

MIND & BODY

The Health Benefits of Plants

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The Health Benefits of Plants

Creating an interior ecosystem can improve the air we breathe and the feelings we experience

TATIANA DENNING

I can still picture it. It was like walking into my favorite fairy tale and “The Jungle Book,” all rolled into one, only I got to be a part of the story.

They were everywhere, and in every shape and size: hanging, sitting, short, tall, pointed, round, and everything in between. And they were arranged so artistically, so beautifully, that you wanted to just sit among them, and enjoy sharing the same space with them.

Yes, walking into my aunt Kimber’s house was a magical experience. She worked at a local greenhouse at the time named Hauge’s, which I also loved going to, so perhaps this explained the jungle of plant life that filled her house. As a result of her green thumb, she grew the most lush, varied, and vibrantly green plants I’d ever seen. Not only were they lovely to look at, but they just made you feel good—happier, somehow.

It should come as no surprise then that I developed a love of plants from my aunt, something that I carried into adulthood.

Walking through the maze of life that decorated her house, or as I relaxed in one of the comfy wicker chairs nestled among them, the air felt somehow easier to breathe, just cleaner, fresher. It seemed to have a special energy about it.

At the time, I wasn’t sure if it was just my imagination.

In addition, plants take in carbon dioxide and give off oxygen, which benefits us all. Putting a few plants in your bedroom can even help you sleep better.

Plants also put moisture into the air while removing allergens, such as mold and dust. Spider plants are particularly good at adding moisture to the air, raising humidity levels from 20 percent up to 30 percent in one study, while plants such as peace lilies, Chinese evergreens, and violets are great at trapping allergens.

As a good rule of thumb, NASA’s Clean Air Study, which demonstrated the air purifying effects of plants, recommends one plant per 100 square feet in your home or office to help improve air quality.

Elevated Mood

The simple act of growing and caring for plants, in and of itself, has been shown to improve mood. After all, as we care for another, it helps to nurture our own soul at the same time.

The beauty and life plants bring to our homes also elevates our mood. When we walk into a room that contains plants, we not only feel lighter, but our day just seems a little brighter. It’s no surprise that plants have been shown to help alleviate depression.

A Korean study published in Psychiatry Investigation in 2009 found pa-



Beyond producing oxygen, plants can also calm our minds and enliven our spirits.

tients diagnosed with moderate to severe depression responded significantly better to cognitive-behavioral therapy when it was performed in an arboretum with a forest-like setting compared to a hospital.

Decreased Anxiety and Stress

Plants have been shown in a number of studies to reduce stress and anxiety, helping people stay calm and relaxed.

A study published in the Journal of Physiological Anthropology compared people’s reaction to two types of work: one with plants, one with a computer. It found that “active interaction with indoor plants can reduce physiological and psychological stress compared with mental work. This is accomplished through suppression of sympathetic nervous system activity and diastolic blood pressure and promotion of comfortable, soothed, and natural feelings.”

So the relaxed and peaceful feelings I experienced in my aunt’s house weren’t just in my head.

Plants have even been shown to help improve PTSD. The Journal of Environmental Horticulture has composed a four-part series on the many benefits of plants, stating, “When victims of natural disasters, who are at a high risk of PTSD, participated in horticulture therapy (HT) programs, they showed an increase in regional gray matter volume (rGMV) of the left subgenual anterior cingulate cortex and left superior frontal gyrus compared with the stress education (SE) group.” That’s a pretty impressive change.

According to Tarun Kapoor on the site McGill Media, researchers in Germany conducted mice studies showing the scent from the jasmine plant has a significant calming effect, so much so that it caused the mice to stop their activity, and sit quietly. Brain scans demonstrated this change was due to an increase in the neurotransmitter GABA, which essentially acts as a calming agent. Researchers point out that the scent of jasmine is more effective than many sleep aids, sedatives, and anxiety medications.

But what if jasmine isn’t for you? Well, aloe vera and lavender plants are two great alternatives that have also been shown to calm and relax the mind and body.

Improved Concentration and Memory

Can something as simple as a plant increase your memory, concentration, and even your productivity? Accord-



Plants also put moisture into the air while removing allergens, such as mold and dust.

When we walk into a room that contains plants, we not only feel lighter, but our day just seems a little brighter.

ing to researchers, the answer is “yes.”

A study published in Environment and Behavior found that office workers who had flowers and a plant at their desk performed better on attention tasks than those who did not. This was confirmation of an earlier study done several years prior with a reading task.

In one concentration test, published in the Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied, employees who had a view of plants, either indoors or through a window, were able to complete the test 19 percent faster than employees who were in a room without a view of any plants.

Science Direct discusses a study published in Landscape and Urban Planning that found that office workers in the Netherlands and Great Britain had a 15 percent increase in productivity when plants were a part of their office space.

I think most businesses and teachers would be on board with a little added greenery for such great results.

Faster Healing and Better Health

Plants have also been shown to improve our health and result in more rapid healing following surgery.

In a study in the Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine,

researchers Park and Mattson stated: “Viewing plants during the recovery period had a positive influence linking directly to health outcomes of surgical patients. Patients in hospital rooms with plants and flowers had significantly more positive physiologic responses evidenced by lower systolic blood pressure, and lower ratings of pain, anxiety, and fatigue than patients in the control room.”

And according to Amy Kusby on the site Garden Cottage, plants release natural chemicals into the air known as phytoncides, which was discussed in a study published in the International Journal of Immunopathology and Pharmacology. Kusby points out, “These phytoncides are emitted by plants as a defense against diseases, and can be effective at boosting human immunity and protecting us from harmful germs.”

Not only do plants add beauty, they impact our health in a myriad ways that we may have never realized. What a simple, beautiful, and inexpensive way to improve health.

And don’t forget to talk to your plants. We’ve all heard that talking to our plants is good for them, but did you know that it’s how you talk to them really matters?

IKEA conducted an informally

scientific study in a school in United Arab Emirates to show the effects of unkind words on plants, with the goal of encouraging kids not to bully one another by saying unkind things. Two plants were kept in identical conditions, with plant A being subjected to bullying words, and the other complimented. After 30 days, the bullied plant was wilted and noticeably droopy while the complimented plant was thriving.

As with other things in life, when we’re kind, it comes back to us. Showing a little love and care for our plants will yield good things for them, and in return, good things for us, in the form of better physical and mental health, and overall well-being.

So the next time you’re in need of a pick-me-up, head to your nearest garden center for a golden pothos, philodendron, or bird’s nest fern to help brighten your world. It will be some of the best time and money you’ve ever spent.

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

THE ROOT CAUSE

Innovative New Method

Researchers find potential treatment to reduce bad microbes without harming others essential to good health

ARMEN NIKOGOSIAN

Over the past several decades, doctors and researchers have accumulated evidence that our gut microbiome has far-reaching effects on our mood, immune system, and many other aspects of our well-being.

Most recently, researchers have found that reducing the growth of “bad” bacteria may reduce the plaque buildup in arteries that leads to heart attacks and strokes.

Researchers at Scripps Research in La Jolla, California, have identified specific peptides (large molecules made up of a chain of amino acids) that can remodel the bacterial population in the intestines of mice. This remodeling consequently reduced cholesterol levels and dramatically slowed the growth of plaque deposits and the thickening of the artery wall also known as atherosclerosis. The findings were reported in Nature Biotechnology.

These peptides reduced the growth of less-desirable species of gut bacteria. These species of “bad” microbes are linked to habitual consumption of

the high-fat standard American diet. In mice that developed high cholesterol and atherosclerosis from this high-fat diet, the peptides beneficially shifted the balance of species in the gut microbiome to a more favorable balance. This shift reduced cholesterol levels and reduced the buildup of fatty deposits in arteries.

High cholesterol and arterial plaque are defining characteristics of atherosclerosis which leads to heart attacks and strokes, the leading causes of death among humans.

The gut microbiome plays a very important role in health by helping control digestion and immune system tolerance as well as many other aspects of health. It includes thousands of symbiotic microbial species that find food and shelter in the gut and in return assist their human and animal hosts in a variety of ways including improved digestion, enhanced detoxification, and nutrient generation.

Gut microbiome dysbiosis is a condition in which the state of the microbes in the gut are out of balance and not favorable to continued health. Gut dysbiosis can promote the onset and progression of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, and central nervous system disorders. When antibiotic medications are used indiscriminately or a standard American diet (SAD) rich in refined carbohydrates like refined grains and sugar, trans and hydrogenated fats, and processed foods are consumed, the gut microbiome can

be altered in ways that promote disease.

Diet likely plays the most important role in the composition of the gut microbiome through its direct effect on which microbes get the foods they need to grow. It now appears that the increased risks of obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and atherosclerosis that have been associated with the SAD diet are at least in part due to changes in the microbiome. That realization led researchers to seek methods to remodel the microbiome, with the goal of reversing these pathological changes and restoring good health. The researchers at Scripps wanted a method to reduce the growth of bad gut bacteria without reductions in good gut bacteria.

“Our approach, using small molecules called cyclic peptides, is inspired by nature. Our cells naturally use a diverse collection of molecules including antimicrobial peptides to regulate our gut microbe populations,” co-author Luke Leman told Science Daily.

The researchers started by using mice that were genetically susceptible to high cholesterol. They then fed the animals a SAD diet that consistently produced high blood cholesterol and atherosclerosis, as well as gut microbiome dysbiosis. The animals’ gut contents were then sampled and a different cyclic peptide was applied to each sample. After waiting a day, the bacterial DNA in the samples were sequenced in order to determine which peptides had shifted the gut microbiome into the desired direction.



Researchers have found that reducing the growth of “bad” bacteria may reduce the plaque buildup in arteries that leads to heart attacks and strokes.

Two peptides were found that had significantly slowed the growth of undesirable gut bacteria, shifting the overall gut microbiome balance closer to what was seen in mice that were fed a healthier diet. In the treated mice, blood levels of cholesterol and atherosclerotic plaque were significantly reduced when compared to untreated mice. In the treated mice, researchers noted 36 percent reductions in blood cholesterol levels and 40 percent reductions in the area of atherosclerotic plaques in the arteries.

The cyclic peptides molecules used in the study interacted with the outer membranes of certain bacterial cells in ways that slowed or stopped their growth. The research team has been working with these peptides for years and didn’t report any toxicity or adverse events to the cells of mammals.

The cyclic peptides transit through the

“Our cells naturally use a diverse collection of molecules including antimicrobial peptides to regulate our gut microbe populations.”

Luke Leman, co-author of the study

gut without absorbing into the body or entering the bloodstream. The success of this study has led researchers to now test their cyclic peptides in mice that model diabetes and other common conditions associated with an unhealthy gut microbiome.

Prior to this finding, the treatment of most cases of gut dysbiosis typically entailed an initial broad reduction in all of the microbes in the gut with either pharmaceuticals, herbs, or an elemental diet. Both good and bad microbes would be removed or reduced in the initial phase of treatment, followed by a methodical repopulation of the beneficial microbes.

While this method has been used for decades with solid clinical benefits in patients, the potential use of cyclic peptides to target only the “bad guys,” while leaving the “good guys” intact would be an eagerly awaited improvement to an already well-established treatment in functional medicine.

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

3 Strategies to Prevent Osteoporosis, Build Strong Bones

Exercise, food, and supplements can have a big effect—without dangerous side effects

There are alternatives to osteoporosis drug therapies that can keep your bones healthy and help to prevent bone fractures.

[For links to the 45 studies this article draws on, please find it online at the EpochTimes.com or Greenmedinfo.com]

An estimated 54 million Americans currently have osteoporosis or low bone mass with women (mostly postmenopausal) outnumbering men 2 to 1, but both experience fractures, which lowers the quality of life.

The World Health Organization's T-score measures bone mineral density (BMD) using a DEXA scan. Patients are then labeled "osteopenic" if they have T score between -1 and -2.5 or "osteoporotic" if their T-score is -2.5 or below. But despite the reassuring precision of such numbers, it is an imperfect way to predict bone health or bone fracture risk.

In fact, the majority of patients who sustain a low-trauma fracture do not meet the T-score definition of osteoporosis and younger individuals with BMD in the osteoporotic range but no other risk factors have relatively low fracture rates and yet are often questionably treated with osteoporosis drugs.

Adverse Effects of Osteoporotic Drugs
Common osteoporotic drugs—bisphosphonates, like alendronate (Fosamax), risedronate (Actonel, Atelvia), ibandronate (Boniva) and zoledronic acid (Reclast)—may cause adverse effects to the upper gastrointestinal tract, musculoskeletal pain, jaw osteonecrosis, ocular events, more risk of serious atrial fibrillation, fever, musculoskeletal swelling, and fatigue.

People on alendronic acid showed no reduction in four-year fracture risks and a higher risk of gastric and esophagus ulcers. Prolonged use (over four years) increased stress fractures (50 percent), pain (76 percent) and bone micro-cracks.

Fortunately, there are alternative approaches to these drugs. These alternative strategies are essential to increase bone health and prevent fractures.

1. Exercise/Movement

Neuromuscular abilities such as walking and speed of gait are strong predictors of



Dance, yoga, and Tai Chi are gentle forms of exercise that can improve bone health.

falling and hip fracture risk. When you exercise regularly, your bone adapts by increasing its quality and quantity, which enhances balance and coordination, and in turn, helps prevent falls and broken bones.

Some of the proven ways to exercise or move to increase bone health include Tai Chi, dance, yoga, and non-weight and weight-bearing exercises.

2. Nutrients

The top categories of nutritional foods most helpful to bone health include prunes, flavonoids, Soy isoflavones, carotenoids, and vitamin-dense foods.

Prunes (dried plums) are one of the richest bone-building foods. In a study of postmenopausal women, eating five prunes a day prevented bone loss during a year-long trial and exhibited long-lasting bone protection in a five-year study. Prunes improved BMD by suppressing the bone turnover rate in 237 postmenopausal women.

Flavonoids (found in black tea, dark chocolate, fruits/veggies) were associated with disease prevention. Black tea, in particular, is a rich source of flavonols (myricetin, quercetin, and kaempferol), which are potent antioxidants and good for your health.

Higher intake of black tea/flavonoids was associated with a lower risk of fracture-related hospitalizations in 212 elderly high-

risk Australian women. Since flavonoids are abundant in fruits and vegetables, it is not surprising that a meta-analysis (225,062 subjects) found a lower bone fracture risk was associated with an increase of one serving of fruits/veggies daily.

Soy isoflavones, particularly genistein (fermented soy, red clover, fava beans, coffee, and kudzu), were superior to osteoporosis drugs (alendronate, raloxifene, and estradiol) for increasing BMD and bone strength, reducing bone resorption (loss of calcium) and increasing bone formation in postmenopausal women. They significantly improved spine, hip, and neck BMDs and three bone turnover markers in a meta-analysis of 52 articles.

Carotenoids (found in carrots, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, apricots, and spinach), especially lycopene (found in guava, tomatoes, watermelon, grapefruit, red peppers, red cabbage, papaya, and mangos), promote bone health. In a 17-year study of 946 men and women suffering 100 total hip fractures, those eating the highest level of carotenoids experienced a lower risk of hip fractures, and those with the highest lycopene intake had a lower hip and non-vertebral fracture risk.

High vitamin foods offer greater dietary vitamin levels. For example, vitamin C (found in broccoli, cantaloupe, cauliflower, kale,

kiwi, oranges, papaya, peppers, sweet potato, strawberries, and tomatoes) was associated with a 33 percent lower osteoporosis risk and reduced hip fracture risk, as well as higher neck and spine BMDs. Subjects who ate more fish (vitamin D3) and green vegetables (K1 and K2 vitamins) also reduced fracture risks.

3. Vitamins/Supplements

In a meta-analysis of 1,349 postmenopausal women, low magnesium levels were an osteoporosis risk factor. In a study of young adults, magnesium supplementation had beneficial effects in reducing bone loss.

Vitamin D deficiency also can lead to osteoporosis and mineralization defects, associated with falls and fractures, but vitamin D and magnesium should be taken together as vitamin D can deplete magnesium levels.

In addition, vitamin K2 increased bone strength in the femoral neck and reduced the incidence of clinical fractures, increasing bone growth, and decreasing bone loss. Vitamins K and D work synergistically together for bone health as well. Vitamin C exerts a positive effect on the bone formation of genes involved in skeletal health.

Choosing Bone Health

These three options of exercise/movement, nutritional foods, and vitamins/supplements are great for bone health and lower fracture risk, without harmful drug side effects. For the latest scientific research compiled by GreenMedInfo.com, see the research databases for osteoporosis and bone fractures.

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At-home Care Designed for Covid-19 Is a Breakthrough

Ohio's health care system evolved over night. Now the goal is to make sure it doesn't backtrack.

BRIE ZELTNER

CLEVELAND—In late March, Andrea Laquatra began to feel sick. At first, it was overwhelming fatigue, and the 32-year-old Cleveland mother of two tried to push through it.

A fever, headaches, and body aches soon followed. Then she noticed she'd lost her senses of taste and smell.

By March 23, Laquatra could no longer deny the nagging fear she'd had since first falling ill: She might have COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, which by then had been detected in every state. That day, 351 new cases, 83 hospitalizations, and three deaths were reported in Ohio.

The phone call Laquatra made next, to a COVID-19 hotline staffed by the area's public health system, MetroHealth, likely helped contain the spread of her illness to only her husband, Tony.

MetroHealth's hotline connected the Laquatras to nurses and doctors who assessed their symptoms and checked in daily while they were ill. MetroHealth also took care of all the family's immediate needs—including home delivery of prescriptions, groceries, toiletries, and diapers for their 2-year-old—so they could safely stay home until they felt better.

MetroHealth has offered the hotline and home assistance free to any Ohioan since mid-March. It said the hotline, which has fielded more than 11,000 calls, has saved the hospital system from being overwhelmed by a surge of COVID patients. It has also paved the way for a new model of health care delivery, one that brings care where patients are—at home.

It's a model they believe must—and will—last beyond the current crisis, saving money for its health care system and addressing the

myriad social needs that keep patients from getting and staying healthy.

The Hotline

It's a Tuesday in mid-May, and Dr. David Margolius is in his office on MetroHealth's main campus in Cleveland's Brooklyn Centre neighborhood, keeping an eye on a screen displaying a list of calls to the hotline.

It's late afternoon, and about 63 people have called that day. Ten have been referred for testing. Nearly all of the callers have symptoms of COVID-19 and have been counseled to self-quarantine.

Margolius calls a young woman who works as a protection officer at a juvenile detention center, and shares his half of the conversation with a reporter via video call. A nurse flagged the detention officer's hotline call for follow-up with a doctor because one of the woman's colleagues had tested positive for the coronavirus that day. While she doesn't have any clear symptoms (just a scratchy throat), she's worried about getting sick and exposing others. After hearing that she's wearing a mask and maintaining social distance at work, Margolius assures her she's probably fine.

"You're on top of it," he tells her. "If things change and you develop symptoms, we're here if you need us."

Dr. Noha Dardir, a family medicine specialist who has fielded about 780 hotline calls, said patients were terrified, but they had few options early on because most of the primary care offices at MetroHealth were closed.

"If we're telling them to call their doctor and not go straight to the emergency room, we had to be there to take those calls. And it had to be 24/7," she said. "I felt

obligated to my patients."

MetroHealth was prepared for a surge of 1,000 patients, but at the pandemic's peak in early May, only 13 COVID-positive patients were in intensive care. Only 82 people have been hospitalized with COVID-19 at MetroHealth since the crisis began.

The hotline's peak came much earlier, on March 17, when nearly 700 people called. In the hotline's first three days, staffers advised 200 people to quarantine themselves.

"We just couldn't keep up," said Dr. Nabil Chehade, MetroHealth's senior vice president for population health. "At one point, we had to have 12 physicians working to answer these calls."

Cuyahoga County Health Commissioner Terry Allan, who has worked closely with hospitals to trace and contain COVID cases, believes the public hospital's quick work in advising quarantines for those with symptoms—even mild ones—helped to contain the outbreak.

"We joked early on that if you had a paper cut, we'd tell you to stay home for two weeks," Allan said. "But that helps to reduce people from potentially being part of the chain of transmission."

As of early June, about 300 of Cuyahoga County's 1.3 million residents had died of COVID-19. While the county, Ohio's second-most populous, has had a high proportion of the cases in the state, it has fared much better than hard-hit counties with similar demographics in other parts of the country.

Nine weeks in, call volume has slowed. Now, about 100 people call daily and about three-quarters talk to a doctor. Still, MetroHealth's hotline remains available round-the-clock, and Margolius said it's clearly still needed. The county recently sav

its highest rate of infections since the pandemic started, likely due to the partial reopening of Ohio's economy, which began in mid-May. "This is obviously so far from over," Margolius said.

A New Model

When MetroHealth's doctors told Andrea Laquatra to quarantine at home in late March, she and her husband weren't sure how they'd manage. They were already low on diapers and wipes, and had been grocery shopping for Tony Laquatra's parents.

"We always take care of my mom and dad. We couldn't do anything for them because we didn't want to get them sick," Tony Laquatra said.

Many others the hospital told to quarantine were in the same boat. So the MetroHealth team added a social worker check-in and same-day delivery of groceries and other basic supplies through the hospital's Institute for H.O.P.E. (health, opportunity, partnership, empowerment), launched last year with the goal of finding and addressing the causes of health disparities in the community.

As of May 22, institute staff members had delivered food and supplies to 620 households. In the early days of the pandemic, as the team scrambled to respond to the influx of calls, even members of the hospital's executive team pitched in on those deliveries. So did some doctors.

The health system also started screening for loneliness and stress and has since referred 700 people for calls from the hospital's behavioral health team, Chehade said.

MetroHealth also connected the Laquatras to a church group that could shop for his parents.

"I just cried, I was so grateful," Andrea Laquatra said. They have since recovered, and because they were never tested, are among the hundreds of probable COVID cases in the county.

The pandemic proved to be the perfect opportunity for MetroHealth to deliver on a long-discussed but only partly implemented plan to treat patients at home while addressing the basic social needs that sometimes prevent them from staying healthy, Chehade said.

"We were forced to really transform our care overnight," he said.

No Going Back?

The health system has vowed not to return to business as usual when the pandemic eases.

"This is an inflection point in the delivery of health care, and it would be a tragedy if we didn't learn from it," said Dr. Brook Watts, MetroHealth's vice president and chief quality officer. "The health care system will try to go back because there were a lot of incentives for the system to deliver care the way we did. We're not going to go back. I'm not going back."

For now, MetroHealth is paying for this new model of care through donations, its own funds, and payment from Medicare and Medicaid, which have expanded reimbursement for telehealth in response to the pandemic. The health system estimates 30 percent to 60 percent of its visits in the future will be managed through telehealth, compared with just 0.5 percent pre-pandemic.

And a new program, Hospital at Home—which delivers Bluetooth-enabled equipment such as heart rate, blood pressure, and blood-oxygen monitors to patients with chronic illnesses to manage their recovery at home—could deliver hospital-quality care at 60 percent of the cost for half of all medical-surgical admissions.

It remains unclear if insurers, including the Centers for Medicare & Medicare Services, will continue to pay for expanded health care delivered via telephone or video calls after the pandemic eases. If they return to pre-pandemic rules for reimbursement, it could make maintaining the current model difficult, or even impossible.

For the model to be viable and adopted widely, MetroHealth CEO Dr. Akram Boutros said, the nation's health care system will have to reinvest these savings, and redirect the money it wastes on unnecessary tests and procedures, repeated hospitalizations for chronic, manageable diseases, and overpriced medications and high-tech devices.

Brie Zeltner is a freelance public health reporter. This article was originally published on Kaiser Health News.

HALFPOINT/SHUTTERSTOCK

Reader's Blurbs (7)

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I like hearing about how they are doing in the ET. I have also enjoyed your articles about the great renaissance artists. Very thoughtful stuff based on truth and tradition. I leave it on our dining table so the kids read it when they wake up and eat their breakfast."

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TRUTH AND TRADITION





Anger, in giving us a strong surge of feelings, can motivate us to change our behavior, stand against injustice, and protect our interests.

A Healthy Expression of Your Anger

Take a moment to think before saying it aloud, but don’t let it linger

CONAN MILNER

Anger is like a wild animal trying to deliver an urgent message. The better our ability to control that animal and interpret its message, the better we make our lives, and the lives of those around us.

Because of its volatile nature, anger is typically considered a negative emotion, but it can be used to positive effect. Anger, in giving us a strong surge of feelings, can motivate us to change our behavior, stand against injustice, and protect our interests.

But often this force proves to be more than we can handle. According to Dr. Kate Balestrieri, a clinical and forensic psychologist working in Los Angeles, anger is one of the least understood and most feared emotions, because many of us recall bad examples of how to handle it.

“Anger is really scary for a lot of people because they haven’t had good models for how to use anger productively,” Balestrieri said.

At its best, anger pushes us toward good communication. It helps us identify a problem we couldn’t quite detect before, and express it in a way that can bring about a desired change.

However, transforming our primal fury into a convincing call to action is notoriously tough.

“Anybody can become angry—that is easy,” said the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle. “But to be angry with the right person and to the right degree and at the right time and for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not within everybody’s power and is not easy.”

We can try to deny our anger, but we can never escape it because the animal will just find more covert ways to bite back. Balestrieri says people who ignore their frustrated feelings often end up acting them out in a passive-aggressive manner. When they’re questioned about their behavior, they may still insist there is nothing wrong.

“It’s especially damaging to our loved ones when we deny our own anger, because that kind of gaslighting really separates people from their intuition,” she said.

One reason for why we deny our anger is that it can give us a sense of power and conviction that we may not be ready to own. Anger is often rooted in conflict, which most of us seek to avoid.

Another reason is cultural baggage. Anger is a human emotion, but it has a masculine edge. So women may hold back for fear of being labeled a nag, or worse.

Whatever the reason for why you struggle to admit your anger, Balestrieri sug-

gests approaching it in steps.

“People will say, ‘I’m not angry, I’m irritated.’ Guess what, you’re still angry, it’s just a smaller dose,” Balestrieri said. “Irritated, frustrated, annoyed—those are all in the anger family. If people can get in touch with the fact that they’re irritated, then they can get in touch with the fact that they’re angry.”

After we can admit to ourselves that we’re angry, the next step is sharing it with others when it’s relevant. Take a moment before saying it out loud to consider how best to express it, but don’t let it linger. The longer we wait, the worse it can get.

Laura MacLeod is a consultant, therapist, and creator of the Inside Out Project—a nonprofit dedicated to making the work environment more harmonious. She has seen several employees carry long grudges over conflicts that could have been resolved in moments, and mentions one staff meeting in which a worker confessed to anger because a coworker hadn’t accepted his apology three months earlier.

“The coworker had no idea this was a problem. She barely remembered the incident, but was verbally attacked for her lack of empathy,” MacLeod said. “Group members began to take sides or try to calm the mess, but it was too late.”

What is MacLeod’s advice? Don’t let anger fester.

“Do your best to get right to the source of it,” she said. “Waiting allows it to build unreasonably, and by holding on and not saying anything, you are denying the other person the opportunity to straighten it out with you.”

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Dr. Kate Balestrieri, a clinical and forensic psychologist

While some try to hide from their anger, others seem to approach everything from an angry angle. Particularly for those desperate for a sense of authority and confidence, anger is more than a temporary

reaction—it can become a way of life.

According to Dr. Thomas Harbin, a clinical psychologist in North Carolina who specializes in the treatment of male anger, a lot of chronically angry men suffer from deep doubts about their worth. To keep their doubts at bay, they’re always on the defensive.

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Anger is really scary for a lot of people because they haven’t had good models for how to use anger productively.

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For anger to be constructive, it requires some self-control and the desire for resolution.

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WISE HABITS

The Honest Guide to Mindfulness

Meditating and tuning into the present moment are difficult—and that’s the way it’s supposed to be

LEO BABAUTA

Mindfulness has become quite a buzzword in the last decade or so, and for good reason. It’s powerful and can help us to become more present, happier, and more focused.

However, if you’re new to mindfulness, it’s easy to get the wrong idea from all the marketing you’ll find online: images of people at complete peace with the world and themselves, full of bliss, simply by sitting still and meditating for a few minutes. They are beautiful images, but they don’t tell the whole truth.

Mindfulness is powerful, and you should absolutely do it. But you should do it with your eyes wide open, knowing what’s up.

So here’s my attempt at an honest guide to mindfulness.

Mindfulness is hard. You can meditate and get antsy, want to get up, want to go do something else, plan your day, dive into your work, answer a few messages, search for some information you’re itching to know about.

Mindfulness is hard, which is a good reason to do it.

Mindfulness is messy. You’ll get started with meditation, maybe get on a streak of meditating every day, and feel really good about yourself. Then you might fall off, struggle to start again, feel bad about it. You’ll do this for years, perhaps. Or maybe you’ll meditate regularly but struggle to be mindful throughout the day, especially during certain situations like working online or while you’re eating or socializing. You’ll get better at being present, but only in spurts and starts, and the learning will be anything but smooth.

Mindfulness is messy, just like life, which is the reason to open up to the messiness instead of our usual desire for things to be orderly and neat. We can learn to accept the messiness of life if we practice with it.

Mindfulness is uncomfortable. Sitting still and facing the sensations of the present moment can feel boring. It can bring up itches that you just need to scratch right now. Urges to go to do something else, to plan and solve and remember, will come up, because they are the old mental habits. And not following those urges can be very uncomfortable.

Mindfulness is uncomfortable because it’s so rare for us not to indulge in those old mental patterns. But that’s the very reason it’s so powerful.

Mindfulness pulls the rug out from under your feet. Let’s say you’ve been practicing meditation for a few months, and you think you’re getting the hang of it. All of a

sudden, everything you think you knew about meditation can be upended, as you learn something new, or as a new pattern starts to come up. Now you have to adjust to that. After a few months, you might think you know a thing or two, and then you read a book or listen to a talk from a teacher, and that gets yanked away from you too. Over and over, you get upended, and it can be very jarring each time.

Mindfulness can be jarring when you get upended. And that’s part of the magic, too—feeling like we are on solid ground is an illusion, and learning to deal with the groundlessness of not knowing is an incredible practice.

Mindfulness takes a ton of practice. You’ll suck at meditation (or any other mindfulness practice) when you first start. You can’t “do it right” or keep your attention on anything for very long. Don’t worry, it’s all continual practice, without ever feeling like you know exactly what you’re doing. You practice and practice, and then practice some more. You might make some progress, only to find out that you still have so much more to learn.

It takes a lot of practice, and that’s a beautiful thing to open up to.

You’ll think you’re doing it wrong and fail a lot. You’ll start out and continually feel like you’re doing it wrong, and that won’t feel very good. The good news is that no one knows what they’re doing, and it often won’t feel very good. The better news is that it’s not supposed to feel good, and you learn to accept the idea that you’re never very sure of anything. This is what life is always like, but we just usually blame it on the external circumstances (or think there’s something wrong with us), rather than accepting this uncertainty about everything as a basic part of our lives that we can open up to and even love.

It’ll show you all your ‘faults.’ You’ll learn through mindfulness practice that you’re not as disciplined as you’d like to be. You’re not as tough, competent, skilled, exceptional. This will become clear as you practice.

You’ll come face-to-face with all of our demons. And then you’ll begin to master them.

You’ll start to think other people should be more mindful—and you’ll be wrong. As you start to get “better” at mindfulness, and more and more aware of your habits and patterns and thoughts, it will become clearer when other people aren’t being mindful. And you might think they should be practicing, too, that they should put their



Mindfulness is uncomfortable because it’s so rare for us not to indulge in those old mental patterns. But that’s the very reason it’s so powerful.

phones down and be more present.

You’ll think you know how others should be mindful because you’ve learned a thing or two.

And then you’ll realize that judging others and thinking you know how others should behave is just your mind’s old pattern of judging and trying to get control. You’ll learn to let that go, too, sometimes. And when you do, that’s when you’ll become more open to connecting with others.

It requires more than mindfulness. As you practice, you’ll find that mindfulness by itself isn’t the answer to everything. It doesn’t magically solve any problems. It’s a powerful practice and can bring wonderful awareness to your life. But sometimes that awareness is of all the terrible things you’re feeling, all the harsh thoughts you have about yourself, all the harsh thoughts you have about other people or the world around you. Awareness doesn’t always feel good. And it doesn’t solve everything.

Mindfulness is only part of the work. The work also requires compassion—for yourself and others. It requires vulnerability and the ability to open your heart. It requires honesty and the willingness to face things. It requires being willing to love things as they are, without needing to control things. It requires letting go of what you think things should be like, of what you think you should have or shouldn’t have. The work requires you to be willing to be curious, to be open, to remain in not knowing.

It is beautiful work, and requires courage.

Leo Babauta is the author of six books, the writer of “Zen Habits,” a blog with over 2 million subscribers, and the creator of several online programs to help you master your habits. Visit ZenHabits.net

The work requires compassion—for yourself and others.

Negative Thinking Could Play Role in Dementia Risk, Study Suggests

Repetitive gloomy thoughts can feed stress that causes a long list of health problems

DEVON ANDRE

Are you a glass half full or glass half empty type of person? A new study suggests that how you answer could play a role in dementia risk.

Repetitive negative thoughts (RNT) can put your brain under a lot of stress. Always assuming the worst, ruminating on past experiences you can’t change, and fearing the future can all put your mind in a precarious situation.

It may lead to increased forgetfulness, memory troubles, and decision-making.

New research shows that RNT is linked with a buildup up of tau and amyloid protein in the brain, which are key markers of dementia.

The study looked at two cohorts of participants, totaling 360 people, including 113 who had tau and amyloid proteins measured. Participants were either part of the Pre-Symptomatic Evaluation



Changing your inner monologue and easing RNT can be quite challenging.

of Experimental of Novel Treatments for Alzheimer’s Disease (PREVENT-AD) research project or the Multi-Modal Neuroimaging in Alzheimer’s Disease study. Researchers measured participants’ RNT, depression, anxiety,

experiences negative thoughts from time to time. When it happens on occasion, it’s unlikely to lead to severe problems. If you find yourself having these types of thoughts chronically, taking measures to stop the cycle is recommended.

The study was unable to prove cause and effect, however, the result indicates that treating negative thought patterns may play a role in slowing the onset of dementia.

Changing your inner monologue and easing RNT can be quite challenging. But with some guidance and effort, it’s possible to change thinking to lead to more positivity. A few things to try include:

- Focusing on things in your life you can control and accepting the things you cannot
- Making peace with your current situation
- Expressing gratitude
- Positive self-talk

It’s possible that how you think could play a role in your future brain health. Trying to reduce RNT may help reduce the risk of dementia and Alzheimer’s.

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 BelMarraHealth, which first published this article.

CONNECT TO LEAD

Changing the Game

Communication is key for police and the communities they serve

SCOTT MANN

A couple of years ago, our government commissioned a task force to find solutions to restoring the trust gap between law enforcement and American communities and closely examine 21st-century policing. The resulting report was comprehensive with a lot of lessons and great observations, and more importantly, a lot of recommended actions.

In this time of growing distrust between law enforcement and American communities, I think it's important to circle back to that and pull out a particular quote that I found very, very interesting as a former Green Beret.

It says: "Law enforcement agencies cannot ensure the safety of a community alone, or of communities alone, but should seek to contribute to the strengthening of neighborhood capacity to prevent and reduce crime through informal social control. ...

"More than a century of research shows that informal social control is a much more powerful mechanism for crime control and reduction than is formal punishment, and perhaps the best evidence for the preventative power of informal social control may be the millions of unguarded opportunities to commit crime that are passed up each day."

It reminds me so much of the Village Stability Program that we embarked on with Special Forces Green Berets in Afghanistan in 2010. What we realized was that an empowered community that was able to stand on its own and exercise all aspects of informal civil society is the ultimate antidote to crime and instability.

Said another way, if it is not empowered to do what it's supposed to do and at the most resilient level, a community can become an accelerant to crime and instability. I think as we look at what's going on in our country today, community engagement is going to be critical.

So, how do we engage the community?

How do we come from a place where it's hard to even have a conversation to get people to listen to one another? How do we go back to a level of community engagement where communities are standing up and feeling empowered?

We were asking these same questions in 2010 in Afghanistan. After 10 years of actively targeting Taliban and pushing ourselves into at-risk communities to go after the enemy, we had a lot of work to do. We had a lot of relationships to restore. We had a lot of human connections to make at a person-to-person level. We had a lot to learn. We had to completely change our mindsets in order to change the game.

When trust is low and the stakes are high, we have to change our mindset and focus on the interpersonal skills that are necessary for advisers, law enforcement, and community influencers to come together, bridge trust, and make real change.

Changing the game is never an easy thing to do. As a Special Forces veteran, it's hard to watch our communities going through what we're going through now. A lot of communities feel separated, disenfranchised from their government and from law enforcement.

It's also hard to watch law enforcement officers, who are trying to find their way and reconnect to communities so they can play the most relevant role possible. It's not an easy place to be, having trust gaps between neighborhoods and the organizations charged with protecting them. It's not easy when neighborhoods become battlegrounds.

In order for our communities to feel resilient, empowered, and able to stand up on their own again, we need to bring a sharper focus to the interpersonal skills we have all but forgotten. In order to begin restoring trust, we need to master the arts of active listening and narrative competence.

If we focus on being attuned to the people in our arena, so they really feel heard, their



Police are facing criticism and tension that require a new look at important skills.

emotional temperature will come down and they will be ready to sit and have the critical conversations that we need to be having right now.

These are serious skills that have never been more relevant as we look at the need to restore trust between law enforcement and the communities that they have sworn to protect.

The game is changing and it's time we started playing by a new set of rules ... the rules we learned as Green Berets in the

dusty villages of Afghanistan.

To learn more about the methodology behind "changing the game," visit RooftopLeadership.com/ChangingTheGame

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

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Get Fit Faster but Don't Hurt Yourself

As exercise routines get more intense, more care is needed

CONAN MILNER

Our culture is obsessed with the aesthetic results of fitness, but the real wealth of a regular workout is found in the practical benefits: a stronger, better-functioning body and a clearer mind. Science has shown that physical exercise can extend our lives, lift our spirits, and prevent cognitive decline more reliably than anything else we can do.

Despite recent discoveries of how critical exercise is to our well-being, most of us are moving less than ever. Only 20 percent of Americans get the 150 minutes of strength training and cardiovascular activity per week recommended for optimal health, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

There are several reasons why we don't move as much as we used to. Modern conveniences have eliminated the need for a lot of the physical activities our ancestors were forced to do. Now, even if we want to exercise, it becomes one more thing we have to cram into our already busy day.

Perhaps that's why CrossFit, boot camp, and other intense workout styles have become so popular over the last decade. The sales pitch promises everything we want to hear: rapid fat loss, more energy, elevated mood, improved lung capacity, and a stronger heart in less time, plus research that backs up all these claims.

To make these claims come true, however, you have to be able to push yourself—and know when to take it easy.

The New Workout
The technique behind this type of

Only 20 percent of Americans get the 150 minutes of strength training and cardiovascular activity per week recommended for optimal health.

workout is called high-intensity interval training (HIIT). HIIT can be applied to any form of heart-pumping exercise—just add more intensity. Picture calisthenics in fast forward.

Unlike traditional cardio—in which exercisers aim for a steady yet moderate pace for half an hour or more—HIIT demands that you give it your all and then ease off for a moment, alternating short bursts of intense effort with small periods of rest.

In terms of fitness goals, this alternation of work and rest really pays off. Studies show that HIIT engages more muscle fibers and burns more calories in a shorter amount of time compared to conventional workouts. It also keeps your metabolism revved up for 24 hours after your exercise is finished.

Continued on Page 11

TRUTH and TRADITION: *In Our Own Words*

WE ARE HOLDING THE LINE

In America, publishing news is easy. But publishing the truth ... that's very difficult.



You might've seen some of the videos we've produced over the last year. But you likely don't know the difficulty of creating this type of honest news content to be published on the big tech platforms.

Because The Epoch Times has the courage and fortitude to both investigate and report stories that most media don't as well as to call into question the "established" narratives when the facts don't seem to line up, we have been attacked, demonetized, and de-platformed by the giant tech conglomerates, the legacy media outlets, and even certain service providers.

That's not to even mention how over the last 20 years, there were dozens (maybe even hundreds, but we never thought to count) of times when the Chinese Communist Party's consulates around the world have used threats to force businesses and ad agencies to

pull their advertising from our publication.

I believe that open public discourse is vitally essential to our nation. It is paramount to a free republic.

Working here over the last eight years, at a truly independent news organization, has opened my eyes to the many forces attempting to restrict your access to truthful information. And contrary to what it seems like on the surface, **these forces are not censoring our mouths. They are actually censoring your ears and your eyes.**

They are engaged in an act of theft: robbing you of the truth.

For instance, when we examined claims about the CCP virus's origins that didn't line up with the established narrative or when we looked beneath the surface of FISA abuse that took place during the 2016 election and reported inconsistencies with the mainstream narrative, we were further attacked, censored, and de-platformed—directly limiting your access to a treasure trove of our investigative findings.

So what we are doing here at The Epoch Times is not simply reporting stories or conducting investigations.

We are holding the line.

We are taking the attacks so that you may be informed of the truth, and so our future generations may know what truth is.



a holistic Mind and Body reaction.

To me, that might've seemed like hyperbole 10 years ago, but having seen this encroachment first-hand, I believe it is a grim possibility that we might just "naturally" slide into it if we don't take a strong stand against it right now.

I hope you are enjoying this paper. I hope you share it with your friends, your family, and your entire community so that we can restore decency in this country's public discourse.

And I hope when that happens, you'll be there with us to see it.

In Truth and Tradition,



See how the Chinese Communist Party knew what was happening

Roman Balmakov
The Epoch Times

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TRUTH and TRADITION



Roman Balmakov
Video Producer

THE EPOCH TIMES Week 27, 2020

MIND & BODY | 11

Get Fit Faster but Don't Hurt Yourself

As exercise routines get more intense, more care is needed

Continued from Page 9

In theory, the more intense your HIIT routine, the sooner you will see results. But this only pans out if your body is up to the challenge. Going too hard, or too often, can easily result in a setback.

Kai Marshall is a personal trainer and strength coach in Fort Worth, Texas, who specializes in HIIT. He says high-intensity exercise can be good for everyone, as long as they respect their bodies' limits.

"You want to be working out hard, but you don't want to be past the point where you're going to hurt yourself," Marshall said.

And it's not just beginners. Tehrany says a lot of his patients who have a long history of working out may not notice the degenerative process as it develops over months or years. A sudden increase in intensity thrust upon a weak or compromised area becomes the final straw.

While people can get caught up in the fast gains of a HIIT routine, Tehrany urges them to remember the fundamentals.

"It's important to balance the musculature around the joint with proper stretching, strengthening, and prevention program exercises," he said.

Take It to the Limit

The benefits of physical exercise are created through a biological principle called hormesis, which holds that a small, controlled dose of stress can condition your body to better handle the unpredictable stresses of life.

Strength training and aerobic exercise push your body beyond its normal activity level. Your heart, muscles, and entire cardiovascular system improve under the increased demand.

Using smaller yet more intense doses of stress, HIIT quickens the pace of improvement.

"The biggest pro is the time-saving aspect," Marshall said. "A good HIIT class is 30 minutes long. That's the same as running for an hour and a half for most people. You get in, get out. Get the heart rate up. Get those endorphins up."

However, the body still has to be stable and flexible enough to withstand the intensity you throw at it. And that can take time and patience.

Physical therapist Dr. Karena Wu, owner of ActiveCare Physical Therapy in New York City and Mumbai, says it's hard on the body to jump into high-intensity exercise if it's been a while since you've worked out.

"Intense exercise can challenge your endurance as well as your cardiovascular fitness," Wu said. "If your body is not prepared, it cannot get enough oxygen to the tissues, and that means your muscles and tendons work at a disadvantage. They will fatigue quickly, which means potential for overuse injury as you continue to push to get through a class."

Your muscle contractions must increase when performing a high-intensity regimen, and this in turn increases lactic acid build-up and muscle soreness. Some soreness is good—your body makes gains when you push past the point of comfort. However, if you don't give your sore body ample opportunity to recover, your muscles won't be able to generate a good contraction the next time you exercise, raising the potential for strain and injury.

Wu mentions one patient who went crazy with abdominal exercises—leg lifts, planks, and other belly-busting routines. The next day, he couldn't sit up because his abs were strained and swollen.

"He actually tore his abdominal tissue because of the number of reps as well as the back-to-back number of exercises," Wu said.

We intuitively seek to undo our sedentary sins by pushing ourselves in the other direction. HIIT can help speed up this process, but the pursuit of a ripped body in record time can cloud our sense of balance. HIIT advocates often judge the quality of their workouts by how "destroyed" they feel the next day, but in some cases they may really be destroying their bodies.

Rhabdomyolysis, the rapid breakdown of muscle due to overuse, was once considered a rare condition, but a 2016 report in the American Journal of Medicine called the rise in rhabdomyolysis due to overzealous HIIT a "public health concern."

overworked muscle fibers deteriorate, they are released into the bloodstream and overwhelm the kidneys with a massive amount of dead protein. This muscle-melting condition can lead to kidney failure or even death.

Tehrany says feeling sore the next day is normal, especially for beginners. However, if the soreness doesn't go away in a day or two, pay close attention.

"If it's a sharp pain, or a feeling of instability where it feels like it's shifting, that's definitely a cause for concern," Tehrany said. "That's something that should be checked right away."

Professional Advice

With so many factors to consider in performing a HIIT routine properly, health experts urge those taking on an intense regimen to seek the guidance of a personal trainer or a small class geared to your skill level.

Marshall prefers to teach classes of no more than 10 students, so he can closely monitor everyone's form and make sure nobody faints.

"In big classes, the coach doesn't really have time to make sure that everyone does it perfectly," he said.

While CrossFit is best left to the more advanced crowd, HIIT can be modified for anyone, no matter what shape they're in. Slower, more simplified HIIT routines can actually be a great place for beginners to start, because breaks are part of the pattern.

"High intensity is really relative to the person working out. For someone who hasn't worked out ever before, walking up stairs can be like high-intensity exercise for them," Marshall said.

One factor Marshall adjusts as his students progress is the ratio between work and rest. Newbies get as much rest as they need between intervals to catch their breath. Later, they move up to a 1-to-1 rest ratio—30 seconds of movement followed by 30 seconds of rest.

"When you start going to a 2-to-1 [ratio]—work out for a minute and then rest for 30 seconds—that's when you start getting that heart rate up," Marshall said.

While Marshall is a big fan of HIIT, he admits it isn't for everybody. When it comes to making exercise a lifelong habit, he encourages people to find an activity they actually enjoy.

"If you really hate high-intensity interval training, you have to find something else. You're never going to stick with something you don't like doing," he said.

It's important to balance the musculature around the joint with proper stretching, strengthening, and prevention program exercises.

Dr. Armin Tehrany, honorary surgeon of the New York Police Department and founder of Manhattan Orthopedic Care

"When I learned about this in school, they said, 'You'll never really see this,' and then CrossFit got really big," Marshall said.

Muscles improve under strain—tiny tears in muscle tissue caused by resistance and repetition trigger it to grow back stronger when we rest. In rhabdomyolysis, the tissue never gets a chance to recover. As the



Consume Bee Propolis for Healing and Health

Bee propolis, a kind of “bee glue” or resinous substance used by bees to protect against fungus and seal holes or cracks in the hive, is garnering more attention in the health and wellness community thanks to a growing body of research highlighting its therapeutic benefits.

Composed mainly of resin and wax, bee propolis is full of phenolic compounds, esters, and 12 different kinds of flavonoids that contribute to its anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, antifungal, and antioxidant properties. If you’ve never tried bee propolis, here are eight excellent examples of why you should consider adding bee propolis products into your routine and diet:

1. Bee Propolis Protects Against the Common Cold
Research has shown that due to the antimicrobial properties of bee propolis, it may be useful in relieving symptoms and shortening the duration of the common cold. Additionally, parents may use propolis as a supplement for preventing colds and flu-like illnesses in children, as it has immune-activating properties and has been shown to reduce the likelihood of colds in children.

2. Bee Propolis Fights Upper Respiratory Infections in Children and Adults
The antimicrobial effects of propolis have been shown to effectively fight several strains of bacteria in patients with upper respiratory infections. Researchers believe that bee propolis could be used as a natural antibacterial therapy to prevent upper respiratory infections in both children and adults.

3. Bee Propolis Has Antifungal Properties
Researchers have studied the antifungal effects of propolis on onychomycosis, a common nail infection caused by a fungus that causes nails to weaken and become brittle or ragged. Conventional treatment methods for onychomycosis include medications that often cause severe side effects or interact with other medications, causing the patient to stop treatment. Because researchers have demonstrated the effective topical antifungal properties of bee propolis,

many believe that it could be used as a less expensive remedy for onychomycosis without adverse effects. Researchers have also studied the effects of propolis against 40 yeast strains of the Candida fungus, demonstrating that propolis is effective in inhibiting the growth of these common fungi. Common candida infections include oral thrush and vaginal yeast infections, both of which have been shown to be effectively treated by propolis-based topical treatments.

4. Bee Propolis May Protect Against Cancer
Propolis contains a substance called caffeic acid phenethyl ester (CAPE), which activates DNA damage signaling in cancer cells, making it a potent antitumor therapy in the treatment and prevention of cancer. In fact, some researchers believe propolis may be as effective as chemotherapy or conventional chemopreventative drugs, without the adverse side effects associated with chemotherapy.

Bee propolis extract effectively reduced hyperglycemic and oxidative stress associated with hyperglycemia and had ameliorating effects on cardiovascular health in diabetic subjects.

5. Anti-diabetic Properties of Bee Propolis
A heterogeneous disease caused by insulin secretion or action defects, diabetes mellitus is one of the more common chronic diseases affecting Americans today. In various studies, bee propolis extract effectively reduced hyperglycemic and oxidative stress associated with hyperglycemia and had ameliorating effects on cardiovascular health in diabetic subjects. Royal jelly, a healing secretion of bees intended for their nourishment, also has potent anti-diabetic qualities



and significantly lowers blood sugar levels and oxidative stress caused by hyperglycemia.

6. Bee Propolis Offers Neuroprotective Benefits
Propolis has inhibitory effects against neuronal cell death, possibly preventing the onset of several neurodegenerative and ischemic disorders. This may be due to propolis’ effects on oxidative stress, which is believed to be the underlying pathogenesis of several neurodegenerative diseases, including Alzheimer’s and other forms of dementia.

7. Bee Propolis Is a Potential Gastrointestinal Treatment
The cytotoxic and cytostatic effects of CAPE, an ester contained in bee propolis, make it an excellent potential therapy in the treatment and prevention of gastric cancers. Additional gastrointestinal benefits of propolis include treatment and prevention of ulcerative colitis, probably due to its antioxidant, anti-ulcer, and anti-inflammatory properties.

8. Bee Propolis for Dermatology and Skin Care
Bee propolis has been studied for its topical effects on a variety of skin conditions, including burn treatment, wound healing, insect bites, UV-induced photodamage, oral infections, and sores, and the antibacterial and anti-inflammatory nature of bee propolis makes it a popular ingredient in many natural cosmetic products. Propolis has also been tested for its effects on acne. Conventional antibi-

otic treatments for this follicular skin disease have become less effective due to the rise of antibiotic-resistant strains of Propionibacterium acnes, but researchers have demonstrated that natural antimicrobial extracts such as propolis seem to effectively reduce redness and lessen scarring.

Safety Concerns
Oral or topical use of bee propolis can cause allergic reactions, especially in individuals allergic to honey bee or other bee stings or to asthmatic individuals, with allergies presenting as contact dermatitis or oral mucositis. Nevertheless, researchers believe that while there is a chance for allergic reaction and the exact dosage of propolis has yet to be determined, there is vast potential for the use of this natural and promising substance for those without allergies. For more information and additional research studies, please visit the GreenMedInfo.com research database on bee propolis and other bee products such as honey and bee venom.

The GMI Research Group is dedicated to investigating the most important health and environmental issues of the day. Special emphasis will be placed on environmental health. Our focused and deep research will explore the many ways in which the present condition of the human body directly reflects the true state of the ambient environment. This work is reproduced and distributed with the permission of GreenMedInfo LLC. Sign up for the newsletter at www.Greenmedinfo.health

Spicy Foods and Hot Drinks Can Keep You Cool in the Summer Heat

People with heart disease face a greater risk of stroke and cardiovascular events during hot periods

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

Temperatures are increasing across the continent, and some areas have already experienced mid-summer heat. If you’ve got heart disease, it could put you at a higher risk of stroke. But do you know the best ways to cool down? Warm temperatures put stress on everybody’s heart. When temperatures climb, the heart has to beat faster and work harder to keep you cool. For people with heart disease, higher temperatures can boost the risk of a significant cardiovascular event. But what do you usually do to cool down? Have an ice cream or cold drink? Believe it or not, these methods are not the best and can actually end up increasing your temperature.

When you eat ice cream, for example, the cooldown is fleeting. Its high-fat content means your body must work hard to digest it, ultimately boosting body temperature in the long term. Instead, eating spicy food and reaching for a hot drink can help you maintain cooler temperatures. How? Spicy foods make you sweat without raising body temperature. Sweat is your body’s natural cooling system. There is also research showing that spicy pepper consumption is associated with a significantly lower risk of heart disease and stroke. Hot drinks such as coffee and tea can

also help you cool down in the heat by inducing sweat, leading to a cooling effect that outweighs and outlasts cold beverages. When you’re out and about and looking for some respite from the hot sun, seek the shade of trees instead of buildings or umbrellas. Due to a process called transpiration, leaves give off water vapor that offers a cooling effect. You don’t get that from buildings. There’s also evidence to suggest that vitamin C can have an effect on heat acclimatization and may help prevent heat exhaustion. Those are a few ways of staying cool in

the summer you may not have thought of. Give them a try and remember to wear loose clothing and more light colors than dark. Drink plenty of water, and try to avoid direct sunlight during peak hours. Keeping your temperature cool can help reduce the stress on your heart and potentially lower the risk for heart attack, stroke, and other cardiovascular events this summer. 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.



A hot drink can help you body cool down by spurring you to sweat.



Why Do Men Tend to Get More Severe COVID-19?

As clearer numbers are collected around COVID-19 illness and death, a clear bias has emerged

KATIE PEARCE

There needs to be a broader study of how biological sex differences affect outcomes with COVID-19, researchers argue in a recent paper. Though it’s still unclear exactly why, what is clear is that men are suffering worse fates than women when it comes to COVID-19, regardless of geography or age. A variety of data from outbreaks across the world has established this, and researchers like Johns Hopkins University biologist Sabra Klein are trying to understand more. Last month, Klein contributed to a paper published in the Journal of Critical Investigations, which calls for a study of sex differences in COVID-19 outcomes. The authors argue that these differences should be a significant consideration for developing effective treatments and vaccines.

“Because these findings are cutting across social and cultural boundaries, that strongly suggests the biological difference between males and females is contributing.

Sabra Klein, biologist, Johns Hopkins University

Here, Klein explains what the scientific community knows so far about the different outcomes between men and women who contract COVID-19:

KATIE PEARCE: What is the evidence showing different outcomes for men and women

who contract COVID-19? **SABRA KLEIN:** Around the world, on every continent, we’re observing that men are significantly more likely to be hospitalized with severe COVID-19, and men are also significantly more likely to die from COVID-19. Some studies are showing the risks are twofold for men. Women are contracting the virus at the same rates as men, but they are more likely to recover. Because these findings are cutting across social and cultural boundaries, that strongly suggests the biological difference between males and females is contributing. That likely doesn’t tell the full story, however—social and lifestyle factors may certainly be influencing the trends, but we need to understand more.

MS. PEARCE: What might be the possible explanations for the discrepancy? **MS. KLEIN:** I am hypothesizing that because women typically have a more rapid and robust immune response to viruses than men, this may be one factor contributing to female-biased protection against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. There are data from early outbreaks in Wuhan, China, for example, that show women clear the virus more quickly than men. A sex difference in immune responses that control and clear SARS-CoV-2 suggests there there’s a difference between sexes affecting immunity. We have data for other viruses illustrating that sex differences in immunity are caused by genetic as well as hormonal differences between women and men. For example, in females, hormones such as estrogen and progesterone may be protective against the virus, and it’s possible testosterone does the opposite for men. Scientists are also looking into the role of the ACE-2 receptor, which is found on the cells lining the lung and airways and is used by the SARS-CoV-2 virus to enter cells. From what we know about this receptor, from other conditions such as hyperten-

sion and kidney disease, ACE-2 expression is greater in males than in females. We also know from work in the kidneys that estrogen downregulates the expression of ACE-2, which could be a plausible biological explanation for reduced severity of the virus in women. **MS. PEARCE:** How is the factor of age overlapping with all of this? **MS. KLEIN:** It turns out the male bias severity is happening across a diverse range of ages. A very large JAMA study on cases in New York City, for example, looked at ages 30 through 90, and found that males were significantly more likely to be hospitalized or die regardless of age. Another study in The Lancet examining ages 20 upwards in European countries also shows this trend across ages. What we’re seeing in ages 60 years and older is that this is where we find the most severe outcomes of death.

MS. PEARCE: You said that social and cultural factors may also be playing a role. **MS. KLEIN:** My colleague Rosemary Morgan, in international health, is studying this; she specializes in gender-associated factors that impact health and disease, including COVID-19. We know that biological differences are only part of the story of what makes men and women different. It also has to do with our behavior and even the social and cultural norms that define our roles and responsibilities. For example, females may be more likely to be frontline workers, which could create more risks for exposure. In terms of lifestyle, men tend to be more likely to be smokers, which is a risk factor, and they’re less likely to seek out medical care when there’s a problem. And with COVID-19, if men are less likely to engage in behaviors like mask-wearing and hand-washing, that may increase risks. There are also underlying conditions such as hypertension, heart disease, and diabe-

tes, which men are statistically more likely to have and some of which can be attributed to lifestyle factors, that also amplify risks with COVID-19. **MS. PEARCE:** What are the implications of all of this for treatment and vaccines? **MS. KLEIN:** As my colleagues and I wrote in the Journal of Critical Investigations, we need to be ensuring a large prism of men and women take part in the numerous clinical trials for vaccines and we need to be able to compare outcome data between men and women. Formulating vaccines should take into account the differences.

“A sex difference in immune responses that control and clear SARS-CoV-2 suggests there there’s a difference between sexes affecting immunity.

Sabra Klein, biologist, Johns Hopkins University

Vaccines are just one arm of how we’re addressing protections from COVID-19, however. Another is therapeutics. We have data from the past showing more adverse reactions for women than men with antiviral drugs, and it’s important to be aware of that. We don’t want the reaction to the drug to be worse than the condition it’s trying to treat.

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Depression Symptoms Linked to an Increased Risk of Cardiovascular Disease

MAT LECOMPTÉ

A new study has found a link between depression and cardiovascular disease. The study, co-led by Simon Fraser University health sciences professor Scott Lear, adds to the compounding evidence that depressive symptoms could lead to an increased risk of heart disease and early death. The study analyzed data from 145,862 middle-aged participants from 21 countries and found a 20 percent increase in cardiovascular events and death in people with four or more depressive

symptoms. Participants who lived in urban areas showed risks that were twice as high. This is a concern as the majority of the global population will be living in urban areas by 2050. It was also found that men with depression had more than double the risk of women for cardiovascular disease. Lear explains that the results from the study are timely as experts anticipate an increase in the number of people dealing with mental health issues as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many people have reported depressive symptoms,

even those who are not normally at risk for depression. **Traditional Risk Factors** The results of the study published in JAMA Psychiatry suggest that depressive symptoms should be considered as important as traditional risk facts of cardiovascular disease such as smoking, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure. Greater awareness of the physical health risks associated with depression is needed and physicians should be aware of them when looking at risk factors in patients.

The results of the study add to mounting evidence to existing World Health Organization (WHO) policies, which aim to integrate treatment and prevention of mental disorders into primary care. Researchers hope that this study helps to outline the importance of tackling non-communicable diseases and mental disorders to achieve greater overall health, including cardiovascular disease. *Mat Lecompte is a freelance health and wellness journalist. This article was first published on Bel Marra Health.*



ALTANAKA/SHUTTERSTOCK

MINDSET MATTERS

How We Think About Forgiveness at Different Ages

Children’s understanding of forgiving deepens and expands as they grow older

ROBERT ENRIGHT

If you’ve seen your children struggle to forgive someone for hurting them, you know that forgiveness is complicated. After all, forgiveness is complicated for adults, too. At times, we wonder why we’re trying to forgive someone anyway. Later, we might think we’ve forgiven them, only to experience a sudden burst of anger and resentment.

My research has found that it takes many years for us to grasp the notion of forgiveness as we grow up. In over 30 years of studying forgiveness, I have interviewed children and adolescents as well as college students and adults—and found that our understanding of forgiveness evolves over childhood and young adulthood, partly influenced by what we learn from our parents and communities.

Young children are often taught that the proclamation of “I’m sorry” followed by the automatic reply of “I forgive you” can solve any conflict. This may be because we as parents and educators seek a quick solution to interpersonal disputes—and when problems are short-lived, these kinds of quick exchanges help. At the same time, if there is deeper hurt with deeper anger, children need more time to process the unfairness and to feel angry for a while.

To support children’s maturing understanding of forgiveness, parents can start by having age-appropriate discussions about it with their kids, based on where kids are in their cognitive and emotional development. These conversations can change the way children think about forgiveness and help them emotionally recover when they inevitably experience harm and unfair treatment from others in life.

Getting Even

In our studies of how children, adolescents, and adults think about forgiveness, we assess their thinking by presenting them with dilemmas and asking them questions about what kinds of conditions might make forgiving easier. As an

example of a dilemma, Mrs. Jones falsely accuses Mr. Thompson of a crime, and he now faces time in prison for something he didn’t do. In general, what we find is that children and adolescents start with some misconceptions about forgiveness—and eventually grow in their understanding and practice of it.

When they think about forgiveness, fourth graders often equate it with first getting even. Without formal learning about what forgiveness is, many 9- and 10-year-olds think they could forgive and make up with classmates only if those classmates first got what they deserved: punishment for their misbehavior.

Of course, sometimes classmates aren’t punished, because whatever happened never gets the attention of a parent or teacher. If kids don’t forgive unless the perpetrator is brought to justice, they may never be able to release their pent-up anger.

At this stage, one way to help kids learn about forgiveness is to challenge their conditional thinking (if no punishment, then no forgiveness). Parents can encourage their children to reflect on these questions: Do all people have inherent or built-in worth? If so, do those who act unfairly from time to time also possess this kind of worth? If so, can you see that those who sometimes hurt you also have inherent worth?

It’s not that people with inherent worth should never be punished. But as children see the inherent worth of everyone, including those who behaved badly, then they might consider forgiving (because the other has worth) and not become trapped in their anger as they await punishment that may never come.

This does not mean that kids abandon the quest for justice or stay quiet about the harm done to them. Instead, it means that external circumstances will not get in the way of the emotional healing that forgiveness can provide.

Compensation

Compared to fourth graders, when we talk to seventh graders, we see them developing what’s called a reciprocal perspective. They can think of themselves and others at the same time, and in turn they can try to do good for themselves and others. With a reciprocal perspective, the students often say that it will be easier to forgive if they are compensated for what happened to them.

This is not the same as the younger kids who seek punishment. If a 12-year-old had an apple stolen at lunch, for example, they might forgive when the other person even-

Younger children often require revenge as a prerequisite to forgiveness, but this changes as they grow older.

Children can reach a profound understanding of forgiveness in adulthood by persistently practicing it, with the help of parents, when they are hurt by others.

At its highest developmental level, forgiveness means to unconditionally offer mercy to someone who acted unfairly.

tually gives them an apple in return.

What’s similar is the tendency for these children to see forgiveness as a conditional act, offered only if there is recompense. Again, this means that they can get trapped in deliberate unforgiveness until compensation comes.

Of course, compensation is not always possible. If one person pushes the other down, what compensation can occur there? Perhaps a heartfelt apology will do, but it’s less clear-cut, and the conditional forgiving may never take place.

Around this age, we can help kids learn about forgiveness by distinguishing forgiving from reconciling, a process where people negotiate their way back to a sense of mutual trust. Is it possible to forgive before you reestablish trust with the other person? The answer is yes; just because you forgive someone doesn’t mean you’ll choose to reconcile with them, and just because they aren’t interested in reconciliation doesn’t mean you can’t release your anger and get closure through forgiveness. As kids learn that forgiving and reconciling are not the same thing, then they may be more open to offering unconditional forgiveness, even while (as above) they still strive for fairness.

A Social Norm

In my interviews, some of the seventh graders and many of the 10th graders take a more complex view of forgiving, unrelated to the need for punishment or compensation. Now, the focus is on their peer group and their family context. Students consider: What does my peer group have to say about forgiving? Do they like it and encourage it, or not? What does my family think about forgiving?

At this point, the teen’s willingness to forgive depends on what the norms are in his or her group and family. Similar to younger ages, the teen continues to be influenced by outside factors—here, other people’s beliefs and attitudes—rather than driven by an internal conviction that forgiveness is good in and of itself.

Still, social norms can be useful in shaping people’s own values, so nurturing forgiveness at this age means taking advantage of those norms. For instance, we can highlight examples of peer and family interactions in which forgiving was a central theme and seen as good. Hearing stories of peers accepting forgiveness, or families who go through conflicts and yet forgive and reconcile, might help teens to value and try out forgiveness for themselves.

If parents are opposed to forgiving, then at this stage it becomes more difficult for adolescents to learn to appreciate it. Still, if peers and teachers value the norm of forgiving, this can challenge adolescents to think more deeply about it. We get conflicting messages all the time in society, and this is why some of the important groups in an adolescent’s life (including families, social media groups, or houses of worship, if they belong to one) might consider talking about the theme of forgiveness as a possible response to unfairness.

Adolescents can easily handle the cognitive complexity of holding both forgiveness and justice in mind at the same time: Forgive and seek justice.

A Moral Virtue

At its highest developmental level, forgiveness means to unconditionally offer mercy to someone who acted unfairly. College students and adults begin to see that if forgiving is a strong moral virtue, then it should be offered regardless of external factors such as punishment, compensation, or the norms of different groups. They tend to see forgiveness as worthy of their time because it’s good for families, communities, and entire societies.

The highest form of forgiving is to offer love and kindness for the good of others—and not for some self-serving reason, like hoping for compensation or approval by our peer group after we forgive.

Sometimes, though, young adults (just like teens) can still experience external pressure to forgive, if they see that their communities demand forgiving. In other words, they are forgiving because of other people’s expectations and not yet as an end in and of itself.

To fully grasp forgiveness in this sense is rare, and formally learning about forgiveness may be necessary. Children can reach a profound understanding of forgiveness in adulthood by persistently practicing it, with the help of parents, when they are hurt by others. Such learning, begun early in life, is a building block for mature adult thinking about forgiveness.

It is hard work, but helping our children to reach this highest level of forgiving can set them up to exercise their own free choice to forgive, and to live a life without unhealthy anger and with more peace.

Dr. Robert Enright is the founder of the International Forgiveness Institute. This article was originally published in the Greater Good online magazine.

BECOMING MINIMALIST

Not Your Grandma’s Minimalism, or Your Neighbor’s

We live vastly different lives with vastly different material needs—and that’s OK

JOSHUA BECKER

One unfortunate belief that keeps people from pursuing minimalism is the assumption that there are strict rules and guidelines to the lifestyle. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Let me try to break that myth for you: Minimalism will always look different from person to person.

Find freedom to make it yours in a way that works for you and your family. Minimalism looks different in both practice and process.

In Practice

Consider how these different factors might affect the possessions you need:

Geography. Somebody who lives in a city will likely own different things than someone who lives in the suburbs, or someone who lives in a rural setting.

If you live in the city, you may not need a specific mode of transportation because public transit is nearby. If you live in the suburbs, that might not be a possibility. Or if you live in a rural setting, even further away from a store, your needs will change and the possessions you keep on-hand will differ.

Your household. Minimalism will also look different based on your family or

household. A single person in their 20s is going to own something different than a young family with children. And a family with young children is going to need different possessions than a family with teenagers. Or even empty nesters.

Different people struggle to minimize different items.

Your specific stage of life will affect your practice of minimalism in significant ways.

Your career. Minimalism also looks different based on our work.

A minimalist blogger is going to own something different than a minimalist dentist, or a minimalist architect, or a minimalist schoolteacher, or even a minimalist farmer.

There is little benefit to comparing our possessions in this way. We may find motivation or inspiration in the story of the young minimalist YouTuber, but trying to apply their strict rules to your unique situation is rarely helpful.

I believe that anyone, regardless of their occupation, can pursue minimalism. It’s just going to look very different from one person to another.

Your passion or purpose. The good that we feel called to accomplish in the world may also impact the possessions that we own.

In 2015, I founded The Hope Effect, a nonprofit organization changing how the world cares for orphans. Because of my desire to do this work well, there are some

things I own that I might not if this wasn’t a passion of mine.

Likewise, your passion for serving a purpose may cause you to own different items than your minimalist neighbor down the street.

Your hobbies. Hobbies can become a source of clutter in our homes and lives—especially if we try to do too many at one time.

But the fact remains that hobbies are beneficial to us. They bring us joy, or peace, or entertainment, or exercise, or simply serve as a distraction. In theory and in practice, they help us live bigger, more intentional lives.

As a result, our hobbies will impact the items we own—even as we seek to live intentional lives.

In Process

It is equally important to realize that minimalism looks different in process. How we get there changes from person-to-person and family-to-family.

There are some people who hear about minimalism, rent a dumpster, and throw out everything over the course of a weekend. But those people are few and far between.

And there are some people who just seem to be minimalist at birth.

But for most people who choose to live a minimalist life, it takes a little more time. It also takes a little more intentionality, a little more strategy, a little more effort to wrestle with emotions that emerge.

For us, it took about three months to go through the “lived-in areas” of our home

(living room, bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchen, etc.). But it took us nine months to minimize all our possessions if you count the basement and garage and storage shed in the backyard.

In fact, we moved into a smaller house three years later, and got rid of even more things. So the time frame may vary significantly from one person to another.

The process can also look different in more ways than just time.

Some people can read one book or one blog post and that’s all they need to get started. Others need a little more help or someone to come alongside them in the process. In fact, that’s one of the reasons I created the Clutterfree App—it’s just another tool that might be helpful to someone seeking to own less.

Additionally, different people struggle to minimize different items.

One person might struggle with books or sentimental items, while someone else might have a hard time deciding what to do with their yarn stash or excess hobby supplies.

I want to encourage you today. Minimalism is a lifestyle with countless benefits. Owning less means less cleaning, less burden, less anxiety, and less stress each and every day.

You can enjoy freedom.

Minimalism will look different for you than it does for me, both in practice and in process.

But always remember, as long as you’re moving in the right direction, you’re moving in the right direction.

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



PHOBIA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Can Talking Lead to Lower Inflammation and a Healthier Heart?

Our mind and body are linked through a variety of channels, and our stress response is a critical one

DEVON ANDRE

Gabbers, listen up: You might be able to talk your way to a healthier heart and life.

A new study has just found that cognitive behavioral therapy, like talk therapy, can improve inflammatory markers that contribute to a host of health conditions.

Commonly used to treat mental health conditions like depression, anxiety, and stress, behavioral/talk therapy may also have big benefits for fighting inflammation. A new review suggests therapy can boost immunity and ultimately improve physical health.

Using psychotherapy to treat physical health disorders may work indirectly. Studies have shown that reducing stress and anxiety can lead to less taxation on the immune system and fewer negative emotions.

The mental results of effective therapy reduce stress and lower

Stress relief through psychotherapy can also lead to better sleep, a calmer mind, more activity, and improved eating habits.

levels of cortisol and adrenaline, which put pressure on your heart and body. This added pressure, when long-lasting, can contribute to the inflammation that is associated with conditions like high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes.

Stress relief through psychotherapy can also lead to better sleep, a calmer mind, more activity, and improved eating habits. Each of these factors is known to contribute to a healthier immune system and reduced risk for several illnesses.

The review found that patients undergoing some form of psychotherapy experienced almost 15 percent better immune system function and an 18 percent decrease in harmful immune system overactivity. These benefits also lasted for six months following therapy.

Therapy’s impact on the immune system appears to control the production of cytokines. Cytokines are molecules sent out by your immune system to fix a problem. They can



WAVEBREAKMEDIA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Effective therapy can provide ways to better manage stress, which has a direct impact on heart health.

become damaging, however, if they are always on the scene.

A constantly engaged immune system leads to chronic inflammation, which causes tissue damage and is a known contributor to heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and more.

If talking about your feelings or chatting with a therapist has been on your mind, this could be some added incentive to do so. Many are practicing online and could help you ease stress as well as improve immune function.

You also might be able to combat

stress and improve immune function by talking with friends and family. There is evidence to suggest that strong social connections are an important component of anti-aging, which indicates a role in limiting inflammation.

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 BelMarraHealth, which first published this article.

WISE HABITS

The Power of Getting Clarity

Sometimes all it takes to find motivation and move to action is some clarity

LEO BABAUTA

Before I started Zen Habits, I was in a place in my life where I had a beautiful family, but I was stuck and dissatisfied with myself. I knew I wanted to change things—my health, finances, job, and the way that I was approaching life—but I didn’t really know what I wanted to do about any of it. Most of the time, I just ignored all of this and distracted myself. I didn’t have any clarity on what I wanted or what I needed to do. This lack of clarity is felt in all of us very deeply, so that it shows up in how we talk, how we hold ourselves, how other people feel us. It affects our relationships, our jobs, and our health. Then I got very clear that I needed to change. And clear that I wanted to quit smoking, start running, become vegetarian, start waking earlier, and start writing more. I went on to do all those and more.

Clarity helps us to focus, to take action, to feel energized. A lack of clarity causes stress,

inaction, a scattered focus, relationship difficulties, confusion on teams. It is helpful to find clarity in big things like your life mission, morning routine, financial plan, and how how to improve your relationships and health. It is also helpful to find clarity in smaller, more specific things, like how you will run a meeting or what your boss expects from you. As you can see, focus is a pretty broad topic—it can apply to every part of our lives. We don’t have to get clarity on everything this week. It is something to bring awareness to and improve over time. The more we find clarity, the more we’ll have focus, calm, and motivation. **How to Get Clarity** There are several things you can do to find clarity. Here are some things I have learned can help. **Create some space.** When we’re unclear on something—how we should reach a goal, for example—we often put it off instead of seeking clarity. Instead of

avoiding the issue, try creating some space to get clarity. Carve out an hour, half a day, or a weekend, depending on how big the thing is that you need clarity on. Then do the things below **Journal, iterate.** Write about what you need clarity on. You don’t have to come up with solid answers or write coherently. Just let your thoughts pour out. Stream of consciousness is fine. The important thing is to give yourself space to reflect. **Meditate and contemplate.** Similarly, you can go out in nature and spend some time in solitude. Go for a walk, sit on a rock, or meditate. See what comes up for you. Hold one question in your mind. For example, “what do I want here?” See what emerges. **Talk to others.** Share your thoughts with others. Share what you’re not sure about or afraid of. Hear their thoughts. Just the act of talking it out is valuable—you’re giving space for your thoughts



DEAN DROBOT/SHUTTERSTOCK

If you have some kind of answer, any kind of clarity at all, write it down as simply as you can.

is what was meaningful for me. I also got clearer on how I’d go about doing it. Maybe in a couple of years, I’ll have even more clarity, but I’m not going to wait for that in order to take action. Start moving, and learn from that. **Reflect after you take action and get clearer.** As you set things in motion, it’s useful to step back every month or two to see how things are going. What have you learned? What’s getting in the way? Use what you’ve learned to get even more clarity. Write it down simply. Take action again. And repeat. What areas of your life need clarity? How is the lack of clarity affecting you and those around you? Are you ready to create the space to get the clarity? *Leo Babauta is the author of six books and the writer of “Zen Habits,” a blog with over 2 million subscribers. Visit ZenHabits.net*

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