on the planet and the void in which all other cultures, upon meeting you, die."

Haidt and Lukianoff clarify that the student was calling for cultural genocide, meaning the dissolution of the culture of "whiteness," rather than actual genocide; but the student's words still demonstrate the false dichotomy of good people versus evil people. His words make it apparent that he fails to see individuals rather than tribes, and by grouping them into a subset he views as "bad," he insinuates that they are "bad" as well.

As for what explains the resurgence of this kind of thinking, Haidt and Lukianoff claim it's a form of "Marxist approaches to social and political analysis."

The analysis posits that "when power is perceived to be held by one group over others, there is a moral polarity: the groups seen as powerful are bad, while the groups seen as oppressed are good."

Imagine being encouraged to constantly view people in terms of group identity and automatically labeling those groups as good or bad, based on their perceived position of power. You would go through the world constantly identifying people as potential threats. A worldview like this is toxic and could be one of the sources of Gen Z's poor mental health.

To counteract the good people versus evil people trend, Haidt and Lukianoff encourage us to "[take] a generous view of other people, and [look] for nuance (rather than assuming the worst about people within a simplistic us-versus-them morality)."

Notice Your Thoughts, Free Yourself After reading "The Coddling of the American Mind," I noticed all kinds of distorted thought patterns and worked to change my worldview. I'm still far from perfect, but implementing the suggestions from Haidt and Lukianoff has made a positive impact on my well-being.

I challenge you to notice your thoughts and identify areas in which your thinking could be improved. Change starts from the bottom-up, and if like me, you wish that young people suffered less and improved their mental health, working on your own well-being is the beginning of that transformation.

As I said in a previous article about the power of individual improvement:

"As soon as you start improving, others around will take notice. Hopefully, your growth inspires people in your immediate sphere to grow alongside you. But, if some want to bring you down out of jealousy, don't let that distract you. All you can do is offer a shining example for those ready to follow it."

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Being Grateful—Even When Your Family's Driving You Bananas

The holiday season can come with added stress and difficulty, which makes it a great time to practice gratitude

AARON JARDEN

The holiday season can be a stressful time of year. You will blow your budget, your relatives will annoy you, and you'll receive gifts that go straight to charity.

Meanwhile, your friends post pictures on social media of their idyllic vacations, yearly accomplishments, and super happy toddlers and cats. You may feel extra stress from not accomplishing all the goals you set at the start of the year. You feel this stress in the face of other people's overt jolliness.

So how can the science of gratitude help you enjoy the ups and downs of the festive season?

Remind Me Again, What Is Gratitude?

Gratitude, in short, is a strong feeling of appreciation toward someone who's helped you. You can also feel gratitude when you make a habit of noticing and appreciating the positives in life. This might be feeling grateful for a cooling breeze on a hot day, the skills you've learned in the kitchen, or circumstances that have led to a good life.

Over the past 20 years or so, there has been quite a bit of research on gratitude.

Some of our own research shows that older people are more grateful than younger people, and shows it's possible to become more grateful with practice.

Gratitude is not the panacea to all stresses of life; it helps, but it doesn't cure.

How Can Gratitude Help Me?

Practicing gratitude can have many positive impacts, including an increased sense of well-being and life satisfaction, positive emotional functioning such as more pleasurable emotions and thoughts that life is going well, increased optimism, a sense of connectedness, improved relationships, and more and better quality sleep.

So all in all, researchers really get quite excited about all the positive things gratitude is related to.

There is also research indicating that gratitude can help increase resilience and help us cope with everyday life stress, as well as with more major adversities.

Gratitude can help with our mental health, like a depressed mood or post-traumatic stress disorder, and can help us cope with loss after trauma.

How Can I Use Gratitude?

So if you want a buffer against those annoying relatives and

blown budgets, and to be more resilient to life's stressors, develop a greater sense of gratitude.

Among the many ways researchers have tested, you can:

- Write a thank you note for a gift or behavior you've appreciated. It doesn't have to be a handwritten letter. You can express gratitude via text, email, or social media.
- Visit someone and thank them in person.
- Keep a daily journal of things you feel grateful for. Write down three things at the end of the day as well as your role in bringing about the three things.
- Spend time contemplating being grateful for certain activities, such as having a family or friends to spend Christmas with, or opening presents with children. In other words, thinking about being grateful is also helpful, not just the act of being grateful.

Hang On a Minute. Surely It's Not That Simple

However, there are also a few tricks, twists, and turns to be aware of:

- **Consider cultural nuances:** Someone's culture can influence how they perceive and react to gratitude. For example, in East Asian and Indian cultures, receiving gratitude can be accompanied by feelings of indebtedness or guilt. This can put pressure on people to reciprocate. This can also be true, but not to the same extent, in Western cultures.
- **Gratitude is not for everything:** Gratitude is not the panacea to all stresses of life; it helps, but it doesn't cure. It should also not be used to distract from real issues and problems, especially in interpersonal relationships.
- **Think about when you use it:** Be purposeful and strategic about expressing gratitude, and don't overdo it. Start with the people who help you the most and are the most meaningful to you.
- **Don't forget yourself:** Show gratitude toward yourself as well as others, such as being grateful for some of your strengths and capabilities.

If You Can't Be Grateful ...

With all the best will in the world, it can be difficult to be grateful for the same present from Aunt Betty three years in a row. In this case, our only advice is to grin and bear it rather than to pretend to be grateful. You will feel better and so will she.

Aaron Jarden is an associate professor at the Centre for Positive Psychology at Melbourne Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne in Australia. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.

SEBASTIAN GAUER/SHUTTERSTOCK



Being grateful, even when facing added stress and tension, can ease your discomfort and improve your life.

SATAPAT/SHUTTERSTOCK

How to Stay Motivated

A New Year's resolution can be a great way to make a healthy change—if you can stick to it

KATRINA GOLDBERG

The New Year has begun, you've made your resolutions, and, by now, you may be wondering, "How do I stay motivated?"

When forming new, healthier habits, the first month is usually the hardest. Your motivation was there when you made the fitness resolution, but as the initial excitement wears off, you need a little something more to keep yourself moving toward your goals. Sometimes, you might even need to reassess your goal.

Below are some tips and tricks to take your dreams from resolutions to ways of life!

Prioritize Your Workouts

Achieve your fitness goals by prioritizing your workouts. Schedule them into your planner on a weekly basis, and set them in stone as you would a work, school, or dentist appointment. If you are in your first month of a new activity, try to schedule your workouts in the morning, because in the early hours,

you have a fresh mind and renewed energy.

Earlier in the day, there is less risk that a workout is skipped due to life's events, like a meeting taking longer than expected, traffic, or your best friend or family member calling you with something "very important that just can't wait." There are often things that come up that can easily give us an excuse to skip the fitness. Try not to let these things keep you from your success.

We set goals and resolutions that are challenging so we can improve ourselves from the inside out.

For extra encouragement, make a group commitment. Join a running group or take the same group fitness classes at the same hour of the day, and meet other people with similar goals to help you reach yours.

Fuel Up for Success

We all know that we need eight glasses of water a day to stay hydrated, but when? Start the day right by drinking two cups of fresh, room temperature water. During the night is the longest amount of time most people go without water, so when we rise for the day, our bodies need hydration. Drink the first two cups right when you get out of bed, and you will find yourself feeling alert and ready for your day. Drink the other six cups evenly throughout the day to prevent mistaking thirst for hunger, a common cause of overeating.

Eat breakfast every day to get your metabolism moving. Some fitness-friendly breakfast ideas are yogurt and fresh fruit smoothies with a dash of honey, a hard-boiled egg with orange slices and tomato juice, or for the non-breakfast type, try a handful of red grapes or a banana to give your body some carbohydrates for energy.

Keep healthy snacks in containers in your refrigerator for easy access. For example, fill one with pre-washed organic baby spin-

ach, another with hard-boiled eggs, and several with your favorite washed, sliced vegetables. Use the ingredients to mix and match for breakfasts, snacks, and salads. Most people agree that if they have healthy options available, they will eat them.

Reward Your Progress

Starting with a dream, such as running a marathon, and then taking the action to achieve that dream is remarkable. If fitness were always easy, there would be no reason for this article. So be sure to give yourself rewards—you deserve them.

For example, if you keep to your scheduled workouts for two weeks, reward yourself with a new workout top. If you keep your schedule to four weeks, go get the matching pants. Why not flaunt your newly defined muscles in some new threads?

Reassess Your Goal

Sometimes, when we make resolutions we get discouraged because it appears that we will never reach our goal. And sometimes, we are correct in believing that. I knew a lady that set a goal to run a full marathon, barefoot. She had read that running barefoot was better for the feet. She had never run barefoot before and had never run more than five miles, and the marathon was two months away. Soon after she set the goal, she realized that running barefoot was more than just taking off your shoes and going for it. She also realized that two months would not be enough time to properly and safely train for a 26.2-mile run. So, she modified her goal to run a half-marathon (13.1 miles) in shoes. She found success both in the race and in her life.

When you put your mind to it, you can achieve anything. We set goals and resolutions that are challenging so we can improve ourselves from the inside out. Be proud of what you have achieved so far. Prioritize your fitness as you would any other important event, and fuel up for success. And don't forget that big pat on the back—you deserve a reward for starting, and continuing your journey toward a healthier 2020.

Katrina Goldberg is a RockIt Body Pilates trainer. RockIt Body Pilates is a unique fusion of the lengthening and stretching fundamentals of pilates, with an intense blend of cardio and strength training. This article was originally published on NaturallySavvy.com

Try to schedule your workouts in the morning, because in the early hours, you have a fresh mind and renewed energy.

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The aftermath of these drugs is much more serious—potentially even permanent.

Research Finds Antidepressants May Have Permanent Effects on Unborn Children



Mounting evidence finds medications can affect genetics through several different mechanisms

KELLY BROGAN

In psychiatrists' offices, all around the world, women are being presented with a difficult choice—let your mental illness go untreated, or face the risks of medication exposure in pregnancy.

One in four women of reproductive age is psychiatrically medicated in this country, with approximately 6 percent to 15 percent of women prescribed antidepressants during pregnancy. Studying the safety of medication exposures around conception, pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding is a notorious blindspot of conventional allopathic care.

Women are not studied in conventional randomized trials due to the ethics of exposing the newborn, but this leaves actual patients to participate in open-label experimentation that lacks the same

rigor. Despite the poor quality of research that relies on patients to report outcomes in registries, a signal of harm around the use of antidepressants in pregnancy has emerged and it links these medications to a number of unintended effects for the unborn child.

Previous studies of babies exposed to antidepressants in utero have found associations with increased risk for preterm birth, low birth weight, infant convulsions, cardiovascular defects, excessive brain fluid at birth, smaller head size, low Apgar scores, neonatal adaptation syndrome, risk of autism spectrum disorder, and cognitive developmental issues. Most of the research over the past decade has been focused on whether babies are born early, born intact, and can leave the hospital in a timely fashion.

Continued on Page 11

The researchers concluded that their study was an important demonstration that 'even brief' ancestral exposure to a common antidepressant modifies the stress response and critical coping behaviors for several generations.'

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One of the insidious effects of a regular lack of high-quality sleep is decreased testosterone production.

5 Evidence-Based Ways to Boost Testosterone

Low levels of testosterone can come with glaring symptoms such as fatigue, erectile dysfunction, weight gain, and reduced bone mass.

In the face of aging, many men immediately opt for hormone replacement therapy. While significant results may manifest in no time from this increasingly popular treatment, there can be serious consequences down the road, particularly if the underlying cause of low testosterone isn't addressed properly.

Here are five things that you can try for a natural testosterone boost:

1. Zinc
A deficiency in zinc, an essential dietary mineral, has long been associated with testicular suppression, including reduced testosterone levels. A 1996 study found a significant reduction in the blood testosterone of healthy young men after 20 weeks of zinc restriction. The study also found that six-month zinc supplementation in marginally deficient elderly men translated to a testosterone boost.

The exact mechanism behind how zinc deficiency affects testosterone levels isn't yet fully understood, but the mineral may affect the cells in the testes that produce testosterone. Zinc also helps your immune system function properly, plays a role in cell division, and helps enzymes break down nutrients.

2. Magnesium
Studies have shown that magnesium intake affects testosterone and total levels of insulin-like growth factor 1 (IGF-1). The age-related decline in these anabolic hormones is deemed a strong predictor of metabolic syndrome and diabetes, as well as mortality in elderly men.

One proposed mechanism behind this mineral's testosterone-enhancing role is its ability to inhibit the binding of testosterone to sex hormone-binding globulin, resulting in an enhancement of bioavailable testosterone.

3. Weight Management
Weight gain and related chronic conditions, including Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, have been strongly tied to a reduction in testosterone, especially in middle-aged and elderly men. Here's how it works: As you gain weight as fat, your testosterone production drops. However, this can be reversed through weight loss via adjustments in diet and lifestyle.

4. Vitamin D
A dose of sunshine can be a handy solution to low testosterone levels, with studies vouching for vitamin D's impact on regulating testosterone levels. Ideally, you would be able to get all the vitamin D your body needs through optimal sun exposure. This, however, may be more difficult for those who live far from the equator, are dark-skinned, or spend most of their time indoors.

Weight gain and related chronic conditions, including Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, have been strongly tied to a reduction in testosterone.

5. Adequate Quality Sleep
One of the insidious effects of a regular lack of high-quality sleep is decreased testosterone production. A 2013 study probed the effects of 33 hours of sleep loss on endocrine function as well as reactive aggression in 24 young men and 25 women, and found that sleep deprivation lowered testosterone in the male subjects.

There's a double whammy here, as sleeplessness also facilitates fat gain, which, as mentioned earlier, is linked to impaired testosterone production.

Scientific findings are quick to show that correcting a mineral or nutrient deficiency may raise low testosterone levels. For further information, check out the GreenMedInfo.com testosterone database to better learn how to increase testosterone naturally.

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. Join the free newsletter at www.GreenMedInfo.health

Research Finds Antidepressants May Have Permanent Effects on Unborn Children

Continued from Page 9

But are we asking the right questions?

Even if babies are born with 10 fingers and toes, despite a mother's SSRI prescriptions, it doesn't mean that they're born fully healthy, nor that prescribing is in the best interest of mother or baby.

It may be time to explore the issues surrounding antidepressants with greater levels of nuance in order to help women navigate risks, benefits, and alternatives. We can look to current research around SSRI-induced epigenetic changes to understand what using these drugs could mean for our future generations.

Transgenerational Effects of Antidepressants

In 2018, researchers from the University of Ottawa, the University of Florida, and the Canadian government's Environmental Health Science and Research Bureau dug into the transgenerational effects of antidepressants to understand how a woman's decision to take medication in pregnancy can affect her grandchildren's health.

The scientists used zebrafish, whose embryos develop externally to the mother and can be exposed to specific concentrations of the studied chemical. While zebrafish seem like a strange choice for an animal model, these fish share a surprising number of physiological and genetic overlaps with humans. Past studies have also

shown that using animal models to investigate developmental questions later yielded similar results in humans.

Three groups of zebrafish embryos were used in the experiments. One group was exposed to "high" concentrations of fluoxetine (generic Prozac) during embryonic development (54 micrograms per liter), one was exposed to "low" concentrations (0.54 micrograms per liter), and the third group was not exposed at all. The researchers then performed a series of stress-related behavioral and physiological tests on those three groups after the embryos matured. They then bred those fish, performing the same tests on three subsequent generations.

The researchers found that the high exposure group had significantly less movement and exploratory behavior in response to being placed in a new tank. While the non-exposed fish swam around their tank and explored it thoroughly, the exposed group generally restricted itself to swimming along the bottom of the tank.

At the end of the study, the researchers concluded that their study was an important demonstration that "even brief ancestral exposure to a common antidepressant modifies the stress response and critical coping behaviors for several generations."

This study suggests that the use of SSRIs in pregnancy can go on to affect future generations through epigenetic adaptations.

What Is Epigenetics?

When we discovered DNA, we started to understand how organisms were designed. DNA was a blueprint, a code that your organelles read to then build proteins. How that code is passed down across generations and how it changes and affects an organism—that is the study of genetics. Epigenetics is the study of changes in organisms that are capable of being inherited and are caused by the modification of gene expression rather than alteration of the genetic code itself.

So while DNA may be unchanged, the expression of certain genes can change, often in response

to environmental factors, lifestyle, the food we eat, and, as we are learning, the use of antidepressants.

SSRIs Have Effects That Last Longer Than We Imagined

What epigenetics and the SSRI-affected zebrafish transgenerational study tells us is that the effects of antidepressants don't "wear off" after a few hours as we assumed. Instead, the aftermath of these drugs is much more serious—potentially even permanent. SSRI drugs change how our body makes and regulates itself. Even more, the drugs can cause lifelong alterations to how an unborn child's body learns to develop and live, and these changes can carry over into future generations.

Knowing the side effects of SSRI medications for an adult—which include tardive dyskinesia, antidepressant tachyphylaxis, severe withdrawal symptoms—can be severe, what would antidepressant exposure look like for an unborn child whose body is in a rapid state of development?

In a Cerebral Cortex-published study of 84 mothers that was controlled for maternal symptoms and confounding variables, scientists from Helsinki University began to examine the extent of SSRI effect on newborn children whose mothers had taken antidepressants while pregnant.

The researchers conducted structured behavioral assessments for the babies to find only minor effects associated with the drugs. But, when they looked at neurophysiological testing, they discovered that the brains of children exposed to SSRIs in the uterus had lower levels of global integration, interhemispheric connectivity, and local cross-frequency integration beyond the immediate withdrawal period common to newborns.

The combined findings of these studies suggest that babies' brains are seriously changed by SSRI exposure with potentially life-altering consequences.

The Right Questions

Beyond whether or not babies can be born or on time, maybe we should be asking whether we should be worried that SSRI exposure during gestation and lactation will affect DNA methylation, given that exposure to fluoxetine during gestation and lactation affected DNA methylation in an ex-

periment with rates. DNA methylation is a regulatory process that "turns" specific genes on and off. Maybe we should be asking how worried we should be that psychotropic drugs interact with mitochondria, the bacteria-derived organelles in the cell that directs energy production and control a cell's life, reproduction, and death through epigenetic mechanisms. Studies show that these drugs can cause irreparable damage.

Studying the safety of medication exposures around conception, pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding is a notorious blindspot of conventional allopathic care.

Maybe we should be asking how dangerous it is that medications like lithium, haloperidol, or valproate have been shown to induce changes of miRNA profiles in the brain, when miRNAs are key regulators of gene expression. Maybe we should consider whether they permanently change the makeup of mothers' and babies' gut microbiomes, a keystone in leaky gut and other depression-causing profiles.

As we learn just how widely and deeply psychotropic drugs affect our bodies and how our bodies interpret our DNA, how can we keep on thinking that antidepressants are safe for adults, much less unborn children? Perhaps we should be examining our standards for "safety."

What do we do about it?

Though the medical industry is accustomed to prescribing SSRI drugs to medicate pregnant and lactating women, studies show just how unsafe this is for the mothers and their unborn children.

The medical field's current fixation on the chemical imbalance myth blames depression on serotonin imbalance, a reductive and misleading interpretation of depression.

Instead of relying on drugs in a futile attempt to "fix" depression, perhaps we should be focusing on how to resolve lifestyle and diet issues that can cause depression. Instead of hanging onto outdated ideas about how our bodies are broken and need fixing, it's time to embrace our cellular and molecular connection with the natural world and utilize diet, meditation, and environmental detoxification as our tools for healing.

Kelly Brogan, M.D., is a holistic women's health psychiatrist and author of The New York Times bestselling book "A Mind of Your Own," the children's book "A Time for Rain," and co-editor of the landmark textbook "Integrative Therapies for Depression." This work is reproduced and distributed with the permission of Kelly Brogan, M.D. For more articles, sign up for the newsletter at www.KellyBroganMD.com

While pregnancy can often be depicted as idyllic, many women struggle with depression and face the dilemma of how to deal with it.



Why It Can Be Hard to Stop Eating Even When You're Full

Some foods have a combination of ingredients that can make them as addictive as drugs

TERA FAZZINO & KAITLYN ROHDE

All foods aren't created equal. Most are tasty, which is helpful because we need to eat to survive. For example, a fresh apple is palatable to most people and provides vital nutrients and calories.

But certain foods, such as pizza, potato chips, and chocolate chip cookies, are almost irresistible. They're always in demand at parties, and they're easy to keep eating, even when we are full.

In these foods, a synergy between key ingredients can create an artificially enhanced palatability experience that is greater than any key ingredient would produce alone. Researchers call this hyper-palatability. Eaters call it delicious.

Initial studies suggest that foods with two or more key ingredients linked to palatability—specifically, sugar, salt, fat or carbohydrates—can activate brain-reward neurocircuits, similarly to drugs such as cocaine or opioids. They may also be able to bypass mechanisms in our bodies that make us feel full and tell us to stop eating.

Our research focuses on rewarding foods, addictive behaviors, and obesity. We recently published a study with nutritional scientist Debra Sullivan that identifies three clusters of key ingredients that can make foods hyper-palatable. Using those definitions, we estimated that nearly two-thirds of foods widely consumed in the United States fall into at least one of those three groups.

Cracking the Codes

Foods that are highly rewarding, easily accessible, and cheap are everywhere in our society. Unsurprisingly, eating them has been associated with obesity.

Documentaries in the past 20 years have reported that food companies have developed formulas to make palatable foods more enticing. However, manufacturers typically guard their recipes as trade secrets, so academic scientists can't study them.

Instead, researchers have used descriptive definitions to capture what makes some foods hyper-palatable. For example, in his 2012 book "Your Food Is Fooling You: How Your Brain Is Hijacked by Sugar, Fat, and Salt," David Kessler, former commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), wrote:

"What are these foods? ... Some are sweetened drinks, chips, cookies, candy, and other snack foods. Then, of course, there are fast food meals—fried chicken, pizza, burgers, and fries."

But these definitions aren't standardized, so it's hard to compare results across studies. And they fail to identify the relevant ingredients. Our study



Foods like potato chips may be able to bypass mechanisms designed to help us stop eating when we are full.

sought to establish a quantitative definition of hyper-palatable foods and then use it to determine how prevalent these foods are in the United States.

3 Key Clusters

We conducted our work in two parts. First, we carried out a literature search to identify scientific articles that used descriptive definitions of the full range of palatable foods. We entered these foods into standardized nutrition software to obtain detailed data on the nutrients they contained.

Next, we used a graphing procedure to determine whether certain foods appeared to cluster together. We then used the clusters to inform our numeric definition. We found that hyper-palatable foods fell into three distinct clusters:

1. Fat and sodium, with more than 25 percent of total calories (abbreviated as kcal) from fat and at least 0.30 percent sodium per gram per serving. Bacon and pizza are examples.
2. Fat and simple sugars, with more than 20 percent kcal from fat and more than 20 percent kcal from simple sugars. Cake is an example.
3. Carbohydrates and sodium, with more than 40 percent kcal from carbohydrates and at least 0.20 percent sodium per gram per serving. Buttered popcorn is an example.

Then we applied our definition to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food

and Nutrient Database for Dietary Studies, or FNDDS, which catalogs foods that Americans report eating in a biennial federal survey on nutrition and health. The database contained 7,757 food items that we used in our analysis.

We were surprised to find that 49 percent of foods labeled as containing 'reduced,' 'low,' or zero levels of sugar, fat, salt or calories qualified as hyper-palatable.

More than 60 percent of these foods met our criteria for hyper-palatability. Among them, 70 percent were in the fat-sodium cluster, including many types of meat, meat-based dishes, omelets, and cheese dips. Another 25 percent fell into the fat-simple sugars cluster, which included sweets and desserts, and also foods such as glazed carrots and other vegetables cooked with fat and sugar.

Finally, 16 percent were in the carbohydrate-sodium cluster, which consisted of carbohydrate-dense meal items such as pizza, plus bread, cereals, and

snack foods. Fewer than 10 percent of foods fell into multiple clusters.

We also looked at which of the USDA's food categories contained the most hyper-palatable foods. More than 70 percent of meats, eggs, and grain-based foods in the FNDDS met our criteria for hyper-palatability. We were surprised to find that 49 percent of foods labeled as containing "reduced," "low," or zero levels of sugar, fat, salt, or calories qualified as hyper-palatable.

Finally, we considered whether our definition captured what we hypothesized it would capture. It identified more than 85 percent of foods labeled as fast or fried, as well as sweets and desserts. Conversely, it didn't capture foods that we hypothesized weren't hyper-palatable, such as raw fruits, meats, or fish, or 97 percent of raw vegetables.

Tackling Obesity

If scientific evidence supporting our proposed definition of hyper-palatable foods accumulates, and it shows that our definition is associated with overeating and obesity-related outcomes, our findings could be used in several ways.

First, the FDA could require hyper-palatable foods to be labeled—an approach that would alert consumers to what they may be eating while preserving consumer choice. The agency also could regulate or limit specific combinations of ingredients as a way to reduce people being exposed to these difficult-to-resist foods.

Consumers also could consider the role of hyper-palatable foods in their own lives. Our team needs to do further work validating our definition before we translate it for the public, but as a first step, individuals can examine whether the foods they eat contain multiple ingredients such as fat and sodium, particularly at high levels. Recent surveys show increased interest among U.S. consumers in making informed food choices, although they often aren't sure which sources to trust.

One starting point for people concerned about healthy eating is to consume foods that are unlikely to be hyper-palatable—items that occur naturally and have few or no additional ingredients, such as fresh fruit. As food writer Michael Pollan recommends, "Don't eat anything your great-grandmother wouldn't recognize as food."

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If you have trouble sleeping, it's possible your blood sugar is working against you due to too much refined carbs.

Is Your Diet Keeping You up at Night?

New study finds close links between certain foods and insomnia

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

If you had a big bowl of pasta and some chocolate cake for dessert, it might explain why you're having trouble sleeping. New research has found a close association between diet and insomnia that might help you answer the perplexing question of why you can't sleep.

These new findings are likely part of a larger picture, with other factors including screen time, stress, and sleep apnea contributing to widespread insomnia.

On the food side, Americans eat a lot of "refined" carbs. Foods like white bread and pasta, cake, cookies, sugary sweets, and drinks are central components of the

"Standard American Diet." Insomnia is becoming a standard part of American life as well, with estimates suggesting that roughly 30 percent of the population suffers from it.

A recent study from Columbia University in New York looked at diet-linked fluctuations in blood sugar and sleep. Researchers focused on the glycemic index of food—how much and how quickly they boost blood sugar—to assess sleep patterns.

According to the lead author of the study James Gangswich, "when blood sugar is raised quickly, your body reacts by producing insulin, and the resulting drop in blood sugar can lead to the release of hor-

mones such as adrenaline and cortisol, which can interfere in sleep."

Looking at food diaries completed by 50,000 older women as part of the ongoing Women's Health Study, a clear association emerged between high refined-carbohydrate content and insomnia.

On the other hand, those who ate more vegetables, whole fruits, and fiber were much less likely to go through bouts of insomnia and more likely to report high-quality sleep.

The researchers believe the same results would be found across age groups and genders.

Sleep quality is likely determined by a number of factors, however, it might be

heavily influenced by food choices. The nutrients and compounds, or those missing, in various foods cause your body to react in different ways; some conducive to sleep, others not.

If you're experiencing trouble sleeping at night and practice decent sleep hygiene, consider looking to your diet. Try eating less refined foods and more whole foods, and foods rich in fiber. You may get the quality shut-eye you desire.

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How to Tell If Your Digital Addiction Is Ruining Your Life

Finding balance between the benefits of staying connected and being distracted by our devices can be tricky

TERRI R. KURTZBERG

The fear that digital distractions are ruining our lives and friendships is widespread.

Consider the 2,600 times we touch our phones every day, our panic when we temporarily misplace a device, the experience of "phantom vibration syndrome" and how merely seeing a message alert can be as distracting as checking the message itself.

This pattern has real consequences. For example, other people do take it personally if you stop talking to them to answer a message. And taking a break from a task to look at your cellphone precludes deep thinking on whatever you were doing. But this tells only part of the story. We need to also acknowledge that today's technologies can make us more connected than ever before.

So how do we avoid the potential pitfalls while still reaping the benefits?

How Screens Affect Our Interactions As a researcher in the area of technology and communications, I have spent nearly two decades looking at the ways in which interacting via screens is different from interacting in other ways, including face-to-face, on the phone, and in writing.

My research group has produced study after study showing that people are more self-serving (that is, they lie more), more negative (for example, giving others lower feedback ratings) and less cooperative (more "looking out for No. 1" behavior) when they use digital means of communicating. And for children under five, there are serious concerns for brain development.

Our fears about the impact of increasing amounts of screen time on ourselves and our children involve three main areas: mental health, addiction, and the level of engagement with what's going on around us. In all three, the risks may be overblown.

Much has been made of the potential links between depression and cellphone use—especially in teenagers—but recent evidence seems to indicate that that link could be tenuous.

As for addiction, the field of psychology has now recognized video game addiction as a genuine and diagnosable problem. Stories from rehab centers for people whose lives have been consumed by this addiction suggest the phenomenon is real and the suffering can be quite genuine.

But this is rare compared with the numbers of people who play online games without serious consequences.

And in terms of engagement, despite growing amounts of time spent on screens, the vast majority of kids do still get educated, make friends, and go on to lead productive lives.

A More Connected World

As more and more of our interactions move away from the traditional face-to-face and into the online realm, I believe we must recognize that in some

There is no question that our devices have changed our social lives, both for good and for ill.



My research group has produced study after study showing that people are more self-serving, more negative and less cooperative when they use digital means of communicating.

areas, richness and engagement may also be on the rise.

Colleagues can work together from afar, friends can keep in touch without restraint, and grandparents can directly touch base with their grandkids without needing to schedule a visit or go through the parents.

Language changes as we interact in shorter bursts, allowing us to connect in less formal ways. Humor changes as we are able to add visuals—pictures, emojis, GIFs, memes—to our words. Even those online video games can be a portal to increased social interactions for some.

Do You Have a Problem?

Perhaps the best way to evaluate the time spent with our phones is to ask two related questions.

First, what are you doing with the time you're devoting to your phone and is it consistent with your values and priorities?

If you feel that you and your kids are enjoying your screen time and not risking sleep, work, or in-person interactions, you may not have much reason for concern. To help manage device usage, there is a greater prevalence of tools and apps that can track your screen time and let you know where your attention is being directed—or even limit where it can go.

Secondly, what are your blind spots about where and how phone use might be limiting the rest of your life?

Most of us realize we shouldn't use phones right before bed—or, even worse, when driving or crossing streets. And we generally know we should keep an eye on our kids and teenagers to ensure that they are building good habits both inside and outside the digital realm. But we're less clear on how our phones might be affecting our lives in other ways.

The latest research offers some lessons. For starters, we're not as good as we think at multitasking. We generally give more attention to both tasks when we try to do two things at once. Over time, people who do this constantly end up with greater error rates on tasks, perhaps linked to poorer working memories.

Even the mere presence of a phone can limit your engagement with work and your ability to build relationships with others.

Finding That Ever-Evasive Balance

All of this means that even though you may not need to worry about your phone use overall, there are still moments when you'd be wise to put your device out of sight and earshot. This will give you the best chance to think about complex tasks without interruption or to engage more fully with those around you.

Putting down our phones completely seems neither realistic nor desirable: Society has moved forward, phones in hand. But choosing the moments where being phone-free is most valuable can help keep you on track.

Terri R. Kurtzberg is an associate professor of management and global business at Rutgers Business School, Newark and New Brunswick. This article was first published on The Conversation.

The Aging Myths You Can Stop Believing

Poor ideas about aging can lead to habits that take healthy years off your life

DEVON ANDRE

While it can be amusing to listen to people talk about anti-aging strategies, it's unfortunate when people believe in aging myths and choose to live their lives according to these myths.

Myths surrounding aging can be dangerous and encourage your chances of illness in old age. Realizing that they are untrue can cut the risk for chronic illness, inflammation, and a host of issues associated with advanced age.

If you believe the following common misconceptions about aging and hold on to skin-care and hair dye as the only real anti-aging techniques, you could be setting yourself up for a future you really don't want.

Top Myths About Aging

You don't need to socialize: Nothing could be further from the truth. Sure, it might require a little more energy and planning, and the venues may have changed from the nighttime movies, clubs, or festivals, but social interaction is an essential component to healthy aging.

After retirement, recreational socialization takes on an added component. Getting together with friends for dinners, card games, events, or joining various groups in your community focused toward your age group allows you to enjoy the health benefits of conversation and socialization.

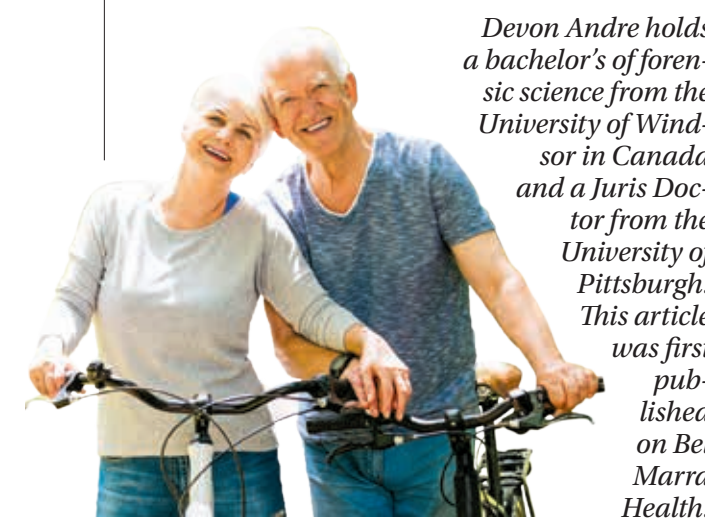
You can't exercise: Look, if you can get up out of bed, you can exercise. "Exercise" doesn't mean running a marathon, sprinting, or lifting hundreds of pounds. Joint pain, weaker bones, and heart trouble may change the way you exercise, but they certainly don't mean you can't boost activity.

Instead of running, go for a walk. You can participate in plenty of suitable activities that ease the burden on joints including walking, dancing, water aerobics, swimming, cycling, or Zumba. Exercise doesn't have to leave you feeling beat up.



You can't change: Perhaps you've been eating the same way for most of your life and think it's never done you wrong. Dietary habits, however, can wear away at your body over time and lead to weight gain, blood sugar problems, and other conditions that contribute to inflammation. Teaching yourself some new tricks such as focusing on more nutrient-dense foods, swapping white bread for whole-grain or lettuce wraps, ditching fruit juice for water, and opting for more fruits and vegetables over processed foods can all produce anti-aging health benefits very quickly.

Disease is par for the course: This might be the worst myth of all because if you think you're bound to get sick anyway, there is little incentive to do anything about it. But understanding that you have a substantial amount of control over your health through lifestyle choices such as socializing, getting more activity, and making healthier food choices, you can give yourself a top-notch anti-aging plan.



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Is it possible to transform that job into a better one? The answer is yes, but you must first transform how you think about that job.

Embracing a job we need but don't want is a critical step toward creating a better situation for ourselves.



THINK WELL, WORK WELL

Start With You to Improve Your Job Situation

Our careers grow directly from who we are and how we look at our situation

JEFF GARTON

What can you do when life's challenges force you to take a job you need but don't want? Is it possible to transform that job into a better one? The answer is yes, but you must first transform how you think about that job.

You can't always control what happens to you, but the one thing you do control is how you think. Doing so creates the emotions you rely on to self-motivate your ability to bounce back from hardships and persevere until you can turn your situation around. That's what John did and so can you.

John learned to think intentionally in a non-negative manner to create the emotion of contentment. He then used this self-empowering emotion to transform his perspectives of a job he didn't want into one that became quite fun.

Here is his story.

John was laid off after working for several years with the same employer. His efforts to find a similar manager's job weren't working. After months of being unemployed, John was forced to accept any job he could find. His savings were gone and his unemployment checks were insufficient to pay bills and care for his family. He was getting dangerously close to losing his home.

John took a retail clerk position in a strip mall. This was a big step down. He wouldn't be using his skills, he disliked his boss, and he thought his coworkers were unfriendly. Even worse, he had to serve his former employees when they visited the store. He felt humbled, ashamed, and embarrassed by his situation. In the meantime, he was continuing to look for a better job.

John asked for my help as a coach and we agreed on working together for three months. It soon became clear that his problems in finding a job weren't due to his resume, credentials, or job search skills. John was the problem.

He was beaten down and miserable about being laid off, complaining about his interim job, and worried about running out of money and never finding his dream job. Although he tried to appear upbeat and optimistic, all of his troubled thoughts were creating the worst feelings and impressions.

You could see the anger and fear in John's eyes, hear the doubts and frustration in his voice, and his posture told you he wasn't emotionally well. Interviewers didn't want to risk their reputation by hiring him. How John was thinking had made him untouchable, and that's where we began his transformation.

John started to realize that taking an interim job out of necessity to pay bills and feed his family was a noble purpose. And although this wasn't his ideal job, he found there was virtue or goodness in working with a clear conscience that he was doing the best he could to fulfill his purpose.

John found new meaning in a job he needed but didn't want. He started to feel grateful for what he had and stopped complaining about what he lacked. When John changed, his situation changed around him.

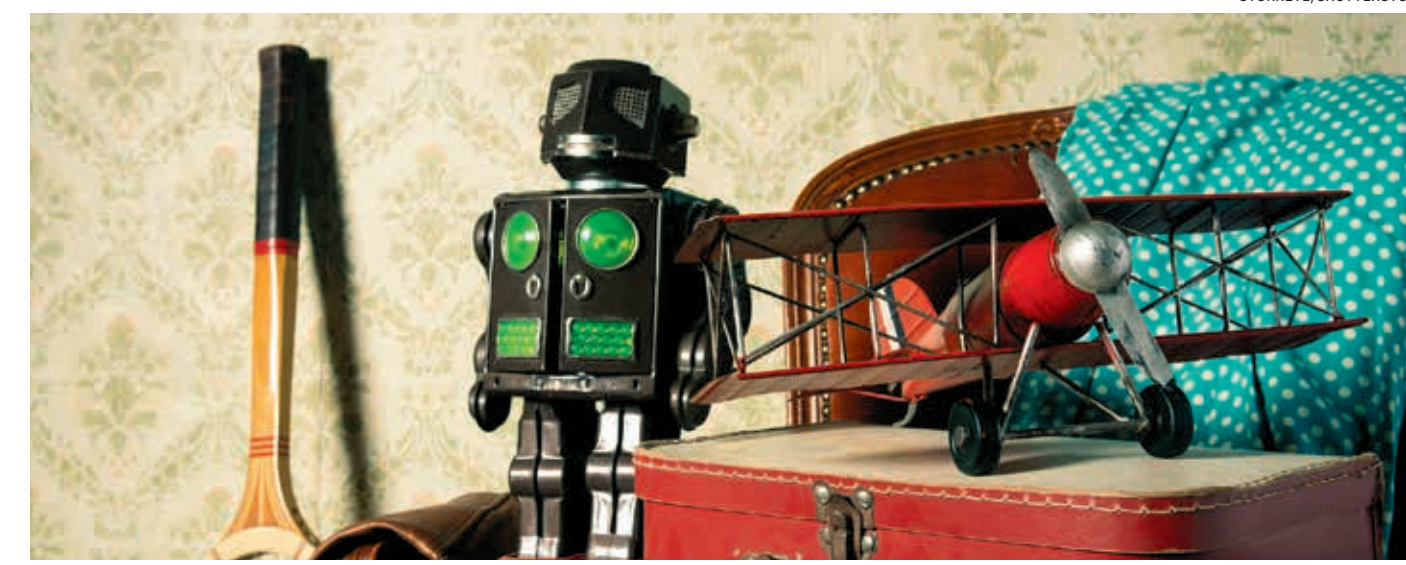
John's difficulties with his boss and coworkers seemed to melt away, and he looked forward to catching up with his former employees when they visited the store. In less than four months, John was offered and accepted an excellent job that put him back on his original career track.

John's new boss told him he got the job because they admired his attitude, humility, and resilience. They liked how he put his heart into doing his best in a job other people would have complained about. John lacked job satisfaction, but he chose to recognize his career contentment, and that's not all.

After accepting his new job, John worked out an arrangement to work weekends and holidays at the retail store. Nearly two years later, he was still in the interim job he had needed but hadn't wanted. He was having fun.

Realize that when you choose not to transform how you think about your situation, you are choosing not to transform your situation. When you're judgmental and troubled with matters you can't control, you cause yourself to feel miserable and unlikeable to others. But it costs nothing to transform yourself and your situation by taking control of what you can, which is how you think intentionally in a non-negative manner.

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



BECOMING MINIMALIST

I Am Thankful for My Past, I'm Just Not Moving That Direction

We live our lives by moving forward and sometimes that means we need to let go of some things

JOSHUA BECKER

It is difficult for me to articulate how blessed and thankful I am for my past. My parents love me, love each other, and love life. They provided me with stability, security, acceptance, and love. They continue to provide the same even today.

My grandparents could be described in the same way. All four of them were faithful to each other, faithful to God, and involved in my life growing up. Two of them are still alive today—and continue to be a part of my life.

The education I received was valuable. A private Christian school in South Dakota for elementary, a public school in North Dakota for high school, a four-year university in Nebraska for my bachelor's degree, and a four-year private university in Minnesota for my master's degree.

I am thankful for a mind that allowed school to come easy and a body that allowed me to participate in sports.

In high school, I met Kimberly. Shortly after graduating from college, we married—20 years ago. And I couldn't be happier. She is loving, patient, selfless, kind, and beautiful. She has supported me every step of the way, and I hope I've done justice in supporting her.

I have never worked a job I didn't find fulfilling. I am thankful for the men and women who offered opportunities and mentorship along the way.

My two kids are 16 and 13. Both are healthy, do well in school, participate in extracurricular activities, are active at church, and have close friends they can rely on.

Not every day of my life has been perfect, certainly not. To live is to suffer strife and trials of every kind. But in almost every imaginable way, my life until now has been richly blessed.

I am thankful for my past, but I am not moving in that direction. My past has been lived and can never be re-lived.

Forward is the only direction we can live our lives.

This is true whether our past is something we want to remember or something we want to forget.

The best way to honor those who loved us is to live our best life possible, not to be weighed down by their things.

If our past was difficult, we learn from it. We redeem our past mistakes by learning from them. And we overcome wrongs committed against us by serving others and vowing to chart a different path forward for ourselves.

If our past was positive, we honor it most by living our best life in the current season and the next.

This is something we need to be reminded of often. It is easy, over the course of life, to collect more and more possessions from previous seasons of life: objects that were passed on to us by our parents, things that were used by our children when they were young, or items that signify accomplishments in life and career. Items that, by nature, represent the past—whether it be a season of life, a relationship, an accomplishment, or an experience we want to remember.

But the possessions we keep should represent the person we are trying to become, not the person we were.

Sometimes we think we're honoring our departed loved ones by keeping their stuff, but let's ask ourselves if they would want us to be burdened by their belongings. Doubtful. The best way to honor those who loved us is to live our best life possible, not to be weighed down by their things.

In the same way, we don't do ourselves favors when we cling to past seasons of life after we have entered into new ones.

You may have loved mothering young kids, for example, and look back on those days with great fondness. But if your kids have grown and have families of their own, you are in a new stage of life and should embrace it fully. Holding on to a lot of mementos of motherhood and longing for those days may be hindering you from fully entering into the potential of your new time of life.

Minimizing possessions from our past isn't a sign of disrespect. Quite the opposite. It is the most honoring thing we can do. Because no matter how sweet the memories, our lives aren't moving in that direction.

Just because something brought you joy in the past doesn't mean you should carry it forever.

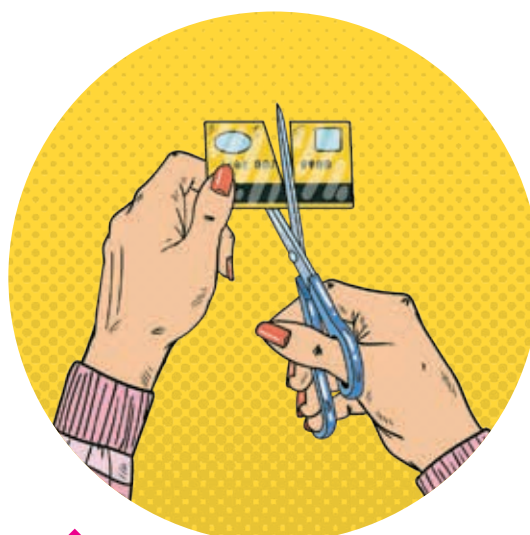
Joshua Becker is an author, a public speaker, and the founder and editor of *Becoming Minimalist*, where he inspires others to live more by owning less. Visit BecomingMinimalist.com

Science-Based Strategies to Boost Your Willpower

You can better succeed with your New Year's resolutions if you follow a few smart tips

JELENA KECMANOVIC

It's that time of year when people make their New Year's resolutions—indeed, 93 percent of people set them, according to the American Psycho-



Banish all credit cards from your wallet if your goal is to save money.

logical Association. The most common resolutions are related to losing weight, eating healthier, exercising regularly, and saving money.

However, research shows that 45 percent of people fail to keep their resolutions by February, and only 19 percent keep them for two years. Lack of willpower or self-control is the top-cited reason for not following through.

How can you increase your willpower and fulfill your New Year's promise to yourself? These seven strategies are based on behavioral science and my clinical work with hundreds of people trying to achieve their long-term goals.

1. Clarify and Honor Your Values

Ask yourself why this goal matters to you. Do you want to lose weight because you value getting in shape to return to a favorite pastime of hiking, or because of societal expectations and pressures? People who

are guided by their authentic values are better at achieving their goals. They also don't run out of willpower, because they perceive it as a limitless resource. Figure out what makes you tick, and choose goals consistent with those values.

2. Frame Goals and Your Life in Positive Terms

Focus on what you want to accomplish, not what you don't. Instead of planning not to drink alcohol on workdays during the new year, commit to drinking your favorite sparkling water with Sunday to Thursday evening meals. Struggling to suppress thoughts takes a lot of energy, and they have a way of returning to your mind with a vengeance.

It also helps to reflect on the aspects of yourself and your life that you're already happy with. Although you might fear that this will spur complacency and inaction, studies show that gratitude and other positive emo-

tions lead to better self-control in the long run.

Research shows that 45 percent of people fail to keep their resolutions by February, and only 19 percent keep them for two years.

3. Change Your Environment to Make It Easier

Research suggests that people with high willpower are exceptionally good at arranging their environment to avoid temptations. So, banish all credit cards from your wallet if your goal is to save money. And don't keep a bowl of M&M's at your work desk if you intend to eat healthier.

If your coworkers regularly bring sweets to work, ask them to help you with your goals (they might get inspired to join in) and bring cookies only for special occasions. Supportive friends and family can dramatically increase your chances of achieving your resolutions. Joining a group whose members practice behaviors you'd like to adopt is another great way to bolster your willpower because having role models improves self-control.

4. Be Prepared With 'If-Then' Strategies

Even the best resolution falls apart when your busy schedule and exhaustion take over. Formulate a series of plans for what to do when obstacles present themselves. These "if-then" plans are shown to improve self-control and goal attainment.

Each time you wake up in the middle of the night craving candies or chips, you can plan instead to read a guilty-pleasure magazine, or log into your online community of healthy eaters for inspiration, or eat an apple slowly and mindfully, savoring each bite. When you're tired and about to skip that gym class you signed up for, call your supportive sister who is on



Try self-compassion instead. Cut yourself some slack and remember that being human means being imperfect.

standby. Anticipate as many situations as possible and make specific plans, vividly imagining the situations and what you will do in the moment.

5. Use a Gradual Approach

When you embark on a new goal, start small and build on early successes. Use one less spoonful of sugar in your coffee. Eventually, you might be able to forgo any sweeteners at

all. If resisting that muffin initially proves to be too hard, try waiting 10 minutes. By the end of it, your urge will likely subside.

You might be surprised to realize that change in one domain of life—like abstaining from sweet, processed foods—tends to spread to other areas. You might find you are able to bike longer distances, or moderate your caffeine intake more easily.

6. Imagine Rewards and Then Enjoy Them

Picture the feeling of endorphins circulating through your body after a run, or the sun on your skin as you approach a mountain summit. Pay attention to all your senses: smell, sight, hearing, touch, and taste. Visualizing rewards improves your chances of engaging in the activity that results in them.

If it's hard to imagine or experience these rewards in the beginning, decide on small, meaningful gifts you can give yourself until the positive effects of the new behaviors kick in. For example, imagine yourself taking a half-day off work each month after you pay down your credit card debt: visualize exactly what you would do and

how you would feel. And then do it.

7. Be Kind to Yourself, Even During Setbacks

Most people believe the way to increase willpower is to "whip oneself into shape," because being kind to oneself is indulgent and lacks self-discipline. But the exact opposite is true—people who harshly blame themselves for even small willpower failures tend to do worse in accomplishing their goals in the long run.

Try self-compassion instead. Cut yourself some slack and remember that being human means being imperfect. When you fall for that doughnut, don't despair, and don't throw in the towel. Treat yourself with care and understanding and then recommit to your goal the following day.

Remember, you aren't likely to achieve your New Year's resolutions by being self-critical and hard on yourself. Instead, boost your willpower through a series of small and strategic steps that will help you succeed.

Jelena Kecmanovic is an adjunct professor of psychology at Georgetown University. This article was originally published on *The Conversation*.

6 Reasons for Optimism in 2020

We have much to be grateful for and many reasons to be ecstatic about continued human progress

TYLER BRANDT

"The 2010s have been the best decade ever. The evidence is overwhelming."

Those are the words of Cato Institute senior fellow Johan Norberg, penned in an op-ed for The Wall Street Journal.

Norberg's words seem hyperbolic at first glance, but he may be right. In many ways, the world is getting better every day, and at an explosive rate. This is contrary to mainstream sentiment, where pundits clamor about democracy falling apart, climate catastrophe threatening our very existence, and capitalism failing us.

Yet, the proof is in the pudding, as they say. Data show the past decade has been a story of human flourishing and progress. Here are six facts about human progress that give us reason to be optimistic heading into 2020:

1. Extreme Poverty Is Plummeting

Extreme poverty rates, defined as living on less than \$1.90 per day, continue to fall. From 1990 to 2015, the global extreme poverty rate fell from 36 percent to 10 percent. In 2018, it fell to 8.6 percent. This means more than 137,000 people escape extreme poverty every day.

2. More Than Half the World Is Middle Class

This might not shock you at first, but consider that September 2018 was the first time in human history that more than 50 percent of the global population was considered middle class, which amounts to about 3.8 billion people. One huge benefit of this is the demand the middle class places on the global economy, resulting in more entrepreneurial

opportunities and increased commerce.

To put this in perspective, only 1.8 billion were considered middle class in 2009. That's only 26 percent of the global population, meaning proportionally, the percentage of total global population considered middle class grew 92 percent from 2009 to 2018.

3. Global Life Expectancy Is Rising

As Norberg also states in his WSJ column:

"Global life expectancy increased by more than three years in the past 10 years, mostly thanks to prevention of childhood deaths. According to the U.N., the global mortality rate for children under 5 declined from 5.6 percent in 2008 to 3.9 percent in 2018. A longer perspective shows how far we've come. Since 1950, Chad has reduced the child mortality rate by 56 percent, and it's the worst-performing country in the world. South Korea reduced it by 98 percent."

4. Climate-Related Deaths Are Falling

Norberg also addresses the question, "Hasn't this all come at the cost of a de-spoiled environment?" "No," he says. "At a certain point developed countries start polluting less." To make the point, he cites the falling rate of climate-related mortalities:

"Death rates from air pollution declined by almost a fifth world-wide and a quarter

The percentage of total global population considered middle class grew 92 percent from 2009 to 2018.



in China between 2007 and 2017, according to the online publication Our World in Data.

Annual deaths from climate-related disasters declined by one-third between 2000-09 and 2010-15, to 0.35 per 100,000 people, according to the International Database of Disasters—a 95 percent reduction since the 1960s. That's not because of fewer disasters, but better capabilities to deal with them."

5. Life Is Getting Better in the World's Poorest Countries

Data from the World Bank show continued progress in the world's poorest countries, especially in the past two decades. Access to basic drinking water has increased, as has electricity, sanitation, and clean cooking fuel. Data also show decreasing rates of poverty and childhood mortality.

6. The Cost of Starting a Business Has Plummeted in Developing Economies

Burdensome and onerous regulations can prevent individuals from starting their own business, which is one of the best ways to alleviate poverty. Not only is it tricky for the entrepreneur to navigate around excessive red tape, it also ends up costing them more. Thankfully, the cost of starting a business has drastically declined, especially in developing economies. In low- and middle-income economies, the average cost of starting a business was 141.76 percent of income-per-capita in 2004. In 2019, it was just 30.85 percent.

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