

WEEK 30, 2020

THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND & BODY

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Exercise not only helps with physical health but mental health, too.

Getting Fit After 50

Why it's never too late to start exercising **2**



All About Nuts:

8 Healthiest Varieties

PAGE 4



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MADE TO MOVE

Getting Fit After 50

Why it's never too late
to start exercising

CONAN MILNER

Anyone over 50 likely knows the feeling: You catch a glimpse of your reflection and realize the face and body you've always known has been replaced by a worn-out impostor.

For best-selling author James Owen, that moment came on his 70th birthday, when he watched a video clip of himself giving a lecture. He was mortified to see how badly he had aged.

“It didn't look like me. It looked like an old guy shuffling up to the podium,” he said. “It was embarrassing. I thought, ‘My God, this is what old age looks like.’”

Owen felt old, too. His back was in excruciating pain, and his rotator cuff was frozen stiff. He was clearly falling apart and shuddered to think what several more years of this downward slide might entail.

“So, I set a goal for myself,” he said. “I was going to walk for 30 days.”

He didn't worry about how far or how long—he just knew he had to do something. He started off slow, just doing as much as he could handle. He immediately felt better, and his wife noticed how much better he looked. After 30 days, he wanted more. His workouts gradually became more intense, his health improved, and his self-confidence grew.

At 77 Owens was in the best shape of his life: lean, strong, and pain-free. His doctor marveled at the dramatic turnaround in his health indicators.

Owen credits his success to developing an exercise habit and is on a mission to inspire other older adults to do the same. His 2017 book, “Just Move: A New Approach to Fitness After 50,” is a call to action for those who are tired of watching their health deteriorate.

“If you do this, your body will thank you,” Owen said.

Couch Potato to Fitness Addict

Although Owen loves to exercise now, he spent most of his life at odds with it. In high school, he aspired to be an athlete, but was slow and uncoordinated, usually ending up warming the bench. In his 40s, he jumped into an intense exercise routine, but soon quit because his knees and back hurt so badly. By his 50s and 60s, he had become a certified couch potato—too busy and tired to move any more than he had to.

When Owen approached fitness this last time around, he began at a slower pace and with a different goal in mind than when he was younger. His inspiration wasn't some fantasy number on the scale or six-pack abs, but something far nerdier: research.

“I had a career as a money manager for 35 years,” he said. “Being an investment guy, I loved research. So I set to work reading, and became fascinated by the science of exercise.”

Although modern medicine has long promised that a new drug or procedure may soon reverse the effects of aging and illness, hard science shows that the real fountain of youth is found simply in eating well and moving more. A large body of research over the past 30 years reveals that regular exercise protects against chronic disease far better than any pill or treatment available.

This idea isn't new. The earliest texts of traditional Chinese medicine, for example, point to a time when elders were able to preserve their health far into old age. One of the top tips from these ancient books is to get regular exercise to keep the body feeling youthful.

Most modern exercise science is focused on the benefits of cardio. That's why health experts feel so comfortable recommending it. Emerging studies point to unique benefits associated with other forms of exercise such as strength training and yoga.

Exercise not only helps with physical health but mental health, too. A recent study finds that those who exercise just

one hour per week can significantly decrease their risk of depression.

Unfortunately, we're moving less than ever. The average adult sits an average of 10–13 hours per day. Inactivity is the fourth-leading risk factor for global mortality and is directly responsible for 3.2 million deaths per year.

It's not unusual for people to slow down as they age, but it seems many of us barely budge from our seats anymore.

“Our great-grandparents were working out in the fields when they were 70 or 80 years old,” Owen said. “We sit behind the desk all day.”

Smashing the Age Stereotype

According to certified yoga and qigong instructor Cynthia Singleton, a big reason why older adults are resistant to exercise is that it conflicts with the stereotype of what old age should look like.

“We've all heard the [complaints about aging] from older relatives. ... We often buy into their experiences of aging, not realizing that ours can be completely different,” she said in an email.

There are many elderly individuals who defy the stereotype, like the 99-year-old man Singleton recently danced with at a family gathering. He still goes out every day to check on the cattle at his small ranch.

Singleton contends that what keeps people feeling vital in their old age is moving their body on a regular basis. “Movement is life, and our bodies were built to move,” she said.

A sedentary lifestyle takes a toll even earlier than you might imagine. Not only do we start gaining weight at a younger age, but our body functions also deteriorate faster. In our 20s, we begin to lose our sense of balance. In our 30s, our oxygen consumption and bone density begin to decline. In our 40s, memory starts to fade, and by our 50s our loss of muscle mass accelerates to about 15 percent per decade. Fat accumulation speeds up, too.

By the time one hits the elder years, a lifetime of sedentary habits contributes significantly to a variety of chronic illnesses. At this point, exercise no longer seems like an option because even minor movements can be extremely painful. But there still may be time to turn things around.

“It's harder when you're 70 than when you're 40 or 50, that's for sure. But I'm living proof that it's never too late,” Owen said.

Health-Driven Goals

You might imagine exercise to be more of a young person's game. But when it comes to developing an exercise habit, being older may actually give us a leg up.

Young people tend to approach fitness with short-term goals such as looking better in a bathing suit or losing 20 pounds for a wedding. When Owen found his inner athlete in his 70s, he began with a different set of priorities.

“When you're my age, it's health-driven,” he said. “I want to feel better. I want to be healthier. I want to be pain-free.”

Instead of image, Owen's goal is to condition his body so that it can better meet the demands of daily life. His book features a program he developed with health experts to hit what he calls the “five dimensions of functional fitness”: strength, flexibility, core stability, balance, and cardiovascular endurance.

You can find moves that are both fun and challenging at any stage of fitness ability. But avoid taking on too much too soon, as it increases your risk of injury. Exercise can be a little uncomfortable, but the magic is in subjecting your body to small challenges every day, which pushes it to work better.

Once you feel your functionality improve, the progress becomes empowering.

“I'm very proud when I look back and know I couldn't do this a month ago,” Owen said. “I get constant reinforcement, and it's the reinforcement that provides the motivation.”

Stress and the Immune System

We can calm our stress response, support our well-being by tending to body's core needs

JONI RAVENNA SUSSMAN

Occasional stress is good. It kicks our bodies into high gear, making us more able to ward off imminent threats. But prolonged stress—the kind many Americans have felt since COVID-19 arrived—can suppress the immune system and disrupt our digestive system, lymphatic system, and more.

“Stress is physical,” says Chris Johnson, an exercise physiologist and author of a series of best-selling “On Target Living” books, the first of which came out in 2007. “The heart rate goes up, muscles contract, pupils dilate. It doesn't matter if what you perceive as threatening is in fact near or far, real or not, the effect is still physical and over time, harmful.”

Johnson is a nationally recognized speaker and has been the director of health, wellness, and fitness at Sparrow Hospital's Michigan Athletic Club for more than 15 years. His lectures (these days by remote) focus on taming our sympathetic nervous system (the gas pedal) and engaging the parasympathetic nervous system (the brakes) so that we aren't always in stress mode. The three foundational pillars of health—how we rest, eat, and move—are key, he says.

Below are some of his tips to lower the stress response and thereby strengthen the immune system.

Breath

According to Johnson, most people are shallow breathers, taking 18 breaths per minute, when the goal should be 10. He advises placing your finger below your nose and noticing how the belly expands. Then, slowly exhale and feel the belly contract inward. Be mindful of how many breaths you take per minute, aiming for 10 slow, deep breaths.

“Forty percent of us breathe through our mouth. Instead, breathe through your nose, using your diaphragm,” he says. “That will calm us by engaging both the vagus nerve (the longest nerve in the body) and the parasympathetic system.”

Another calming trick is to breathe out of one nostril, your finger closing the other, for 30 seconds. Repeat on the opposite side.

“Don't underestimate the power of proper breathing,” he urges. Age reduces breath capacity, so make diaphragmatic breathing a habit starting now.

Sleep

One of the fastest-growing number of prescriptions in the United States today is for sleeping pills, more evidence of the stress most Americans are feeling.

“During REM sleep, the lymphatic system takes out the trash,” says Johnson. “And the last two hours of sleep are important because that's when most of our REM occurs. So, try to get eight hours.”

Equally important is learning to relax before eating, which means habits like ‘saying grace’ or ‘giving thanks’ at mealtimes likely have healthful benefits.

Johnson advises asking ourselves how our “sleeping environment” is. The room should be kept between 60 and 65 degrees because when our body temperature drops at night, our sleep mode is initiated. A hot bath is a good idea. Once out of the bath, the body cools naturally.

If you awaken in the night, Johnson suggests getting more magnesium into your daily diet, ideally from food rather than supplements. Beans, almonds, chia and flax seeds, oatmeal, blackberries, and cocoa nibs are great sources. Cocoa nibs also have more antioxidants than green tea and studies show help insulin sensitivity.

Finally, put on soothing music. Soundscapes is a TV channel that plays tranquil, sleep-inducing music. And it can be set on a timer so it turns off automatically.

“I love Baroque music,” he says. “It's a chill pill.”

Proper Hydration

“Life in the U.S. is acidic,” Johnson says. As the body gets acidic, inflammation rises, setting the stage for disease. Moreover, if

your body is too acidic, a state known as acidosis, alkalizing minerals like magnesium are leached out. Water, which is naturally pH balanced, can clean out detoxify the body. Water is also key to our metabolism and indirectly helps energize the body. Johnson recommends six to eight ounces of water when you first wake up.

“

Thirty million Americans are on auto-immune drugs and 90 percent of our immune system is in the gut.

Chris Johnson, exercise physiologist and author

The daily target should be half of one's body weight in ounces; a person who weighs 150 pounds should drink 75 ounces of water.

“Ninety percent of people coming into emergency rooms are dehydrated,” Johnson says. Everything in our body works better hydrated. Our skin is the first line of defense from invaders; other blockers include mucus in nasal passages (which is why we should breathe through the nose), the clear layer over our cornea, and specialized tissue that lines the lungs, bladder, and digestive system.

The liquids our body makes not only shield us from dirt and germs, but also contain enzymes that can kill bacteria. That's why staying hydrated is vital. Unfortunately, during stressful times, it's not unusual for people to turn to dehydrating alcohol. So, make drinking plenty of water a priority.

Superfoods

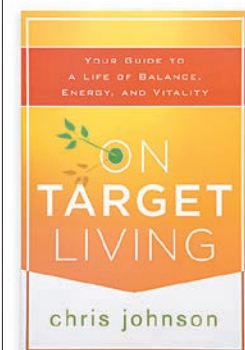
“All diets out there have always manipulated one of the three macronutrients, either carbs, fats, or protein,” Johnson says. “The latest manipulate carbs, but remember most of your pre and pro-biotics come from carbs like yams, bananas, oats, apples, and grains.”

And serotonin, which helps create melatonin (the sleep hormone), can be more readily available after digesting carbs, particularly the much-maligned of late, whole grains.

“We've been eating grains for 5000 years. So why now is everyone gluten intolerant?” he asks. “Thirty million Americans are on auto-immune drugs and 90 percent of our immune system is in the gut.” Johnson believes the constant stress of modern life is destroying our immune systems but the impact of our poor diet can't be overlooked. Eating true food,



Chris Johnson, exercise physiologist and author of the best-selling “On Target Living.”



One of the fastest-growing number of prescriptions in the United States today is for sleeping pills, more evidence of the stress most Americans are feeling.



with actual fiber and nutrients, is critical. Slow-cooked, steel-cut oats aren't the same as instant, flavored oatmeal.

Superfoods such as cod liver oil, flax seeds, and chia seeds will provide omega-3 fatty acids that are linked to better nervous system function, but most Americans don't get enough. Another superfood Johnson likes is chlorophyll, which cleanses us internally. Particularly good sources of chlorophyll are spinach, collard greens, mustard greens, chlorella, spirulina, alfalfa, parsley, and broccoli.

And to get important probiotic support naturally, eat one tablespoon of sauerkraut before dinner. Probiotics are helpful bacteria and other microbes that reside in the gut.

Equally important is learning to relax before eating, which means habits like “saying grace” or “giving thanks” at mealtimes likely have healthful benefits. Pausing for a moment of prayer lowers stress hormones such as cortisol, while increasing saliva, allowing for better digestion so the body can extract the needed nutrients for a healthier immune system. A healthy immune system isn't disturbed by nuts and grains that might otherwise cause an allergic reaction.

Bottom line, according to Johnson, a healthy gut equals a healthy immune system, which equals a positive mind more able to adapt to stressors.

Movement

Daily movement helps every bodily system, including the cardiovascular, lymphatic, and digestive systems.

“But the No. 1 benefit of moving your body is what it does for the mind,” the exercise physiologist says. “Motion creates positive emotion and it helps clear the mind.”

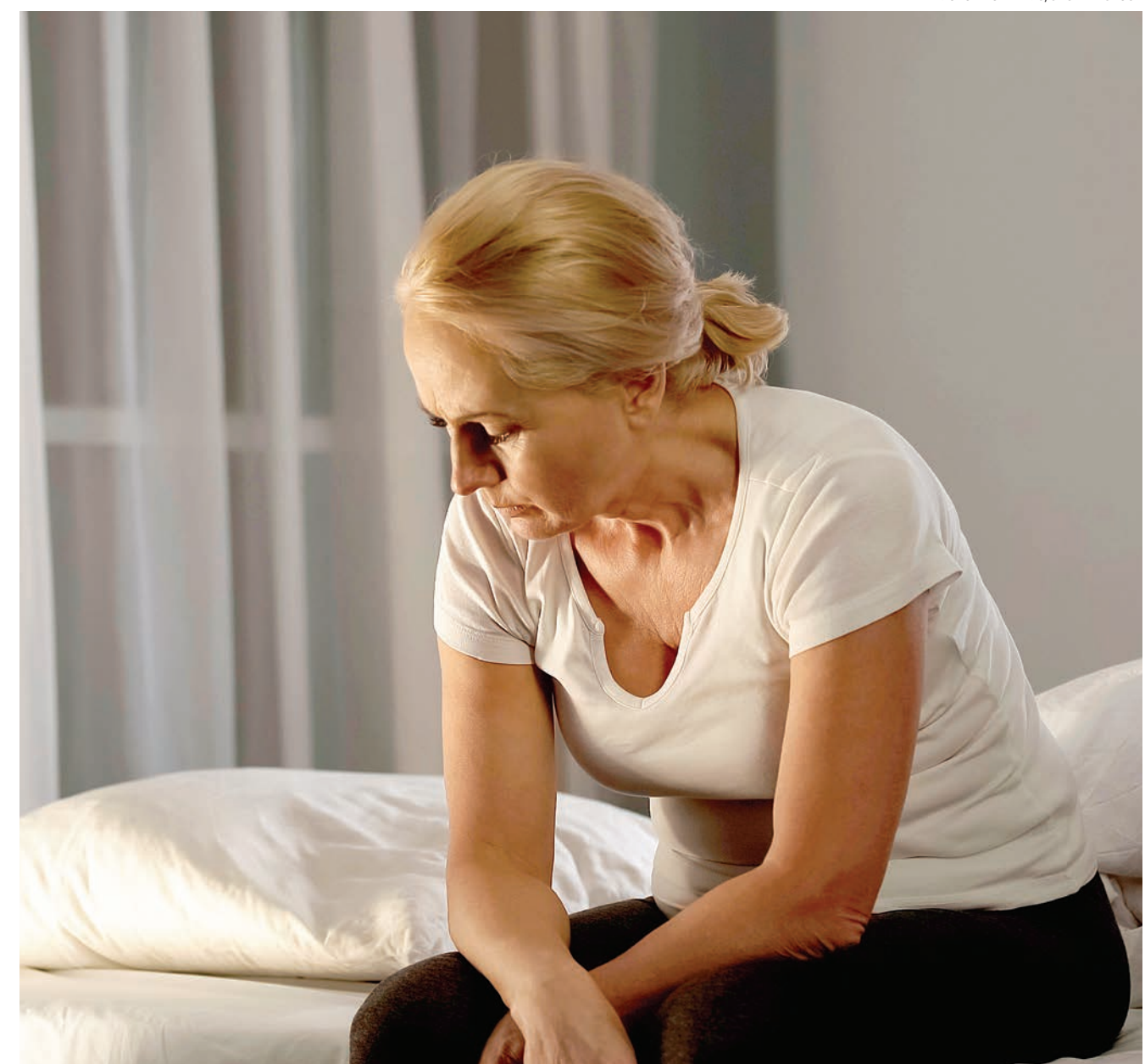
Johnson advises exercising at least 10 minutes every day and working up to more. “And find time to play more.”

Of course, easy stretching and yoga are instant stress busters and Johnson urges both, as well as the use of a foam roller, which can be used to ease back and neck muscle tension by placing it on the floor, lying on it horizontally, then rolling from side to side between shoulder blades with knees bent and arms extended to each side.

When asked where to begin, Johnson advises starting with the breath, which will calm the nervous system, then adds: “Most of us tend to overestimate a threat and underestimate our ability to handle it. You have control over the three foundational pillars of health, how you rest, eat, and move.

“You are the source and solution to your stress.”

Joni Ravenna Sussman is a freelance writer specializing in health and wellness. Her articles have appeared in dozens of national and regional publications over the years. She is also a playwright and TV writer.



If you awaken in the night, Johnson suggests getting more magnesium into your daily diet, ideally from food rather than supplements.

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KRISTIN BROWN/UNSPASH



Inadvertently, the COVID-19 safety guidelines to self-isolate have created new health risks by leaving many older adults even more socially isolated and inactive than before.

Social Isolation: The COVID-19 Pandemic's Hidden Health Risk for Older Adults, and How to Manage It

Social isolation is now viewed as risk factor for premature death, similar to cigarette smoking, physical inactivity, or obesity

MARCIA G. ORY & MATTHEW LEE SMITH

As COVID-19 cases rise again, it can be hard for older adults to see any end to the need for social isolation and the loneliness that can accompany it.

For months now, they have been following public health advice to reduce their risk of exposure by staying home, knowing an infection can have life-threatening complications. But sheltering at home has also meant staying distant from family, friends, and the places that kept them active and engaged.

Inadvertently, the COVID-19 safety guidelines to self-isolate have created new health risks, by leaving many older adults even more socially isolated and inactive than before.

As co-directors of the Texas A&M Center for Population Health and Aging, we have been examining social connectedness in

Sheltering at home has also meant staying distant from family, friends, and the places that kept them active and engaged.

TIZIANA FABU/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES



An elderly couple during the pandemic in Italy on April 5, 2020.

old age and the detrimental effects of social isolation and loneliness on physical and mental health. We're concerned about the paradox of government directives for physical distancing that protect older adults from COVID-19, but that might actually result in more social isolation.

We believe public health officials need to look closely at this potential risk in their messaging and identify strategies to minimize the unintended consequences.

How Social Isolation Can Harm Human Health

Even before the pandemic began, national studies indicated that nearly a quarter of older Americans were socially isolated and about one-third of middle-aged and older adults experienced loneliness.

Having few social connections and feeling isolated have been associated with myriad health-related conditions, including chronic diseases and psychiatric disorders. Social isolation is now viewed as a risk factor for premature death, similar to cigarette smoking, physical inactivity, or obesity.

Social distancing during the pandemic was never meant to thwart social connections, but many family members, friends, and neighbors of older adults are staying away to avoid exposing their loved ones to the virus. While that protects older adults from some health risks, limited physical interactions reduce feelings of connectedness with others. It can also exacerbate other health risks.

Without frequent and meaningful social interactions and stimulation, older adults' cognitive functioning can decline. As the days of isolation wear on, older adults are especially susceptible to depression and anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts.

Remaining at home also makes it harder to engage in healthy lifestyles, including physical activity and eating well.

Without exercise, muscles can weaken, leaving older adults more prone to falling. Inactivity can also lead to weight gain and other health problems, including declining heart and lung capacity. Access to healthy food is also necessary for staying healthy and for preventing and managing chronic conditions.

While not everyone will see the same effects, the older adults most likely to be affected include those who already experience social isolation, live alone, or have limited financial resources, as well as those with multiple physical ailments, mental health concerns, and memory problems.

What Can Older Adults Do?

Although the immediate demand for COVID-19 screening, testing, and treatment have made it more difficult for health care and aging organizations to reach out to older adults, many still offer opportunities for older adults to engage in a variety of meaningful ways within their homes or communities and to connect with helpful resources, services, and programs. Some states, such as Iowa, have set up free programs to connect isolated residents with

counselors and support groups by phone and online during the pandemic.

Older adults can also take steps on their own to stay active and engaged:

1. Plan your day. While the days may seem to be an endless blur, keep up with daily routines like getting out of bed, getting dressed, and being engaged with small activities. Planning time for online classes, calls with friends, reading, puzzles, cooking, gardening, or home repairs can give meaning to the days.
2. Stay physically active. Find exercises that can be done at home or in the immediate neighborhood, like walking. Many virtual and online physical activity and health promotion programs are available, which can remotely foster engagement and connection to others.
3. Know your risk. Take the AARP Foundation's Connect2Affect tool to assess your risk for being socially isolated, and refer to the local assistance directory for support services you might need.
4. Don't be afraid to leave home, but do so wisely. New CDC guidelines emphasize what older adults can do to stay safe when leaving home. For example, when going outside, practice everyday preventive actions: Carry a cloth face covering, tissues and hand sanitizer; and avoid close contact with others who are not wearing face masks to the extent possible.
5. Think of others. Regularly reach out to others who may need to hear a friendly voice on the phone. Volunteering has

been shown to have many positive health benefits, and there are online opportunities for doing so.

6. Accept help from others. Many individuals and organizations are working hard to keep seniors socially connected. Remain open to accepting the kindness and support from family members, friends, health care providers, and social service agencies.

Strategies for Healthier Response

Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the need for social distancing, there are ways to help older adults remain connected.

Phone calls and online platforms offer older adults ways to safely connect with peers and professionals, as well as friends and family. Online learning and internet-based volunteering can also provide interaction and intellectual stimulation.

For older adults, staying healthy and safe means also staying socially connected while following public health recommendations. Public health efforts to stop the spread of COVID-19 should also take into account the importance of social connectivity for maintaining older adults' physical and mental health.

Marcia G. Ory is a regents and distinguished professor of environmental and occupational health at Texas A&M University, and Matthew Lee Smith is co-director of the Texas A&M Center for Population Health and Aging. This article was first published on The Conversation.

Creativity Is Needed Now More Than Ever

Creativity isn't just for the good times, it's also for the challenges we face getting through the bad times

T. K. COLEMAN

In a world that's problem-free and satisfaction guaranteed, you don't need to be creative.

In a world where desires are fulfilled and goals are achieved without effort, you don't need to be creative.

In a world where our dreams are instantaneously realized by merely wishing things into existence, you don't need to be creative.

In a world where you can throw a party, make art, laugh with friends, or simply get through a day without having to negotiate a single element that's unpredictable, unwanted, or uncooperative, you don't need to be creative.

We don't live in any of those worlds.

We live in a world where time and space often feel like stubborn gatekeepers separating us from the things we want and need.

We live in a world where our goals are constantly challenged by the realities of inertia and inconvenience.

We live in a world where success and satisfaction depend on imagination and innovation.

We live in a world that requires creativity.

Creativity brings us pleasure, but it's made necessary by the things that delay, decrease, or deny our pleasure.

When we feel disappointed with the world, that is not a reason to give up on creativity. That is a reminder of why we need it.

People ask me "Why should I strive to live creatively when things are going bad?"

Because that's really the main reason for being creative. Challenges are not an argument against being creative. Challenges are the reason why we need to get creative in the first place.

If things were naturally going your way, what use would there be for creativity? If your desires could be fulfilled without tradeoffs and opportunity costs, why would you ever need to be creative? No single work of art or act of good has ever arisen from a completely effortless state devoid of the need to deal with some form of resistance or difficulty.

Creativity isn't just about playing theater games or putting paint on your face. It's about having goals, encountering obstacles, and bearing the burden of having to come up with counter-intuitive strategies for getting around those obstacles.

It doesn't take any creativity to lie back and passively hope good things will happen on their own. We need creativity precisely for those moments when the way forward seems unclear or impossible.

Creativity isn't just for the good times. It's for the challenges that get in our way when we're busy trying to enjoy or pursue the good times.

Creativity may serve the purpose of having fun, but it's made necessary by the fact that having fun can't be done without the ability to innovate and improvise around the unwelcome and unexpected.

If we're having more problems than ever before, then I can't think of a better time to be creative.

At least that's the way I see it.

T.K. Coleman is the director of entrepreneurial education at the Foundation for Economic Education and co-founder and education director of Praxis. This article was first published on FEE.org

Without frequent and meaningful social interactions and stimulation, older adults' cognitive functioning can decline.

WISE HABITS

The Lost Art of True Rest

We often default to our devices when it is time to unwind—only to feel more depleted

Often, calling this a “lost art” is a bit of hyperbole, because there are some people who actually rest these days. But I don’t believe most people do it well anymore. I could rail about the age of distraction, and social media and devices. Yada yada, you’ve heard it before. But whatever the reason is, we rarely rest anymore.

Think about it: when you get a break, what do you normally do? Go on your phone or computer? Check messages, or social media, or your favorite websites? Watch videos online? That’s how most people spend their breaks—myself included. I’m part of this.

What happens when you’re done with work for the day? That’s if you’re ever done—many of us will work practically until we are falling asleep if we’re allowed to. But if you’re done, do you read and watch and message online? Most people I know do that.

When do we ever truly rest, not only our bodies but our minds?

We need it. We really need it. We’re never fully energized, fully present, fully alive. It means that our relationships start to lack energy and connection. It means we sap the joy out of our lives. That might not be true for everyone, but it is true

for too many of us.

I have caught myself taking breaks or finishing for the day, only to get on my phone or laptop for mindless digital wandering. It feels like the thing I want to do when I have rest time—but it’s not really resting. I don’t feel refreshed afterward, only more drained. It feels like I’m going to comfort, but not getting the rest I really need.

So let’s talk about the lost art of true rest, and how to rediscover it.

Having a cup of tea, going for a walk, taking a bath are all relaxing.

4 Kinds of True Rest

For me, there are a handful of ways to rest that feel very nourishing and replenishing:

1. Closing my eyes, lying down, and doing nothing. This may or may not result in a nap. It might be more meditation. But I’m not reading, doing, watching. More on this below.
2. Going outside without using a device. Connecting to nature. Most likely in solitude. Letting my mind have some



mental and physical space.

3. Relaxing with someone else. Feeling a connection with them. This can’t be a very active conversation—if we’re talking, it has to be something that makes us feel connected, relaxed. We might just be cuddling without conversation.
4. Being fully present with a simple non-work activity, like having tea. This isn’t time to think about work, though those thoughts might arise. It’s about nothing other than having the tea. Relaxing with the experience. Savoring it. Soaking in a bath or having a spa day are other examples.

There are probably other ways to truly rest. Playing music, creating art, dancing, and more. But these four are my favorite. You’ll notice that you don’t need much for these kinds of true rest—no equipment or devices (maybe tea if you have

it), no special spaces (other than nature, if it’s available). It’s simple stuff.

We just forget to do it!

How to Relax While Doing Something Simple

Having a cup of tea, going for a walk, taking a bath are all relaxing. You don’t have to be lying down, closing your eyes. The key is to make this the one thing that you’re doing. Single-task. Relax. Be all in with this task, instead of jumping around. Give the activity your full focus. Really be with the cup of tea, or with your walk. Do it slowly, savoring the activity.

“Drink your tea slowly and reverently, as if it is the axis on which the world earth revolves—slowly, evenly, without rushing toward the future.”

—Thich Nhat Hanh

That quote sums up the approach. You can do it with

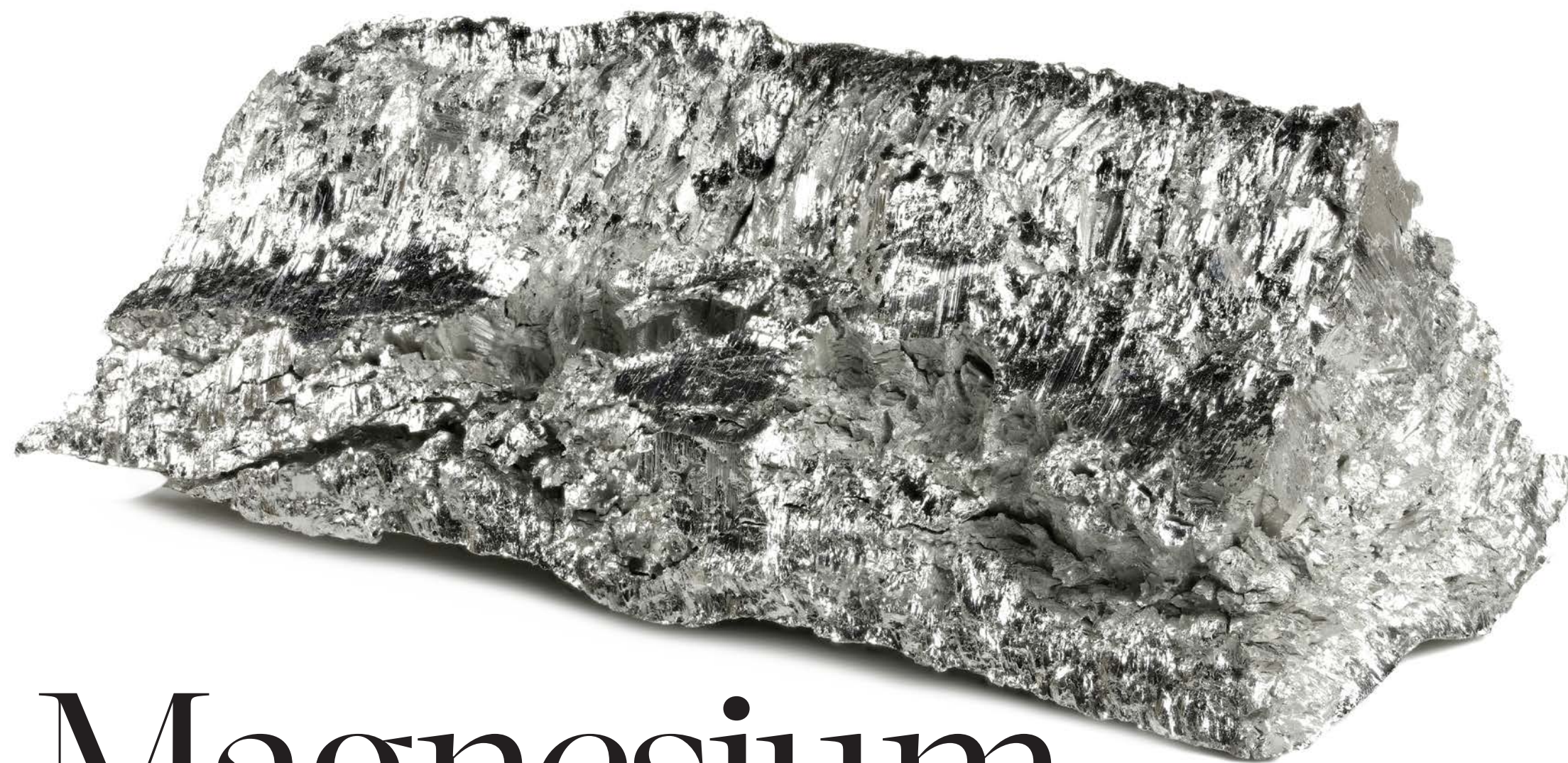
anything, not just drinking tea. Be fully immersed.

A Powerfully Simple Practice With those relaxation approaches in mind, I’ll leave you with a simple but really powerful practice:

When you’re done with something, pause and notice if you need rest. Are you tired? Are you craving true rest? If so, give yourself a few moments of true rest. Not checking your phone, not reading or watching online, not taking care of small tasks. True rest. One of the things discussed above, or your version of true rest.

Ask yourself throughout the day. You might find that you need true rest more than you realize.

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



Magnesium

The Missing Mineral



Most of us aren’t getting enough, and it’s wreaking havoc on our health

M

CONAN MILNER

Minerals are key to a well-functioning body: Iron helps generate red blood cells; calcium builds bones; the dance of sodium and potassium ions delivers energy to cells.

Minerals fuel a spark vital to all organic life. Magnesium’s spark contributes to more than 300 enzymatic reactions—it’s a driving force behind muscle and nerve function, blood sugar balance, immunity, and more.

Despite all that magnesium does, modern medical practice routinely overlooks it in the course of disease diagnosis and treatment. Magnesium tests are rare, yet most of us are magnesium deficient. Experts estimate that as many as 80 percent of Americans lack the recommended daily allowance of magnesium: about 350 milligrams (mg) per day for women, and 420 mg for men.

According to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, we used to have a lot more magnesium in our diet. Just a century ago, we consumed about 500 mg of magnesium per day. Today, we’re lucky to break 200 mg.

Many things contribute to our deficit, such as drinking bottled water (which is often stripped of minerals in the filtering process), and our general aversion to magnesium-rich foods such as nuts, greens, seeds, and whole grains.

Meanwhile, we require more magnesium than ever. Stress burns up a lot of this min-

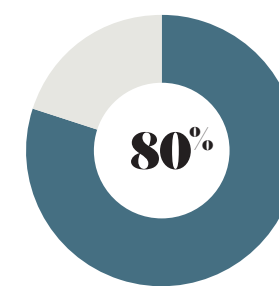
eral, as does sugar, caffeine, prescription drugs, and even common supplements. Our food is grown in magnesium-compromised soil. Chemical fertilizers high in potassium and phosphorus inhibit magnesium absorption. Herbicides such as glyphosate bind with magnesium in the soil, making it inaccessible to plants.

We’re starving for this mineral at every level, but most doctors are blind to it, says Dr. Carolyn Dean, author of the bestselling book “The Magnesium Miracle.”

“We never learned about magnesium in medical school,” she told The Epoch Times, “but the evidence is there if we’re willing to open our eyes.” Dean first learned about magnesium after she graduated from conventional medical school and began taking courses in naturopathic medicine. While researching her book, Dean discovered many health problems linked to magnesium deficiency, with plenty of data to support it. Her latest edition points to more than 15,000 articles on PubMed exploring the impact magnesium has on our body.

A Better Test

Because magnesium plays a role in so many bodily processes, running low can contribute to a wide range of symptoms. Magnesium deficiency contributes to diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, migraines, irritable bowel syndrome, constipa-



Experts estimate that as many as 80 percent of Americans lack the recommended daily allowance of magnesium.

tion, stroke, ADHD, osteoporosis, and more.

But even if a doctor orders a magnesium test, they probably still won’t see a correlation with these diseases, because the test can be misleading. Our blood serum doesn’t accurately reflect the body’s total magnesium levels, yet this is where a standard test takes its measurement.

“If you test the serum, it’s almost always going to show a normal level because the heart muscle has to be provided with enough magnesium so it does not go into spasm or arrhythmia,” Dean said.

According to the National Institutes of Health, “serum levels have little correlation with total body magnesium levels or concentrations in specific tissues.”

A more appropriate test measures the body’s magnesium ions. This test was developed by professors Bella and Burton Altura in the 1990s at the State University of New York.

The Altura test isn’t well known, but Dr. James DiNicolantonio believes it should be. DiNicolantonio is a cardiovascular research scientist at Saint Luke’s Mid America Heart Institute in Missouri and the associate editor of the British Medical Journal’s Open Heart. He contends that if more doctors and hospitals were familiar with magnesium ion testing, they would take this mineral much more seriously.

Continued on Page 10

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Magnesium

The Missing Mineral

Most of us aren't getting enough, and it's wreaking havoc on our health

Continued from Page 9

"Advanced testing needs to become more common," DiNicolantonio said. "We need to realize how common this problem is and how many disease states are caused by this deficiency."

Symptoms such as muscle cramping, heart palpitations, and anxiety may signal deficiency. The ion test can provide confirmation.

"It can be quite illuminating to see a person who has high blood pressure, insomnia, migraines ... you'll find they're often very low in ionized magnesium," Dean said.

"The more medications people take, the more magnesium they're burning up from their precious reserves, because the body needs magnesium to detoxify drugs."

Dr. Carolyn Dean, bestselling author

Treating a Mineral Deficiency
In addition to their ion test, the Alturas have dedicated their career to highlighting the importance of magnesium. For the past 40 years, the couple has produced about a dozen peer-reviewed journal articles on magnesium per year.



ANATOLY SADOVSKIY/SHUTTERSTOCK

But this data has done little to sway the standard of care. In fact, conventional treatment may actually contribute to a patient's deficiency. "The more medications people take, the more magnesium they're burning up from their precious reserves, because the body needs magnesium to detoxify drugs," Dean said.

The only permanent fix for a nutritional deficiency is to feed the body what it lacks. Pharmaceuticals may temporarily address symptoms, such as high blood pressure, high blood sugar, and high cholesterol. But if the root cause is a lack of magnesium, drugs can never heal the underlying problem.

Ultimately, test results determine doctors' decisions about treatment. That's why DiNicolantonio wants the health care system to screen for magnesium deficiency as routinely as it does for cholesterol.

"When you talk to researchers who

"We never learned about magnesium in medical school, but the evidence is there if we're willing to open our eyes."

Dr. Carolyn Dean, bestselling author

have been doing this for years, we get it. It's just that the system is broken because drug companies don't have an incentive to screen for this," he said. "You can't patent a mineral."

Magnesium-Stealing Supplements

If your magnesium intake is low and your need for it is high, it will literally eat you up inside. If you don't consume enough to meet demand, your body will go mining for it in your bones.

The mineral most associated with bone health is calcium, but magnesium also plays a significant role. Whereas calcium gives bones structure and density, magnesium provides a spongy cushion, making bones more flexible and less likely to break or fracture.

Unlike magnesium, calcium gets a lot of attention. Many older women pop a daily calcium tablet, and foods are often fortified with calcium in an effort to keep bones strong. But our bodies require magnesium in order to absorb calcium. That's why too much calcium may actually weaken our bones.

"The higher amounts of calcium you consume, the more magnesium deficient one can become," DiNicolantonio said.

Magnesium has a similar relationship with vitamin D. Dean cautions her patients never to take calcium or vitamin D without also adding more magnesium to their regimen.

Excess phosphorus (found in sodas) is another mineral that increases our magnesium needs, but the opposite is true with sodium. If sodium levels get too low, the body fights to hold onto it by sacrificing magnesium instead. Sweating can force us to lose up to 10 times the amount of magnesium in an effort to maintain enough sodium.

This is one of the reasons why DiNicolantonio, author of "The Salt Fix: Why The Experts Got It All Wrong, and How Eating More Could Save Your Life," says modern medicine's low salt advice actually does more harm than good.

"When people follow low salt guidelines, the body starts conserving sodium and starts pushing out more magnesium. ... You're losing more magnesium from the bone, and you're peeing out more magnesium because of the elevated aldosterone levels," he said.

Dean sees examples of this in teen athletes, who sweat out all their magnesium and often suffer from anxiety and panic attacks as a result. To prevent this magnesium drain, Dean recommends adding a pinch of sea salt to your drinking water in place of high-sugar sports drinks.

Getting More Magnesium

To protect your magnesium reserves, curb the behaviors that waste it and learn how to get more in. Start by reducing stress, getting enough sleep, and eating more magnesium-rich foods.

Almonds, bananas, avocados, fish, and pumpkin seeds are all high in magnesium, but cocoa tops the list. A chocolate craving may even

Stress burns up a lot of this mineral, as does sugar, caffeine, prescription drugs, and even common supplements.

be a sign of magnesium deficiency, particularly during menstruation, when a woman's magnesium levels are lowest.

However, cocoa is usually paired with sugar, which robs us of magnesium. To get the most magnesium from your chocolate, go dark. Reach for bars with a cocoa percentage of at least 85 percent. Dean recommends the least processed form: raw cacao nibs.

Supplements offer the most concentrated source of magnesium, but absorption can be a problem. Magnesium oxide is often prescribed because this is the form used most in research. Unfortunately, magnesium oxide has a strong laxative effect, making it difficult to absorb and hard for patients to take.

One strategy is to supplement your magnesium topically. Epsom salts (magnesium sulfate) added to a hot bath can be a pleasant way to soak it up. Another option is magnesium oil—liquefied magnesium crystals—that can be sprayed on the skin.

Thankfully, magnesium oxide is not the only option for oral magnesium. Dozens of companies now sell supplements designed to be absorbed better and be easier on the gut. However, even these products may trigger diarrhea at higher doses. But Dean believes this is an asset, because it prevents an overdose.

"Magnesium is one of the only minerals that has a real failsafe," she said. "If you have too much, once your cells are saturated you will get the laxative effect."

Dean's advice to try magnesium first when addressing disease sounds radical in a health care system geared more toward drugs than nutrition. But when 80 percent of chronic disease is linked to a poor diet and a lack of exercise, perhaps it's time to shift our focus.

"If we're going to get out of the health care crisis that we're in, we need to start preventing disease," DiNicolantonio said.

For Dean, the road to good health is simply about giving the body the tools it needs to thrive.

"When people get saturated with magnesium, get enough water, and get their basic building blocks of nutrition, they gradually get better. I see it every day," she said.



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TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

What You Need to Know About Inflammation

Chinese medicine and scientific research take many identical views on inflammation's causes and cures

LYNN JAFFEE

What do heart disease, stroke, arthritis, colitis, fibromyalgia, lupus, MS, diabetes, chronic fatigue, and Alzheimer's have in common? Well, yes, they're all diseases, but the A-plus answer is that they are all caused by or associated with inflammation.

Scientists are finding that the common cause in a long list of illnesses is an inflammatory process that's run out of control. Inflammation is an important way the body deals with injury or disease. It is one way the body combats pathogens and burns off dying or infected cells. It is controlled by a group of hormones called prostaglandins, some of which promote, and others that reduce inflammation. You can affect these hormones through a number of factors, including emotions, lifestyle, and especially through diet.

In Chinese medicine, inflammation tends to be associated with heat. Heat

is also a primary sign of inflammation. This heat can be very apparent when you have an infection of red and warm arthritic joints. The heat, however, may not be so obvious and can cause more subtle symptoms such as a mild sensation of feeling warm, chronic thirst for cool drinks, irritability, lots of sweating, restlessness, and constipation.

This inflammatory heat can come from a variety of sources. One is through improper diet, which according to Chinese food therapy includes too many spicy, greasy, or rich foods, and sweets. Similarly, eating unhealthy foods can aggravate the body and stir inflammation from a western medical perspective as well. Heat also occurs from stagnation in Chinese medicine. This simply means that when things don't move well, it creates a buildup that causes heat.

In your body, anything from your energy or digestion to your emotions can stagnate. If you've ever seen someone get hot with anger, that's an

emotional stagnation causing a little heat. While this way of thinking can seem foreign to western minds, this is more than symbolic symmetry.

For instance, one common cause of lingering anger is when someone cannot let go of an incident, like an insult. Instead of accepting the situation and moving on with their life, they keep thinking about the situation, fixating on it in an unhealthy manner that stokes their anger.

Western scientists have found that the foods you eat can be pro-inflammatory or anti-inflammatory. Fats are strongly linked to inflammation because your body makes prostaglandins from fatty acids. Similar to Chinese food theory, the fats that promote inflammation include partially hydrogenated oils/fats, and polyunsaturated oils, such as corn, peanut, and safflower. Also, trans fats, such

as margarine or vegetable shortening, and saturated fats, as found in animal products (except fish) promote inflammation.

Now you may be thinking that there's nothing you can eat, but there are actually one or two healthy choices. Just kidding! There are lots. Anti-inflammatory foods include fish (especially deep-sea fish), fish oils, olive oil, nuts (especially walnuts), ground flax seeds or flaxseed oil, and soy foods.

Other anti-inflammatory foods include colorful fruits and vegetables, known for their high antioxidant content, which also decreases inflammation. In addition, ginger and turmeric, which are both important Chinese herbs, are effective in taming inflammation.

There is a blood test that measures inflammation in your arteries through looking at your levels of

C-reactive protein, or CRP. However, if your health insurance plan tends to deny more than approve, a fasting blood insulin test is more likely to be covered and is also an indicator of inflammation. In general, higher insulin levels in your blood means greater inflammation.

Keeping Inflammation in Check
There are several things you can do to keep inflammation under control, or at least reduced.

Maintain an appropriate weight. Fat tissue is an accumulation of dampness, which over time will ultimately turn to heat. Western research specifically links belly fat to inflammation.

Get regular exercise. It gets energy moving and relieves stress, both of which can contribute to inflammation. Exercise also improves the health of your heart and lungs. You don't need to sign up for a triathlon; walking for 20-30 minutes at least four times a week will do the trick.

If you're a smoker, quit now. Today, in case you haven't noticed, smoking creates heat in your body, inflames your lungs, and inhibits your circulation.

Take processed foods off your shopping list. In most cases, processed foods are made with lots of sugars, trans fats, and chemicals—all of which can contribute to inflammation. If an item has a long list of ingredients that you can't pronounce, put it back on the shelf and roll your cart to the produce aisle.

Get your stress under control. Take a yoga class, do some deep breathing, or visualize your happy place—whatever it takes. Stress is a killer in its

own right. Take note of your thinking, as your thoughts have a powerful influence on your emotions and stress reaction.

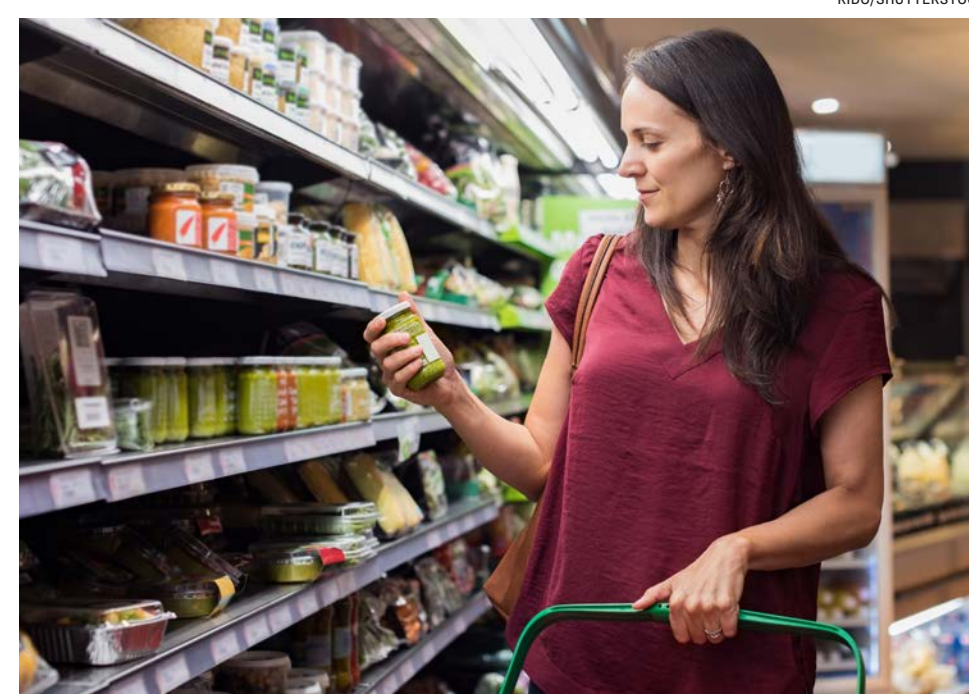
Floss. That's right, pull out the dental string or floss sticks and go to town. There is a direct relationship between gum disease, inflammation, and heart disease.

Get regular exercise. It gets energy moving and relieves stress, both of which can contribute to inflammation.

Get medical care for any infection that doesn't heal quickly. Again, there's a direct link between chronic infections and systemic inflammation.

Pay attention to food sensitivities. These can cause inflammatory symptoms, not only in your gut but throughout your body. Some common culprits include grains that contain gluten, dairy foods, and nightshade plants, like tomatoes, peppers, and eggplant. Sugar is a prime culprit as well. If you suffer from digestive problems, you may want to experiment with eliminating those foods that you suspect are causing problems.

Lynn Jaffee is a licensed acupuncturist and the author of "Simple Steps: The Chinese Way to Better Health." This article was originally published on AcupunctureTwinCities.com



Foods can either irritate or relieve inflammation. Anti-inflammatory foods include colorful fruits and vegetables. Most processed foods are pro-inflammatory.

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Why Kids Develop Sleep Problems, and How Parents Can Help

Factors of biology, psychology, and environment play complex role influencing how children sleep

ADAM T. NEWTON

For some parents, getting their child into bed is a struggle that can take hours. Others get up at midnight to help their child fall back to sleep. Sleep problems like these affect one in four kids—and their parents, too.

As a pediatric sleep researcher, I've grappled with the question of why these sleep problems happen. My team's research delivers the largest synthesis of why kids develop these sleep problems, capturing over 30 years of research. We have identified the 10 biggest reasons these sleep problems occur for kids ages 1-10.

We identified nearly 60 factors that could play a role, from a pool of 98 studies. Ten of these factors were supported in several rigorous studies.

These factors fall under three "lenses" we can use to understand where children's sleep problems come from: biology, psychology, and the environment.

Biology

Biology involves the child's internal functions, their make-up.

We identified two reasons kids develop sleep problems stemming from their biology—their temperament and their age. Temperament, or disposition, is the personality you see in your baby. Babies who seem more fussy or irritable can have a hard time responding to change and may not settle easily. Babies with this type of temperament may be more likely to have sleep problems later in childhood.

As children get older, they're less likely to have sleep problems. This may be because their brains can better manage the processes needed to settle at night, or that they're more independent in their bedtime routines.

Psychology

The psychology of children's sleep problems involves two parts: how children act and feel, and how children and parents interact with each other.

We found six psychological reasons kids develop sleep problems: three relating to how kids act and feel, and three relating to family interaction.

Children with mental health problems tend to have more sleep problems, even if there's no diagnosis. There are two groups of problems linked with sleep problems: internalizing problems (like anxiety and depression) and externalizing problems (trouble with following rules and focusing). Internalizing problems can make it harder for kids to settle down and fall asleep, due to higher stress levels. Externalizing problems may make rules and routines more difficult for children to follow, which then makes it harder to settle to sleep. First, we know that children who have had sleep problems earlier in life are likely to continue to have sleep problems later in childhood—unless change happens.



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Consistency is also important at night. Children with consistent bedtime routines tend to have fewer sleep problems than children with inconsistent routines.

How children and their parents interact also matters.

At night, parents who stay with their children until they fall asleep tend to have children with sleep problems. Parents become a cue for children to fall asleep. So when a child wakes in the middle of the night and Mom or Dad isn't there, it's tricky to fall back asleep.

During the day, parents who have inconsistent rules at home, who don't enforce limits on their children or who react very strongly to little hitches tend to have children with more sleep problems. Parents who act in these ways may have trouble keeping their children on the same bedtime routine from night to night and have children who have more stress at bedtime, making it harder to fall asleep.

Consistency is also important at night. Children with consistent bedtime routines tend to have fewer sleep problems than children with inconsistent routines. Consistent bedtime routines help kids to feel safe, settled, and ready to fall asleep.

The Environment

The environment involves how children and parents interact with the world around them.

First, more electronic use is associated with more sleep problems. This is especially true when children use screens in their bedrooms or close to bedtime. This is because screens prevent melatonin (the sleep hormone) from doing its job,

which is to make us sleepy. But this isn't the whole story. Electronics may also keep kids' minds alert, especially if they're playing a game or watching an interesting show.

Second, families with lower incomes and lower education are more likely to have children with sleep problems. This likely isn't a direct result of income or education, but the fallout from these circumstances, like living in noisy neighborhoods or having parents with changing schedules.

These factors give a principal account of why sleep problems occur, but not the whole story. We don't yet know how these factors might influence each other to make sleep problems better or worse. There are also other factors I've not mentioned—like bedroom light and noise or conflicts between parents—that may help our understanding.

How Can Parents Help?

Of the 10 factors I've listed, parents can directly improve four:

- Help kids to fall asleep on their own;
- Develop a clear and consistent bedtime routine;
- Limit electronics in the bedroom and at bedtime;
- Calmly set clear and age-appropriate limits for your child during the day.

These changes can be easy to make and can have a great impact on your kid's sleep.

Adam T. Newton is a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology at Western University in Canada. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.

A Peaceful Death Amid the COVID Scourge

'I couldn't let her be alone' recounts nurse who held patients hand in final moments

JONEL ALECCIA

As her mother lay dying in a Southern California hospital in early May, Elishia Breed was home in Oregon, 800 miles away, separated not only by the distance but also by the cruelty of COVID-19.

Because of the pandemic, it wasn't safe to visit her mom, Patti Breed-Rabito, who days earlier had entered a hospital—alone—with a high fever and other symptoms that were confirmed to be caused by COVID-19.

Breed-Rabito, 69, had suffered from lung and kidney disease for years but remained a vital, bubbly presence in the lives of her husband, Dan Rabito, and three grown children. She was a longtime church deacon and youth leader in Reseda, California, a fan of garage sales, bingo games, and antique dolls. Then came COVID-19, likely contracted in late April following one of her thrice-weekly dialysis sessions. Now she lay sedated and on a ventilator, her life ebbing, with no family by her side.

"I had seen these things on TV and I would pray for those people and say, 'I can't imagine what they're going through,'" said Breed, 44. "And now I was living it."

A single mom of two young sons, she was wracked with guilt at not being with her mother. "You always picture you're going to be right by your parent's side," she said.

Unlike many families of dying COVID patients, Breed and her family were able to find some comfort in her mother's final hours because of the 3 Wishes Project, a UCLA Health end-of-life program repurposed to meet the demands of the coronavirus crisis. In the U.S., where more than 120,000 people have died of COVID, it's part of a wider push for palliative care during the pandemic.

At 5 p.m. on May 10, Mother's Day, before Breed-Rabito's life support was removed, more than a dozen family members from multiple cities and states gathered on a Zoom call to say goodbye. John Denver's "Rocky Mountain High," one of her soft-rock '70s favorites, played on speakers. Online, a chaplain prayed.

Breed-Rabito had been deeply sedated for more than a week, since a terrible night when she struggled to breathe and asked doctors to place her on the ventilator. Confusion abounded, Breed said. Could her mom still hear in that state? Two nights in a row, Breed asked nurses to prop a phone near her mom's ear.

"I prayed with her. I sang her favorite songs. I read her the Bible," she said. Finally, a nurse gently explained that her mother was too sick to recover. If they removed the ventilator, it would be to allow her to die.

That's when hospital staffers described the 3 Wishes program and asked whether the family had any personal requests for her last moments. They decided on the music and the family Zoom call. Dan Rabito requested that a nurse hold his wife's hand as she died.

After it was over, family members received keychains stamped with her fingerprint and a copy of the electrocardiogram of the last beats of her heart.

"I'm grateful to have these keepsakes," Breed said. "All these things have been healing."

The project was developed in Canada but co-launched at UCLA Health in 2017 by Dr. Thanh Neville, an intensive care physician who serves as 3 Wishes' medical director. It aims to make the end of life more dignified and personalized by fulfilling small requests for dying patients and their families in the ICU.

Before COVID-19, the program had granted nearly 1,600 wishes for more than 450 patients, nearly all in person. The deathbed scenarios have varied, from music and aromatherapy at the bedside to meeting a patient's request for one last mai tai cocktail.

"We've done weddings and mariachi bands and opera singers and 20 to 30 family members who could come in

Two nights in a row, Elishia Breed asked nurses to prop a phone near her dying mom's car so she could pray, sing, and read to her.

COURTESY OF ROBERT HERNANDEZ, UCLA HEALTH



Dr. Thanh Neville co-founded the 3 Wishes Project at UCLA Health in 2017. Since then, the program has fulfilled nearly 1,600 wishes for dying patients in the ICU.



The elderly and ill have been particularly hard hit by COVID-19 social distancing and quarantine requirements.

and celebrate," said Neville, 41. "And none of this is possible anymore."

COVID-19 has "changed everything," said Neville, a researcher who focuses on improving ICU care for the dying. Also a clinician, she spent weeks this spring tending to seriously ill COVID patients. Since March, her hospital system has seen more than two dozen COVID deaths.

In the beginning, visitors were strictly prohibited. Now, some may come—but many don't.

"I would still say the majority of COVID patients die without families at their bedside," Neville said. "There are a lot of reasons why they can't come in. Some are sick or old or they have small kids. A lot of people don't want to take that risk and bring it home."

It has been hard to keep 3 Wishes going during a time when in-person memorials and celebrations are banned and infection control remains the primary focus. Neville even had to change the way the fingerprint keychains were made. Now, they're treated with germicidal irradiation, the same method that lets health care workers reuse N95 masks.

The 3 Wishes Project is offered when death is imminent: Patients are enrolled after a decision has been made to withdraw life-sustaining technology or if the chance of death is greater than 95 percent. The program was created to help patients, caregivers and clinicians navigate the dying process in a less clinical, more humane way. Wishes needn't be limited to three, and they can be articulated by patients, family members, or hospital staffers.

The program is based on palliative care tenets that focus on the humanity of the patient amid intensive medical care, said Dr. Rodney Tucker, president of the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine. Seemingly small acts that honor an individual life help counter the efficiency-driven environment of the ICU, which can be dehumanizing. They're at the core of care that has been shown to ease both angst for the dying and grief for those who loved them. "It helps the family that's left behind cope more successfully with the loss," he said.

Such efforts also remind providers of the humanity of their practice, which

can help them cope with the stress of witnessing death daily, especially during something as extraordinary as a pandemic, he said.

A study published by Neville and colleagues last year found that 3 Wishes is a "transferable, affordable, sustainable program" that benefits patients, families, clinicians and their institutions. They calculated that the mean cost of a single wish, funded by grants and donations, was \$5.19.

In the beginning, visitors were strictly prohibited. Now, some may come—but many don't.

Genevieve Arriola, 36, has been a critical care nurse for eight years. When the pandemic struck, she found herself juggling medical care and emotional support more than ever. She took care of Breed-Rabito for three days straight, all the while communicating with the dying woman's family.

"This was a very delicate situation for someone who was married to her for over 20 years and a daughter who was miles away in Oregon and couldn't see her mom," she said.

She was also the nurse who held Breed-Rabito's hand as she died. "I pretty much felt honored to be that person," Arriola said. "I couldn't let her be alone. If no one can be there, I can."

Weeks after her mother's death, Breed is grappling with the loss. The last time she saw her mom was March 16, at a McDonald's off Interstate 5 near Grants Pass, Oregon.

The pair met for less than 30 minutes before Breed-Rabito headed south down the interstate, her long-planned family visit cut short by concerns about COVID. She had just learned that the local dialysis center was closed to outside patients, and she was worried about growing reports of infection and death. "She told me, 'I feel like this disease is coming after me,'" Breed recalled.

Now, the keepsakes from 3 Wishes are placed where Breed can see them every day.

"It added such a level of love and dignity we weren't expecting," she said. "It made the process of losing a loved one to COVID-19 so much more bearable."

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

Stretch Your Legs to Keep Heart Disease and Diabetes at Bay

MAT LECOMPTÉ

New research shows how 12 weeks of passive stretching can help to improve blood flow and keep heart disease and diabetes at bay. Published in the *Journal of Physiology*, the study outlines how stretching can help arteries to dilate, making it easier for blood to flow and decrease stiffness.

Many people are familiar with active stretching, which is done on their own, but passive stretching has been found to offer more health benefits. Passive stretching involves an external force, including another person or gravity performing the stretching. It is known as a type of stretching in which you stay in one position for a set time. You're able to relax your body while a partner, accessory, or prop intensifies the stretch by putting external pressure on your body. You can also use the floor or a wall.

For the study, researchers at

the University of Milan assigned 39 participants into two groups. Participants included both men and women of all ages. The control group did not receive any stretching, whereas the experimental group performed leg stretches five times a week for 12 weeks.

The effect of passive stretching on blood flow locally and in the upper arm was analyzed and it was found that the arteries in both the lower leg and upper arm had increased blood flow and dilation when stimulated, along with decreased stiffness.

Changes in Arteries

These changes in the arteries may lead to implications for health problems such as stroke, diabetes, and heart disease. All these diseases are characterized by changes in blood flow control due to an impaired vascular system.

Emiliano Ce, an author on the paper, said, "This new application

of stretching is especially relevant in the current pandemic period of increased confinement to our homes, where the possibility of performing beneficial training to improve and prevent cardiovascular disease, stroke, and other conditions is limited."

Researchers hope these findings could serve as a new drug-free treatment for improving vascular health and reducing disease risk, especially in people with lower mobility. It is also thought that stretching may be used during hospitalization or after surgical interventions.

In this time of quarantine, it is more important than ever to keep active. As many people are not keeping as physically active as they usually would, health professionals are stressing the importance of finding new ways to stay healthy. Stretching is a great way to stay healthy, improve flexibility, and help keep blood flowing.



DEBORAH BENBROOK/SHUTTERSTOCK

Passive stretching involves an external force, including another person or gravity performing the stretching.

Mat Lecompte is a freelance health and wellness journalist. This article was first published on *Bel Marra Health*.



A program called 3 Wishes has adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic to better help meet the last requests of family members whose loved ones are dying in isolation.

Why Your Friends Are More Important Than You Think

Sustain your friendships in the pandemic by first recognizing their importance, argues author Lydia Denworth

KIRA M. NEWMAN

Researchers and philosophers have explored in great detail the emotional dramas of love and family. But they've spent much less time pondering the deep satisfaction of a good friend.

A similar thing happens in our own lives, writes science journalist Lydia Denworth. When something's gotta give, it's often our friendships, which take a backseat to our family and work obligations—or our latest fling.

But that's a mistake, she argues in her new book, "Friendship: The Evolution, Biology, and Extraordinary Power of Life's Fundamental Bond." In fact, research suggests that friendships can help us find purpose and meaning, stay healthy, and live longer. The intimacy, support, equality, and emotional bonds we have in our friendships are unique.

Her book honors the relationships forged through slumber parties, shoulders cried upon, and kindnesses that don't need to be repaid. "The science of friendship gives you permission to hang out with your friends and call it healthy," she says. "You're not being indulgent." In a conversation with Greater Good, Denworth explains why we need our friends and how to keep those connections strong—even in a pandemic.

KIRA NEWMAN: How does friendship change for people across their lifespan?

LYDIA DENWORTH: When you're very young, of course, your primary social relationship is with your parents or caregivers. But when kids go to school, they start to have deeper friendships that involve, first, doing things together, and then a deeper, shared emotional element. Then in adolescence, it becomes even more abstract and relational.

All the way through high school and college, friendships can feel easy because you are thrown into an environment where you have lots of same-age peers and the pool of potential friends is big. Also, when you're an adolescent, your brain is as attuned to social signals and connection as it will ever be. You are really hyper-interested in social activity.

Then in adulthood, as people start to have jobs and maybe get married or have a family, it can become harder to spend time with your friends. Toward the end of life, we tend to come back around to having a little bit more time once kids are grown and careers and jobs are less demanding.

There are these transition points in life when it's easier or harder to spend time with friends, but what is important for people to know is that friendship is a lifelong endeavor and that it is something that people should be paying attention to at all points in life. I think that people sometimes think (especially in their 30s and 40s), "I just don't have time for friends right now," and that's a mistake.

If you get to be 65 and then now you're ready to start paying attention to friends, well, it's a little bit like stopping smoking when you're 65. If you go from 15 to 65 and you smoke the whole time, it's still better to stop than not, but some damage will have been done. And if you don't pay attention to friends all the way along, the



“**Friendship is a lifelong endeavor and that it is something that people should be paying attention to at all points in life.**”

Lydia Denworth, author of "Friendship: The Evolution, Biology, and Extraordinary Power of Life's Fundamental Bond"

same thing is true.

NEWMAN: You observe in your book that we tend to neglect our friendships when we get busy, more so than other relationships. Can you say more about that?

DENWORTH: The reason we do that is that we feel more beholden to our family that we're related to, and that makes plenty of sense—we're legally and biologically connected to our family members. So, I'm not saying that we should be spending a lot less time with family. But we also feel that spending time with friends, instead of working, is indulgent.

My message is that it is not necessarily indulgent because having good, strong friendships is as important for yourself as diet and exercise, and so it's something you need to prioritize. If you are forever canceling on your friends or failing to make a point of seeing them or talking to them or interacting with them, then you are not being a good friend and you are not maintaining a strong relationship. You need your friends to be there down the road. But you have to do the work along the way, or they won't be there. Friendship does take some time, but that's kind of good news because (mostly) hanging out with your friends is fun.

The second half of the story, though, is that it's quite normal for there to be change in our friendships over the course of a lifetime, and that's OK. Friendship does need to be a relationship that's longstanding, but you can cycle through several longstanding friendships in the course of your life. So, it isn't that you can only stay friends with the people you knew when you were young, of course, because plenty of people do make friends in adulthood and those can become closer friends.

If a relationship is not healthy or even if it's just not serving you well—if it's not positive, if it's really draining, or if it's lopsided and one of you is always helping the other but not vice versa—that's not so great. I think people need to realize that it is OK to walk away from friendships that aren't good ones.

NEWMAN: That seems like the flip side of all the amazing benefits that we get when we have strong friendships: There's a lot of potential for pain when we have difficult,

conflict-ridden relationships.

DENWORTH: Just like a strong relationship is good for you, a negative relationship is bad for you. Even an ambivalent relationship is bad for you, it turns out, biologically.

Researchers had a scale of 1 to 5: How positive does this relationship make you feel, and how negative does this relationship make you feel? Anybody who was two or above on both things [positive or negative] counted as ambivalent, which is really broad. You could be five on the good and two on the bad. What was interesting was that any relationship that was categorized as ambivalent seemed to generate cardiovascular issues and other kinds of health problems. An ambivalent relationship is a relationship where you have positive feelings and negative feelings about the person or about your interactions with them. And that's true of a lot of our relationships—almost half.

It's not as surprising that a toxic relationship would be bad for your health. But I think that the problem with ambivalent relationships, which a lot of us have many of, is more surprising. I think most people suspect that the good outweighs the bad, and so far (it's early days in that research) it doesn't look that way.

I think that all this is a reminder of the importance of working on relationships—all of them, but including your friendships. There's real value in a positive friendship.

If it isn't positive, then you can do a couple of things. One is you can try to make it better, work on it, have a hard conversation, perhaps. Two is you quit and you say, "I'm not going to have this person in my life," but that can be very dramatic. And three would be that you shuffle that friend to the outer circles of your social life. Maybe it's not someone you can easily stop seeing, but if you don't rely on them emotionally anymore, then that's better for you.

NEWMAN: Are there some practices you would suggest or steps that you take in your own life to put more time and energy into friendship?

DENWORTH: It really does just begin as simply as paying attention and prioritizing. I try regularly to plan to get together with my close friends and the people I care about seeing a lot. We all have relatively busy lives, but I, first of all, make an effort



Friendships built over years and maintained over decades can contribute to our well-being in profound ways.

to make the plan, and then I make an effort to get there—to show up. I think showing up is a really critical piece of friendship, in every sense of the phrase.

It could just be that you don't have time to get together with someone for dinner for weeks, so you have a phone call and you catch up that way. Taking time to catch up on somebody's life and hear what's going on with them is an important indicator of "it's worth my time to know what's going on in your life."

In addition, I think it's useful to remember that science has clarified the definition of a quality relationship. It has to have these minimum three things: It's a stable, longstanding bond; it's positive; and it's cooperative—it's helpful, reciprocal, "I'm there for you, you're there for me."

When you're interacting with your friends, you should be thinking about your side of it. Am I contributing to that? Have I been helpful lately? When was the last time I said something nice or told somebody why I appreciated them or did something nice for someone? Am I a reliable presence in that person's life? You can think about the way you interact with your friends as needing to fall into those buckets, at a minimum.

The same thing goes for the online, as well: being positive, being helpful, showing up from a distance, whether that's just checking in by text or sending a funny joke or forwarding an article or calling—making time. People have been stressed and anxious lately, so we need to be there and provide an ear to listen, a shoulder to cry on, even virtually.

NEWMAN: Right now, people in many places haven't seen their friends for months. What do we miss out on when we can't be around our friends in person?

DENWORTH: There's a richness to being with your friends in person, and it hits all your senses. So, we're not getting any of the tactile sense of being with our friends, and there's a difference when you see them on a screen versus when you see them in person, although we don't entirely know, in neuroscientific terms, what those differences are yet.

One of the things our brains do automatically when we're having a conversation with someone in person is this natural

sense of "call and response." I'm talking, and then you respond, and then you talk and I respond. We are reading each other's cues in a way that makes it easier to do that.

When you're online, sometimes not only is there a little bit of an artificialness to the interaction but there's literally a lag that's built-in from the technology, and that is quite off-putting for our brains. Our brains recognize that as a different kind of interaction, and they don't like it very much. I think that's one reason why some people are being driven crazy by Zoom. And if you have a group on Zoom, it's very hard figuring out who's going to speak next. There's a way that we handle that with nonverbal cues in person that is harder to pull off virtually.

When you're in person, you can have a much more natural conversation. There's an ease and a warmth and a naturalness that we get when we're with our friends, and I think we really are missing the ability to hug them and high five—that's big stuff that matters a lot. So, it's a loss.

That said, people are reporting a lot of positive experiences, even remotely. We're being forced to interact virtually, but we're getting a lot of benefits out of it. It's not the same, but it's a whole lot better than nothing. Limited though it is, technology has been a lifesaver in this moment. I can't imagine what this would have been like if we didn't have it.

NEWMAN: What do you most hope people will take away from the book?

DENWORTH: That they will make friendship a priority, that they will call a friend and work harder on thinking about the importance of being a good friend, that parents will think about talking to kids about the importance of friendship and modeling being a good friend and prioritizing it. Parents are full of messages about achievement, and not as many messages about what it means to be a good friend. But I think it's one of the most important skills that a child can develop. Through all our lives, the importance of friendship has been hiding in plain sight.

Kira M. Newman is the managing editor at the Greater Good Science Center. This article was originally published on the Greater Good online magazine.

How to Help Someone You Live With Who Has Depression

COVID-19 has made it more important we know how to help those around us who are struggling

MONIKA PARKINSON & MARIA LOADES

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant sudden changes to our daily lives, with restrictions on free movement, imposed lockdown, and social distancing. Many of these measures have taken a toll on people's mental health.

These changes have increased our exposure to known risk factors for developing depression, such as physical inactivity, lack of structure and routine, lack of social support, loneliness, and limited opportunity to do enjoyable and valued activities.

Also, evidence from previous pandemics, such as SARS and swine flu, suggests that disease-containment measures, such as quarantine and social isolation, may be detrimental to mental health. There is growing evidence that the effect of these changes on people's mental health across the age groups is significant, especially for those who are younger.

Help the person gradually re-introduce activities and social contacts that they see as valuable.

Rates of depression in adults and young people are already concerning, and are predicted by the World Health Organization to rise. By 2030, depression will be the highest burden of disease globally, which refers to the overall impact of a health problem, including the financial cost. So although the initial focus during the pandemic has understandably been on physical health, it is therefore crucial that we also turn our attention to people's mental health, particularly as the two are related.

A lot of advice addresses the person with depression, but here we give advice on what you can do if you live with someone who is depressed.

Cues in Their Behavior

Many people find it difficult to ask for help and to let others know how they are feeling. Don't assume someone is OK just because they say they are. It's better to ask more questions and risk being annoying than to miss something important, such as symptoms of depression. If they don't want to tell you, watch their behavior, and notice anything unusual, such as sleeping much later, not eating, staring for long periods, canceling, and avoiding many things.

People's feelings are often linked to their thoughts and behavior, and this is demonstrated in the cognitive behavioral therapy model. When people feel depressed, they often

experience repeating streams of negative thoughts. It can be helpful to encourage someone who is thinking this way to try to look at different sides to a situation. Useful questions might be: "What advice would you give a friend in this situation?" or "What would be a more helpful way of thinking about this?"

Depression gives rise to self-critical thoughts, such as "I'm no good" or "I shouldn't feel this way." Not surprisingly, these thoughts then fuel further depression. It's helpful to let the depressed person know that you can see how they are feeling and that their feelings are understandable and valid, and will pass in time. This type of validation can help someone who is depressed refrain from criticizing themselves for having difficult feelings and help them develop more self-compassion.

People who are depressed commonly withdraw from other people and activities. By doing fewer enjoyable and valued activities, it can compound a person's depression. Try to counteract this by helping the person to re-engage with things that are important to them. Start with small things such as putting some structure into the day and perhaps increasing exercise, or time spent in nature, if possible. Help the person gradually re-introduce activities and social contacts that they see as valuable. Make some small plans together for the future (short, medium, and long term).

A person with depression may commonly find it difficult to problem-solve, and daily activities and issues can quickly start to feel overwhelming. It's helpful to stay calm and keep conflict and stress in the house to a minimum. Support the person to generate simple solutions to problems and encourage them to put these solutions and ideas into action rather than avoiding things.

Seek Outside Help

There are a number of other effective treatments for depression. Encourage the person you are supporting to seek extra help if needed. This might be in the form of online information and online courses for both adults and young people; through self-help books; or by contacting your local health care provider or mental health services in your area.

Remember, your well-being is extremely important when supporting someone with depression. Take time for self-care so you can model positive behaviors and be replenished enough to provide this crucial support.

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Watch for signs of depression in those around you, like a withdrawal from people and activities they normally enjoy.



Bring Home the Magic of Shen Yun!

