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THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND & BOY

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America's farmland soils have lost about half of their organic matter—the dark, spongy decomposed plant and animal tissue that helps make them fertile.



ECONOMIC WARFARE CORPORATE CYBER ATTACKS INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY THEFT

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Allergies, Candida, Gut Flora and Disease, the Connection

Our microbiome is the key to our immune system and the overall health of our inner ecosystem

MICHAEL EDWARDS

Our body has an ecosystem of bacteria and fungi living in it and on it that is critical to our immune system and overall health. This microbiome helps us break down food, produces hormones, and plays many other roles.

Unfortunately, this ecosystem can get out of wack and one little fungus, *Candida*, can be particularly problematic.

Allergies have been closely linked to the health of the microbiome, several studies have found, including a review of more than 100 studies published in *Frontiers in Immunology* in 2018.

Allergies are symptoms of an overwhelmed immune system trying frantically to defend itself from any and all possible threats. Allergy medications suppress symptoms, but symptom suppression doesn't resolve the problem the body is reacting to. Worse, these drugs, and symptom suppression, can lead to disease. Food allergies, seasonal allergies, and other allergies can be significantly impacted by resolving problems in the microbiome, research has found.

The catch is that the microbiome is affected by our behaviors, particularly food and medication use. While suppressing allergies can be as easy as taking a pill, resolving the actual issue requires more effort—and information.

Your body's microbiome, or gut flora, primarily consists of bacteria and fungi. *Candida* is one kind of fungus present in the gut. A healthy gut contains a ratio of about 1000 bacteria to 1 *Candida* yeast cell. The fungi that like our body best is *Candida albicans*, a kind of yeast that proliferates in a host who consumes a poor diet or otherwise disrupts their gut flora.

Thrush in the mouth or vaginal yeast infections are the more familiar forms of illness that result from *Candida* overgrowth, but several other diseases, including irritable bowel syndrome, are linked to the fungus.

There are several causes of this imbalance in our gut flora. Some of the more common include taking antibiotics or ingesting them from our food. Refined foods that feed the wrong flora, too much sugar, and other toxins, drugs, or contaminants can also damage beneficial bacteria.

When our gut has a diverse mix of beneficial gut bacteria, it can crowd out potential pathogens and keep *Candida* in check.

Candida Are Opportunists

Candida isn't all bad; it has its job to do, just like every other microbe, but when it's not kept in check, things get messy. So what happens when you kill the good bacteria? *Candida* takes over. That's partly because *Candida* spores can survive just about anything and they are just waiting for the room to grow.

When our gut has a diverse mix of beneficial gut bacteria, it can crowd out potential pathogens and keep *Candida* in check.

The most beneficial gut bacteria love to dine on the most beneficial foods we can eat—vegetables and whole grains. The more produce you eat, the healthier

your gut flora will be.

But when you drink alcohol, eat sugary foods, take antibiotics, or do anything else that disturbs the gut flora, you kill beneficial bacteria and leave behind *Candida* spores. These spores will hatch and flourish when they discover the coast is clear. Ideally, when this imbalance happens, our appendix squirts out some bacteria it had saved up for just such an occasion. Unfortunately, our modern sugary, chemically laden diets and lifestyles can clear out our gut flora and leave *Candida* so much space that the appendix's bacteria can't compete.

At this point, there's a very inhospitable environment in the gut. *Candida* doesn't seem to mind neighbors, so once the gut is overrun by *Candida*, the whole ecosystem of the gut becomes distorted. Some of the gut flora that may have been beneficial now adapt to this new environment in unhealthy ways.

Microbes mutate.

E-coli, for instance, is a perfectly fine bacteria to have in our gut under natural circumstances. But if a diet is too acidic, or there are too many antibiotics, the bacteria become harder and more dangerous. This is seen in cows as well. There is now a global problem of antifungal drugs, which can treat *Candida*, becoming less effective as the fungus hardens.

A Causal Agent of Other Infections

Speaking of adapting, once that *Candida* is feeling crowded and has outgrown its home in the gut, *Candida* can grow out of its single-cell yeast form and into a filamentous fungal form that grows root-like tentacles (hyphae) that drill deep into the mucosal lining of the gut, poking "holes" into already an irritated and inflamed, gut lining, resulting in a leaky gut.

Leaky gut, or intestinal permeability, happens when our food and digestive waste is able to leak out the cell walls of the gastrointestinal tract.

When this happens, *Candida* and other waste can leak into the bloodstream and travel throughout the body. *Candida* can then infect every organ of the body and repeat the hyphal hole-making process in all of its new homes. When it takes the pseudohyphal and hyphal fungal forms, it creates a toxic biofilm that protects itself against things that would normally kill it, such as antibiotics and antifungal medications.

Candida is the key that unleashes a barrage of other infectious microbes and partially digested food from our gut into the bloodstream. Now the body is in a constant battle with *Candida* and other invaders that continue to try to rip it apart. There is a back and forth with the gut's permeability, as the body is constantly repairing the gut and fighting off infection while *Candida*, waste, and pathogens undermine this effort.

Candida, parasites, infectious bacteria, other fungi, and all kinds of microbes that escape the gut will set up their colonies where they can hide and find food. Infectious microbes generally eat simple sugars and decaying cells. Pathogens like to congregate in cavities and around old injuries (this is why old injuries ache and become inflamed). The mere presence of these microbes irritates their surroundings, causing damage to cells that die and then end up feeding the pathogens.

This is partly why the body will crave sugar. Every time you feed the pathogens, there's a feeling of relief within the body. It feels good because the pathogens are eating the sugar rather than the body. Unfortunately, the next thing they do is multiply. Then, they turn on

you when they're out of sugar to eat.

Candida can feed a variety of vicious cycles and release toxins that cause more as *Candida* dies. Two of the most prominent toxins produced are acetaldehyde and gliotoxin.

Acetaldehyde, which is a metabolic by-product of *Candida* that is similar to carbon dioxide that we exhale, leads to oxidative stress and inflammation. Too much acetaldehyde in the body is the equivalent of alcohol poisoning. Gliotoxin, another major toxin created by this yeast, suppresses the immune system and kills key immune cells, liver cells, and impairs the liver's ability to detoxify the body.

Is *Candida* the Problem?

Both of the aforementioned toxins can be linked to almost every autoimmune disease or symptom there is, but once *Candida* permeates the gut, it's not just *Candida* causing the problems. The body is susceptible to anything and everything at this point.

All kinds of undigested food particles and microbes flood the bloodstream off and on as the gut walls deteriorate and heal—all while the immune system is completely overtaxed. To make matters worse, what *Candida* does to the intestinal wall when it goes fungal, it will do in other areas of the body as well, which wreaks havoc on the immune system.

The typical human in modern society is dealing with so many different kinds of infections and other toxins at one time that the body reacts to anything and everything that doesn't belong. The more inflamed the body becomes, the more the immune system becomes overburdened and confused. It's a painful cycle linked to allergies and autoimmune diseases. Aches and pains from old injuries and allergies can be some of the first signs of an unbalanced, unhealthy gut that is currently, or has been, seeping toxins and microbes into the body.

Once the gut allows an infection into the body, *Candida* may or may not still play a factor in disease, but it's almost always an underlying cause. Fixing this problem isn't as easy as taking a pill. This is why a holistic approach is imperative to getting well.

Natural Gut Healing Protocol

Signs of *Candida* overgrowth can range from allergies to itchy feet. The impact can unsettle normal hormone production in the gut and have wide-ranging impacts on mood, contributing to depression or anxiety. It can be difficult to test for *Candida* overgrowth since the fungus can grow or decline with diet and other issues.

Fortunately, most people can resolve this issue if they have all of their body parts, and the tonsils, appendix, or other organs once deemed unnecessary haven't been



The more produce you eat, the healthier your gut flora will be.



Your body's
microbiome,
or gut flora,
primarily consists
of bacteria and
fungi.

hastily removed.

Things get tricky when parts are missing, but most of us can get completely well with just the right diet alone. Supplements can speed up the process but aren't usually a necessity. With the wrong diet, supplements aren't going to be nearly as effective.

Here's a protocol to rid the body of infectious microbes, heal the gut, and balance the flora.

Drink Lots of Cranberry Lemonade

As a way of a medical precaution, before considering the treatment below, be aware: If you are susceptible to kidney stones, be careful of cranberry juice and consult a doctor. You should also be wary if you are on warfarin (Coumadin), a drug used to slow blood clotting since there is a mild interaction. Cranberry juice can also affect how quickly the liver breaks down some medications.

For most others, drink between a half a gallon and a gallon of cranberry lemonade a day to flush the liver and kidneys of toxins, and help rejuvenate the endocrine system, which will help keep the blood clean and reduce "die-off symptoms" commonly associated with killing *Candida*. And don't confuse cranberry juice with sugary cranberry drinks.

Cranberry Lemonade Recipe

- Glass gallon jar
- Safe, clean, spring water or distilled water
- 1 cup of unsweetened, organic cranberry juice, not from concentrate
- 3 organic fresh lemons
- A citrus juicer

- Liquid stevia
- Liquid cayenne

Fill the jar to about 85 percent capacity with water, preferable spring or distilled water free of chlorine or other additives. Squeeze the lemons and pour the juice into the water. Add cranberry juice. Add stevia to taste and then add cayenne to taste. The amount of cayenne used is up to you, but the more the better.

Eat Right

Produce detoxifies. Fresh, whole, organic vegetables, herbs, and fruits are the best way to pull toxins from the body as they repopulate healthy, beneficial gut bacteria and give the body the nutrients it needs, including enzymes and other phytonutrients that are almost non-existent in many modern diets.

Try to eat a huge salad every day with lots of greens, plenty of other colors, garlic, cilantro, ginger, and more.

Eat whole foods; avoid refined foods. Brown rice is good; white rice is out. Avoid any wheat; artificial colors, flavors, preservatives, or sweeteners; trans fats; and MSG. Avoid carbonated beverages. Avoid GMOs. Don't go crazy with fruit, and besides stevia, avoid or limit sweeteners.

Our modern diet almost always includes too much refined sugar. You may be thinking honey is a good alternative, but that's only true when the gut is healed, the body is relatively free of infection, and the immune system functions properly. Otherwise, even with its antimicrobial properties, honey can feed infection as it goes through the digestion process.

The above methods should be enough for most people with the right diet, but for really prominent fungal issues, there are plenty of supplements aimed at helping address microbiome issues or *Candida* overgrowth problems.

Conclusion

Candida is a hot topic of debate within both the naturopathic community and conventional medicine, with views ranging from *Candida* being the root of everything that's wrong with the body to it being a very rare issue that is completely overblown.

Fortunately, the best solution to a *Candida* overgrowth problem is a healthy diet that will be good for anybody and just about any health issue. And being mindful of the health of your gut flora is a great way to improve your overall well being.

Michael Edwards is the founder, owner, editor-in-chief, and janitor for Organic Lifestyle Magazine. This article was originally published on OrganicLifestyleMagazine.org



Leaky gut,
or intestinal
permeability,
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It's Time to Rethink Our Food System

The side effects of soil erosion have destroyed once-thriving regions, a lesson we'd be wise to learn

DAVID R. MONTGOMERY, JENNIFER J. OTTEN & SARAH M. COLLIER

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic shutdowns have severely disrupted and spotlighted weaknesses in the U.S. food system.

Farmers, food distributors, and government agencies are working to reconfigure supply chains so that food can get to where it's needed. But there is a hidden, long-neglected dimension that should also be addressed as the nation rebuilds from the current crisis.

As scholars who study different aspects of soil, nutrition, and food systems, we're concerned about a key vulnerability at the very foundation of the food system: soil. On farms and ranches across the United States, the health of soil is seriously compromised today. Conventional farming practices have degraded it, and erosion has worn away much of it.

Iowa has lost about half the topsoil it had in 1850. Since they were first plowed, America's farmland soils have lost about half of their organic matter—the dark, spongy decomposed plant and animal tissue that helps make them fertile.

The soil that produces our nation's food supply is a weakened link slowly failing under ongoing strain. This breakdown isn't as dramatic as what happened in the 1930s during the Dust Bowl, but it's just as worrying. Human history holds many examples of once-thriving agricultural regions around

topsoil that early European settlers praised.

Researchers, government agencies, and nonprofit groups recognize soil degradation as a national problem and have started to focus on rebuilding soil health. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resource Conservation Service helps farmers improve the health and function of their soils. Nongovernment organizations are recognizing the need to restore soil health on agricultural lands. And the 2018 farm bill directed new attention and funding to soil health programs.

Public Health

Beyond growing food, soils support human, public, and planetary health. Well before the current pandemic, experts in public health and nutrition recognized that modern agriculture was failing to sustain consumers, the land, and rural communities. This insight helped spur the emergence of a new multidisciplinary field, known as food systems, that analyzes how food is produced and distributed.

But work in this field tends to focus on the environmental impacts of food production, with less attention to economic and social implications, or to links between farming practices, soil health and the nutritional quality of food. Many studies narrowly focus on greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture when addressing soils and sustainability, without including the many ecological benefits that healthy soils provide.

The study of soil health can also have its own blind spots. Often agricultural research focuses solely on crop yields or the impact of individual conservation practices, such as adopting no-till planting or planting cover crops to protect soil from erosion. Such analyses rarely consider linkages driven by dietary demand for specific foods and crops, or the effects of farming practices on the nutrient content of forage and crops that sustain livestock and humans.

Food systems experts have called for transforming food production to improve human health and make agriculture more sustainable. Some researchers have proposed specific diets that they argue would accomplish both goals. But fully under-

standing connections between soil health and public health will require greater collaboration between those studying food systems, nutrition, and how we treat the soil.

Growing Our Values

Now that COVID-19 has deconstructed much of the national food supply network, it would be a mistake to pour efforts into simply rebuilding a flawed system. Instead, we believe it is time to redesign the U.S. food system from the ground up, so that it can deliver both soil health and human health and be more resilient to future challenges.

What would it take to do this? The foundation of a revised system would be adopting regenerative farming methods that integrate multiple soil-building practices, such as no-till, cover crops, and diverse crop rotations to restore health to land. It would also take creating and expanding markets for more diverse crops, as well as expanding regenerative grazing and promoting the reintegration of animal husbandry and crop production.

It also would require investing in research into the linkages between farming practices, soil health, and the nutritional quality of foods—and what that all could mean for human health.

In sum, we think it's time to rethink the food system, based on the recognition that providing healthy diets based on healthy soils is critical to achieving a healthier, more just, resilient and truly sustainable world.

Laura Lewis, an associate professor of community and economic development at Washington State University, and Dave Gustafson, a project director at the agriculture & food systems institute, contributed to this article.

David R. Montgomery is a professor of earth and space sciences at the University of Washington, Jennifer J. Otten is an associate professor at the center for public health nutrition at the University of Washington, and Sarah M. Collier is an assistant professor of environmental and occupational health sciences at the University of Washington. This article was originally published on The Conversation.

FOOD AS MEDICINE

Shatavari: An Important Ayurvedic Herb

This ancient treatment has compounds and qualities that can have wide-ranging healing effects

LISA ROTH COLLINS

Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*) is an Ayurvedic herb that is, as its name suggests, a member of the asparagus family. Similar to ashwagandha, rhodiola rosea, and ginseng, Shatavari is an adaptogen, which means it helps the body resist stressors and achieve balance.

This staple of Ayurvedic medicine, this herb is commonly found growing in India and the Himalayas, as well as parts of Australia and Africa. The roots of the plant have long been valued as a general tonic and to support the female reproductive system. It also has been used along with ashwagandha for men.

Shatavari has lots of saponins, which are compounds that are rich in antioxidant properties.

Shatavari and Women's Health

Shatavari has been used for centuries to help women with their reproductive health. A review published in *Biomedicine and Pharmacotherapy* in 2018 proposed Shatavari "shatavari may improve female reproductive health complications including hormonal imbalance, polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS) ... and infertility possibly by reducing oxidative stress level and increasing antioxidants level in the body." Shatavari has been used to restore and balance hormones, increase libido, fight fatigue, and treat PMS and menopausal symptoms.

According to naturopath Amanda Frick of Los Angeles, the herb relaxes the uterine tissue, which in turn relieves stomach pain and cramps. It has anti-inflammatory properties, associated with the presence of the substance called racemofuran, which

can be especially helpful for relieving menstrual cramps and bloating associated with your period.

Benefits of Shatavari for Men and Women

Shatavari has several qualities that can be helpful for men or women.

Antioxidant powers. Shatavari has lots of saponins, which are compounds that are rich in antioxidant properties. A specific antioxidant found in Shatavari called racemofuran, along with asparagamine A and racemosol, are believed to be the antioxidant powerhouses in this herbal root.

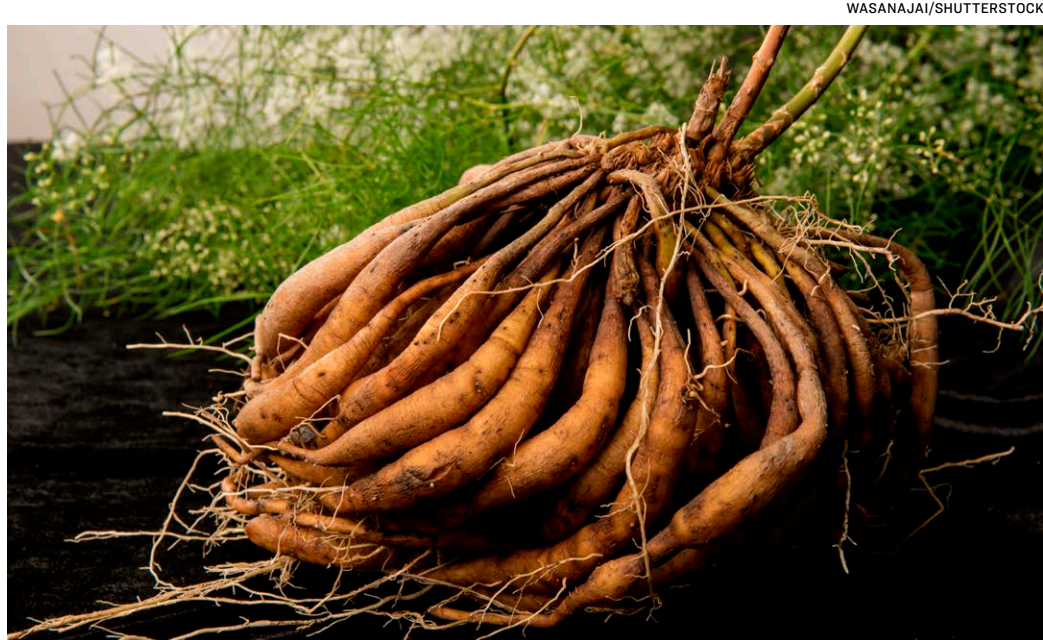
Anti-inflammatory abilities. Racemofuran is an anti-inflammatory agent as well as an antioxidant. Some experts have reported that its anti-inflammatory powers are similar to those provided by COX-2 inhibitors (e.g., celecoxib).

Boost the immune system. The results of animal studies indicate that Shatavari root can increase antibodies and may improve immune response.

Relieve cough. The juice of the Shatavari root may help relieve cough. A study in animals found that the root extract stopped cough just as well as codeine phosphate (a prescription cough medicine).

Eliminate excess fluid. Accumulation of fluid can be a serious problem, especially if you have congestive heart failure or high blood pressure. It also can be bothersome and uncomfortable around menstruation and other issues. A 2010 study found that 3,200 milligrams of Shatavari had a diuretic effect without causing acute side effects.

Manage kidney stones. If you've ever had kidney stones, you probably know they can be extremely painful. Some research indicates that Shatavari root extract can help prevent the development of oxalate, a compound found in spinach,



Shatavari is an adaptogen, which means it helps the body resist stressors and achieve balance.

beets, cranberries, and other foods that contributes to kidney stones. Shatavari can also raise the concentration of magnesium, which may prevent the formation of crystals associated with stone formation.

Help with depression. According to a 2009 study published in *Pharmacology Biochemistry and Behavior*, the antioxidants in Shatavari have antidepressant properties and can also have an effect on neurotransmitters in the brain, including those associated with depression.

Maintain blood sugar levels. Type 2 diabetes is very common, and individuals are often looking for effective, natural ways to manage blood sugar. At least one study indicates that Shatavari root can stimulate the production of insulin, which can help maintain healthy blood sugar.

Wrinkle fighter. The saponins in Shatavari root may help reduce skin damage from free radicals as well as prevent the breakdown of collagen. Both of these activities are good anti-aging actions for your skin. Shatavari is available as a powder, liquid,

and capsules and is bittersweet. Although no standard dose has been established, you should follow the suggestions on the label. Several recommended doses are:

- 4–5 milliliters of Shatavari root tincture three times a day.
- 500-milligram tablets up to twice a day.
- 1 teaspoon powdered root in 8 ounces of water brewed as a tea, twice a day.

Consult your health care provider before using Shatavari supplements to determine the best dose for you.

Women may be interested in the healing properties of Shatavari, especially when it comes to symptoms associated with perimenopause, menopause, and menstruation. However, the herb appears to have healing abilities that surpass the female reproductive system and may be called upon to help with a wide variety of other health challenges.

Lisa Roth Collins is a registered holistic nutritionist and the marketing manager at NaturallySavvy.com, which first published this article.

The New Placebo Effect

Taking sugar pills works even when the patient knows they're fake: study

CONAN MILNER

Americans spend at least \$50 billion each year on back pain—and that's just for the easily identified costs, according to the American Chiropractic Association.

Add lost income and lost productivity and the cost doubles—to \$100 billion—according to estimates by the American Academy of Pain Medicine.

But we have long known that the mind can have a profound effect on our well being. One study, published in the journal *Pain* in 2016, suggested patients will get effective relief with placebo medication—even if they are told it's a placebo. A placebo is a sugar pill or inert cellulose tablet.

Joint study author Ted Kaptchuk, director of the program for placebo studies at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center and professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, says the findings have the potential to change our understanding of the causes behind the placebo effect.

And it's much more complicated than just administering a sugar pill, Kaptchuk said.

"It's the symbols, like the stethoscope. It's the repetitive rituals like taking pills, and, very importantly, it's the interaction between patient and a clinician who provides emotional support and mutual trust. Those are the active ingredients."

The Study

Almost 100 patients with chronic low back pain were selected for the trial and given a 15-minute explanation of the placebo effect.

Subjects were then randomized into one of two groups: treatment-as-usual and placebo.

Participants in the placebo group were given a medicine bottle labeled "placebo pills" with directions to take two capsules twice daily.

Participants in both groups were required to continue with their regular medication regimen during the three-week study period (mostly non-steroidal anti-inflammatories such as aspirin and ibuprofen; opioid users were not permitted to participate). They were not allowed to make any lifestyle changes, like starting an exercise plan, that would affect their pain.

At the end of a three-week course of pills, the placebo group reported a 30 percent reduction in both usual pain and maximum pain level, compared to nine percent and 16 percent reductions, respectively, for the treatment-as-usual group. The placebo group also noted a 29 percent drop in pain-related disability, while the other group saw almost no improvement. Most of the placebo group said they were skeptical that the treatment would work, but by the end of the study, several participants requested prescriptions for the placebo.

In some cases, pain reduction was so significant, participants were convinced they must be taking a real drug. Three participants reported that the dummy pills "worked so well that it has to contain something."

The placebo group reported a 30 percent reduction in both usual pain and maximum pain level, compared to nine percent and 16 percent reductions, respectively, for the treatment-as-usual group.

Placebo Power

Do sugar pills really have the power to heal? It is more complex than that, said Kaptchuk.

The medical professional's interaction with a patient plays a critical role, as the placebo effects show, he said.

"Simply put, the doctor is medicine. The nurse is medicine. The chiropractor is medicine. They're more than just the bag of tricks that they have," Kaptchuk said.

A 2008 survey found that about 50 percent of a representative sample of 679 internists and rheumatologists gave their patients placebos when there was no effective treatment available. They did so because much of the time placebos make patients feel better, even though the American Medical Association's policy on placebos says physicians may use placebos for diagnosis or treatment only if the patient is informed of and agrees to its use.

And, in practice, placebo deception may not be necessary, but Kaptchuk makes clear that it still plays a vital role in identifying effective remedies in drug trials.

"It tells you whether the drug adds something to the context of care in the provider-patient relationship," he said.

This highlights the most important takeaway from Kaptchuk's study: the realization that medicine is much more than drugs, procedures, and surgeries. In a world of evidence-based care, it's easy to forget that the relationships and belief systems in medicine still hold substantial healing power.

"It's about activating self-healing properties that all human beings have," Kaptchuk said.

Other Studies

Four earlier studies have directly tested the effect of an open-label placebo prescription, and all indicated that the practice was beneficial to the patient.

The best of these studies was a controlled trial evaluating patients with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Like the published trial on back pain, the IBS study also showed significant benefits compared with no treatment.

Kaptchuk still wants to see these studies replicated with larger populations and played out over a longer period of time. But he hopes his work thus far helps doctors realize that placebos can be effective even if the patient understands what's going on. He said some patients will likely appreciate the honesty and transparency.

PLACEBO STUDY: A QUICK LOOK

97 patients with chronic lower back pain. All were given a 15-minute explanation of the placebo effect. Randomized into two groups:

1. Treatment as usual
2. Placebo

METHOD:

Both groups were allowed to continue with their regular medication (mostly non-steroidal anti-inflammatories such as aspirin and ibuprofen; opioid users were not permitted to participate) but they could not alter their regimen during the three-week study period.

RESULTS:

- Placebo group:
- 30 percent reduction in usual pain.
- 30 percent reduction in maximum pain.
- 29 percent drop in pain-related disability.

USUAL GROUP:

- 9 percent reduction in usual pain.
- 16 percent reduction in maximum pain.
- almost no improvement in pain-related disability.

MORE PLACEBO STUDIES RESULTS:

- Nearly 50 percent of asthma patients get symptom relief from a fake inhaler or sham acupuncture.
- Almost 40 percent of people with headache experienced relief from a placebo.
- 50 percent of colitis patients felt better after a placebo treatment.
- More than 50 percent of patients with ulcer pain experienced relief with a placebo.
- Nearly 50 percent experienced reduction in hot flashes from sham acupuncture.
- As many as 40 percent of infertility patients got pregnant while taking placebo fertility drugs.
- Placebos are nearly as effective as morphine at relieving pain.

TYLER OLSON/SHUTTERSTOCK



The interaction doctors have with patients is an active medical treatment that has a notable effect on patient outcomes—independent of any other treatment.



A diet that's high in plant-based foods is one way to start boosting immune strength.

Boosting Your Immune System

The keys to immunity are critical as we face pandemics, other disease

DEVON ANDRE

COVID-19 has increased people's desire to learn how they can stay healthy. And although there are certain measures that can reduce risk—such as hand-washing—people want more.

There is evidence that immunocompromised people bear the highest risk. That's not just the case for COVID-19, but also other viral and bacterial infections.

A stronger immune system can result in a lower risk for illness and less severe symptoms if and when illness does hit. Lifestyle measures such as nutrition, activity levels, and sleep influence immunity.

A diet that's high in plant-based foods is one way to start boosting immune strength by limiting inflammation in the body and improving gut health. Both of these factors can play a major role in your susceptibility to illness.

Nutrients and food compounds that play some of the strongest roles in immune health include vitamin C, vitamin E, vitamin D, zinc, fiber, beta-carotene, and polyphenols such as anthocyanin and flavonoids.

Stress results in hormone releases that undermine immunity and the body's ability to rejuvenate itself.

Additionally, there is evidence that regular activity can help bolster immune health. Exercise may charge up antibodies and white blood cells to help with illness, while it also may help flush out illness through the lungs and airways.

Combined with a healthy diet high in fruits, vegetables, and other plant-based foods, exercise will do you some real good. One of the last pillars of a strong immune system is adequate quality sleep. Making sure your body has enough time to recover and recharge each day can go a long way in influencing your ability to stay healthy. Almost inseparable from sleep is stress management. Of course, this is also the most difficult component of a healthy immune system. Some practices like mindfulness, yoga, and tai-chi can be effective in reducing stress. Stress results in hormone releases that undermine immunity and the body's ability to rejuvenate itself.

Outlook can help. Stress is a physiological reaction that most often a result of emotions arising from thoughts of our own (usually unconscious) choosing. Focusing on the things you can control in your life can help, but it really depends on what those things are. Sometimes, the things we can't control are the biggest stressors. In this case, accepting the situations we can't change can stop ruminations that lead to stressful thinking. If you can't change it, there is little benefit to worrying about it incessantly.

A healthy immune system is within the reach of many. But it is not a guarantee that you'll stay healthy. At best, it can offer reduced risk and severity of illness.

Devon Andre holds a bachelor's degree in forensic science from the University of Windsor in Canada and a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Pittsburgh. Andre is a journalist for BelMarra-Health, which first published this article.

No Evidence That ECT Works for Depression, New Review Shows

Sending an electrical current through the brain to trigger seizures is dangerous and lacks evidence

JOHN READ

Many people will be familiar with electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) as a historical treatment for “mental illness,” in which an electrical current is passed through the brain to trigger seizures, with the aim of somehow treating the illness.

In fact, ECT is still being administered to about a million people each year to treat severe depression, including about 2,500 in England, under anesthetic. The majority are women who are over 60 years of age.

In a new review of the research, published in *Ethical Human Psychology and Psychiatry*, we suggest that there's no robust evidence that ECT works as a treatment for depression and the negative impact on patients set against any potential benefits is so appalling that ECT can't be scientifically or ethically justified.

The Evidence Base

Despite its continued use, there have been no ECT versus placebo studies for 35 years. In fact, there have only ever been 11 such studies, in which a control group has received the general anesthetic but not the electricity or, there-

fore, the convulsion.

And even these studies have been deeply flawed.

ECT enthusiasts argue the lack of any new placebo research is because it is unethical to withhold a treatment that is “known” to be effective and which definitely “saves lives.” This argument, however, means that the dwindling number of psychiatrists still using ECT are doing so outside the parameters of science in general—and evidence-based medicine in particular.

In the United Kingdom, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends the use of ECT in some cases of prolonged or severe manic episodes or catatonia when other treatment options have proven ineffective and/or when the condition is considered to be potentially life-threatening.

Although some people who have received ECT do believe it has saved their lives, there is still no study evidence that ECT is more effective than a placebo for depression. Many others believe it has irreparably damaged their lives.

Other Reviews and Meta-Analyses

My colleagues and I have previously published several reviews of the 11 studies. These have shown that there is only very

weak evidence, in some of the studies, for only a minority of patients, that ECT can temporarily lift mood slightly. The reviews also demonstrated that there is no evidence whatsoever that any such effect lasts beyond the last treatment (ECT is typically administered in a series of about eight treatments).

There also is no evidence that it saves lives or prevents suicides, despite the claim by some ECT advocates that it does—a claim that is then used to justify the risk of brain damage. Brain damage has been dismissed as the wrong term but I am not sure what else to call reported persistent or permanent memory loss in 12 to 55 percent of patients. It's sometimes argued that “modern” ECT is safer than it used to be and that the memory loss is caused by the depression rather than the electricity, but there is no research evidence for either of these claims.

Some have asked why other reviews and meta-analyses conclude that ECT is effective and safe? A reasonable question that deserves an answer.

The new study, co-authored with Irving Kirsch, associate director of placebo studies at Harvard Medical School, possibly the world's leading researcher on the placebo effects of psychiatric treatments, answers this question.

Besides analyzing the 11 studies in greater detail than ever before, giving them each a quality score based on 24 methodological criteria, we also evaluated the only five meta-analyses ever conducted on this tiny, and deeply flawed, body of literature.

To guard against bias (and I am indeed biased against ECT, because of its lack of evidence base and the damage I believe it has caused to hundreds of thousands of people) my own ratings of the 11 studies were compared to blind ratings, on carefully defined criteria, by a colleague, Laura McGrath, who had no knowledge of, or particular interest in, ECT.

The five meta-analyses included between one and seven of the 11 studies and in each paid little or no attention to the multiple limitations of the studies they included.

The 11 studies we looked at had a mean quality score of 12.3 out of 24—and eight scored 13 or less. Only four studies described how they randomized subjects and then tested this. None convincingly demonstrated that they were double-blind (where neither the participants nor the experimenters know who is receiving a particular treatment). Five selectively reported their findings. Only four reported any ratings by patients. None assessed the quality of life of patients.

There were other flaws including small study sizes, no significant differences with another treatment, mixed results (including one where the psychiatrists reported a difference but patients didn't). Only two of the higher-quality studies reported follow up data.

We concluded that the quality of the studies is so poor that the meta-analyses were wrong to conclude anything about efficacy.

There seems to be no evidence that ECT is effective for its target diagnostic group—severely depressed people, or its target demographic—older women (therein lies a broader set of issues),

or for suicidal people, people who have unsuccessfully tried other treatments first, involuntary patients, or adolescents.

And given the high risk of permanent memory loss and the small mortality risk, this longstanding failure to determine whether or not ECT works means that its use should be immediately suspended until a series of well-designed, randomized, placebo-controlled studies have investigated whether there really are any significant benefits against which the proven significant risks can be weighed.

As Kirsch says: “I don't think many ECT advocates understand just how strong placebo effects are for a major procedure like ECT. The failure to find any meaningful benefits in long-term benefits compared to placebo groups are particularly distressing. On the basis of the clinical trial data, ECT should not be used for depressed individuals.”

John Read is a professor of clinical psychology at the University of East London in England. This article was first published on The Conversation.

There is no evidence that it saves lives or prevents suicides, despite the claim by some ECT advocates that it does—a claim that is then used to justify the risk of brain damage.



Despite its continued use, there have been no ECT versus placebo studies for 35 years.

To Feel Better, Replace Sitting With Sleep or Light Activity

Taking breaks from sitting to walk around was associated with better mood and lower body fat

ANGIE HUNT

In new research, replacing long periods of sitting with sleep was associated with lower stress, better mood, and lower body mass index.

In addition, substituting sitting with light physical activity was associated with improved mood and lower BMI across the next year, the study shows.

Light activity can include walking around your home office while talking on the phone or standing while preparing dinner, said lead author Jacob Meyer, assistant professor of kinesiology at Iowa State University.

“People may not even think about some of these activities as physical activity,” Meyer said. “Light activity is much lower in-

tensity than going to the gym or walking to work, but taking these steps to break up long periods of sitting may have an impact.”

Meyer and colleagues used data collected as part of the Energy Balance Study at the University of South Carolina. For 10 days, study participants, ranging in age from 21–35, wore an armband that tracked their energy expenditure. Meyer, director of the Wellbeing and Exercise Lab at Iowa State, said the data allowed researchers to objectively measure sleep, physical activity, and sedentary time, rather than relying on self-reports.

In addition to the benefits of sleep and light physical activity, the researchers found moderate to vigorous activity was associated with lower body fat and BMI. Given the negative health effects

of prolonged sedentary time, Meyer said the findings may encourage people to make small changes that are sustainable.

“It may be easier for people to change their behavior if they feel it's doable and doesn't require a major change,” Meyer said. “Replacing sedentary time with housework or other light activities is something they may be able to do more consistently than going for an hour-long run.”

Getting more sleep is another relatively simple change to make. Instead of staying up late watching TV, going to bed earlier and getting up at a consistent time provides multiple benefits and allows your body to recover, Meyer said. Sleeping is also unique in that it is time you're not engaging in other potentially problematic behaviors, such as eating junk

food while sitting in front of a screen.

Making these subtle changes was associated with better current mood, but light physical activity also provided benefits for up to a year, the study shows.

While the research was conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Meyer said the results are timely given the growing mental health concerns during this time of physical distancing.

“With everything happening right now, this is one thing we can control or manage, and it has the potential to help our mental health,” Meyer said.

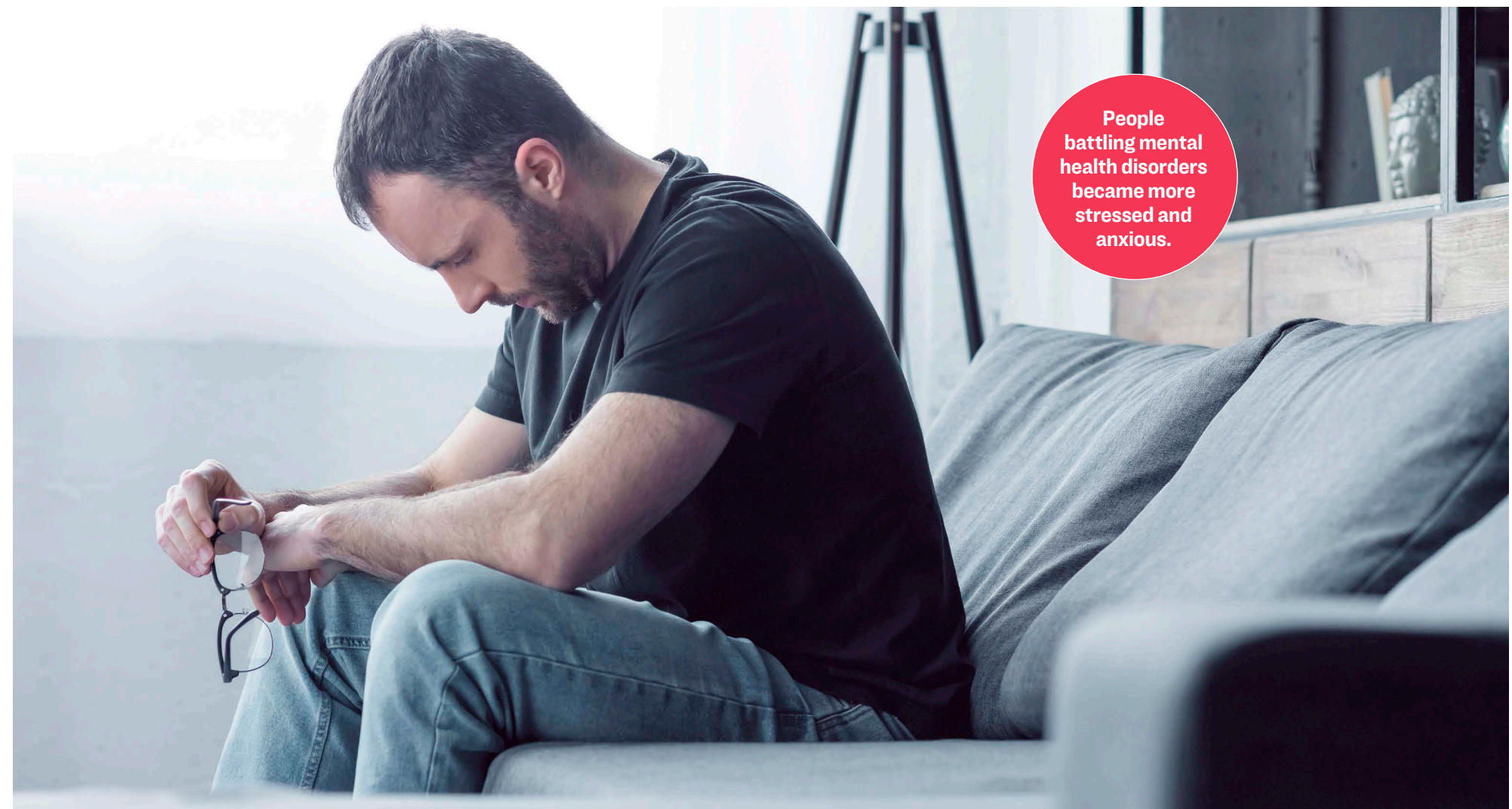
As states start to ease stay-at-home restrictions, Meyer is looking at changes in physical activity and sitting time with potentially interesting results for those who regularly worked out

prior to the pandemic. Preliminary data from a separate study show a 32 percent reduction in physical activity. The question he and colleagues hope to answer is how current changes in activity interact with mental health and how our behaviors will continue to change over time.

The research appears in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

Additional researchers from Western Oregon University, Arizona State University, Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City, West Virginia University, and the University of South Carolina contributed to the research.

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People battling mental health disorders became more stressed and anxious.

In Hard-Hit Areas, COVID's Ripple Effects Strain Mental Health Care Systems

For those facing a mental health crisis, the pandemic and subsequent reponse have made getting care more difficult

CHERYL PLATZMAN WEINSTOCK

In late March, Marcell's girlfriend took him to the emergency room at Henry Ford Wyandotte Hospital, about 11 miles south of Detroit.

“I had [acute] paranoia and depression off the roof,” said Marcell, 46, who asked to be identified only by his first name because he wanted to maintain confidentiality about some aspects of his illness.

Marcell's depression was so profound, he said, he didn't want to move and was considering suicide.

“Things were getting overwhelming and really rough. I wanted to end it,” he said.

Marcell, diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder seven years ago, had been this route before, but never during a pandemic. The Detroit area was a COVID-19 hot spot, slamming hospitals, attracting concerns from federal public health officials, and recording more than 1,000 deaths in Wayne County as of May 28. Michigan ranks fourth among states for deaths from COVID-19.

The crisis enveloping the hospitals had a ripple effect on mental health programs and facilities. The emergency room was trying to get non-COVID patients out as soon as possible because the risk of infection in the hospital was high, said Jaime White, director of clinical development and crisis services for Hegira Health, a nonprofit group offering mental health and substance abuse treatment programs. But the options were limited.

Still, the number of people waiting for beds at Detroit's crisis centers swelled. Twenty-three people in crisis had to instead be cared for in a hospital.

This situation was hardly unique. Although mental health services continued largely uninterrupted in areas with low levels of COVID-19, behavioral health care workers in areas hit hard by COVID-19 were overburdened. Mobile crisis teams, residential programs, and call centers, especially in pandemic hot spots, had to reduce or close services. Some programs were plagued by shortages of staff and protective supplies for workers.

At the same time, people battling mental health disorders became more stressed and anxious.

“For people with preexisting mental health conditions, their routines and ability to access support is super important. Whenever additional barriers are placed on them, it could be challenging and can contribute to an increase in symptoms,” said White.

After eight hours in the emergency room, Marcell was transferred to COPE, a community outreach program for psychiatric emergencies for Wayne County Medicaid patients.

“We try to get patients like him into

the lowest care possible with the least restrictive environment,” White said. “The quicker we could get him out, the better.”

Marcell was stabilized at COPE over the next three days, but his behavioral health care team couldn't get him a bed in one of two local residential crisis centers operated by Hegira. Social distancing orders had reduced the beds from 20 to 14, so Marcell was discharged home with a series of scheduled services and assigned a service provider to check on him.

However, Marcell's symptoms—suicidal thoughts, depression, anxiety, auditory hallucinations, and poor impulse control and judgment—persisted. He was not able to meet face-to-face with his scheduled psychiatrist due to the pandemic and lack of telehealth access. So he returned to COPE three days later. This time, the staff was able to find him a bed immediately at a Hegira residential treatment program, Boulevard Crisis Residential in Detroit.

Residents typically stay for six to eight days. Once they are stabilized, they are referred elsewhere for more treatment, if needed.

Marcell ended up staying for more than 30 days. “He got caught in the pandemic here along with a few other people,” said Sherron Powers, program manager. “It was a huge problem. There was nowhere for him to go.”

Marcell couldn't live with his girlfriend anymore. Homeless shelters were closed, and substance abuse programs had no available beds.

“The big problem here is that all crisis services are connected to each other. If any part of that system is disrupted, you can't divert a patient properly,” said Travis Atkinson, a behavioral consultant with TBD Solutions, which collaborated on a survey of providers with the American

Association of Suicidology, the Crisis Residential Association, and the National Association of Crisis Organization Directors.

White said the crisis took a big toll on her operations. She stopped her mobile crisis team on March 14 because, she said, “we wanted to make sure that we were keeping our staff safe and our community safe.”

“For people with preexisting mental health conditions, their routines and ability to access support is super important. Whenever additional barriers are placed on them, it could be challenging and can contribute to an increase in symptoms.”

Jaime White, director of clinical development and crisis services, Hegira Health

Her staff assessed hospital patients, including Marcell, by telephone with the help of a social worker from the emergency room.

People like Marcell have struggled during the coronavirus crisis and continue to face hurdles because emergency preparedness measures didn't provide enough training, funds, or thought about the acute mental health issues that could develop during a pandemic and its aftermath, said experts.

“The system isn't set up to accommodate that kind of demand,” said Dr. Brian Hepburn, a psychiatrist and executive director of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors.

“In Detroit and other hard-hit states,

if you didn't have enough protective equipment, you can't expect people to take a risk. People going to work can't be thinking, ‘I'm going to die,’” said Hepburn.

For Marcell, “it was bad timing to have a mental health crisis,” said White, the director at Hegira.

At one time, Marcell, an African American man with a huge grin and a carefully trimmed goatee and mustache, said he had a family and a “pretty good job.” Then “it got rough,” he said. He made some bad decisions, lost his job, and got divorced. Then he began self-medicating with cocaine, marijuana, and alcohol.

By the time he reached the residential center in Detroit on April 1, he was at a low point. “Schizoaffective disorder comes out more when you're kicked out of the house and it increases depression,” said Powers, the program manager who along with White was authorized by Marcell to talk about his care. Marcell didn't always take his medications, and his use of illicit drugs magnified his hallucinations, she said.

While in the crisis center voluntarily, Marcell restarted his prescription medications and went to group and individual therapy. “It is a really good program,” he said while at the center in early May. “It's been one of the best 30 days.”

Hepburn said the best mental health programs are flexible, which allows them more opportunities to respond to problems such as the pandemic. Not all programs would have been able to authorize such a long stay in residential care.

Marcell was finally discharged on May 8 to a substance abuse addiction program. “I felt good about having him do better and better. He had improved self-esteem to get the help he needed to get back to his regular life,” Powers said.

Marcell left the addiction program after only four days. “The [recovery] process is so individualized, and oftentimes we only see them at one point in their journey. But recovering from mental health and substance use disorders is possible. It can just be a winding and difficult path for some,” said White.

Seeking Help

If you or someone you know is in immediate danger, call 911. Below are other resources for those needing help:

- National Helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or <https://FindTreatment.SAMHSA.gov>
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255).
- Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746

Cheryl Platzman Weinstock is an award-winning journalist who reports about health and science research and its impact on society. This article was originally published on Kaiser Health News.



A directory guiding people to the emergency room of the Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit on April 8, 2020.

MINDSET MATTERS

Is Self-Care Selfish?

Why true self-care can transform your inner voice and spark deeper compassion for others

NANCY COLIER

Have you ever wondered why we're so bad at self-care, and why taking care of ourselves is so difficult and not instinctual? There are countless books available on how to take better care of ourselves, so why are we not getting it?

For one thing, our self-care approach in this culture is made out of the wrong fabric, or at the very least, the wrong texture. We're taught that self-care is an external process; it means getting a massage, eating well, taking a walk, or putting on our oxygen mask first. All are valid self-caring actions, which serve us. And yet, a far deeper and richer level of self-care exists, one that is not about "doing" for ourselves, but rather about "being" with ourselves.

The self-care that profoundly improves our lives involves creating an inner dialogue that's infused with kindness, support, and curiosity.

The most effective self-care is more about the kind of company we keep inside—the flavor of the conversation we conduct with

ourselves inside our minds. The self-care that profoundly improves our lives involves creating an inner dialogue that's infused with kindness, support, and curiosity. True self-care, as the word implies, means genuinely caring about ourselves.

This variety of self-care—relating to ourselves in a friendly and supportive manner—is not only not emphasized in our culture, but often discouraged. In fact, we tend to be afraid of what would happen to us, who we would become, and how we would be judged if we were to value ourselves and stopped the judgment and impatience. So what is it about developing a kind and compassionate relationship with ourselves that's so threatening?

Isn't Self-Care Selfish?

While most of us would claim that we're pretty good at self-care, we often feel selfish when it comes to actually treating ourselves with care internally: "How selfish of me to spend time thinking about what I need, when so many people don't have that luxury!" The fear of being judged (by oneself and others) as selfish is what keeps many people from having more self-compassion, or asking for kindness from others even when they desperately need it.

We're afraid that if we care too much about ourselves, there won't be any caring left for others, as if caring is a finite commodity. That is, if we take the time to pay attention to our own experience, we'll become so self-involved and

egotistical that we'll stop wanting to be kind to anyone else.

In this belief system, our compassion for others is just a façade of sorts, something we do to seem like a good person. We're desperately afraid of who we would become if we related to ourselves with friendliness—as if just a taste of our own sweetness would unleash the true narcissistic monster within.

The truth is that it's only when we feel well taken care of, and when our feelings have been properly heard and cared for,

that we have adequate resources to offer others. When our well is full, we are at our most selfless and can fully experience our goodness and inherent desire to be of service.

The ability and willingness to empathize with our own experiences are precisely what allow us to empathize with the experience of others. Paradoxically, taking care of ourselves is what makes us unselfish. When we reject or ignore ourselves, we cannot be truly compassionate with others, and certainly not to our full capacity, as a large part of our heart is closed off and inaccessible.

This is not to say that we cannot be kind human beings without being kind to ourselves. But without the ability to relate lovingly to our own experience, we're severed from the real depth of our loving potential. It's as if we are living in a puddle when we could have access to the ocean.

As you take care of others, make

the effort to relate to yourself with the same attitude of kindness and warmth. Remember to offer yourself a curious and compassionate ear: to talk to yourself as someone who matters, to give yourself the benefit of the doubt, to take a break from self-judgment, and even to consider what's good about yourself. Decide to be a supportive and loving presence inside your own being.

Remember that it's OK to be on your own side.

Nancy Colier is a psychotherapist, interfaith minister, author, public speaker, workshop leader, and author of several books on mindfulness and personal growth. Colier is available for individual psychotherapy, mindfulness training, spiritual counseling, public speaking, and workshops, and also works with clients via Skype around the world. For more information, visit NancyColier.com



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When yin and yang are in balance, life flourishes through the creative flow of natural law.

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Yin and Yang

The Path to a Balanced Life

This ancient concept has proven itself both prescient and practical as modern research affirms its accuracy

CONAN MILNER

Stand on one foot for just a few seconds, and life can immediately become awkward or even precarious. Once you're back in balance with both feet firmly on the ground, strength, stability, and harmony return.

This is the lesson of yin and yang. Yin and yang is symbolized by the taiji—a circle composed of two teardrops; one black, the other white. Both sides contain a small piece of the opposing color.

This enigmatic symbol is a popular image today, but the idea goes back millennia and is fundamental to ancient Chinese science and culture. The earliest known reference of yin and yang comes from the I Ching (Book of Changes)—a mystical divination practice at least 3500 years old.

Yin and yang describe the world as an endless pair of polar opposites: cold and hot, up and down, wet, and dry. The literal translation of yin/ yang is

dark/light. It refers to a mountain, one side illuminated by the sun, the other cast in shadow. If the scene was either too bright or too dark the mountain would be hard to see. But a balance of light and shade gives the mountain definition, clarity, and meaning.

However, not everyone gets the gist of the dark-light dichotomy at first. According to Brandon LaGreca, a Chinese medicine practitioner and director of East Troy Acupuncture in southeast Wisconsin, the biggest misconception people have with the yin/ yang relationship is that they mistakenly interpret it as a struggle of good versus evil.

"Instead of opposites in conflict, think of it more as opposing forces in complement," LaGreca said. "We need both of them. One is not better than the other. At face value, yang is male and yin is female, but you need both of those to have a species."

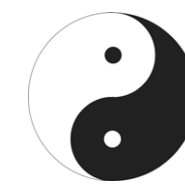
To better understand the yin/ yang relationship, take a step back to the beginning of this ancient origin story. In Taoist theory, the universe starts with

the void or wuji—symbolized by an empty circle. From wuji comes taiji, and from taiji emerges all things. Once you become familiar with this pair of complementary forces, you can find poetic evidence for it everywhere around you: earth and sky, night and day, winter and summer, plants and animals, the rolling waves crashing against the rocky shore.

As modern scientists find their own ways to understand the world, they have also found elements that affirm the idea of yin and yang: The positive and negative charges of atomic elements, the equal and opposite reaction of Newton's third law of motion, the growth and decline of all organisms and systems that are sometimes described as entropy and atrophy.

When yin and yang are in balance, life flourishes through the creative flow of natural law. But when these forces fall out of balance, the life force becomes warped and stagnant. Over time, this imbalance leads to disease and destruction.

Continued on Page 11



The earliest known reference of yin and yang comes from the I Ching (Book of Changes)—a mystical divination practice at least 3500 years old.

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The pandemic lockdown has given some families the time to play with their food—and eat it together.

The Pandemic Is Improving Your Relationship With Food

COVID-19 has upended our lives, but for some people it's a chance to learn healthy new habits

STEPHANIE MEYERS

It's 5 p.m. on who can tell which day, and instead of rushing from work to kids' activities, I'm unpacking a box of produce while my 7-year-old peels carrots beside me. Rather than grab what we can from the fridge on the way to soccer practice, my family is all sitting down together to a homemade meal. On the menu tonight: vegetarian cauliflower lentil tacos.

Before you get the wrong impression that everything's going swimmingly at my house, it's not. But as a registered dietician and a mom, I'm noticing a few noteworthy patterns amid the pandemic, both in my own family and in what my clients report every day. Some of these food-related behavior changes have the potential to become new habits with long-term benefits. Here are five eating-related behaviors I hope endure beyond the pandemic.

One of the most important things I hope people maintain after the pandemic is more friendliness toward themselves as eaters.

1. Families Eating Together

For the first time, some kids now have two parents home for weeknight dinners. In stark contrast, kids of front-line workers may eat more meals away from their parents. Each of these scenarios highlights the importance of eating together when you can. Research has found that eating as a family helps kids have better self-esteem, more success in school, and lower risk of depression and substance use disorders.

Finding time for family meals isn't always possible or easy, but hopefully, people will continue to prioritize eating together whenever they're able. And remember, it isn't only dinner that counts. Even eating a quick snack together or family breakfast is valuable.

2. Kids Learning to Cook

Some families are making time to get kids involved in the kitchen. That's good news because research shows it leads to healthier eating as an adult. A long-term study found that adolescents who learned to cook by age 18-23 were eating more vegetables, less fast food, and more family meals a decade later.

Learning to cook can be fascinating for kids but exhausting for overworked parents. Don't lose heart if it seems every kid but yours can whisk and sauté. Engage them in the basics by letting your child arrange simple snacks on a plate. It's never too little, too early, or too late to start giving kids some autonomy in the kitchen.

3. Eating More Plant-Based Proteins

Nutritionists have spent decades encouraging people to eat plant-based meals. Now suddenly everyone's stocking up on all kinds of dried beans and lentils. They're trying tofu and home-

made veggie burgers and finding out that, with the right recipes, these foods can be delicious.

Alternatives to animal protein benefit the health of individuals and our planet. This doesn't mean you need to become vegetarian, but you can start thinking about meat differently. Make it less of a main dish and more like a condiment. For example, instead of grilling a whole pack of chicken breasts for dinner try making vegetable kebabs using smaller or fewer pieces of chicken on the skewers. Or make a colorful dinner salad with grilled salmon crumbled on top.

4. Buying Local and Helping in the Hunger Crisis

In the early weeks of COVID-19, some grocery shelves went bare while farmers plowed ripe crops into fields and dumped fresh milk down drains. Problems in the food supply chain that have been magnified by the pandemic have prompted people to seek local sources of food. Sales of regionally milled flour, sustainably caught fish, and community-supported agriculture programs have skyrocketed. I hope this trend continues long after the pandemic ends and deepens our appreciation for who and what it takes to bring food to our table.

Another crisis is that 42 million Americans are facing food insecurity, a number that has grown daily amid the COVID-19 pandemic. With increasing awareness of the hunger problem, people are stepping forward to help. Like my friend who's decided to donate the produce from her garden to help other families in need.

5. Changing Mindsets About Wellness

Eating is one of the most basic ways we take care of ourselves, and disruptions in food and activity routines have people rethinking how they define wellness.

Many of my clients are starting to gently investigate their relationships with food and their bodies. With proper support, they're creating "new normal" plans for eating that include self-compassion as a daily practice. One example is short daily meditations, which research suggests improve many aspects of well-being, including self-worth and body appreciation. One of the most important things I hope people maintain after the pandemic is more friendliness toward themselves as eaters.

People have come home to roost around food in these unprecedented times, discovering new habits and insights about what it means to truly nourish themselves.

Take pride in both big and small changes you've recently put into practice. They might turn into brand-new habits with benefits in the long run. I encourage everyone to hang on to a homemade version of at least one food they used to buy instead of going back, because cooking at home has been found to benefit health and personal relationships.

Stephanie Meyers is a registered dietitian, nutritionist, and instructor in nutrition at Boston University. This article was originally published on *The Conversation*.

Yin and Yang

The Path to a Balanced Life

Continued from Page 9

Chinese medicine is all about seeing the human body as a representative of these elemental forces and offering complementary strategies to keep them in balance. "It's at the core of our medicine," LaGreca said. "It informs how we think more than anything. And from that perspective, we can then proceed with proper diagnosis and treatment."

This approach is not unlike that sought by other kinds of doctors and the body itself. Western medicine has the concept of homeostasis, the tendency of a healthy body to move toward a relatively stable balance between its many interdependent elements. We have endless physiological processes that work to create homeostases, like hormones that turn our hunger on and others that turn it off, or immune cells that fire up our immune response when they sense danger and others that turn it off when the danger passes.

Before blood tests and CT scans, ancient doctors relied on their own sensory observation to determine how the body was out of tune. The principle of yin and yang offers a convenient method to detect and address imbalances in the body. No equipment is necessary, but a sense of balance is a must.

Looking at the body through the lens of yin and yang reveals numerous complementary relationships. For example, the inside of the body is yin, the outside is yang. The front of the body is yin, the back is yang. The lower half of the body is yin, and the top half is yang.

If you go to an acupuncturist to treat your headache, it may seem counterintuitive to see him inserting needles into your feet, until you realize the technique in action.

"If someone is manifesting symptoms that are occurring in the head and neck, then maybe we need to counterbalance that by grounding them and do more acupuncture points on the lower part of the body. That's yin and yang manifesting itself," LaGreca said.

This same balancing act runs through every aspect of Chinese medicine. Herbs, for example, are each classified according to their specific yin and yang properties. The characteristics of various herbs are balanced in combination to create the classic Chinese formulas. Each formula is chosen to fit the complementary pattern in a patient's symptoms.

"We generally think of yang as warming and yin as cooling," LaGreca said. "So herbs that have a warming function in the body, like ginger or pepper, are going to bring yang to the body. They're going to

increase circulation and produce sweating. Herbs that are bitter, which means they draw down into the body and are cold, are more yin related."

Food is similarly categorized by its yin or yang nature. Fruit, vegetables, and grains generally fall to the yin side, while meat and eggs are more yang. When the aim of food is to bring balance to the body, choosing what's best to eat varies with each individual.

"It's based on someone's constitution," LaGreca said. "If they have a weak constitution, they need to be built up, and need more yang foods. If they have a very hot constitution, and they have something like high blood pressure, maybe they need more detoxifying or yin foods."

Western medicine doesn't call foods yin or yang, but researchers now have a better understanding of how foods stir these dualities of metabolic responses. We have begun to discover that foods have complex biochemistry that interacts with our own biochemistry in wide-ranging ways. Some foods, cinnamon, for example, thin the blood while leafy greens full of vitamin K can thicken it.

The Power of Choice

Yin and yang have provided health guidance for many generations. But in the past, the world was simpler, and food choices were far more limited. Today, we're besieged with foods that appeal far more to our senses than our sustenance.

Even with good information, our ability to seek the balance we need for a healthy life (or what some doctors would describe as homeostasis in the body) is under constant assault. Just consider the temptation of junk food that awaits you at the till of every grocery store.

Especially when life gets busy or stressful, many of the choices we make can often undermine our balance, rather than help it. You don't have to practice Chinese medicine to recognize this dysfunctional pattern. According to Marcelle Pick, a functional medicine nurse practitioner and founder of the Women to Women Health Center in Maine, a healthy balanced life begins with the choices we make.

"For me, it's about the dance of our inner world and understanding ourselves on the inside as well as the outer world," Pick said.

Everything we experience can influence our balance for the better or worse. Of course, there are some things we cannot control, but there are many factors that we can. When Pick sees patients, she gets them to examine their range of choices. This means not only discussing symptoms,



“Instead of opposites in conflict, think of it more as opposing forces in complement.”

Brandon LaGreca, a Chinese medicine practitioner



“As strange as it sounds, COVID is telling us that we have to have balance. Because if we don't our immune system won't work the way we need it to, and we can have pretty significant problems.”

Marcelle Pick, functional medicine nurse practitioner and founder of the Women to Women Health Center in Maine

but talking about work life, home life, exercise, and nutrition. These details help Pick determine what imbalances could be causing a patient's problems, and what counterbalances can be made to remedy them.

"That's the key for me to help people get better. I had a woman this morning that had very bad diarrhea. We talked about her diet, and what foods she needs to take away. I also asked about the stress that is going on in her life," Pick said. "I asked, 'Are you self-reflective? Are you doing anything that's calming?'"

Modern diagnostic tests can accurately identify specific diseases once the markers for them appear. But we typically don't just go from well to sick overnight. Weeks, months, or years of chronic stress, bad choices, and toxic exposures can turn minor imbalances into major problems.

This is clearly the case in regard to chronic illness. But Pick points to a recent example that shows how people who lead imbalanced lives can also make themselves more susceptible to infectious disease.

"Obesity is one of the risk factors for COVID-19, because of the inflammation involved with it. And in the U.S. we have a population of 40 to 50 percent who are overweight," she said. "For many of these people, there was a trajectory that they were already on with poor nutrition, lack of exercise, high blood pressure, and several medications."

"As strange as it sounds, COVID is telling us that we had to have balance," Pick said. "Because if we don't our immune system won't work the way we need it to, and we can have pretty significant problems."

Those most at risk of death from a COVID-19 infection are those with a compromised immune system. Their immune system overreacts to the infection and a storm of immune cells known as cytokines overwhelms the body. The fine balance that turns their immune response on and off to create balance in the body doesn't work, often because it has been turned on too long due to disease and poor nutrition over the course of their lives.

But even the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic come in opposites as yin and yang would predict. While the disease has upended communities in harmful ways, there are also signs of healing in other ways.

Pick notes that for all the fear and angst brought on by a worldwide pandemic and widespread lockdown, the event has also brought amazing and unexpected changes to the planet. For example, several cities once plagued by pollution have seen skies clearer than they've been in decades.

"For every dark side, there's a light side as well," she said. "What I say to my patients is, 'What can you take from this? What don't you want any more? And what do you want more of as you move forward?' That's the balance."

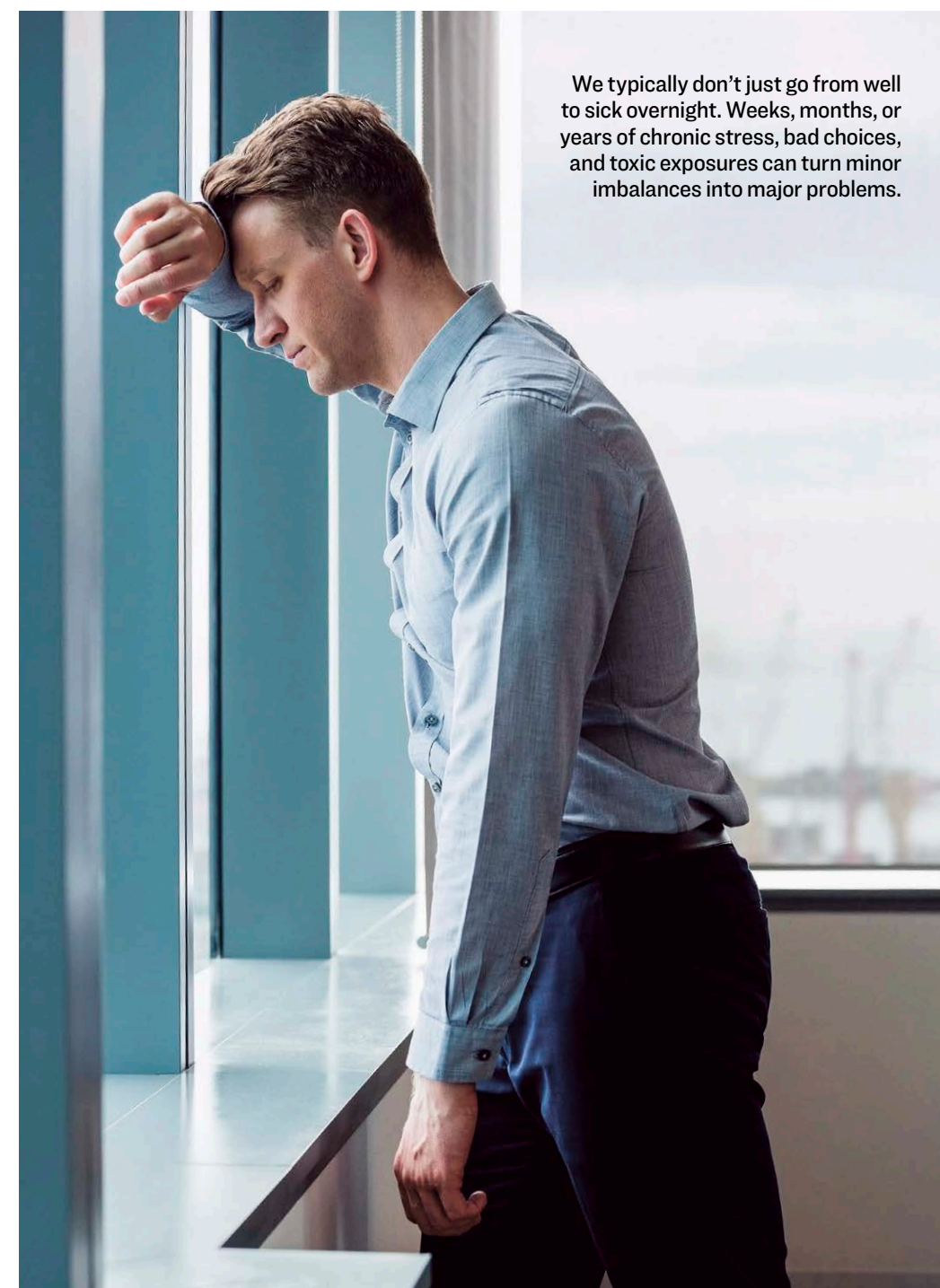
For many people, months of lockdown has meant more free time than they've ever had available to reflect on these big ideas. But not everyone has had this luxury. For those still stretched too thin, Pick says it's important to take a few moments for yourself no matter how busy life becomes. She says just a little bit of personal time can make a difference in your mental and physical health.

"Do what I call 777 breathing. Inhale for seven seconds, hold for seven, exhale for seven. Do it seven times," she said. "You might take five minutes twice a day to do this, or three times a day. We have to figure out some of the pieces of this for ourselves because what works for me doesn't work for you. We have to find out what our dance is."

Another simple and direct way to help bring your body to balance is through movement. LaGreca says that lethargic yin people often need more vigorous movement, like swimming, or bouncing on a trampoline. Likewise, people who are too jittery might benefit from an activity with a more yin or calming effect, like gentle yoga.

The bottom line is that there is no one-size-fits-all answer when it comes to balance. Instead, it always falls upon your ability to consider what you need, and choose an appropriate match.

"If someone is overweight and hasn't exercised in a while, maybe they need to start with some gentle walking, which for them will be yang. For someone who's already an athlete, a gentle walk will be more yin for them," LaGreca said. "You have to always think of it in the context of the person's constitution. What might be yang for one person may be yin for another."



We typically don't just go from well to sick overnight. Weeks, months, or years of chronic stress, bad choices, and toxic exposures can turn minor imbalances into major problems.



Microglia:

The Brain's 'Immune Cells' Protect Against Diseases—Usually

When the cells switch to their aggressive form, they can kill neurons and cause further damage to our brains

ELEFTHERIA KODOSAKI

We know that the body's immune system is important for keeping everything in check and protecting us. But a lot of us don't realize that the brain also has an immune system.

Microglia, which are the brain's immune system cells, are involved in everything—from brain development to protecting against diseases such as meningitis and Alzheimer's. But for all the good these cells do for us, under the wrong conditions they can also cause us harm.

Microglia belong to a group of non-neuronal cells called glia, which originally were thought to play a supportive role for the brain's neurons. Now research shows that microglia actually do much more than only support the neurons: they nourish, protect, and sometimes even destroy them.

These cells are unique because they come from the same place as other immune system cells, but have a different origin from other brain cells, which develop from neural stem cells. Microglia come from the yolk sac—an extra embryonic membrane—and travel to the brain early during its development.

Once established, microglia perform numerous functions. They help neurons connect, clean the brain of waste and dead or injured cells, constantly check everything is in order, and defend the brain from external threats (such as microbes), and internal threats including misfolded proteins (when a protein takes on the wrong form, which can cause disease). Their ability to change physical form and behavior in response to their environment allows them to perform these many roles.

Microglial functions are especially crucial during brain development, when they help young neurons grow and ensure the right connections are made between neurons. Through a procedure called pruning, microglia eat connections between neurons, maintaining strong ones while eliminating weaker or unnecessary ones. This continues somewhat during adulthood. For example, microglia remove unimportant memories by eating or altering synapses involved in their maintenance.

Faulty pruning during brain development has been linked with disorders such as schizophrenia and autism. But uncontrolled pruning by microglia in adulthood has been implicated in developing diseases such as Alzheimer's.

Microglia have specific receptors on their surface that recognize distress signals from other cells. These signals attract microglia to the site of the problem. When the brain's balance is disturbed (usually as a result of inflammation), living neurons can become stressed and produce these signals. This may cause them to be eaten alive by microglia. As neurons are killed, the connections they have with other neurons are also eliminated, which can cause severe issues in brain connectivity and functions.

Inflammation in the brain can be caused

Microglia do much more than only support the neurons: they nourish, protect, and sometimes even destroy them.



Microglia never sleep, but they clean and repair the brain and improve memory while you do. Lack of sleep, however, has also been shown to make microglia take on their inflammatory form.

by stress, pathogens, and auto-immune conditions, and is also connected to inflammation in other parts of the body. Brain inflammation is common in neurodegenerative diseases, as well as mental health disorders, including depression.

Inflammation causes microglia to change roles, and turn into their aggressive form to defend the brain. Usually, when stress signals stop and anti-inflammatory signals are received, microglia go back to first repairing, then protecting the brain.

But there are cases, such as with chronic stress, aging, and neurodegenerative disorders, where microglia can become more aggressive and less easy to regulate, making them more dangerous for the brain. In these cases, microglia can increase in numbers, unnecessarily kill nearby cells, and may contribute to making the brain even more inflamed by secreting inflammatory molecules. They also don't go back to their protective role easily.

Look After Your Brain

But there are many things we can do to keep our microglia happy—and our brains healthy.

Maintain a healthy diet: Compounds found in fruits, vegetables, and healthy fats can keep your microglia young, and shift them towards an anti-inflammatory form.

Keep your gut bacteria happy: The brain and the gut are connected by the vagus nerve, so microbes living in our gut have a large effect on the brain. These microorganisms are involved in the development, maintenance, and overall health of microglia.

Avoid alcohol and smoking: Alcohol causes brain damage. A recent study found that one of the ways it does so is by activating the microglia's inflammatory response.

Research shows this activation is also induced by a specific compound found in cigarette smoke.

Sleep: Microglia never sleep, but they clean and repair the brain and improve memory while you do. Lack of sleep, however, has also been shown to make microglia take on their inflammatory form.

Take care of your mental health: Microglia can sense stress, and they respond to it by turning into their inflammatory form. This form is present in numerous neuropsychiatric disorders, and also in some cases mental health issues (such as depression) that precede neurodegenerative disorders.

It has also been shown that anti-inflammatory treatment can help with managing the symptoms of psychiatric disorders, and that some medications used for the treatment of mental health issues have an anti-inflammatory element. Antidepressants have also been shown to directly regulate microglia responses.

Exercise: A recent review found exercise directly affects microglia and shifts them towards having a protective form. Exercising the brain has also been shown to train microglia to resist Alzheimer's disease.

Although we know some things about microglia, we don't know everything. We know some things about how they form, that they're involved in many diseases and that they might essentially control the brain. But we also know we can't control them. Future research might focus on how we can stop microglia from causing diseases, and how to stop these cells from turning against the brain.

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Your Autonomic Nervous System and You

ESB PROFESSIONAL/SHUTTERSTOCK

Polyvagal theory gives a useful way to examine yourself and shift to a healthier state of being

MICHAEL COURTER

Veterans, people who have experienced childhood abuse, and others who have experienced trauma are often left with emotional and psychological scars. Despite decades of effort, there are no clear-cut answers about how to heal them.

Pharmaceutical solutions, talk therapy, and support groups help some people but not others. Some trauma researchers believe trauma can leave an emotional imprint, not just in our psyche, but in the tissues of the body.

The polyvagal theory, created by Stephen Porges, provides one way to understand the emotional impact of trauma on the body and ways to treat anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health conditions. The theory can also provide a framework to examine the way we all experience our emotions and moods.

Porges's theory describes three primary states of the autonomic nervous system and how we can identify which state we are in and when we change states, as well as how to improve our state to optimize our mental health.

The 3 States

As you read about the three states, see if you can identify times when you have experienced them in yourself or observed them in others.

Social Engagement: The healthiest state of the autonomic nervous system, according to Porges, is the state of social engagement. This is the state we strive to be in when we aren't dealing with an immediate threat or stressful situation. We feel safe, open to experiences and people, trusting, creative, etc. Being in this state allows us to function effectively, think clearly, and make decisions.

Fight or Flight: When we feel threatened, our sympathetic nervous system activates and we enter an energetically aroused state classically described as fight or flight. Specific hormones flood our body, and our muscle functioning increases, our blood pressure goes up, and we become more aggressive or scared.

The fight or flight response has been studied for decades, and we now know it comes with consequences. Our decision-making tends to be more impulsive and we are less patient as well as more irritable and prone to anger. Staying in this state for too long can lead to health and relationship problems. We tend to have a hard time interpreting situations accurately due to the influence of strong emotions.

In a healthy individual, this state will be temporary and they will return to social engagement when the threat is gone. However, in some individuals, this state becomes chronic and they remain in it most of the time, unable to return to a state of social engagement. Chronic stress is an example of being stuck in this state. This is known



Techniques derived from this model have been used to treat PTSD, major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, and even autism.

to lead to many chronic health problems, such as heart disease, digestive problems, headaches, muscle tension, and more.

If we stay in fight or flight too often and for too long, we become exhausted or give up and may drop into the third state of Porges's theory: shutdown.

The value of the model lies in showing that feeling safe and bringing on a return to social engagement is the key to ending the chronic states of fighting, fleeing, or shutting down that some people get stuck in.

Shutdown: In the shutdown state, we are still nervous and scared but have given up fighting. This state is closely related to depression. In the state of shutdown, we have a hard time feeling joy or getting interested in doing anything. We lack energy and focus and we don't want to interact with people. It's hard to make decisions, and we may experience increased aches, pains, and soreness. We are prone to feelings of sadness, shame, and guilt and may feel worthless, apathetic, and hopeless. We may lose our appetite or want to overeat.

This state preserves energy when compared with the fight or flight response. If a state of fight or flight returns, we will leave the shutdown state quickly. For example, research on depression has shown that ex-

ercise or strong anger can bring someone out of a depressed state. If the shutdown state lasts too long, it can turn into chronic depression.

According to the polyvagal theory, the three major states of the autonomic nervous system are hierarchical in the sense that when the highest one, social engagement, is functioning, it shuts off the other two, while the second-highest state, fight or flight, can shut off the lowest one, shutdown.

While everyone enters the three different states routinely in different circumstances, some people will return to a state of social engagement relatively quickly when a stressful situation concludes. Other people have a harder time returning to that baseline.

Treatments Based on Polyvagal Theory While some may challenge Porges's theory, it has proven useful in clinical settings. Perhaps you can see how these states play out in you or the people around you. The value of the model lies in showing that feeling safe and bringing on a return to social engagement is the key to ending the chronic states of fighting, fleeing, or shutting down that some people get stuck in. Techniques derived from this model have been used to treat PTSD, major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, and even autism.

Without necessarily being aware of the state of a person's nervous system, therapists try to create this sense of safety and trust in a social exchange as a basis for doing therapeutic work.

Researchers have long speculated that this relationship itself is curative in ways unrelated to what therapists and clients talk about. In order to promote continued positive social interactions between sessions, I often advise clients to maintain consistent positive social interactions with people they like and care about.

At the time, I was unaware of Porges's theory that this connection could be changing the state of their autonomic nervous system to social engagement while turning

off the other states. The polyvagal theory provides a useful perspective as to why consistent positive social interaction improves people's moods and confirms the practical experience that many therapists observe with their clients.

One type of therapy based on polyvagal theory recommends thoroughly mapping the way the three states manifest in you. You make detailed descriptions of the way you feel, think, and behave in each state and identify situations and events that cause you to move between the states. This allows you to avoid or cope with events that trigger undesirable states and empowers you to take actions that move you back into a state of social engagement after you become aware that you left it.

At a more basic level, this practice encourages you to look inside and reflect on your response to your environment and the events that transpire around you. This alone is at the heart of many self-improvement and healing practices.

Other types of treatments based on polyvagal theory are designed to improve the functioning of your autonomic nervous system in direct physical ways, such as specific massage techniques.

If you read the descriptions above and think that your autonomic nervous system is chronically in a state of fight, flight, or shutdown; you may benefit by seeking the state of social engagement.

Stanley Rosenberg's work, "Accessing the Healing Power of the Vagus Nerve" is a good place to begin. Over years of providing physical, hands-on treatments focused on the functioning of the autonomic nervous system, Rosenberg has demonstrated his techniques to be extremely effective for both physical and emotional problems. He also has very simple tests and exercises you can perform at home on yourself.

Michael Courter is a therapist and counselor who believes in the power of personal growth, repairing relationships, and following your dreams. He can be reached at mc@CourterCounsel.com

Walking Has a Dramatic Effect on Our Health

Sauntering around is cheapest and easiest way to dramatically drop our risk for diabetes, heart disease

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

About 100 million Americans have diabetes or prediabetes, while estimates suggest a similar number of people have high blood pressure.

Unfortunately, those numbers don't seem to be getting any smaller.

But new research is adding to an already robust pile of evidence showing that one of the best defenses against these conditions, and many more, is cheap, relatively easy,

and rather accessible: walking.

General recommendations suggest getting about 10,000 steps per day can offer some major benefits. But recent research indicates between 4,000 and 8,000 can have a significant impact on heart disease risk.

The study found that getting 4,000–8,000 steps per day could cut the risk of heart disease by nearly two-thirds and that getting to 12,000 slashes the risk by almost 90 percent.

Another study, presented in early March at an American Heart Association conference, showed that the more a middle-aged person walked, the less likely they were to get diabetes or experience high blood pressure.

For this study, the average age of participants was 45 and the follow-up period was about nine years. Those who took the most steps per day had a 43 percent lower risk of diabetes and a 31 percent lower risk of high

blood pressure.

This point can't be stressed enough: walk more if you are capable. The walking doesn't have to be intense; it can be as simple as sauntering around your home during television commercial breaks or going up and down the stairs sporadically during the day.

If you're taking more intense steps, for example, hills or stairs, you'll probably experience the benefits at the lower end of the scale. If the steps are largely flat surfaces, 8,000 may be required. This simply has to do with how hard the body has to work for those steps.

Walking can help relax blood vessels to improve resting blood pressure. When blood is pumping and getting where it needs to go, vein health is likely to improve.

For diabetics, an immediate impact of walking is blood sugar control. Research has shown that a 30-minute walk following

a meal can significantly lower blood sugar.

If you're able, the key is finding more ways to work walking into your daily routine. Some suggestions include:

- Walking to run errands
- Pacing at home during phone calls (the other night I added 4,000 to my daily total doing this)
- Walking with a friend (socially distancing)
- Walking during commercial breaks
- Tracking steps

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



We might find this lockdown excruciatingly boring, but that's just one way of thinking.

A Guide to Dealing With Tiredness, Boredom of the Lockdown

Lockdown frustrations can offer a unique chance to practice patience

LEO BABAUTA

This pandemic is no longer an exciting (but scary) novelty. We're more than a couple of months into this lockdown, and it's wearing on many of us. We experience it as boredom, tiredness, and exhaustion, as an ongoing burden, and can't wait for it to be over. We lose patience and want to do something—anything. That all makes sense. It's also exactly why we have difficulty sticking to habit changes, to long-term deep commitments, to ongoing projects, and long-running challenges. It's one thing when things are new, novel, exciting, fresh. It's a completely different thing when things are boring, dull, tiring, and burdensome. What would it be like to work with this difficulty inside ourselves, and shift it? What would it change for us if we didn't have to grow tired of long-term challenges, or feel them as boring difficult burdens? What if we could develop the joy of patience?

The benefits are many. We could endure long challenges, for months and even years. We could shift habits long term, instead of dropping new habits after a couple of weeks. We'd have more patience for people who usually tire us out or get on our nerves. We'd be less drained by things that bother us over the long term and we'd have a greater capacity to endure. Those are benefits worth working toward. The boredom and tiredness we're feeling now from the lockdown is the perfect practice ground. So how do we do that? Let's first look at why these kinds of situations try our patience, and then how to work with them during the current situation. **Why These Things Try Our Patience** If we think about it, there's nothing in most situations that we face that makes them inherently difficult or annoying. We create the difficulty. For example, let's say you had to sit in a room with no devices, nothing to read, nothing to

When you're feeling frustrated, it's also an opportunity to experience the sensations of frustration without judging them

do—for two hours. Many people would find this extremely boring, even excruciating. Some would simply use the time to reflect. Some might even meditate or exercise. Why the difference? We decide whether it's boring or beneficial by choosing how we look at it. Some may find it a perfect place and time to relax and unwind. If we decide it is boring, it is. That's our decision. We create the experience of boredom, burden, and difficulty. The good news is that if we create the experience, we can change it. We have the power to not be bored, annoyed, or frustrated. The shift comes from letting go of the thoughts we have about the situation. These are what ultimately create a difficult experience. Some people say an adventure doesn't begin until the problems set in. "But it really is boring. It really is frustrating. It's not just my thoughts about it!" No, it's not. In reality, it's just life. We create the narrative that it's bad or good. We can let go of the narrative as well. If we let go of our judgments about the situation, we can create a new view: that it's a miracle to be alive, to witness the universe, to be interconnected to other living beings. We can find so many things to be grateful for. Or we can just experience the experience, without any thoughts at all. In many spiritual traditions, this peace of mind is seen as essential to connecting to something true and grand. It's up to us. We can practice with these thoughts and experiences.

Using the Crisis to Practice Patience So with this in mind, let's use this current crisis to practice patience.

Whenever you're feeling restless and frustrated, delight in the opportunity to practice. Look at the situation around you, and ask, "Why is this frustrating or tiresome? Why don't I like it?" See what thoughts come up. "I just want it to be over. I just want some human contact. I just want to go to my favorite restaurant. I don't like having to stay home." Notice that a lot of those thoughts are about what you want or don't want. What you like or don't like. This is about us getting our way—and we always want our way. What would it be like to not need to get our way, but to love things just as they are? Look around, and see the beauty in this moment. See the miracle of life and the world around you. When you're feeling frustrated, it's also an opportunity to experience the sensations of frustration without judging them. What does it feel like in your body to feel frustration? Can you just experience that? Over and over, the feelings will come up. We can just experience them, without judging. We can also tune into the thoughts or beliefs that may underlay those feelings. These are practices of patience. And with practice, we can increase our capacity.

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Ways to Play Without Buying Toys

With fewer toys and a bit of help, children can discover creative and innovative ways to stay entertained

DENAYE BARAHONA

First the bad news: You can't one-click-Ama-zon-order a cure to your child's boredom. We have all desperately wanted to find the "perfect" toy to keep our children engaged and happy. We may seem to have found it briefly, but the novelty passes and their boredom returns. Back to the online shopping cart we go. It's an easy cycle to fall into. Kids get bored? Buy them a new toy. When the newness wears off? Rinse and repeat. Now the good news: You can put your credit cards away. Kids don't need toys to play. In fact, most kids (including my own) spend less time than you think engaging with toys. Don't get me wrong—they're still busy little bodies. But when they have fewer toys, their creativity and innovation blossom—the play doesn't revolve around toys and a "playroom."

The wind on your face is both relaxing and invigorating. These all count as engaging and enjoyable experiences in childhood. Play in nature can look like balancing on a fallen tree, jumping from stump to stump, and building a fairy house in anticipation of magical visitors. Play in nature doesn't have any prescribed form. Some children go "all in" and jump into puddles; others just observe and keep a distance from all creatures. Regardless of how your children are spending this time outdoors, it is valuable. Researchers keep finding ways that our bodies and brains thrive in nature. **2. Imitation** Our children learn through experimenting and exploring, but they also learn through imitation. This means you might find them hanging around your feet when you are trying to take care of "real life" stuff like dishwashing and cooking. When possible, I challenge you to invite them in and let them imitate you. It might not seem playful in the traditional sense since play is defined as "activity engaged in for recreation and enjoyment." But if your children enjoy grabbing a stool and

splashing around in the bubbly dishwater, that's play. The hardest part is taking a deep breath, slowing down, and making space for this type of play.

3. Loose Parts

Handfuls of sparkly rocks. Collections of international coins. An array of treasures from a recent beachcombing adventure. Scrap pieces of fabric. The list goes on. You'd be amazed at the play that can come from loose parts that are gathered together. "Loose parts" play uses natural or scrap materials to create, imagine, and support play activities. This type of play encourages problem-solving and divergent thinking. So next time you go to throw away those toilet paper rolls—think again. The possibilities are endless. And they are free.

Much like a stage performance, play often has "scripts" or stories. Children's play typically involves pretend through acting out these scripts that they either invent or hear in stories. When we keep them surrounded in good books, we are enhancing their literacy skills and also giving them oppor-

portunities to launch off in new play scripts based on the books they are reading. Fill their minds with warm, beautiful stories and you just may see the results in their play. **5. Household items** Minimalists don't use top sheets on their beds. Or maybe that's just me? I made that up. When I purchase a set of sheets, the fitted sheet goes on the bed and the flat sheet goes to the kids. That sheet transforms into a fort, a sled to pull each other around, and even a cape or a makeshift sari. Household items like sheets, towels, and pans can provide incredible options for open-ended play in childhood. But I'm telling you something that your children already know: Play is everywhere in our lives. Our children have a magical way of bringing it to everything that they do. Our job as parents is to start seeing that play in the most unexpected ways and places. When we do that, we can let go of the need to buy toys to keep them happy. Because with fewer toys, children can actually do so much more.



You'd be amazed at the play that can come from loose parts that are gathered together.

1. Nature

Humans need nature. It doesn't have to be a proper hike in the woods, just breathing the fresh air and watching a snail cross the sidewalk can do. Turning over a rock to observe some bugs can be fascinating. Feeling



Mike Crosby is a prostate cancer survivor, and head of Veterans Prostate Cancer Awareness.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIKE CROSBY

A Navy Veteran's Battle With Prostate Cancer Gathers Allies

Veterans face unusually high rates of this deadly cancer, prompting one veteran to dig in for a larger fight

ANDREW THOMAS

While the reasons are still unclear, military veterans get diagnosed with prostate cancer at nearly twice the rate as civilians. Mike Crosby is one veteran who had his own fight the disease. Now, he's dedicated his post-military career to helping his fellow veterans beat it. Crosby is 59 years old and lives in San Diego. After he graduated from the United States Naval Academy in 1983, he went on to serve as a Navy pilot until 1996. After he transferred to the Navy Reserves, he retired in 2009. Crosby looks back on his time flying the F-14 tomcat fondly. He went through Top Gun in 1986, and went on numerous deployments throughout his career including Desert Storm. On September 11, 2001 he was in the parking lot of the Pentagon, on his way to give a presentation when Al Qaeda terrorists flew a commercial airliner into the building. After the attacks, he was called back to active duty and deployed to several countries in the Middle East.

Diagnosis In 2015, Crosby was diagnosed with prostate cancer at the Phoenix Veterans Affairs Hospital. His prostate-specific antigen was measured at 14.7 which was a large jump from his score of 5.7 the previous year. The hospital told him they couldn't perform a biopsy for 29 days, so he went to see another urologist the next day. That doctor told him to wait for six months because he thought that prostate cancer is a slow growing disease. Crosby objected to waiting, and sought treatment outside of the Veterans Affairs Administration. His biopsy came back positive, and the prostate cancer had reached stage three and was metastatic. His wife was with him when he received the news on December 9, 2015. "This is a relationship disease. This isn't a man's disease because if the man is diagnosed, at that same point of diagnosis, the mate is instantly a caregiver and she is instantly involved in this dis-

ease state, and she is impacted," Crosby explained. Crosby's cancer was treatable, but treatment couldn't wait. His doctor wanted to schedule him for surgery the same day he was diagnosed, but Crosby wanted to undergo CyberKnife radiation treatment first. Crosby and his wife went to lunch after the diagnosis, and both broke out into tears. They had new grandchildren, and the disease put a worrying pause on their life plans. Crosby flew to Seattle in December to undergo treatment. His last radiation treatment was on New Year's Eve 2015. He returned to the Veterans Affairs Administration for follow up consultations, and asked about the resources he could get to educate himself about the disease. There weren't any. "This is silly. It's the number one diagnosed cancer inside the VA. Just look at the demographics of the people. We have nine million people in the VA. Seven million of them are men over the age of 40, so guess what. Prostate cancer is going to be your number one cancer, and there's no discussion about it," Crosby said.

"If I didn't advocate for my own health and I didn't understand what these issues are, I would be in a late stage of prostate cancer before the age of 60."

Mike Crosby said

Fighting Back In 2016 Crosby began attending prostate cancer conferences and started to get involved with prostate cancer organizations. He asked them what they were doing for veterans, and they began to do more research. They discovered that veterans are 40 percent more likely to develop the disease than

the general population. In October 2018, Crosby's prostate-specific antigen number had risen again. He underwent a number of tests, and doctors discovered that the cancer had spread to a lymph node near his sacrum. Urologist said they couldn't operate because of where the cancer was located, so they recommended he undergo CyberKnife treatment again. Since Crosby's last treatment his prostate-specific antigen number has decreased, and he continues to go in for testing. Now, he's dedicated much of his life to helping other veterans with prostate cancer. "I'm more determined now to continue with the mission of education and awareness because I'm the example. If I didn't advocate for my own health and I didn't understand what these issues are, I would be in a late stage of prostate cancer before the age of 60," Crosby said. Crosby founded Veterans Prostate Cancer Awareness in December 2016 in an effort to educate and raise awareness about the disease. He regards his fellow veterans as family and believes that they joined the military because they care about the future of the nation and our way of life. When he sees the disparity in prostate cancer education, awareness, and resources between veterans and the general population he believes it is a disservice to the veteran community. Crosby's organization educates active duty military and veterans about prostate cancer, introduces new technologies to treat the disease, and encourages doctors outside of the Veteran Affairs Administration to treat veterans. In the beginning, he would give speeches at a variety of veteran and prostate cancer organizations. Over time, the organization's activities have expanded. They were involved in the drafting and review of the Mission Act which provides the Veterans Affairs Administration with 100 billion dollars for outside care for veterans for the next six years. In 2019, Veterans Prostate Cancer Awareness partnered with the national prostate cancer organization Zero which has provided Crosby and his veterans with a larger platform. Every veteran Crosby has worked with has made a lasting impression on him. He's referred senior active-duty military and veterans to urologists and oncologists and has created a network of high ranking active duty military and veterans who can assist him in the cause.

"It's very selfish if I wasn't to share this stuff because a lot of other people can benefit from it. It's almost an obligation now to have this knowledge that you've got to share, and these are guys you care about. That's why I do this," Crosby said.



Mike Crosby with his grandchildren.

How Mondays Can Help Family Caregivers Overcome Loneliness to Improve Health

SHERRI SNELLING

Current social distancing guidelines have brought stress and anxiety, especially for family caregivers who are forced to isolate from older or at-risk loved ones. According to the Caregiver Action Network, more than 90 million Americans provide care to a loved one who has chronic conditions, disabilities, disease, or is experiencing the frailties of old age. These people are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19.

Many family caregivers feel alone in their caregiving journey. With the lockdown, that feeling has reached a whole new level. Prior to the pandemic, surveys showed 48 million people aged 45 and older report being chronically lonely. This age group is the Sandwich Generation, a caregiver cohort who juggle caring for children while also caring for older loved ones—all while working. Although social isolation and loneliness are increasing for both seniors and family caregivers, they are different. Social isolation is the state of being isolated and not able to interact with others on a regular basis due to illness, disability, or lack of access to social activities. Loneliness is the state of feeling isolated where there is a void in the quality of social relationships. In other words, loneliness is about how we feel, regardless of who is around us. Being socially isolated makes loneliness worse.

A 2019 survey conducted by Data Decisions Group for The Monday Campaigns found 64 percent of respondents said if they start with a positive frame of mind on Monday, they are more likely to stay positive for the rest of the week. Using Monday as a weekly reminder to stay connected can help create a rhythm and routine that makes it easier to plan and sustain that effort. It can also create a sense of happy anticipation that enhances positive emotions that combat loneliness. Try any of these four ideas on Mondays to stay socially connected and defeat loneliness:

It's important we be mindful to consider at what point social distancing and lack of human contact becomes a greater public health risk than COVID-19.

How Loneliness Impacts Health Researcher Julianne Holt-Lundstad, professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham Young University, studied what she calls "the global loneliness epidemic" and the impact of chronic loneliness on health. She found loneliness can cause a negative health equivalent of smoking 15 cigarettes a day. It can actually be a bigger health risk than obesity and air pollution. In fact, it is such a concern in the United Kingdom that the nation named its first Minister of Loneliness in 2018 to address the growing public health crisis.

Caregivers are struggling with the inability to have face-to-face contact during the pandemic. Psychologist and author, Susan Pinker, warns this isolation has harmful effects on our health. Pinker's work points to social contact being linked with the release of neurotransmitters that trigger our brain to feel trust and comfort. Pinker advises that current social distancing rules prohibiting things such as handshakes and hugs are also limiting the release of hormones such as oxytocin, which makes us feel bonded to others, or dopamine, which can elevate our mood and reduce pain. In her TED Talk, Pinker explained how social contacts create a vaccine, not just for loneliness but as "a biological force field between disease and decline." It's important we be mindful to consider at what point social distancing and lack of human contact becomes a greater public health risk than COVID-19. **How Monday Might Be the Prescription Caregivers Need** Finding ways to overcome loneliness as a caregiver is sometimes easier said than done. But using a scientifically based method that helps promote healthier behaviors can help. The Caregiver Monday campaign is part of The Monday Campaigns non-profit public health initiative, dedicated to using Mondays to focus on caregiver self-care practices and promotion. A 2019 survey conducted by Data Decisions Group for The Monday Campaigns found 64 percent of respondents said if they start with a positive frame of mind on Monday, they are more likely to stay positive for the rest of the week. Using Monday as a weekly reminder to stay connected can help create a rhythm and routine that makes it easier to plan and sustain that effort. It can also create a sense of happy anticipation that enhances positive emotions that combat loneliness. Try any of these four ideas on Mondays to stay socially connected and defeat loneliness: **Online support groups:** Talking with other caregivers who understand your challenges creates an important sense of inclusion. **Friends and family:** Making time to connect with friends or geographically distant family is essential. Using video chats—and ensuring you look into the camera instead of the computer or tablet screen—helps simulate the face-to-face contact that will improve emotional and physical health. **Local community:** Make Monday the day you get out of the house and have social interaction. As communities begin to relax shelter-in-place rules and allow for more activity, grabbing a morning coffee and saying "hello" to your favorite barista can help overcome feelings of isolation and loneliness. **Get a respite break:** Some employers offer respite care benefits and there are many organizations that provide respite help at low or no cost through the nonprofit ARCH National Respite Network. Having this caregiving break gives you critical time to focus on self-care and connect with home care aides that can make you feel less alone. *Sherrí Snelling is a corporate gerontologist and ambassador for the Caregiver Monday campaign. She specializes in caregiver wellness, psychosocial behavior modification and brain health/Alzheimer's. She is founder of the Caregiving Club, a consulting and content creation company working with employers to encourage caregiver self-care in the workplace.*

'We Miss Them All So Much': Grandparents Ache as the COVID Exile Grinds On

JONEL ALECCIA

Back home in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, Richard and Denise Victor would get to see their four grandchildren almost every day.

"With the younger ones, we have a routine of stories when they spend the night," Richard Victor said.

But when the coronavirus hit, the couple were at their vacation home in Florida, and, suddenly, it wasn't safe to leave. They've been sheltering there for three months, missing the grandkids, struggling with an absence that FaceTime just can't fill.

"It's very, very difficult," said Victor, a 70-year-old lawyer and founder of the non-profit Grandparents Rights Organization. "You have to try your best because we don't know when this will be over with."

Of all the hardships imposed by the coronavirus pandemic, few are as poignant as the reshaping of relationships between children and the grandparents who love them.

Across America, where more than 70 million people are grandparents, efforts to prevent infection in older people, who are most at risk of serious COVID-19 illness, have meant self-imposed exile for many. At the opposite extreme, some grandparents have taken over daily child care duties to help adult children with no choice but to work.

"All the grandparents in the country are aching," said Madonna Harrington Meyer, a sociology professor at Syracuse University in New York. "Some are aching because they can't see their grandchildren—and some are aching because they can't get away from them."

Both situations are the result of the fast-moving pandemic, which forced families to decide quickly whether to isolate with grandparents "inside the bubble or out," Harrington Meyer said. Three months later, many are still grappling with those decisions—and worrying about an uncertain future.

"I think we all have the exact same set of issues," said Harrington Meyer, author of the 2014 book "Grandmothers at Work: Juggling Families and Jobs." "What will August bring? All of us need to be prepared for this to be fluctuating."

For grandparents separated from their grandchildren, the risks posed by gathering in person haven't changed, said Dr. Krutika Kuppalli, an affiliated clinical assistant professor of medicine in the infectious diseases division at Stanford University. Rates of serious illness and death caused by COVID-19 remain much higher in older people than the young, and children can easily spread the disease.

"I would definitely recommend staying away or definitely continuing to wear masks and perform good hand hygiene," Kuppalli said.

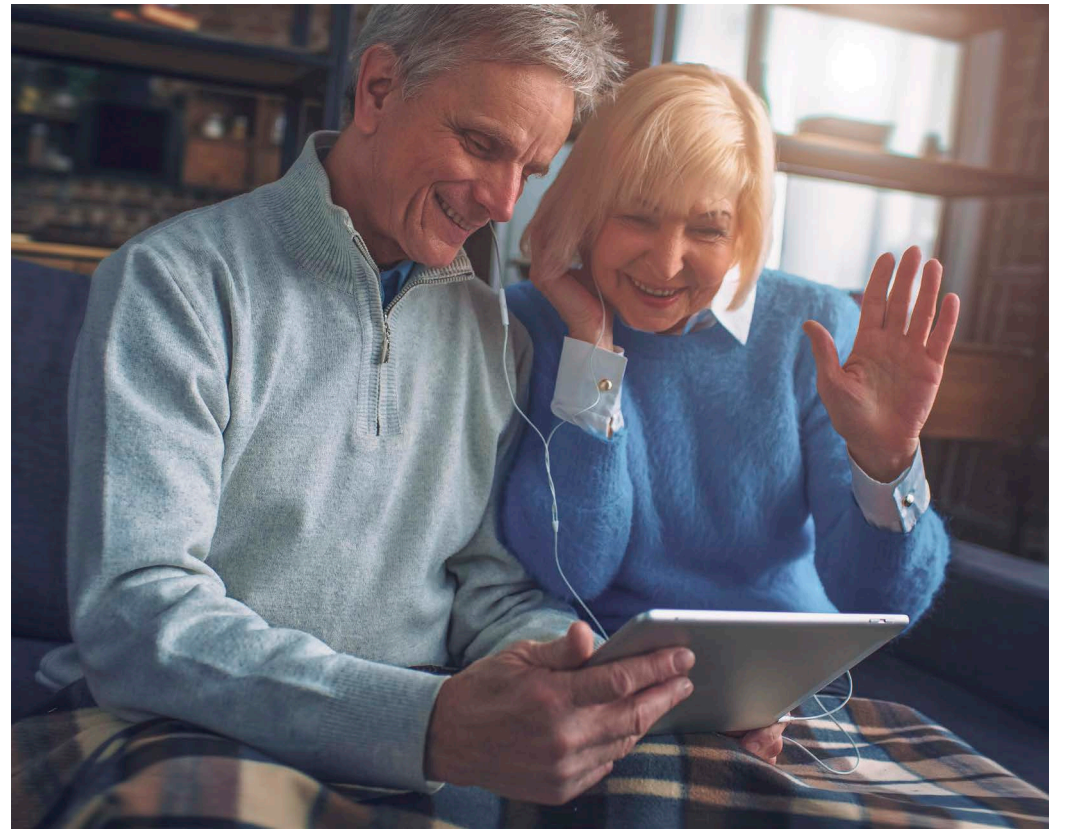
At the same time, maintaining a connection with grandkids is important for the well-being of everyone, said Dr. Preeti Malani, chief health officer, and professor of medicine at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

"There's an incredible health benefit to them to interact with their grandparents," she said. "There's nobody who loves children like their grandparents."

In Highland Beach, Florida, Victor said he and wife Denise, who's in her 60s, have relied heavily on Zoom, FaceTime, and videos to stay connected to their grandchildren. Still, it's been difficult. Since February, the two older boys, ages 10 and 13, have gotten taller and better at basketball. The baby has gone from crawling to walking. And their precocious 4-year-old grandson has paid close attention to the passing time.

"He let me know I'd been gone long enough that he's not 4 1/2 anymore. He's 4 3/4," Victor said. "We miss them all so much."

Some grandparents have calculated that the need to care for their families outweighs the fear of infection. Fran Layton, 73, a law-



Some grandparents continue to see their grandchildren in person, finding ways to stay apart while still being together.

yer who lives in Berkeley, California, rushed to pick up her 2-year-old grandson in San Francisco in late March when his newborn sister arrived earlier than planned.

"My son called and said, 'Mom, they're going to induce. Can you get here?' I did not hesitate," Layton recalled.

She kept the toddler for a couple of days at that time. A month later, she started caring for him at her home a few days each week so his parents could juggle work and the new baby.

"He would take his naps in a stroller in the afternoon," Layton said. "I walked the Berkeley Hills while he napped. It got me my exercise."

Recently, Layton's son and daughter-in-

law decided to return to using their son's nanny. Layton agreed with that decision, but also knew that widened the circle of infection risk. For now, she is choosing to stay away and doesn't know when she'll be together again with her grandson—or her new granddaughter.

"I was a mess when he left," she said. "It's a sadness that we all feel forced apart with children and grandchildren."

Some grandparents continue to see their grandchildren in person, finding ways to stay apart while still being together. "The outdoors is safer than the indoors, in general," said Malani, the University of Michigan professor. "To me, a walk in a park, without a play structure, without other kids around, is OK."

Going forward, families will need to weigh the risks and benefits of staying connected or apart.

"We're not going to have a situation where we can mitigate the risk to nothing," Malani said. "It's about how much risk you're willing to take."

JoNel Aleccia is a senior correspondent, focused on aging and end-of-life issues, on the KHN enterprise team. This article was first published by Kaiser Health News.

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