

# MIND & BODY

Doing our best means giving our all, and going about whatever we endeavor with our whole heart.



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## TRUTH CAN BE BLOCKED BUT NEVER STOPPED

Pass it on, one friend at a time!



I enjoy reading The Epoch Times daily and share links, stories and “real news” updates whenever I can. Because of this, several friends and family members are now subscribers and have thanked me for sharing “real news” that is going on globally.

— DELINDA FORSYTHE

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### CHINESE WISDOM FOR SEASONAL LIVING

## Yang Energy Reaches Its Peak as Plants Emerge Into Their Growth Phase

Exploring Solar Terms: ‘Grain Buds’

MOREEN LIAO

A solar term is a period of about two weeks and is based on the sun's position in the zodiac. Solar terms form the traditional Chinese calendar system. The calendar follows the ancient Chinese belief that living in accordance with nature will enable one to live a harmonious life. This article series explores each of the year's 24 solar terms, offering guidance on how to best navigate the season.

### Characteristics and Meaning

The grains of summer crops are becoming plump, but are not yet ripe. In the ancient Chinese text “Bagua” (The Eight Trigrams), a book that helps one read the seasons and changes in life or society, the corresponding Ba-gua for this solar term is Qian, which represents full Yang energy. “Grain Buds” (May 20 to June 4) is described as pure yang in all six of its trigrams.

This reflects that yang is at its zenith and yin is extinguished during this solar term.

Grain Buds is traditionally the preferred time to harvest herbal medicine because the plant has reached prime condition for nutrients. When the heavy rain comes afterward, it will thin down the active ingredients inside the herbs.

### Impact on People

As we prepare to enjoy the fruits of our labor, yang energy is at the extreme on earth and in our bodies, so we must also take care to protect ourselves from the potential negative impacts of this extreme state.

Another translation of this solar term's name, “Grain Getting Plentiful,” is “xiao man” in Chinese. The meaning of “xiao” is a little bit, while “man” can mean replenishing, full, or contented. Contented can refer to the feeling farmers have after seeing their hard work about to come to fruition. Another meaning is fullness, which refers more directly to the crop. So “xiao man” can mean getting a little bit content or full.

Shennong, one of the three sage rulers of ancient China, was born during Grain Buds, which this year falls on May 20 through June 4.

Shennong was believed to be an overseer of harvests and medicinal herbs. He also taught the people in his time about farming, tea, and herbal medicine. In fact, he left to history the first medicinal herb book, “Shennong's Root and Herbal Classic.” This book is believed to be the earliest herbal medicine text in Chinese history, earlier than B.C. 2070.

It is from this book that we learn Grain Buds is the best time to pick and pro-

cess herbs. The ancient Chinese used to make herbal teas and ointments during this time of year.

Usually the weather is humid and may rain very heavily during Grain Buds. This can make us feel extremely hot and lead us to easily retain humidity inside our bodies.

In the Taoist system, it is believed there is both yin and yang in our bodies, regardless of whether we are male or female. Good health is said to come from the balance of yin and yang.

When yang becomes stronger than yin, traditional Chinese medicine doctors regard this person as having “heat” in the body. When yang is far stronger than yin, one is said to have “fire” in the body.

Heat-related conditions are very common during this solar term, leading to skin problems such as dryness and skin irritation.

For our health, we are reminded to be careful with our heart, blood vessels, and skin, as they can easily be damaged at this time.

### Wellness Tips

Going to bed late and getting up early can help our body to adjust to the temperature more easily during this season. Humility and modesty in temperament, meditation, and gentle exercise, and a lot of herbal tea can also help.

For those who have skin irritation, one can make an herbal tea with chamomile, peppermint, comfrey, witch hazel, melon, or peppermint. Soak a clean hand towel in a tea made from these ingredients and place it in a sealed container in the freezer. Whenever you feel itchy skin, use the cold cloth to cool and cleanse it.

Those who are in their first three months of pregnancy need to be careful of getting skin disease, as this may weaken the immune system for both mom and baby.

### Foods to Eat

Artichoke, broccoli, celery, tomato, water chestnut, yam, and all bitter vegetables are good to eat, to bring balance.

Starfruit, lemon, lime, melons, and all citrus fruits are good.

For those suffering from skin problems, do not eat seafood, especially shellfish. Honeysuckle and patchouli can be helpful.

Epoch Times contributor Moreen Liao is a descendant of four generations of traditional Chinese medicine doctors. She is also a certified aromatherapist and the founder of Ausganica, a manufacturer of salon-quality, certified organic cosmetics. Visit [Ausganica.com](http://Ausganica.com)

DANIEL OBERG/UNSPLASH



## The Benefits of Slow Breathing

If you breathe in and out at just the right frequency, you can force the cycles in sync and boost your heart rate variability.

### Slowing our breath can help lower our blood pressure

MICHAEL GREGER

There are all manner of purported hiccup “cures,” which include everything from chewing on a lemon, inhaling pepper, or, our dog's favorite, eating a spoonful of peanut butter. The technique I'm excited to try the next time I get hiccups is called “supra-supra-maximal inspiration,” where you take a very deep breath, hold for ten seconds, then, without exhaling, breathe in even more and hold for another five seconds, and then take one final, tiny breath in and hold for five last seconds to achieve “an immediate and permanent termination to hiccups.”

When I was a kid, I taught myself to control my own hiccups using slow-paced breathing, and, as an adult, was so excited to see there was finally a case report written up on it.

There's a nerve—the vagus nerve—that goes directly from our brain, to our chest, and to our stomach, connecting our brain back and forth to our heart and our gut, and even to our immune system. The vagus nerve is like the “hard-wired” connection that allows our brain to turn down inflammation within our body. When you hear about the mind-body connection, that's

what the vagus nerve is and does.

“There has been increasing interest in treating a wide range of disorders with implanted pacemaker-like devices for stimulating the vagal afferent [vagus nerve] pathways,” but certain Eastern traditions like yoga, qigong, and meditation allow a way to do it without having electrodes implanted into your body.

**Practicing slow breathing a few minutes a day may have lasting beneficial effects on a number of medical and emotional disorders, including asthma, irritable bowel syndrome, fibromyalgia, and depression.**

“A healthy heart is not a metronome,” as a study titled exactly that explains. “Your heart rate goes up and down with your breathing. When you breathe in, your heart rate tends to go up. When you breathe out, your heart rate tends to go down.” Test this out on yourself right now by feeling your pulse change as you breathe in and out.

Isn't that remarkable?

That heart-rate variability is a measure of vagal tone—the activity of your vagus nerve. Next time you're bored, try to make your heart rate speed up and slow down as much as possible within each breath. This can be done because there's an entirely other oscillating cycle going on which is the speeding up and then slowing down of your heart rate, based on moment-to-moment changes in your blood pressure.

And, as any physics student can tell you, “all oscillating feedback systems with a constant delay have the characteristic of resonance,” meaning you can boost the amplitude if you get the cycles in sync. It's like pushing your kid on a swing: If you get the timing just right, you can boost them higher and higher. Similarly, if you breathe in and out at just the right frequency, you can force the cycles in sync and boost your heart rate variability.

And what's the benefit again? According to the neurophysiologic model postulation it allows us to affect the function of our autonomic nervous system via vagal afferents to brainstem nuclei like the locus coeruleus, activating hypothalamic vigilance areas.

Huh? In other words, it's not just about curing hiccups. Practicing slow breathing a few minutes a day may have lasting beneficial effects on a number of medical and emotional disorders, including asthma, irritable bowel syndrome, fibromyalgia, and depression. In the United States, we've also put it to use to improve batting performance in baseball.

To date, most studies have lacked proper controls and have used fancy biofeedback machines to determine each person's resonant frequency. When musicians were randomized into slow-breathing groups with or without biofeedback, slow breathing helped regardless. It's the same with high blood pressure, you can use this technique to significantly drop your blood pressure within minutes.

The hope is if you practice this a few minutes every day, you can have long-lasting effects the rest of the day breathing normally.

Practice what exactly? Slow breathing—taking five or six breaths per minute, split equally between breathing in and breathing out. So, that's five seconds in, then five seconds out, all the while breathing “shallowly and naturally.” You don't want to hyperventilate, so just take natural, shallow breaths, but be sure to simply breathe really slowly. Try it the next time you get hiccups. Works for me every time!

Michael Greger, M.D. FACLM, is a physician, New York Times bestselling author, and internationally recognized professional speaker on a number of important public health issues. Dr. Greger has lectured at the Conference on World Affairs, the National Institutes of Health, and the International Bird Flu Summit, testified before Congress, appeared on The Dr. Oz Show and The Colbert Report, and was invited as an expert witness in defense of Oprah Winfrey at the infamous “meat defamation” trial. This article was originally published on NutritionFacts.org

## Natural Sunlight: Is It Worth the Risk?

Sunlight can affect immune system and overall health

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

On sunny days, it's even harder to stay inside. With temperatures climbing and the sun making outdoors more inviting, is getting outdoors to enjoy it worth the risk?

Sunlight has never been particularly simple. For decades, we've been told to limit exposure to protect from harmful UV rays. With the added risk of COVID-19, getting outside can seem even riskier.

But humans need sunlight. Daniel Gonzalez Maglio, a professor at the University of Buenos Aires and researcher in the field of photo immunology, recently told The New York Times, “there is some limited but convincing evidence that moderate sunlight exposure is capable of modulating the immune system and improving health.”

Of course, sunlight is not a cure or treatment for the novel coronavirus, but it could offer some benefits you could use right now. Adequate sunlight exposure is associated

with better mood, improved sleep quality, and better immune function.

There is even some evidence it could help the body fight against infections. One study showed that hospitalized patients who were taken out in the sun during the Spanish flu pandemic had lower death rates than those who were left indoors.

Some research suggests that vitamin D (which your body makes when it's exposed to sunlight) boosts the expression of hundreds of genes that may help regulate immune function, thereby making immune systems stronger and more effective.

Although the reasoning is not fully understood, vitamin D's impact on immune health may have something to do with its ability to regulate circadian rhythm, limit inflammation, and more.

When you don't get enough natural light, it can lead to what one specialist described as a “kind of permanent jet lag.” To offset these feelings, there are a few things you can do.

One is to try to spend more time outdoors.



Sunlight starts a chain reaction in our body that helps boost the expression of hundreds of genes.

Getting out for a 15–45 minute walk per day can be great for sun exposure and vitamin D production. This is true even when it is cloudy. When you're outside, be sure to observe social distancing.

If you don't want to go outside or are not comfortable with the idea, positioning yourself close to a window and facing it, especially in the morning, can help.

If you're getting more than about 30–45 minutes of sun exposure, apply sunscreen. Further, if you have a history of sun-related skin issues, it's essential to speak with your doctor before increasing outdoor time.

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## NAVIGATING AGING

# As COVID-19 Lurks, Families Get Locked Out of Nursing Homes



As families lose touch with loved ones in nursing homes, ensuring quality of care can grow nearly impossible.

Concerned for loved ones, families wonder if they are cared for and safe

JUDITH GRAHAM

Many families are beset by fear and anxiety as COVID-19 makes inroads at nursing homes across the country, threatening the lives of vulnerable older adults.

Alarming, more than 10,000 residents and staff at long-term care facilities in the United States have died from COVID infections, according to an April 23 analysis of state data by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

But often facilities won't disclose how many residents and employees are infected with the coronavirus that causes the disease, citing privacy considerations. Unable to visit, families can't see for themselves how loved ones are doing.

Are people getting enough to eat? How are their spirits? Are they stable physically or declining? Are staff shortages developing as health aides become sick?

Perhaps most pressing, does a loved one have COVID symptoms? Is testing available? If infected, is he or she getting adequate care?

"This is the problem we're all facing right now: If you have family in these facilities, how do you know they're in danger or not?" Jorge Zamanillo told the Miami Herald after his 90-year-old mother, Rosa, died of COVID-19 only days after staffers said she was "fine."

In recent weeks, amid mounting concern, states including California, Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts and New York began releasing data about cases and deaths in individual nursing homes. (The data varies by state.) And the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services said it would require homes to report cases to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and to notify residents and families. (Previously, facilities were required to report only to states.)

Families' worst fears have been expressed in recent headlines, including a New York Times story that described "body bags piled up" behind a New Jersey nursing home where 70 residents had perished. Another investigation called nursing homes "death pits" and reported that at least 7,000 residents across the nation had died of COVID-19—about 20 percent of all deaths reported at the time, April 17.

What can families do? I asked nearly a dozen long-term care advocates and experts for advice. They cautioned that the problems—lapses in infection control and inadequate staffing foremost among them—require a strong response from regulators and lawmakers.

"The awful truth is families have no control over what's happening and not nearly enough is being done to keep people safe," said Michael Dark, a staff attorney at California Advocates for Nursing Home Reform.

Still, experts had several suggestions that may help:

**Stay in touch.** With virtually all visitors barred from nursing homes since mid-March, frequent contact with loved ones via telephone calls or video visits has

**Many nursing homes have family councils that advocate for residents, potentially valuable conduits for support and information.**

become even more important. In addition to providing much-needed emotional support, it signals to staffers that family members are vigilant.

"When a facility knows someone is watching, those residents get better care," said Daniel Ross, senior staff attorney at Mobilization for Justice, a legal aid agency in New York City. "Obviously, the ban of visitors is a real problem, but it doesn't make family oversight impossible."

If a resident has difficulty initiating contact (this can be true for people who have poor fine motor coordination, impaired eyesight or hearing, or dementia), he or she will need help from an aide. That can be problematic, though, with staff shortages and other tasks being given higher priority.

Scheduling a time for a call, a video chat or a "window visit" may make it easier, suggests Mairead Painter, Connecticut's long-term care ombudsman.

AARP is pressing for Congress to require nursing homes to offer video visitation and to provide federal funding for the needed technologies. If you can afford to do so, buy a tablet for your loved one or organize a group of families to buy several.

**Band together.** More than likely, other families have similar concerns and need for information. Reach out through email chains or telephone trees, suggested Richard Mollot, executive director of the Long Term Care Community Coalition in New York City.

Ask your nursing home administrator to update families weekly through a conference call or video chat. Explain that families will probably call less often with repetitive questions if communication is coordinated. Many nursing homes have family councils that advocate for residents, potentially valuable conduits for support and information. Your long-term care ombudsman or administrator can tell you if a council exists at your facility.

Working with a group can reduce the fear that complaining will provoke retaliation—a common concern among families.

"It's one thing to hear 'Mrs. Jones' daughter is making a big deal of this' and another to hear that families of everyone on the second floor have noted there's no staff there," Ross said.

**Contact ombudsmen.** Every state has a long-term care ombudsman responsible for advocating for nursing home residents, addressing complaints, and trying to solve problems. While these experts currently are not allowed to visit facilities, they're working at a distance in this time of crisis. To find your ombudsman, go to [TheConsumerVoice.org/Get\\_Help](http://TheConsumerVoice.org/Get_Help).

Twice a week, Painter holds an hourlong question-and-answer session on the Connecticut Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program's Facebook page. Among dozens of questions that people asked last week: What kind of

communication can I expect when a family member is COVID-positive and in isolation? What's the protocol for testing, and are homes out of test kits? Could families get a robo-call if a resident died?

One person wondered whether installing cameras in residents' rooms was an option. This practice is legal in eight states, but facilities may consider this elsewhere on a case-by-case basis. A fact sheet from the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care lays out the pros and cons.

"Most of what we do is trying to work out better communication," Painter said. "When there are staffing issues, as there are now, that's the first thing that falls off."

**Log a complaint.** Usually, Painter advises families to take concerns to a nurse or administrator rather than stew in silence. "Tell the story of what's going on with the resident," she said. "Identify exactly what the person's needs are and why they need to be addressed."

If you think a family member is being ignored, talk to the director of nurses and ask for a care plan meeting. "Whenever there's a change in someone's condition, there's a requirement that a care plan meeting be convened, and that remains in effect," said Eric Carlson, a directing attorney with Justice in Aging, a legal advocacy organization.

If that doesn't work, go "up the facility's chain of command" and contact the corporate office or board of directors, said Robyn Grant, director of public policy and advocacy at the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care.

If you're getting nowhere, file a complaint with the agency that oversees nursing homes in your state. (You can find a list at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services website.) This is a formality at the moment, since CMS has temporarily released agencies from the obligation to investigate most complaints. Still, "there may come a day when you'll want a written record of this kind," Dark advised.

Complaints that are getting attention from regulators involve "immediate jeopardy": the prospect of serious harm, injury, impairment or death to a resident.

"If you believe your concern rises to that level, make sure to indicate that," the National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care advises.

Also, contact local, state and national public officials and insist they provide COVID-19 tests and personal protective equipment to nursing homes. "Calls, letters—the lives of your loved ones depend on it," said Dr. Michael Wasserman, president of the California Association of Long Term Care Medicine.

**Bring a relative home.** Some nursing homes are asking families to take loved ones out of their facilities and bring them home.

*Continued on Page 8*

# Wisconsin's Controversial Vote Was 'Low-Risk activity'

Researchers find no detectable surge in COVID-19 cases following high-profile election

JON MILTMORE

Authors of a new study conducted by researchers at the World Health Organization and Stanford University say there is no evidence of increased transmission of COVID-19 in Wisconsin following the state's April 7 primary election.

The study, published on medRxiv, an online medical research platform operated by Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, BMJ (a medical publisher), and Yale University, states that data suggest Wisconsin's high-profile vote was a low-risk activity.

"We analyze confirmed cases and new hospitalizations in Wisconsin in the weeks surrounding the April 7, 2020 election, and find no evidence of a surge in SARS-CoV-2 Transmission," the authors write.

SARS-CoV-2 is a virus that causes COVID-19. The researchers allowed for a virus incubation period of 10-15 days, noting that most cases would not be reported until April 17.

The findings, which have not yet undergone peer review, are significant because the Badger State came under scrutiny following the decision to hold on-site elections over the objection of the Gov. Tony Evers (D).

Many said it was irresponsible and dangerous to hold elections during the COVID-19 outbreak.

"It's obvious how voting in public amid a pandemic is not compatible with safety," Leah Litman, an assistant professor of law at the University of Michigan, wrote in The

Atlantic.

The Republican-controlled legislature disagreed, however, and their decision was narrowly upheld (5-4) by the state's Supreme Court.

Nevertheless, the state's decision became a lightning rod for critics, even capturing the ire of former President Barack Obama. "No one should be forced to choose between their right to vote and their right to stay healthy like the debacle in Wisconsin this week," Obama tweeted.

Tensions continued in the weeks following the election and grew when national media outlets reported that more than 50 Wisconsinites had been diagnosed with the novel coronavirus after casting ballots.

Despite the fears and the anecdotal cases, researchers said hospitalizations for COVID-19 "steadily declined throughout April," falling from 101 on April 3 to just 14 on April 18.

Wisconsin this week will stop asking COVID-19 patients if they were at the polls on election day. Researchers said the results of their study are clear.

"Taken together, there is no evidence to date that there was a surge of infections due to the April 7, 2020 election in Wisconsin," the authors state. "Taken together, it appears the voting in Wisconsin on April 7 was a low-risk activity."

The findings, which have yet to be reported, are important because many nations are seeking to transition away from the state-enforced lockdowns that have resulted in widespread economic distress

# Why Video Meetings Are So Exhausting

As work shifts online, it brings new gains and new pains to our jobs

LIBBY SANDER &amp; OLIVER BAUMAN

For many of us, working from home during COVID-19 has meant we are spending a lot of time on video meeting applications like Zoom. The effects of this have taken us by surprise.

Having giant heads staring at us up close for long periods can be off-putting for a lot of us. Never mind that we feel we should fix our iso-hair (COVID mullet anyone?), put on makeup, or get out of our pajamas.

So why are online meetings more tiring than face-to-face ones?

People feel like they have to make more emotional effort to appear interested, and in the absence of many non-verbal cues, the intense focus on words and sustained eye contact is exhausting.

## Face-to-Face Meetings

Meetings in person are not only about the exchange of knowledge, but they are also important rituals in the office. Rituals provide comfort, put us at ease, and are essential in building and maintaining rapport.

Face to face meetings are also important mechanisms for the communication of attitudes and feelings among business partners and colleagues.

Emotions precede and follow our behaviors, and influence management decision-making. Sensitive topics are often canvassed, requiring us to notice subtleties and display empathy.

## How Are Zoom Meetings Different?

Our brains can only do so many things consciously at once because we have limited working memory. In contrast, we can process much more information unconsciously, as we do with body language.

Meeting online increases our cognitive load because several of its features take up a lot of conscious capacity.

## 1. We miss out on a lot of non-verbal communication

Our feelings and attitudes are largely conveyed by non-verbal signals such as facial expressions, the tone and pitch of the voice, gestures, posture, and the distance



We have to work harder to process non-verbal cues when meeting through video teleconference.

between the communicators.

In a face-to-face meeting, we process these cues largely automatically, and can still listen to the speaker at the same time.

But on a video chat, we need to work harder to process non-verbal cues. Paying more attention to these consumes a lot of energy. Our minds are together when our bodies feel we're not. That dissonance, which causes people to have conflicting feelings, is exhausting.

Also, in face-to-face meetings, we rely heavily on non-verbal cues to make emotional judgments, such as assessing whether a statement is credible. We automatically take in information such as, is the person fidgeting? Predominantly relying on verbal information to infer emotions is tiring.

## 2. What if the kids run in?

We feel anxious about our remote workspace and controlling events that might make us look bad to our colleagues, like children fighting in the background.

And none of us want to be like Trinnie Woodall, fashion guru, and television presenter, who was doing a live stream when her partner walked naked across the room.

## 3. No water-cooler catch-ups

In-person, we often meet people on the



A resident waits in line to vote at a polling place at Riverside University High School in Milwaukee, Wis., on April 7, 2020.

**Despite optimistic signs, fears remain high and much of the world remains in lockdown.**

and have taken a toll on the psyches of Americans and others around the world.

Nations such as Denmark, Germany, and the Czech Republic have recently reopened their economies after instituting lockdowns in March. As of May 4, none of the countries had shown signs of a "second wave" of the virus which has claimed the lives of more than 250,000 people worldwide.

Despite optimistic signs, fears remain high and much of the world remains in

lockdown. To some extent, this is to be expected. Individual liberty and collective security are fundamental ideas humans have wrestled with and debated over for thousands of years. Fear has long been freedom's greatest enemy.

As we grapple with COVID-19, humans must ask themselves a familiar question. "Is the promise of a perfectly secure world worth the price of our individual rights?" asks my colleague Sean Malone in the most recent *Out of Frame*. (Marvel fans especially should watch it.)

Recent events in Wisconsin and Europe suggest humans increasingly are beginning to answer "no."

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video call, silence makes you anxious about the technology. Even a 1.2-second delay in responding online made people perceive the person talking as less friendly or focused.

In addition, frustration with people turning their microphones on and off, lagging connections, and background noise mean the online meeting rarely flows as smoothly as the real-world version.

## It's Not All Zoom and Doom

On the upside, social anxiety is positively correlated with feelings of comfort online. So for people who dread physical meetings, meeting online might be a welcome respite.

And even though the increased focus on verbal information in video meetings can be more draining, it might also have some positive side effects by reducing biases due to social and emotional signals.

For instance, certain physical factors are linked to social dominance, such as height. But these factors are less apparent in video meetings, which could lead to increased emphasis on the merits of arguments.

## How Can We Reduce Fatigue?

With predictions that the new workplace "normal" will be very different from the old one, it seems that video conferencing is here to stay. There are a number of steps we can take to reduce the negative effects of online video meetings.

Firstly, consider whether the meeting needs to happen. In some cases, shared document platforms with detailed comments can reduce the need to meet.

Limiting the number of video meetings in a day can assist, as well as using messaging and email.

Sometimes, the phone is better. On the phone, we only have to concentrate on one voice and can walk around which can help thinking.

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ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

Each of us has a purpose and a strength that we may not even recognize. We have resiliency, and goodness within. When we experience difficulties, when things are tough or don't turn out as we'd like, we learn.

## The Benefits of Doing Our Best, Even in Adversity

Challenges help us learn, even as they help us grow as people

### TATIANA DENNING

"If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven played music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'" — Martin Luther King, Jr.

From the time he was little, I've encouraged my son to do his best. Whether in school, doing chores around the house, or when helping another, I've

stressed that giving his best effort is always important. Some might say that I've put too much pressure on my son, that he can't always be great at everything he does. But this is where thinking sometimes gets confused, leading to an incorrect understanding and focus.

#### Being the Best

Asking my son to do his best, and asking him to be the best, are two very different things. He couldn't possibly be the best at everything, nor should that be the goal. But he can always do his best.



Whatever our job or role in life may be, whether the president of a company or the janitor of a company, we should always do things to the best of our ability.

outdoing us. And when we compare what we do against what others do, rather than against what is truly right or wrong, we may find ourselves out of alignment with our values.

Our hearts often become uneasy as we strive to outdo others, and we may find that our minds churn even at night, and our sleep suffers as a result.

Living this way is not only stressful, it's downright exhausting.

#### Doing Your Best

Doing our best means giving our all, and going about whatever we endeavor with our whole heart. No matter how hard the task may be, it's important to strive forward with focus and determination.

David Erichsen, on his website Lifehack, says, "Doing your best is synonymous with living out each and every moment to its fullest potential. And this potential exists in every situation you encounter in your life. All that is required of you is not to fight whatever life throws your way."

Doing our best is a virtue. It not only fills us with a sense of accomplishment but serves to strengthen the good things in us. It takes resolve and determination, focus, and perseverance, as well as a great deal of self-discipline. Things such as patience, honesty, ingenuity, and being thoughtful and considerate of others are also required. And sometimes, it even involves blood, sweat, and tears.

Some of the most successful and well-respected coaches in sports, in whom many of these qualities can be found, understand this. They know that even in competition, core values are vitally important, things like hard work, self-sacrifice, and thinking of others.

The great Herb Brooks, who coached the underdog U.S. hockey team to victory against the highly favored Soviets in the 1980 Olympics, had this to say, "I looked for people first, athletes second. I wanted people with a sound value system, as you cannot buy values. You're only as good as your values. I learned early on that you do not put greatness into people ... but somehow try to pull it out."

Phil Jackson, the all-time winningest coach for basketball championships, having coached both the L.A. Lakers and Chicago Bulls to multiple victories, said, "Once you've done the mental work, there comes a point you have to throw yourself into the action and put your heart on the line. That means not only being brave, but being compassionate towards yourself, your teammates, and your opponents."

Even in competitive sports, the great coaches recognize that attributes such as bravery and compassion for others are necessary. Doing our best takes effort, and at times, it can be just plain hard. Be it mentally or physically, it can test our endurance and push us to our limits. It may require reaching beyond what we thought we were capable of and for a search deep within for strength and clarity.

As the great Notre Dame coach Lou Holtz said, "Show me someone who has done something worthwhile, and I'll show you someone who has overcome adversity."

While it may not be easy, I think

most of us would agree that when we lay our heads down at night, we sleep better knowing that we've tried to do our best that day. It fills a deep need in our soul in a way that nothing else can.

#### Look for the Lesson

In striving to do our best, things may not always work out as we'd like. But even if the results aren't great, if we remember to focus on the process, rather than the result, we can see it's really in the process that we learn and grow. No matter the result, we can reflect on what we've learned and use that to help us improve and do even better the next time.

In fact, it's often in our failures and difficulties that we learn the most.

Even knowing this, there have been times when I've tried to protect my son from hardship. I've come to understand that doing this was more about me and less about him. While it might be hard for me to see him fail or go through a difficulty, if I shield him from all of life's hardships, he'll never learn how to handle them. In reality, when I try to make his life too easy, I rob him of valuable lessons that were meant to help him improve.

It is in our adversities that we grow stronger, learn how to do better, and develop our moral character. As Mahatma Gandhi said, "Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths. When you go through hardships and decide not to surrender, that is strength."

Life inevitably has its share of ups and downs. If I don't give my son the chance to experience this, and to learn how to handle adversity and develop resiliency, how will he ever manage life's challenges as an adult?

When we face adversity, this is when we stop and reflect within. Our tribulations, hard though they may be, are truly a gift, if we can allow our minds to view them as such. As a quote from Arthur Golden says, "Adversity is like a strong wind. It tears away from us all but the things that cannot be torn, so that we see ourselves as we really are."

We have seen our lives turned upside down by the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) virus, popularly known as COVID-19, and some have even lost their loved ones. There are other hardships as well, be they the loss of a job and income, concerns over keeping ourselves and those we love healthy, the pressure of homeschooling our children, and uncertainty of what the future holds.

Having been mandated to remain within the confines of our homes, we may struggle with the loss of human contact and companionship as well. But since we have been forced to slow down and put things on pause, perhaps we can view this as an opportunity to reflect within.

Taking a closer look at our thoughts and actions can help reveal where we can improve. For example, when life was busier, perhaps we were not doing our best to take care of our health or watching our thoughts and actions.

Maybe we'd let anger, fear, or jealousy control our thoughts and behaviors. By using this time to take an honest look at our hearts and minds, we can make sure we are aligning with the values we want to uphold.



Whatever our job or role in life may be, whether the president of a company or the janitor of a company, we should always do things to the best of our ability.

In doing so, maybe we can be a little kinder to our neighbors, help one another when we see the chance, call to check in on those we care about, and ultimately remember what is truly important in life. By holding good things in our hearts and minds, and by taking good care of our health, we are less vulnerable to illness of not just the body, but of the mind and spirit as well.

The ancients believed that when tribulations befell a society, it was a wake-up call, a sign from the heavens, warning people that the morals and values of society had degenerated to a dangerous point. It was understood that when the people recognized their wrongdoing, felt sincere remorse, and were determined to improve themselves and do what is right and good, the calamity would be resolved and blessings would follow.

Perhaps we, too, are each being given a chance to improve our hearts, to let go of what is self-serving, and do what is right and just—to truly do and be our best. While our modern ways of thinking may find these things hard to believe, this pandemic is certainly enough to give one pause to think things over. The fundamental principles of right and wrong are eternal and still apply today.

### Being the best and doing our best does not have to be mutually exclusive; it's our hearts and intentions that matter.

Each of us has a purpose and a strength that we may not even recognize. We have resiliency, and goodness within. When we experience difficulties, when things are tough or don't turn out as we'd like, we learn. Falling down and picking ourselves up is part of the process. Through this process—falling, getting back up, and growing—we learn to do better, and be better people.

#### Mind Your Thoughts and Actions

Conversely, if we take the easy way out, we may become lazy, complacent, and perhaps even apathetic. In taking this path, we never truly feel good about ourselves, at least not deep down inside. While we may have gotten away with something, gotten something over on someone, or moved ahead of another, where does this really get us in the end? In harming another, in wanting something for nothing, or when we don't put forth an effort, who we really harm is ourselves.

The danger in striving to be the best is that we may not actually be doing our best. If we see others getting ahead of us, we could find ourselves doing whatever it takes to achieve our goal. We may even lessen our own standards for ourselves, forgetting that we should abide by certain values, for, after all, being the best is what matters most.

With this focus, we may cut corners, infringe upon others, put our work onto another, or worse. If the goal is to outdo others in order to be the best, then we may do

any manner of things, from lying, to cheating, to stealing.

#### Strengthening Character

It's long been held that hard work and doing our best builds character, something the older generation knows very well. They were raised on it.

I came across these wise words in *The Wisconsin Farmer*, dated February 14, 1908 "A thoughtful writer says: "We cannot all have talent, we cannot all have great powers, we cannot all do great work, but we can all, by slow and patient endeavor, build up character, which may do good work, even though it may be small and humble. We do not improve the character of anybody else in any other way so well as by improving our own character, and that is in the power of each one of us; we can begin at once, and we can always go on with this work, wherever our lot is cast."

Though what we do may not be great or grand things, and while we may not excel at everything we do, if we strive to do our best, to do good work, no matter how menial the task may be, we will be better for it. Whatever our job or role in life may be, whether the president of a company or the janitor of a company, we should always do things to the best of our ability.

Joshua Becker, on his blog *Becoming Minimalist*, discusses putting in our best effort, even for tasks, we may not love. He says, "I understand that not every job is enjoyable, and feeling motivated to work hard comes easier to someone who looks forward to punching in the clock each morning (or evening).

Sometimes, we are required to do work we do not enjoy. If that's you, please remember, your enjoyment of work does not diminish the inherent value in it."

By realizing that even the smallest task has value, perhaps we can find the motivation to give our best effort and to look more deeply at what can be learned from the experience.

Becker goes on to say, "If you are working a job you hate in order to provide for your family, you are doing a noble thing and should be commended. And working hard at it, in the place you are today, is your most important step out of it."

Being the best and doing our best does not have to be mutually exclusive; it's our hearts and intentions that matter. Sometimes, in striving to do our best, we may naturally find ourselves in a better place for having given of ourselves, for pushing ourselves, even when it's physically or mentally challenging.

But even more importantly, when we know that we've done our best, that we've given our all, we are sure to have few regrets.

The next time a task or a situation presents itself, even if it's one you don't like or don't relish doing, try putting forth your best effort, such that all the hosts of heaven and earth pause to take notice, and see what happens. You may just find that you learn and grow and succeed in ways you never imagined!

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



Asking my son to do his best, and asking him to be the best, are two very different things.



Social distancing can be particularly difficult for people suffering from depression, bipolar disorder, or addiction.

## Social Distancing and Mental Health

Isolation can fuel downward spiral for some people facing mental illness

### ANDREW THOMAS

Most of the world's focus has been on helping those infected with COVID-19 and preventing further contagion. While successful, social distancing and self-isolation have been hard to bear, leaving more people contending with mental health issues.

I had an opportunity to speak with Elisabeth Mandel Goldberg, a family and marriage therapist based in New York, about how these measures and the experience of the pandemic are affecting those with mental illness, a misunderstood and often stigmatized population.

According to Goldberg, the most common mental health conditions being affected are obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and addiction disorders—in ascending level of severity.

#### OCD and Anxiety

For those with obsessive-compulsive disorder, the measures to prevent infection and spread of the virus such as the washing of hands have normalized some symptoms of the disorder.

Goldberg suggests that those with OCD remind themselves that this situation is temporary, and even though some obsessive behaviors are being encouraged at the moment, that this pandemic will not last forever.

For those who struggle with anxiety, the uncertainty of this time has exacerbated the condition.

"People are losing sleep because they don't know who's going to get affected, they don't know who's going to die," Goldberg said.

Goldberg advises those who stuck at home, struggling with anxiety who are stuck at home to clean their homes and themselves thoroughly. The act of cleaning itself allows someone with anxiety to remind themselves that they are doing everything that they can in the moment to help themselves and alleviates their compulsive worries of what might happen in the future.

#### Depression

One of the main symptoms of depression is social isolation, and social distancing has exacerbated this symptom. For people who are trying to manage depression, social distancing allows them to sleep in more than they should, to not go outside, and to cry because the media is sending the message that the world is ending. Most importantly, since those with depression are isolated, the potential for suicidal thoughts increases.

"When you describe the symptoms of depression it's like a biofeedback loop because it fuels itself, so it's a downward spiral of darkness and hopelessness encouraged by social distancing," Goldberg said.

Goldberg recommends that those who are struggling with depression find a creative outlet to help alleviate their symptoms. Reading, writing, and music are all good creative activities. Exercise is also helpful, however those suffering from depression may not have the motivation to do so. Therefore, Goldberg

recommends stretching, maintaining personal hygiene, and eating a balanced diet. If you know someone who is depressed and you call them they may not pick up, so sending an uplifting text message is a good idea, Goldberg said.

#### Bipolar Disorder

According to Goldberg, the pandemic is exacerbating hypomanic, manic, and mixed episodes for those with bipolar disorder.

### If you know someone who is depressed and you call them they may not pick up, so sending an uplifting text message is a good idea.

For instance, the shortage of basic necessities is enabling those with bipolar disorder to search frantically for them, and they may get a high from spending, which could potentially induce a hypomanic episode.

Furthermore, significant life transitions can be a catalyst for manic episodes, Goldberg said.

Goldberg suggests that those with bipolar disorder should pay close attention to their spending habits, keep track of their supplies, and make a budget.

#### Addiction

Those who are struggling with drug and alcohol addictions are the most vulnerable population. Whether someone is at home alone, with their families, or with their significant other the pressure of having to be stuck in the same home can exacerbate addictive tendencies. They also may be out of work and lack a schedule. The only message they hear is stay home and don't go outside, and that creates a lack of accountability for someone who has addictive tendencies.

"They feel like they have an excuse. They can say to themselves 'I'm not doing anything wrong, I'm doing something right. At least I'm numbing the pain whereas other people have to deal with fear and anxiety, so I have a means of escape,'" Goldberg explained.

Goldberg believes that family members and friends can help a loved one who is struggling with addiction by sending uplifting text messages to them. If they live in the same home, Goldberg suggests family keep an eye on their loved one, engage in family activities, and keep track of the alcohol in the home.

Overall, Goldberg suggests keeping track of one's finances, not sleeping too much, and limiting the amount of time they spend reading and watching the news about the pandemic. She also recommends limiting alcohol consumption and keeping in touch with family members. Remind yourself this is temporary, think about how you can feel a sense of control over your immediate surroundings, do something creative and enjoyable, and stay connected with friends and family.



# Learning to Let Go of Your To-do List

You are not defined by what you own—or what you accomplish

ROSE LOUNSBURY

I've always tried to organize my time. I've been a keeper of planners, both digital and paper, my entire life. I can't go to bed without writing out a to-do list for the next day. I've read time management books and consumed copious podcasts on productivity. Heck, I've even taught classes on time management!

Why then, do I continue to struggle in this area? Why do I feel like every day is a battle with a never-ending to-do list that, like a zombie army, seems to regenerate each time I kill off one member?

This bothered me so much that I stopped teaching time management classes. It's no fun to stand in front of a room and tell people how to manage their time when you feel like you're barely holding it together.

But like many problems, this one unraveled itself in the shower. As I contemplated how many more minutes I could legitimately stand under the hot water before getting my kids up the other morning, I realized ...

My old system of Step 1: Minimize, followed by Step 2: Organize, was missing a key 3rd step: Let Go.

I never included this step because it wasn't something I struggled with regarding my stuff. I could let go of stuff pretty easily. Old college newspaper

**I've always pinned my self-worth on doing and thus the more I do, the better I am.**

articles I wrote? Don't need 'em. Too-tight jeans? Into the donation bag. Toys my kids have outgrown? Goodbye.

But when it comes to my time and commitments ... ah, there's the rub! It's much harder for me to let go of things I want to do. And here's why.

For most of my life, I've defined myself not by what I own, but by what I accomplish.

When I was a kid, I remember adults asking me that familiar question: What do you want to be when you grow up? It seemed like "becoming something" was the most important thing I had to figure out in order to enter the adult world. And I did.

I went to college and became a teacher. A respectable profession. It allowed me to easily answer the adult version of that childhood question, now asked over cocktails at fundraising events and in the present tense: So ... what do you do?

I've always pinned my self-worth on doing and thus the more I do, the better I am.

There's just one slight problem with that. It's not true.

My self-worth is not determined by what I do any more than by what I own.

I've just had 38 years of practice looking

at it that way.

Now, I've learned I can minimize my commitments. I can say 'no,' I can say 'I'm too busy,' I can flat-out refuse.

I can organize my time. Give me planners, apps, notebooks, sticky notes, and synced calendars galore.

But unless I learn to let go of the belief that what I do is equal to who I am, none of that matters.

So my task is not to say 'no' more often. And it's not to organize my time with color codes and time blocks and pinged reminders.

My task is to realize that who I am is irrelevant to all of that.

Who I am has always been worthy and valuable and important and no amount of to-do list crossing off can touch it. It's the unshakable, never-changing, underlying part of me.

And the only thing worth crossing off my to-do list each day is to simply remember that.

*Rose Lounsbury is a minimalism and simplicity coach, speaker, and author of the Amazon bestselling "Less: Minimalism for Real." You can find her online at RoseLounsbury.com. This article was first published on "Becoming Minimalist."*

It's much harder for me to let go of things I want to do.

## As COVID-19 Lurks, Families Get Locked Out of Nursing Homes

Continued from Page 4

Every day, all day, Dark said, he gets calls from California families in this situation who are distraught and terrified.

Families need to think through these decisions carefully, said Dr. Joanne Lynn, a policy analyst with the Program to Improve Eldercare at Altarum, a research organization. What if their

loved one becomes ill? Will they be able to provide care? If their relative has dementia or serious disabilities, can they handle the demands such conditions entail?

Researchers in Ottawa, Canada, have developed a useful decision aid for families, available at decisionaid.ohri.ca. (Americans can ignore the Canada-specific information.)

At the very least, "get plans in place in case your relative has a bad [COVID-19] case. People can go from stable to serious illness within hours in many cases," Lynn said.

This involves updating advance directives, including whether your loved one would want cardiopulmonary resuscitation, mechanical ventilation, transfer to the hospital in the event of a

life-threatening health crisis or hospice care, should that be indicated.

*Judith Graham is a contributing columnist for Kaiser Health News, which originally published this article. KHN's coverage of these topics is supported by The John A. Hartford Foundation, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, and The SCAN Foundation.*



Practicing positive states of being can lead to physical changes in the brain, which in turn improves our state of mind in the future.

# How Our Brains Can Find Peace in a Crisis

Becoming more resilient can transform our capacity to face hardship—and grow

JILL SUTTIE

During this stressful time, it can be hard to manage the emotional challenges of sheltering in place and facing an uncertain future.

We can't rely on some of our usual ways of coping, like going out on the town with friends or getting hugs from a sibling. That means many of us are falling back on the (healthy or not-so-healthy) mental habits that we've been building up for years.

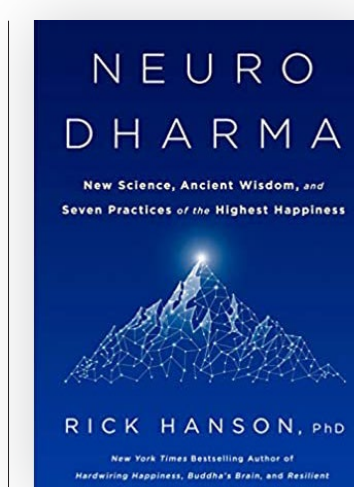
Psychologist and neuroscience expert Rick Hanson studies the mental resources that promote resilience, from calm and gratitude, to confidence and courage. According to Hanson, the coronavirus crisis is exposing some of our psychological vulnerabilities, and reminding us how

important it is to nurture our social and emotional strengths.

In his new book, "Neurodharma," Hanson writes about how we can cultivate more equanimity, wisdom, and moral action using meditation and other practices. As he illustrates with neuroscience research, practicing positive states of being like these can lead to physical changes in the brain, which in turn improves our state of mind in the future.

His book and website offer a wealth of ideas for practices to cultivate a calmer, healthier way of being in the world and responding to the ups and downs of life. In the edited discussion below, I spoke to Hanson about his book and its message.

**JILL SUTTIE:** In your book, you write about qualities that people can develop in themselves for greater well-being and wisdom.



**Neurodharma: New Science, Ancient Wisdom, and Seven Practices of the Highest Happiness (Harmony, 2020, 352 pages)**

Can you describe these?  
**RICK HANSON:** There are seven qualities available to all of us that are at the heart of resilient well-being:

- To steady your mind, so that you're mindful, focused, stable, and on a solid footing.
- To warm the heart—bring compassion, kindness, and a courageous heart into your life.
- To rest in fullness, which is a poetic way to describe equanimity—a felt sense of calm strength and having enough already.

Those first three hang together—steadiness, lovingness, fullness—and we can see how useful they are in everyday life, including helping us have emotional balance. The next three also hang together:

Continued on Page 11

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

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TRUTH and TRADITION

# A NEWSPAPER GEORGE WASHINGTON WOULD READ

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# Realizing How We Are Essential

Decisions about nonessential work has left millions jobless and wounded

JOSHUA BECKER

More than 20 million Americans lost their jobs in April. Those are Depression-era numbers.

As businesses closed for the quarantine, policymakers discussed essential workers and nonessential workers.

Who is an essential worker and who is a nonessential worker? Which businesses and industries are essential and which are not?

Medical experts and political leaders debated these phrases in countless communities around the world—ofentimes arriving at drastically different conclusions.

Regardless of how they ended up classifying work in their jurisdiction, “essential” workers were allowed to continue, “nonessential” were asked to stay home.

There may be fall out from this type of designation and how “essential” workers have been heralded and praised in every community, while many “nonessential” workers have lost their livelihoods over seemingly arbitrary designations. In some cases, the work being accomplished was identical.

Let me offer some thoughts if you are hurting.

First of all, if you are an essential worker and have been putting yourself out there for our society, thank you. If you have been stocking shelves, driving trucks, packing food, or responding first, thank you for the hard work and extra hours you have been putting in.

But equally important, if your work or business has been classified as nonessential, please know your work is likely essential—even if not classified as such by some.

In almost every case, your work is needed, your talent is appreciated, and your dedication to serving others is required for all of us. Your work, by definition, makes us better people and a better society.

If you think the rush for toilet paper was bad, wait until 300 million Americans try to schedule a haircut at the same time.

Your work may have been deemed nonessential, but your life is not. You are essential to somebody, every day.

**There may be fall out from this type of designation and how ‘essential’ workers have been heralded and praised in every community, while many ‘nonessential’ workers have lost their livelihoods over seemingly arbitrary designations.**

So make the most of every opportunity:

- Care for your body and health.
- Love your spouse.
- Spend time with your children.
- Call your neighbors and friends and extended family.
- Serve the less fortunate.
- Foster your faith.
- Offer hope and life to everyone you see.

Live your life with intention and purpose.

You are important. You are essential to someone. And no designation changes that.

*Joshua Becker is an author, public speaker, and the founder and editor of “Becoming Minimalist” where he inspires others to live more by owning less. Visit [BecomingMinimalist.com](http://BecomingMinimalist.com)*



Hair stylists and barbers may not seem essential, but can you imagine a life without these professionals?

**The coronavirus crisis is exposing some of our psychological vulnerabilities, and reminding us how important it is to nurture our social and emotional strengths.**

# How Our Brains Can Find Peace in a Crisis

*Continued from Page 9*

- To feel whole and not at war with parts of yourself.
- To receive “nowness”—really living in the emergent moment, in the present, not getting lost in the past or lost in the future as we so often do.
- To open into “altness”—meaning the sense that we’re connected to everything. We know that intellectually, but to feel it and to relax our sense of self, to take things less personally, to be less identified with things, less possessive, and less prickly and reactive with other people.

Then there is the ultimate—what I call “finding timelessness,” which speaks to the ultimate ground of well-being. For instance, the Buddha pointed toward what is “unconditioned”—not subject to arising and passing away. The unconditioned is therefore a more reliable basis for lasting happiness and inner peace. As one example, the field of awareness is effectively unconditioned; experiences change, but awareness is stable.

These are ways of being that we develop through practice, through experiencing them and turning those experiences into lasting changes in the brain. They’re accessible to all of us.

Further, we can operationalize them, just like people who do psychology research do when they look at the factors that make someone resilient. We can observe people who seem fully self-actualized ... and we can ask, “What is the basis in their brain of these wonderful ways of being?”

**MS. SUTTIE:** How does understanding neuroscience help people cultivate well-being?  
**MR. HANSON:** I don’t think brain science is necessary for full awakening. It’s not necessary for ordinary psychological healing or the development of resilient well-being over time, either. Many people have obviously proved that point by developing in those ways without access to an MRI or the latest study.

On the other hand, we recognize scientifically that the experiences of a human being—how contented you are, how fulfilled you feel in your relationships, what happens when another person mistreats you—are all based on what the body is doing, especially our neurobiology.

So, if we’re interested in disengaging from dread, fear, and helplessness and

engaging in a feeling of calm strength and openheartedness, we should be interested in how the brain is making those experiences happen. And we should be interested in how we can intervene in the brain skillfully, with precision and some granularity, to help ourselves and others have beneficial experiences more often and learn from them more effectively. When you understand how the hardware works, it turbocharges your practice.

The book is full of examples where identifying underlying neural “circuitry” that underpins beneficial traits—such as present-moment awareness or grateful contentment—helps to establish them in ourselves. You can deliberately stimulate those circuits, and, as you start having those experiences, you can also help your brain heighten the conversion of those experiences into lasting changes of neural structure and function. So that’s really useful.

The second reason is that it’s motivating to bring neuroscience into account. You appreciate that your brain is being changed by your practices and also by your bad habits. A lot of people who have not typically been drawn to personal growth get really interested in it when they realize that it’s “techie”; there’s an engineering aspect here. Practice actually changes the physicality of your brain.

It can also sharpen your insight into your moment-to-moment experience if you understand it’s based on very fast ebbs and flows of neurochemical activity. Increasingly, I can watch the show in the theater of my own consciousness with an understanding of what’s actually prompting the experiences I’m having. Whether it’s a surge of anger or whether it’s a wave of calm, whether it’s some kind of a warm connection or whether there’s some feeling of being dismissed or disrespected by somebody else, I can understand what’s happening in my brain that’s generating that experience. It really helps you come home to yourself when you realize that your experience is a body-mind process.

**MS. SUTTIE:** Isn’t there a conflict between the idea of self-acceptance and the desire to be a better, more effective person in the world? How do you reconcile those two seemingly opposing goals?

**MR. HANSON:** Yeah, that’s a classic question. But basically all the great teachers say to do both. We are innately wakened, loving beings deep down in our core, but

most people, me included, are not like that all the time. We’re not continuously living from our innate goodness. We must make efforts over time to clear away the crud so we can come home to who we always were.

We need to gradually cultivate the slow accumulation of practice on the path and then we may experience sudden awakenings that create qualitative shifts. We need to engage willful effort in our mind as well as be able to have a profound serene acceptance underneath it all. They’re not at odds with each other; both are necessary, and each one supports the other.

**MS. SUTTIE:** How is your book relevant to our current moment, as we encounter the changes in our lives around the pandemic?

**MR. HANSON:** If you think about people who are models to us, who have really developed themselves, what you see in them is great fortitude and commitment to others; they are incredibly strong and brave. For me, the book is a manual of deep resilience; it really emphasizes what we can develop each day ourselves.

**“**  
**We need to gradually cultivate the slow accumulation of practice on the path and then we may experience sudden awakenings that create qualitative shifts.**

*Rick Hanson, author, psychologist, and neuroscience expert*

My opinion about this time is that many of us have been propped up by various activities and settings and interactions and the experiences that we had as a result. And that was fine, as long as the music was playing. But when the music stops and the storm comes as it has, and so much of that which we relied upon has fallen out from beneath our feet, we are left with what we have cultivated inside our own heart, inside our own being. This time teaches us how important it is to gradually grow the good inside oneself.

We do this for other people as well as for ourselves. As much as individuals are now facing the results of not having invested in their own practice or in self-development over time, we’re also recognizing that there has been a 40-year sustained attack on the common good—a politicized and relentless eroding of the rule of law, the social safety net, respect for science, expertise, and truth telling; and the playing of people against each other. Now, we are inheriting the consequences of that attack and that lack of investment in the common good.

When inevitably something happens, like the pandemic, it shows that our resource capability as a nation, particularly at the federal level, has been really hollowed out. We’ve been living in a house that looked all shiny and pretty from the outside with some good paint on it, but which had been hollowed out by highly motivated, politicized termites. And now a great storm is pounding on our house, and we are seeing the results.

This time calls on us to practice, as both individuals and communities, like we’ve never practiced before.

**MS. SUTTIE:** But how does each of us pursuing our own enlightened way of being really contribute to the greater social good?

**MR. HANSON:** I think there’s a false dichotomy between the personal and the political. We can see all around us people who develop themselves, in terms of mindfulness, compassion, confidence, grit, and commitment to helping others. As we cultivate these over time, we become more able to be helpful to people around us, and to take effective action for the greater good.

People who develop a core of resilient well-being, so that they’re not so preoccupied or distracted by a lot of suffering or psychological issues, also develop strengths that make them more effective in the world. Dacher Keltner and other researchers have shown that when people feel more whole and have a sense of self-worth, and as they cultivate a greater sense of compassion, they’re more inclined to be prosocial. It’s when people feel desperate and empty inside that they’re less likely to be prosocial. And, in the process of helping the common good, we have many opportunities for experiences of fulfillment and well-being. The two are intertwined—the personal and the political.

**MS. SUTTIE:** What would you most like people to take away from your book?

**MR. HANSON:** The power of personal practice and the possibility of profound personal development. I think every person is longing for more—not as craving or a world-denying dismissal of ordinary life, but as a longing for a deep peace, love, and contentment, and a release from always grasping for more. It could include a longing for something that feels deeper or different than ordinary reality. These are important longings to honor.

I think there are a lot of people who meditate a little here, practice a little gratitude there, and it’s good. It’s way better than the alternative. But they have hit a kind of plateau, where it’s comfortable, it’s pleasant. But, if a person is interested in next steps, whatever those might be, I want to encourage them to take those next steps. Your personal path of awakening honors that deep longing for more.

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



# Lessons From Medieval Europe's Waves of Plague

Plagues that upended societies of past centuries also required economic action plans

KRISTON R. RENNIE

The Black Death (1347-51) devastated European society. Writing four decades after the event, the English monk and chronicler Thomas Walsingham remarked that “so much wretchedness followed these ills that afterward the world could never return to its former state.”

This medieval commentary reflects a lived reality: a world turned upside down by mass fear, contagion, and death.

Yet, society recovered. Life continued despite the uncertainty. But it was not “business-as-usual” in the aftermath—the threat of plague remained.

## Slow and Painful Recovery

The post-Black Death world had “not been made any better by its renewal.” The French monk, Guillaume de Nangis, lamented that men were more “miserly and grasping,” “greedy and quarrelsome” and involved in more “brawls, disputes, and lawsuits.”

The shortage of workers in the aftermath was acute. The contemporary Historia Roffensis notes that swaths of land in England “remained uncultivated” in a world dependent on agricultural production.

A scarcity of goods soon followed, forcing some landlords in the realm to lower or pardon rents in order to keep their tenants. “If laborers work not,” quipped the English preacher, Thomas Wimbleton, “priests and knights must become cultivators and herdsman, or else die for want of bodily sustenance.”

Sometimes, the stimulus came by force. In 1349, the English government issued its Ordinance of Laborers, which legislated able-bodied men and women be paid salaries and wages at the pre-plague 1346 rate.

Other times, the recovery was more organic. According to the French Carmelite friar, Jean de Venette, “everywhere women conceived more readily than usual;” none was barren and pregnant women abounded. Several gave birth to twins and triplets, signaling a new age in the aftermath of such great mortality.

## A Common and Familiar Enemy

Then, the plague returned. A second pestilence struck England in 1361. A third wave affected several other countries in 1369. A fourth and fifth wave followed in 1374-79 and 1390-93 respectively.

Plague was a constant feature in late medieval and early modern life. Between 1348 and 1670, wrote historians, Andrew Cunningham and Ole Peter Grell, it was



“The Triumph of Death,” by Pieter Bruegel the Elder shows a devastated landscape where death is taking people indiscriminately as it appeared to during a wave of plague.



A portrait of Edmund Gibson, the bishop of London, attributed to English portraitist John Vanderbank. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

**A scarcity of goods soon followed, forcing some landlords in the realm to lower or pardon rents in order to keep their tenants.**

a regular and recurring event:

“... sometimes across vast regions, sometimes only in a few localities, but without omitting a single annual link in this long and mournful chain.”

The disease impacted communities, villages, and towns with greater risks to urban centres. With its dense population, London was scarcely free from disease with large outbreaks in 1603, 1625, 1636, and the “Great Plague” of 1665, which claimed 15 percent of the city’s population.

No generation escaped its wrath.

## Controlling the Disaster

Governments weren’t shy in their responses. While their experience could never prevent an outbreak, their management of disease tried to mitigate future disasters.

Queen Elizabeth I’s Plague Order of 1578 implemented a series of controls to support the infected and their families. Throughout England, a government initiative ensured that infected people did not leave their homes for food or work.

Pesthouses were also built to house the sick and protect the healthy. In 1666, King Charles II ordered each town and city “to be in readiness in case any infection should break out.” If an infected person was discovered, he or she would be removed from the house and city while the former was closed for 40 days, with a red cross and the message “Lord have mercy upon us” affixed to the door.

In some cases, barriers, or cordons sanitaires, were built around infected communities. But they sometimes did more harm than good. According to the Enlightenment historian Jean-Pierre Papon, residents of the Provençal town of Digne in 1629 were prevented from leaving, from burying their dead and from constructing cabanes, where they might have otherwise safely isolated from the disease.

## State and Moral Authority

Experience and regulatory measures weren’t always effective.

The great plague that struck the southern French city of Marseille between 1720 and 1722 killed an estimated 100,000 people. Following the arrival of the Grand Saint-Antoine, a merchant ship returning from the Levant, “proper care and remedies” to prevent the fatal consequences of this disease were delayed and ignored. The disease spread to all parts of the city.

The plague began to rage there within a matter of weeks. A corrupt doctor, false bills of health, political and economic pressures to unload the ship’s merchandise, and corrupt officials investigating the initial spread of the disease, all contributed to a disaster that could scarcely be contained in southern France.

Hospitals were saturated, unable to “receive the vast quantity of sick which came to them in throngs.” Exercising “double diligence,” authorities built new hospitals in the alleys, “fitted up large tents” on the city’s outskirts, filling them with “as many straw beds as possibly could remain there.”

**Throughout England, a government initiative ensured that infected people did not leave their homes for food or work.**

Fearful of transmission on its shores, the English government quickly updated its protective measures. The Quarantine Act of 1721 threatened violence, imprisonment, or death on anyone endeavoring to escape the enforced confinement, or those refusing to obey the new restrictions.

Some deemed these measures unnecessary. “Infection may have killed its thousands,” wrote one anonymous author, “but shutting up hath killed its ten thousands...”

Edmund Gibson, the bishop of London and an apologist for the government disagreed. “Where the disease is desperate,” he wrote, “the remedy must be so too.” As such, he wrote, there was no point dwelling “upon rights and liberties, and the ease and convenience of mankind, when there was plague hanging over our heads.”

Social dislocation was an inevitable result—a necessary evil. But as medieval and early modern experiences with plague remind us, it is not a permanent fixture.

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# Frank Herbert Was Right: Fear Is the Mind-Killer

Our freedom is our hope and happiness. We must not give it away out of fear.

JEN MAFFESSANTI

“I must not fear. Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration.” Frank Herbert, noted writer of science fiction, was being scientifically factual when he included this line in his novel “Dune.” Fear is, in fact, the mind-killer.

Don’t get me wrong, fear serves a purpose. There are times when fear is justified, and its effects on our brains and bodies are needed to keep us alive. We’ve all felt that jolt of adrenaline when something scares us—our fight-or-flight reflex readying us to either do battle or dash away—and it has served an important survival purpose.

But adrenaline-induced increased speed, strength, and heightened senses, like all things, come with trade-offs. Because the process of fear involves multiple portions of our brains doing complicated things, like coordinating the release of various hormones and neurotransmitters and limiting the blood supply to “nonessential” processes (like digestion), it can’t do other things as well. According to the University of Minnesota:

“Fear can interrupt processes in our brains that allow us to regulate emotions, read non-verbal cues, and other information presented to us, reflect before acting, and act ethically. This impacts our thinking and decision-making in negative ways, leaving us susceptible to intense emotions and impulsive reactions. All of these effects can leave us unable to act appropriately.”

**We must not let ourselves give away the things that make life worth living on the off-chance that doing so will somehow shield us from harm.**

These side-effects generally fade away once our fear does. After all, humans aren’t built to feel fear constantly. Chronic feelings of fear and anxiety hurt our physical health and emotional well-being. Sometimes we can know that our fears aren’t rational. But disordered thinking—like post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and panic disorders, and phobias—doesn’t listen well to rationality, which is where mental health professionals can help.

So given all of this information, what happens when something serious, like a terrorist attack or a pandemic, scares us? It’s perfectly normal to be scared by something like that. But that state of fear often prevents us, all of us, from making smart, well-considered decisions.

It’s difficult and uncomfortable to work past fear. At some level, we know that we don’t make our best choices when we’re afraid. This drives us to seek out those who seem to be less afraid than we are to make important decisions for us. Generally, the people our modern society looks to are our political leaders.

The problem with that is that our political leaders are just as human as we are. They might have better public relations teams than everyday people, but they’re still human. They are still subject to all of the same emotions and incentives that the rest of us are. Election to public office doesn’t somehow magically change the fundamental ways that people respond to various stimuli.

We want to believe that our political leaders (at least the ones we rooted for) are full of goodness and light, that they think and legislate justly with only good intentions in their hearts. We want to believe this because we want to believe that we would do that if we were in the same position. But as Zuri told T’Challa in Marvel’s “Black Panther,” “It’s hard for a good man to be king.”



This coincides with Lord John Dalberg-Acton’s warning that “power corrupts,” a belief echoed by what economists call “public choice theory.”

Public choice theory posits that people do not magically become angels upon gaining a position of power, like political office. They are still subject to behavioral incentives like the rest of us. It also states that it’s not particularly beneficial for voters to be especially informed since it is difficult, time-consuming, and exceedingly rare for any single vote to sway the results of an election.

Therefore, it’s very easy for politicians to become comfortable with their positions of power and seek to secure or increase that power (after all, it’s what people do). It doesn’t make sense for voters to keep close tabs on their politicians’ behavior because their informed vote weighs just as much as their neighbor’s uninformed vote (and matters just as little). So bad behavior by politicians is often forgotten or glossed over or just doesn’t matter all that much.

Then, the Scary Thing happens; the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the 2008 financial crisis, COVID-19. Real problems that are legitimately frightening lead to demands from the citizenry to “Do Something” because they suspect they are too afraid right now to make good decisions for themselves.

Only the politicians are scared, too. They don’t want to die in an explosion or be hooked up to a ventilator in the ICU any more than we do. And being just as human and prone to error as we are, they tend to make bad decisions in the heat of the moment.

In the aftermath of 9/11, we saw a huge expansion in the power and scope of the U.S. federal government. From the security theater of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to the broadening of the surveillance state, “national security” became the perfect excuse for every extension of government into the daily lives of ordinary, peaceful people. After all, you don’t want the terrorists to win, do you?

We’re seeing eerily similar expansions of power now during the current COVID-19 outbreak. A great many decisions are, properly, being left to state and local governments. Unfortunately, the power granted, and then exercised, by state- and local-level state-of-emergency declarations are revealing just how many would-be tyrants

Our fear of the virus could be as dangerous as the virus itself if we allow our reactions to it be affected by the brain-limiting effects of fear.

we have in office. Businesses have been ordered closed, curfews instated, travel restricted, prices controlled, all with disastrous and heartbreaking effects.

True, a great many burdensome and, frankly, pointless regulations have been lifted in an effort to slow the economic bleeding and help get much-needed goods and services to medical personnel. But an economy is not a machine. It can’t just be turned off for a few weeks or months and be expected to run just like it used to when it’s allowed to start back up again.

A lot of people are sick, and some of them are dying. That is tragic and terrifying, and I don’t want to make light of it. As a member of a high-risk category, I’m all too aware of the risks and the what-ifs and the worry. I know the fear.

But if our own recent history has taught us anything, it’s that we must not give in to the fear. We must not let ourselves give away the things that make life worth living on the off-chance that doing so will somehow shield us from harm. Our freedom is our hope and our happiness, and it is mighty. But once we allow it to be taken from us, it’s incredibly difficult to gain it back.

That first quotation from Frank Herbert goes on:

“I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me. And when it has gone past, I will turn the inner eye to see its path. Where the fear has gone, there will be nothing. Only I will remain.”

This crisis will end, as all things end. That is not in question.

The question that does exist, however, is when the smoke has cleared and we emerge from our quarantines, will we have faced our fears, permitted them to pass over and through us, and remain free individuals? Or will we, in a flash of terror, have allowed ourselves to be bound by fearful dictates? Worse still, will many of us have asked for it?

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# Using Activity to Regulate Your Mood

It can be hard to keep active during the pandemic—but it’s crucial to try

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

One great way to regulate mood and stave-off depression during lockdown is with activity. Of course, for many, the options available just a few months ago no longer exist.

A new study published in JAMA (The Journal of the American Medical Association) found that activities are a useful form of mood regulation. They found that many people use activities to bring them up when they are feeling down, creating something dubbed “mood homeostasis.”

This has become much more challenging in the pandemic as activity choices may feel extremely limited. It’s possible that you or the people you love are finding it increasingly difficult to work up the energy to engage in meaningful activities.

It’s estimated that more than 7

percent of American adults have had at least one major depressive episode. Because medications only work about half the time, finding alternative ways to improve mood can be a useful form of treatment.

The big question is what can you actually do when a pandemic has turned normal life upside down.

Thinking outside the box is likely the best way to get through it. People I know have been able to adapt by dancing at home, scheduling virtual game nights with friends, working on small indoor vegetable gardens, or heading out for walks around their neighborhood.

But really, it doesn’t stop there. For example, if you’re involved in your local church or another community group, you can find new ways to engage. Perhaps you can help others by writing a newsletter for members, conducting interviews, or hosting a

virtual service.

You can dive a little bit deeper into a hobby or take a closer look at something you’ve always wanted to learn. The key is to find things that keep you occupied and feeling good.

Finding ways to regulate mood can come with a host of other benefits. Avoiding depression might help with pain relief, cognition, inflammation, and a lower risk for heart disease.

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**The key is to find things that keep you occupied and feeling good.**

Many people use activities to bring them up when they are feeling down, creating something dubbed ‘mood homeostasis.’





Drop complex chemicals for effective, simple, natural cleaners

DEBORAH MITCHELL

Spring cleaning is a rite of passage: clearing out the cobwebs and cabin fever and opening up your living space to the fresh, clean energy of spring. Even better, you can do this without synthetic chemicals and harsh cleansers that contaminate this life-renewing time of year.

It's no secret that indoor pollution is

worse than outdoor pollution. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency warns the public about the many different indoor air-quality issues you should address, from off-gassing furniture and carpeting to radon, asbestos, mold, and certain household cleaners.

Exposure to conventional household cleaning products can cause a wide variety of symptoms, ranging from eye and throat irritation to dizziness, fatigue, headache, worsening of asthma and other respiratory conditions, and even cancer. That's because they contain hazardous ingredients such as chlorine, phosphates, sulfates, phthalates, parabens, perfumes, dyes, or petroleum products. Cleaning products that contain these toxins are a danger to humans and their pets.

Everyone has a different living environ-

**If you want your homemade cleaning products to have a wonderful scent, then you can add essential oils.**

ment and different cleaning needs, but there are some basic materials and nontoxic ingredients you can use to welcome spring while protecting your health, the planet, and your wallet. Begin with a list of basic supplies.

**Natural Spring Cleaning Basics**  
Supplies: bucket, soft cloths, spray bottle(s), scrub brush, mop

**Baking Soda:** Also known as sodium bicarbonate, this staple deodorizes, fights grease, cleans well, brightens colors, and combines well with other ingredients.

**Borax:** Some studies suggest Borax can irritate the skin and eyes and may even disrupt hormone levels. So if you are looking for borax in the following formu-

las for spring cleaning, you won't see it.

**Castile Soap:** If grease and grime are a problem, this 100 percent plant oil soap can cut through it!

**Essential Oils:** If you want your homemade cleaning products to have a wonderful scent, then you can add essential oils. Lavender, wild orange, peppermint, tea tree, and cinnamon are favorites, but you can choose your own. Most essential oils are safe, but some can trigger allergies so check them before using them in your products.

**Baking soda, also known as sodium bicarbonate, this staple deodorizes, fights grease, cleans well, brightens colors, and combines well with other ingredients.**

**Lemon Juice:** Watch out mold and mildew because lemon juice is your enemy thanks to its acid content. Lemon juice also leaves a shine on hard surfaces and a pleasant aroma.

**Olive Oil:** You don't need to use your organic extra-virgin olive oil for cleaning—reserve that for your cooking. However, lower-grade olive oil is helpful as a polish and cleaner.

**Rubbing alcohol:** This old favorite is a good alternative when vinegar may harm some surfaces.

**Washing Soda:** This is used mainly for washing clothes. You can make your own washing soda by baking sodium bicarbonate, which is baking soda.

**White Vinegar:** The acidity in vinegar is the secret behind its ability to cut through soap scum, grime, grease, and other dirt. Vinegar also disinfects.

**Let's Spring Clean**  
Get out your spray bottles and cloths, and let's get to work.

**Spring Cleaning in the Bathroom**

**Toilet:** For serious cleaning, create a cleaning fizz by pouring in 1/2 cup baking soda, 10 drops of tea tree oil, and finishing off with 1/4 cup white vinegar. Use your scrub brush to clean. For routine cleaning, combine 8 ounces of white vinegar and 3 to 4 drops of your favorite essential oil in a spray bottle. Spray on the toilet seat and wipe clean, then use in the toilet, scrub, and flush.

**Tubs and showers:** Mildew, mold, and scum don't have a chance in your tub or shower if you spray on pure white vinegar. Let it sit for about 10 to 30 minutes, depending on how much build-up you have, then rinse it off with water and a sponge.

**General Spring Cleaning**

**Disinfectant:** A powerful disinfectant consists of 2 cups water, 3 tablespoons shaved castile soap, and 25 drops of tea tree oil. Shake vigorously and use to disinfect just about anything in the house.

**Glass Cleaner:** Clean your windows and mirrors with this super glass cleaner. Combine 2 cups water, 2 tablespoons each of rubbing alcohol and white vinegar, and 4 drops of lavender or citrus essential oil in a spray bottle. Spray onto glass and wipe off with a soft cloth.

**Tile Floor Cleaner:** Combine 1 part white vinegar with 2 parts warm water in a bucket. Mop and go—no need to rinse! Note: Do not use this combination on wood floors.

**Wood Floor Cleaner:** Combine 1 gallon warm water, 1/2 cup white vinegar, and 2 drops lemon essential oil. Use a mop that is barely wet to wash wood floors.

**Wood Furniture Polish:** In a medium bowl, combine 1/2 cup olive oil and 1/4 cup lemon juice. Use a soft cloth to polish wood furniture.

**Borax-Free Laundry Detergent:** Combine 5 ounces of castile soap (grated finely), 1/2 cup each baking soda and citric acid, 1 cup washing soda, and 1/4 cup coarse

**Watch out mold and mildew because lemon juice is your enemy thanks to its acid content.**

sea salt. Mix well and store in an airtight container. Just 1 to 2 tablespoons of this DIY natural laundry detergent will work.

**Spring Cleaning the Kitchen Countertops:** Keep your countertops clean with a mixture of equal parts of water and white vinegar in a spray bottle. If you have granite, marble, or stone countertops, substitute rubbing alcohol or vodka for the vinegar.

**Cutting Board:** Perhaps the most critical item to keep clean in your kitchen is your cutting board. Use a cut lemon on plastic or wood boards. Rub the cut fruit on the board, let it sit for 10 minutes, and then rinse with water.

**Garbage Disposal:** It's easy to forget to clean the garbage disposal, so start with an easy, natural approach. Pour white vinegar into an ice cube tray and fill the slots only half. Top off with water and freeze. When you have solid cubes, put them down the disposal and run it. The vinegar and ice sanitize as well as clean the blades.

**Microwave:** The solution for a dirty microwave is lemon juice and vinegar. Pour about 1/4 cup white vinegar and 2 tablespoons of lemon juice into a cup and microwave it for 2 minutes. Keep the door closed for several minutes after it is done, then wipe down the steamy inside of the microwave with a cloth or sponge.

**Oven:** Often, oven grime is not far behind that in the microwave—or it's worse. No worries, heat up your oven to 125 degrees F, fill your spray bottle with white vinegar, and spray the dirty areas. Then sprinkle salt or baking soda on the treated areas, turn off the oven, and use a wet cloth to wipe away the grime once the oven has cooled.

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



It's no secret that indoor pollution is worse than outdoor pollution.

## COVID-19 Linked to Greater Risk for Obese People

Severe infections may be more likely due to fat-altered immune response

PAUL MACDARAGH RYAN & NOEL CAPLICE

A worldwide COVID-19-related deaths tip a quarter of a million, a concerning trend is surfacing in the medical literature: high rates of obesity in groups of patients with severe or life-threatening infection.

While a recent report from New York showed about 2 in every 5 COVID-19 patients requiring a breathing tube were obese, which is on par with population obesity rates, studies point to a greater risk for obese patients.

A report from one intensive care unit in France found almost 90 percent of morbidly obese patients admitted required mechanical ventilation compared to less than half of those with lower body weight.

There are several reasons why patients with obesity admitted to intensive care with COVID-19 may require invasive ventilation. Higher levels of fat in the chest and belly put pressure on the lungs, making it difficult for people with obesity to fill their lungs to capacity under normal circumstances. This reduced breathing capacity may add to respiratory distress in patients with COVID-19.

Carrying extra weight also means there is a higher oxygen demand. Some patients with obesity might breathe too shallowly or too slowly to provide enough oxygen to the body, and some may intermittently cease breathing altogether.

Both of these factors already put a strain on the heart and lungs and may worsen COVID-19 symptoms. But they don't seem to entirely explain the unexpectedly high rates of obesity in very sick coronavirus infected patients. This suggests that there may be other factors at play that are unique to this virus.

In a recent review paper, we looked at why patients with obesity are at higher risk of severe or life-threatening COVID-19 infections. Based on our findings, we believe fat tissue is a potential source of unchecked inflammation which could cause damage to organs, including the lungs, as a result of COVID-19.

People with obesity are commonly shown to have an unbalanced or inflamed immune system. Their blood often has higher levels of several inflammatory signals which are similar to COVID-19 responses in the body. This may mean their immune systems are more likely to overreact to coronavirus infection.

Because fat tissue stores a large reservoir of immune cells, people with obesity may be more likely to suffer a cytokine storm reaction from COVID-19.

**Carrying extra weight means there is a higher oxygen demand.**



Fat tissue also acts as a vast reservoir for a range of immune cells, including macrophages and T cells. Macrophages devour infectious agents (such as bacteria and viruses) and present the leftovers to T cells, who alert the body to the infection.

Studies have found the body's immune signal response is higher in people with severe forms of COVID-19. This reaction is referred to as a "cytokine storm."

Cytokines act as "messengers" that tell other immune cells about potential threats and also trigger inflammation (often in the form of fever or swelling) in order to destroy the pathogen. But sometimes the immune system over-

reacts, releasing too many cytokines (a "cytokine storm").

After becoming infected with coronavirus, an obese person's body may activate the large fat-dwelling reservoir of immune cells, which can cause excessive swelling and inflammation. This disproportionate activation of the immune system can cause damage in organs, including the lungs.

At day 7 to 10 of COVID-19, the patient often either begins to improve or can take a turn for the worse. This delayed deterioration suggests that the true harm caused by COVID-19 may be caused by the cytokine storm, rather than the infection itself.

Because fat tissue stores a large

reservoir of immune cells, people with obesity may be more likely to suffer a cytokine storm reaction from COVID-19. This would result in damage to the lungs, severe respiratory distress, or even death.

There is currently no FDA-approved treatment or cure for COVID-19. Doctors are primarily focusing on keeping patients oxygenated and hydrated.

Targeted immunosuppressive drugs (which reduce the strength of the body's immune system) may be particularly beneficial for patients with severe infections and trials are currently underway.

However, researchers have also seen deficiencies of specific subpopulations of T cells in severe disease. Therefore, non-targeted immunosuppressive medicines could potentially worsen symptoms by further dampening the immune response.

Several additional inflammatory messengers, such as TNF $\alpha$ , may be worth targeting at different stages of the disease. Testing is ongoing for a number of drugs, with more than 600 clinical trials currently underway. But it may be months before any immune therapies are approved and none of these drugs will be a cure.

People with obesity should take extra measures to protect themselves from getting COVID-19, including following social distancing measures. Public health attention should also be drawn to underprivileged, overcrowded neighborhoods where poor diet and obesity often coexist. The threshold for escalating intensive treatment should be lowered for subjects with obesity to prevent severe infection.

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## Find Ways to Move While Social Distancing

Keeping the body active is important to your mood and immunity

RENEE J. ROGERS

Recent Fitbit activity tracker data show a significant drop in physical activity worldwide that corresponds with the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. In the United States, physical activity has fallen by 12 percent.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, fewer than a quarter of Americans were getting the recommended amount of exercise.

I'm an activity expert, and I am concerned about how this reduction in physical activity may impact our overall health and well-being.

Some of the drop in physical activity is due to temporary fitness center closings and stay-at-home guidelines. However, even people who don't typically work out may have a reduction in activity because they are walking less to do everyday tasks and spending more time in front of a computer. These decreases in activity may add to the health concerns resulting from COVID-19.

Because of this, my colleagues and I want to use our expertise in physical activity promotion and obesity treatment and prevention to help individuals cope with the challenges resulting from this global pandemic.

**It's Important to Move**

Prior to the pandemic, there had been concern about weight gain and the high prevalence of obesity in the United States and on a global scale.

This is important because obesity has recently been identified as a risk factor for COVID-19 complications. Evidence has also shown that disruption in regular exercise can lead to increases in depressive symptoms.

For an individual who is not a regular ex-

erciser, adding periods of activity throughout the day may have mood-enhancing effects. Short activity breaks throughout the workday can enhance emotional well-being.

Possibly most important is that physical activity can enhance immune function. This immune system boost may even occur in older people who are especially at risk for dying from COVID-19.

The argument is there to exercise more, but the reality is that many people are now doing less.

**Activity Over Exercise**

By definition, exercise is structured and planned.

The lack of planning and structure in our lives during this period of social distancing is likely contributing to the overall reduction in our activity levels.

Many people have been taught that exercise has to be intense and done for extend-

ed periods of time to make a difference, but U.S. government guidelines and many studies now suggest otherwise.

Light activity breaks that get the body moving, without any kind of intense exercise, are often overlooked but helpful for breaking up sedentary time.

On the higher end of the spectrum is moderate to vigorous activity, which aligns more closely to what people classically consider to be exercise. Good news for us is that new evidence suggests that doing this type of activity in shorter bouts may provide the same benefits as long periods.

**Building An Active Lifestyle at Home**

My team works every day to translate research into practice, and we have a strong track record of getting people to be active at home by starting at a low level and ramping up activity over time.

To start, take one-minute screen-time activity breaks, or a 5- to 10-minute brisk walk while social distancing. It all adds up.

Consider letting go of "all-or-nothing" exercise thinking.

Renee J. Rogers is an associate professor of health and physical activity and programing director at the Pitt Healthy Lifestyle Institute at the University of Pittsburgh. This article was originally published on [TheConversation.com](http://TheConversation.com).



Short activity breaks throughout the workday can enhance emotional well-being.



## FOOD AS MEDICINE

# The Potential Benefits of Flavonoids in Treating Neurodegenerative Diseases

Compounds found in berries and other foods offer multiple benefits for the brain

**N**eurodegenerative conditions from Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)—currently affect at least 6 million people in the United States alone.

There is not yet a solid treatment to slow or block these disorders from developing or progressing, but a review from June 2019 probed the impact of flavonoids, plant compounds that boast multiple biological activities on age-related changes in the brain contributing to neurodegeneration.

## The Flavonoid Factor

Several epidemiological studies highlight the potential benefits of flavonoids in preventing this group of disorders. There are more than 5,000 flavonoids and they can be divided into six groups, namely flavones, flavonols, flavanones, flavanols, anthocyanins, and isoflavones.

Flavonoids have historically been celebrated for their antioxidant and free-radical scavenging properties. However, recent studies demonstrated their diverse actions could make them beneficial in blocking the age-related toxicity pathways linked to neurodegenerative diseases. Here are some findings from the review:

**Alzheimer's disease:** Multiple flavonoids showed significant benefits in three distinct models of the condition, improving cognitive function and reducing markers of inflammation, oxidative stress, and synaptic dysfunction, while increasing neurotrophic factor signaling.

**Parkinson's disease:** A wide range of flavonoids displayed significant benefits in multiple models of the condition. Flavonoids reduced inflammation and oxidative stress markers while increasing markers of neurotrophic factor signaling. When combined, these effects helped to prevent nerve cell death and reduce behavioral deficits.

**Other neurodegenerative diseases:** A number of different flavonoids offered benefits, specifically in preserving motor

**Flavonoids can be derived from your diet via berries and other fruits, vegetables, cocoa and chocolate, legumes, and beverages such as wine and tea.**

function in both chemical and transgenic models of Huntington's disease. While there were a few studies with flavonoids in ALS models, the results suggested further investigation is needed, especially as all the flavonoids providing benefits in the transgenic ALS model also had positive effects in other neurodegenerative conditions.

The results strongly support the thinking that common changes occurring in the aging brain underlie the development of neurodegenerative conditions, and compounds that can successfully address these changes maintain "the best chance of clinical success," according to the review's author, Pamela Maher with the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla, California.

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## Neurodegeneration in Focus

The umbrella term "neurodegeneration" covers a range of conditions mainly wreaking havoc on the neurons in the human brain. Hundreds of disorders of this kind are known, but most of the attention has focused on Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, Huntington's disease, and ALS, even while others such as frontotemporal dementia are also prevalent.

This group of diseases is currently incurable, debilitating, and result in progressive degeneration or the death of nerve cells, leading to movement or mental functioning issues. Dementias make up the greatest burden of neurodegenerative disease, with Alzheimer's representing some 60 percent to 70 percent of existing dementia cases.

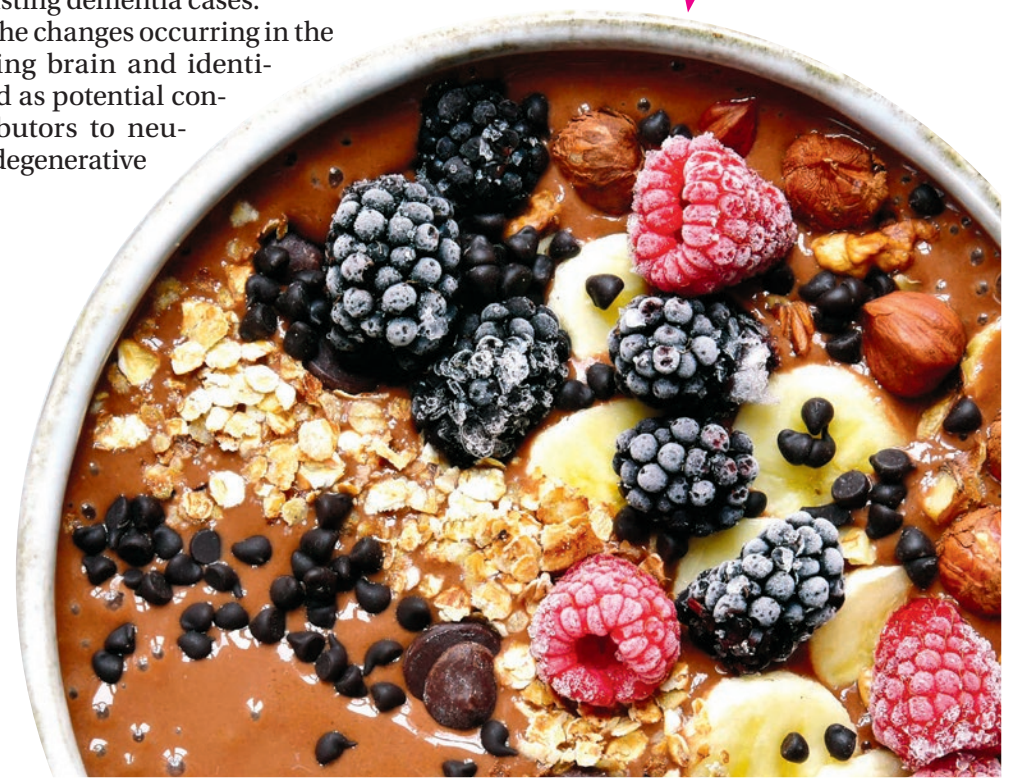
The changes occurring in the aging brain and identified as potential contributors to neurodegenerative

conditions include increased oxidative stress, changes in energy metabolism, loss of neurotrophic support, changes in protein processing leading to accumulated protein aggregates, neurovascular dysfunction, and immune system activation, among others.

You can find out more about the neurodegeneration and flavonoid connection through the more than 700 abstracts with flavonoid research and at least 2,300 abstracts with neurodegenerative disease research on GreenMedInfo.com.

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Chocolate, berries, and other foods contain flavonoids.



LILIYA KANDRASHEVICH/SHUTTERSTOCK

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