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POSITIVE AGING

Senior Sweethearts

Remarrying after a spouse has died has become more common

MARILYN MURRAY WILLISON

have a dear friend who has been a widow for three years. She recently told me that special days, like her birthday, Valentine's Day, or her anniversary always make her feel depressed. She knows that no one would ever love or pamper her the way her husband did. And that sobering fact always makes her very sad.

I let my friend cry on my shoulder for as long as she needed to. Then I looked her directly in the eyes and said: "I know that you feel very alone right now, but experience has taught me that you never know who or what might be right around the corner. I'm willing to bet that you won't always feel so lonely." She didn't know it, but I had just finished reading the latest data about people who fall in love later in life (sometimes much later). Statistically, she stands a good chance of once again becoming a much-loved wife.

There's no doubt about it: Romance among retired folks is definitely on the rise. For some, it may be a matter of loneliness, financial need, physical longing or merely a desire to feel loved again. Whatever the reason, there are far more 60-plus couples on the relationship landscape than ever before. And while the topic of senior intimacy might be uncomfortable for younger people, when it comes to the elderly, there are a variety of measurable benefits for togetherness. And perhaps the most important bonus is that elderly people who have a lover or a spouse tend to enjoy longer and happier lives.

Ten years ago, NPR's Connie Goldman published "Late-Life Love: Romance and New Relationships in Late Years," an insightful book including interviews with 22 older couples who were in love. In her words: "Late-life love—along with the challenges, joys, a loving partner. Whether you're 18 or and pleasures of re-mating in the later 80, love just might turn out to be the ears—continues to enrich the lives of real-deal fountain of youth so many. A colleague once told me that those of us in the winter of our lives can

Of course, lots of people over 65 are definitely not hoping to find a new partner. Many widows and widowers aren't looking for love because they're mourning the loss of their spouse. But according to the Pew Research Center, in 2013, 67 percent of individuals aged 55 to 64 had entered a "subsequent marriage."

This statistic shows a 12 percent increase in the number of older remarriages since 1960. Additionally, 34 per-

cent of adults ages 65 and older had remarried in 1960, but by 2013, that number had climbed to 50 percent.

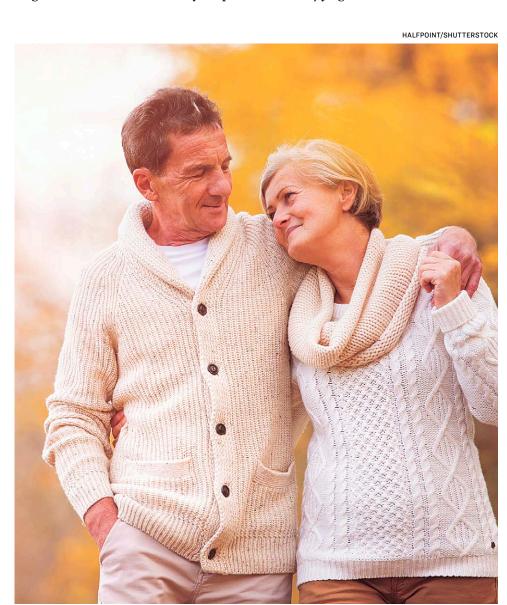
I know three lovely women—the youngest is 64, and the oldest is 77 who have lost their husbands within the last few years. Much to my surprise and delight, they have each found an attentive, serious, and worthy sweetheart, almost effortlessly. Their partner's ages range from 60 to 91. Right now, none of them are contemplating remarriage, but they all admit that it's wonderful and comfortable to have a male "companion and escort" for dinner dates, movies, and weekend getaways.

Whether you're **18 or 80, love** just might turn out to be the real fountain of youth.

Two of these women had husbands who experienced lengthy illnesses before their deaths, and they became their husbands' loving primary caregivers for the last two years of their lives. My third friend lost her husband of 40 years to an unexpected heart attack. I was surprised—and relieved—to see these women respond so warmly to their new sweethearts' romantic overtures. Obviously, the "widow's weeds" days, when women were punitively expected to mourn their departed spouse for the rest of their lives, are long gone.

Most widows and widowers today—not to mention those who are divorced—are anxious to reconnect and share their remaining years with

Marilyn Murray Willison has had a varied career as a six-time nonfiction author, columnist, motivational speaker, and journalist in both the U.K. and the U.S. She is the author of "The Self-Empowered Woman" blog and the award-winning memoir "One Woman, Four Decades, Eight Wishes." She can be reached at MarilynWillison.com. To find out more about Marilyn and read her past columns, please visit the Creators Syndicate webpage at Creators. com. Copyright 2020 Creators.com



Late-life romance has risen, giving widowers and widows a second chance at love.



MONKEY BUSINESS IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOC

WhyHuman Connection

Is Good for Your Health

TATIANA DENNING

think of eating a better diet or getting more exercise. But there is another simple—and perhaps more enjoyable—way to ensure a long and healthy life.

Just what is this magic method? Human connection. Socializing is more than just a way to spend our leisure time or have a little fun—it's important for our health. This is something researchers have discovered as they study people who age well and live the

Blue Zones

In recent years, areas known as Blue Zones have been making headlines for the longevity of those living there. These areas are known to have more people living past 100 years than other parts of the world. But why?

There are a few factors. A healthy diet and frequent walking are part of it, but close, personal relationships play a critical role in the good health and long lives of people in these areas.

In fact, their active and meaningful social lives may be more important than their healthy diets or physical activity. Sardinia, an island off the coast

of Italy, is considered a Blue Zone. It has six times as many centenarians as the Italian mainland, and ten times as many as North Psychologist Susan Pinker

points out that Sardinia also has the distinction of being one of the few areas in the world where the men live as long as the women. In the United States, women outlive men by an average of five years, according to CDC statistics. The greatest female longevity advantage is found in Russia, where women outlive men by an aver-

find social interactions more rewarding than men, which may improving our lead women to make more investin Sardinia encourages people towards general social engagement,

> Socializing seems to be key in longevity. But not just any form of socializing—face-to-face interaction is what really makes a

regardless of gender.

"Face-to-face contact releases a whole cascade of neurotransmitters," Pinker said. "So simply making eye contact with somebody, shaking hands, giving somebody a high-five is enough to release oxytocin, which increases your level of trust, and it lowers your cortisol levels. It lowers your stress. And dopamine is generated, which gives us a little high, and it kills pain. It's like a naturally produced morphine. This face-to-face contact provides stunning benefits, yet now almost a quarter of the population said they have no one to talk to."

Communicating through technology simply cannot provide the same kinds of benefits that real, human connection can.

On a side note, this has important implications in the current period of social distancing, when many of our everyday social interactions are being curtailed or

An article by Elder Care Alliance on the secrets of centenarians notes that consistent social interaction is a part of life for centenarians. "More than 80 percent communicate with a friend or family member daily," it notes. The network said that, for centenarians, being socially engaged with their community is vital to their longevity.

relationships are so important

A Prescription for Physical Health

Family physician Dr. Tzvi Doron believes that socializing and close

Some research shows women to the health of his patients, he prescribes socializing just as he would a medication.

"When I 'prescribe' social activities, I don't have to caution patients included among the group of tionships. But perhaps the culture about the potential negative side participants was eventual Presieffects. In fact, questionnaires at my practice often include questions about their social circle, social behaviors, and social network. It's that important to your health,"

> As a physician working with a geriatric population, I've come to discover the same. I once believed that diet, exercise, and our genes played the biggest roles in aging well. But as I've talked with more healthy, older patients over the years, I've found the most common factor they share is regular and consistent social lives.

> Many studies have borne out what we physicians have observed in our patients. One such study, led by Nikole Valtorta in the British Medical Journal, discovered that those who had poor social connections had a 29 percent increased risk of heart disease and a 32 percent increased risk of stroke. Surprisingly, even "perceived loneliness" has a negative impact on health, proving just how powerful the mind is.

> Socializing has been shown to have many health benefits, including decreased blood pressure, increased pain tolerance, and even improved immunity leading to a decreased incidence of the common cold and other

A study by Holt-Lunstad, Smith and Layton at Brigham Young showed that decreased social connections result in a 50 percent increased risk of early death, and is as harmful to our health as risk factors like smoking 15 cigarettes a day and obesity. Inflammation, a known contributor to things such as heart disease and arthritis, has also been shown to increase with decreased social

In essence, a lack of social interaction impacts health in much trist who joined the team of re-

Mental Health Impact Of course, it's not just

physical health that's impacted. Those who have regular social contact show a decrease in stress, anxiety, and depression while showing

ience and compassion. And while advances in technology have their benefits, there's just no replacing in-person, face-to-face contact for the positive psychological benefits it

A study by the American Geriatrics Society confirmed that regular and frequent contact with friends and family leads to a lower incidence of depression in the elderly. "Clinicians should consider encouraging face-to-face social interactions as a preventive strategy for depression," the authors suggested.

Studies have also shown that socializing not only improves memory, but may even help protect against Alzheimer's disease and dementia. The Journal of Gerontology followed 12,000 participants over a period of 10 years, and found a strong correlation between dementia and loneliness, demonstrating that those who feel the loneliest have a 40 percent increased risk for dementia.

Lessons Learned

It was during the Great Depression, in the year 1938, that Harvard began one of the world's longest known studies, the Harvard Study of Adult Development. The goal of the study was to discover the factors that contribute to a healthy and happy life. The ongoing study has now followed the health of participants for over 80 years. While it has expanded to include groups outside of Harvard, it has continued to follow the original remaining partici-

Now in their mid to late 90's, of the original Harvard group, only 19 are still alive. Interestingly, dent of the United States, John F.

Commenting on the study, the Harvard Gazette notes, "Close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives."

The Gazette article noted that those social ties protected people from life's various hardships, delayed mental and physical decline, and were better predictors of long and happy lives than were genes, social class, or IQ.

Decreased social connections result in a 50 percent increased risk of early death, and is as harmful to our health as risk factors such as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and obesity.

Professor Robert Waldinger, the study's fourth and current director, told the Harvard Gazette, "Taking care of your body is important, but tending to your relationships is a form of self-care too. That, I think, is the revelation." He goes on to say in his TED talk, "What Makes a Good Life? Lessons From the Longest Study on Happiness," that "Loneliness kills. It's as powerful as smoking or alcoholism."

Dr. George Vaillant, a psychia-

the same way chronic disease or searchers in 1966, and who went on to lead the study from 1972 through 2004, came to understand the vital role relationships play in living healthy, long, and happy lives, "The key to healthy aging is relationships, relationships, relationships," he con-

Looking Ahead

With studies showing rates of loneliness are rising at an alarming rate, AARP has developed a program called Connect2Affect. "By drawing attention to how isolation can harm both physical and brain health, we hope to empower and inspire older people to take steps themselves to increase the number and quality of their social contacts," said representative Sarah Lock.

Senior Planet is also trying to fill the need by offering more than 60 online programs for learning and connecting with others, while Element3 Health offers physical, social, and mental activities for members on insurance plans that have contracted for these

When I was considering writing this article last fall, the CCP virus (COVID-19) and social distancing were not part of our vernacular. Yet even then, a lack of personal connection could be found in all age groups, including in those as young as their teens.

As a matter of fact, the number of people who say they have no close friends has nearly tripled since 1985. While this may seem strange in the era of social media, Time Magazine points out, "the 'friends' orbiting at the farthest reaches of your digital galaxy aren't the ones that matter when it comes to your health and hap-

Of particular concern is the elderly, a group for whom social distancing and isolation have proven to be a real hardship.

While working last month in Florida, a state with a large population of healthy, active elderly folks, I heard the same story time and again, "Before the virus, I was never home. Like everyone in our neighborhood, I was always involved in some sort of social activity. When the lockdown began, we called each other every day, but gradually, the phone calls have become fewer and fewer, and now, I rarely tall to my friends."

With a look of sadness, this patient went on to say, "I can't go to the gym or our community pool, I can't hug my neighbor, I can't go out dancing with my husband, or even go to church ... and we don't know when we'll be able do these things again. I find myself becoming a bit depressed

Amidst this difficult situation, Very Well Mind has listed some things folks can do to help maintain some sort of normalcy in their lives. For example, sticking to a daily, planned routine and schedule, taking a walk around your neighborhood every day, working on an art or home improvement project, gardening, joining an online book club like the one at Goodreads, connecting with family or friends on a daily basis, or connecting with someone else who's stuck at home through QuarntineChat, can all help you feel more connected and give you something to look

We are designed to be social beings; it's part of who we are. That's why social isolation has long been used as a form of torture for prisoners of war—its impact is that significant.

Our human connection helps provide us with a sense of belonging, a sense of purpose, and a sense of well-being, not to mention the positive effects it has on our mental and physical health.

With society's current situation, let's hope we're not making the cure worse than the disease.

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.

Youth Suffer **Greater Mental** Health Decline During Pandemic, Study Finds Restrictions, worries brought about by COVID-19 take different tolls on different people, researchers say

KATHRYN ABEL & MATTHIAS PIERCE

blic health responses to the pandemic have focused on preventing the spread of the virus, limiting the number of deaths, and easing the burden on health care systems. But there's also another, less visible potential epidemic we should be focusing on: mental

Our recent study found that people's mental health worsened following the onset of the pandemic. We discovered that by analyzing data provided by 17,452 adults in the United Kingdom who were surveyed in April as part of the UK Household Longitudinal Study. This is a large ongoing study of people who contribute data every year, some from as far back as 1992.

Not everyone, we discovered, was affected equally. Young people, women, and those with small children saw their mental health worsen significantly more than other groups.

How We Measured Distress

The survey measured mental health using 12 questions, which covered people's difficulties with sleep, concentration, and decision-making, as well as their emotional state, such as whether they were feeling strained or overwhelmed.

People's answers were then assigned a value between zero and four, with higher scores indicating worse mental health. These scores were added together to give each person a total of between zero and 36, which offered an overall measure of their mental health. We also applied a separate scoring system to people's answers to estimate whether they were showing clinically significant levels of psychological distress—that is if their distress was

Young people, women, and those with smal children saw their mental health worsen significantly more than other groups.

We found that many common and well-known mental health differences persisted in the middle of the lockdown.

high enough to potentially need medical

We found that many common and wellknown mental health differences persisted in the middle of the lockdown. For instance, women showed substantially worse mental health than men (with a mean score of 13.6 compared with 11.5), and one-third of women had clinically significant levels of distress compared with one-fifth of men.

Mental health also tended to get worse further down the income scale. The lowest fifth of earners had an average score of 13.9, with 32 percent showing clinically significant levels of distress. This compared with an average score of 12.0 in the highest fifth of earners, of whom 26 percent showed

Yet, while this told us where the mental health need was, it didn't tell us what the pandemic's effects had been. We got a better sense of this by comparing this year's scores with prior measurements—and indeed, mental health was, on average, worse this year. Average scores have risen from 11.5 in the 2018–19 financial year to 12.6 in the recording made in April. We also saw a significant overall increase in the proportion of people showing clinical levels of distress: 19 percent in 2018–19 versus 27 percent in April.

However, because the pandemic arose against a background of worsening mental health in the UK, we expected some deterioration. We took account of this by looking at each individual's pre-pandemic answers, stretching back to 2014. These helped us predict what the scores were likely to have been in April, had the pandemic not hap-

Overall, we found that scores were 0.5 points worse this year than we would have expected, suggesting that the pandemicspecifically—has had an effect on mental

Not Everyone Is Affected Equally

This worsening of mental health differed considerably for different groups. Compared to what we would have predicted to see, men's scores got only marginally worse (+0.06), while the change for women was far greater (+0.92). Young people, aged 18–24, were most affected, seeing a relative increase of 2.7 over what we would have expected if the pandemic had not happened.

We had also predicted that fear of the virus would be a driver of poorer mental health and that this would disproportionately affect key workers or people with unthe case.

The factors driving the decline in some people's mental health aren't yet clear. But some clues are revealed when we consider who was most affected. The deterioration in women and those with young children points to the difficulty of managing the domestic load during the lockdown. Having young children is challenging at any point, and we know that reliable support from family members, paid childcare, and friends lessen its difficulty. The government's social restrictions and lockdown abruptly cut off most of these supports.

The effects on young people are especially troubling to see. These have happened against a background, in the past decade, of significant worsening mental health for young people and of young people's mental health services struggling to cope.

Some young people are vulnerable to social isolation and are affected badly by being withdrawn from school. They may lose oversight of their well-being by teachers and other responsible adults, as well as

access to regular meals and peer support from friends.

Could There Be Long-Term Effects?

As lockdown measures ease, we may see improvements in people's mental health. It remains to be seen whether there will be any long-term effects, such as preexisting mental health demographic differences becoming more entrenched.

The pandemic has brought people's differing life circumstances into stark contrast. Access to outside space, household crowding, food insecurity, domestic violence, addiction, maintenance of social connectivity, and economic reserves are all relevant to mental health. It's likely these differences will become more important during the anticipated economic recession, and these may have different effects on mental health compared with the government lockdown.

What these changes will do to people's overall health, well-being, and family isn't known. But to mitigate and manage any additional mental health needs requires them to be closely monitored. People also need to receive high-quality information about mental health in public health messaging and be provided with adequately resourced services.

We would do well to remember that our mental health is as important as our physical health, and this shouldn't be lost in our future planning.

Kathryn Abel is a professor of psychological medicine at the University of Manchester in the UK, and Matthias Pierce is a research fellow in psychology and mental health at the University of Manchester. This article was first published on The Conversation.

Lonely and Confused: Coping With Dementia During COVID

Caregivers and their charges struggle as resources and freedom disappear during the pandemic

HEIDI DE MARCO

Daisy Conant, 91, thrives from routine. One of her favorites is reading the newspaper with her morning coffee. But, lately, the news surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic has been more agitating than pleasurable.

"We're dropping like flies," she said one recent morning, throwing her hands up.

"She gets fearful," explained her grandson Erik Hayhurst, 27. "I sort of have to pull her back and walk her through the

Conant hasn't been diagnosed with dementia, but her family has a history of Alzheimer's. She had been living independently in her home of 60 years, but Hayhurst decided to move in with her in 2018 after she showed clear signs of memory loss and fell repeatedly.

For a while, Conant remained active, meeting up with friends and neighbors to walk around her neighborhood, attend church, and visit the corner market. Hayhurst, a project management consultant, juggled caregiving with his job.

Then COVID-19 came, wrecking Conant's routine and isolating her from friends and loved ones. Hayhurst has had to remake his life, too. He suddenly became his grandmother's only caregiver—other family members can visit only from the lawn.

COVID-19 has upended the lives of dementia patients and their caregivers. Adult daycare programs, memory cafes, and support groups have shut down or moved online, providing less help for caregivers and less social and mental stimulation for patients. Fear of spreading the virus limits in-person visits from friends and family.

These changes have disrupted longstanding routines that millions of people with dementia rely on to help maintain health and happiness.

"The pandemic has been devastating to older adults and their families when they are unable to see each other and provide practical and emotional support," said Lynn Friss Feinberg, a senior strategic policy adviser at AARP Public Nearly 6 million Americans age 65

and older have Alzheimer's disease, the most common type of dementia. An estimated 70 percent of them live in the community, primarily in traditional home settings, according to the Alzheimer's Association 2020 Facts and Figures journal.

People with dementia, particularly those in the advanced stages of the disease, live in the moment, said Sandy Markwood, CEO of the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging. They may not understand why family members aren't visiting or, when they do, why they don't come into the house, she added.

"Visitation under the current restrictions, such as a drive-by or window visit, can actually result in more confusion," Markwood said. The burden of helping patients cope

with these changes often falls on the

more than 16 million people who provide unpaid care for people with Alzheimer's or other dementias in the United States.

The Alzheimer's Association's 24-hour Helpline has seen a shift in the type of assistance requested during the pandemic. Callers need more emotional support, their situations are more complex, and there's a greater "heaviness" to the calls, said Susan Howland, programs director for the Alzheimer's Association California Southland Chapter.

"So many [callers] are seeking advice on how to address gaps in care," said Beth Kallmyer, the association's vice president of care and support. "Others are simply feeling overwhelmed and just need someone to reassure them."

Because many activities that bolstered dementia patients and their caregivers have been canceled due to physicaldistancing requirements, dementia and caregiver support organizations are expanding or trying other strategies, such as virtual wellness activities, check-in calls from nurses, and online caregiver support groups. EngAGED, an online resource center for older adults, maintains a directory of innovative programs developed since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The changes have disrupted long-standing routines that millions of people with dementia rely on to help maintain health and happiness.

They include pen pal services and letter-writing campaigns, robotic pets, and weekly online choir rehearsals.

These may not always be enough. Hayhurst, for example, has experienced some rocky moments during the pandemic.

He said it was hard for Conant to understand why she needed to wear a mask. Eventually, he made it part of their routine when they leave the house on daily walks. Conant has now learned to put on her mask without prompting.

"At first it was a challenge," Hayhurst said. "She knows it's part of the ritual

People with dementia can become agitated when being taught new things, said Dr. Lon Schneider, director of the Alzheimer's Disease Research Center at the University of Southern California. To reduce distress, he said, caregivers should enforce mask-wearing only when necessary.

That was a lesson Gina Moran of Fountain Valley, California, learned early on. Moran, 43, cares for her 85-vear-old mother. Alba Moran, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2007.

"I try to use the same words every time," Moran said. "I tell her there's a virus going around that's killing a lot of people, especially the elderly. And she'll

HEIDI DE MARCO/KHN

Alba Moran must be reminded about the COVID-19 pandemic when she is asked to wear her mask.

respond, 'Oh, I'm at that age."

If Moran forgets to explain the need for a mask or social distancing, her mother gets combative. She raises her voice and refuses to listen to Moran, much like a child throwing a tantrum, Moran said. "I can't go into more information than that because she won't understand," she said. "I try to keep it simple."

The pandemic is also exacerbating feelings of isolation and loneliness, and not just for people with dementia, said Dr. Jin Hui Joo, associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. "Caregivers are lonely, too."

When stay-at-home orders first came down in March, Hayhurst's grandmother repeatedly said she felt lonesome, he recalled. "The lack of interaction has made her feel far more isolated."

To keep her connected with family and friends, he regularly sets up video conference calls.

But Conant struggles with the concept of seeing familiar faces through the computer screen. During a Zoom call on her birthday last month, Conant tried to cut pieces of cake for her guests.

Moran also feels isolated, in part be cause she's getting less help from family. In addition to caring for her mom, Moran studies sociology online and is in the process of adopting 1-year-old Viviana. Right now, to minimize her mother's exposure to the virus, Moran's sister is the only person who visits a couple of times a week.

"She stays with my mom and baby so I can get some sleep," Moran said. Before COVID-19, she used to get out more on her own. Losing that bit of free time makes her feel lonely and sad, she

"I would get my nails done, run errands by myself and go out on lunch dates with friends," Moran said. "But

Heidi de Marco is a reporter and producer for California Healthline. This story was produced by Kaiser Health News, which publishes California Healthline, a service of the California Health Care Foundation.

CONNECT TO LEAD

Managing Hard Conversations

Connecting is crucial, even when it is over bad news

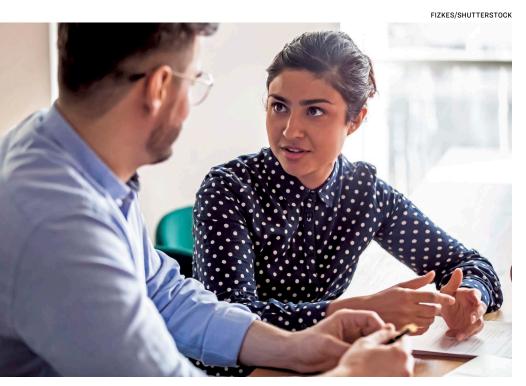
SCOTT MANN

The other day, I was on a call with the leader of a manufacturing company and he was talking about how this pandemic has put a huge pinch on his business. One of his unfortunate roles as the leader of this company is being the bearer of bad news and having the hard conversations about furlough with his employees. Even when they've been able to bring back some of those furloughed employees, they avoided him and looked at him like the face of death itself.

Hard conversations are part of our re-

this pandemic start to make themselves known. That's why the mindset of human connection is crucial. In this new arena, we've got to think about how we connect in order to be relevant on the other side. People are going to get furloughed and laid off, and because we're meaning-seeking, emotional, social beings who thrive on connection, our relationship portfolio is our greatest asset—especially in a crisis. If you're a leader and you truly value peo-

ple, there's nothing easy about this. Even if you're good at it, it takes a toll. So, how do we have these hard conversations yet ality as the economic constraints from still keep the relationship intact? We have



People may not expect a leader to coddle them, but they do expect that leader to be clear and direct.

to develop the mindset of delivering bad news with dignity and respect.

The first thing to do, if you know a hard conversation is coming up, is prepare. Automatically, you're going to go into a sympathetic state. You will go into a state of fight, flight, or freeze, where your anxieties go up. Prepare to bring that energy down so that it sets an Before a difficul emotional temperature that's

more manageable for the conversation. Pre-engagement preparation is a great way to do that. It takes less than five

Five to 10 minutes before the conversation, go to a quiet area where you won't be interrupted, close your eyes, take three deep, lower-body breaths, and slowly say, "I have time." Repeat this process three times. Then ask and answer the following questions out loud: "Who am I? Why am I here? What do they

need from me?" Finally, open your eyes and do some ballistic movement, such as push-ups, jumping jacks, or stretches.

The more direct you can be, the better. People don't expect you to be nice to them, but they expect you to be straight with them. That doesn't mean that we hurt feelings or that we're cold, it

conversation,

pause to conside

the broader

purpose your

eam is working

ed. Nesting your actions in the context of the larger purpose of the organization is always a useful mindset and will be a great anchor point in a difficult conversation.

simply means that we are nest-

You also have to be careful about damaging someone's identity. We all assess our worth in the context of other people. Without even meaning to, you can make a hurtful comment about someone's performance or economic relevance. "Nonessential," in many cases, can be a harmful term. We've got to be careful

about how we use words in this context because, as humans, we take things right to our core.

A few years ago, I was coaching an Afghan army officer about how his folks weren't properly pulling security on patrol. He took that right to his identity. I should have started that conversation by saying: "Hey, your soldiers are great soldiers. They're motivated and working hard. There are a few little areas that they need to work on. Would it be OK if I share that with you?" Do you see

If you're going to have to have a hard conversation, it's important to rehearse. As a whole, we don't rehearse enough for our high-stakes engagements. Taking the time to rehearse the engagement before it happens is critical.

After the hard conversation, have a micro recovery, even if it's just turning off the lights in your office and doing some deep breathing to bring yourself back RooftopLeadership.com

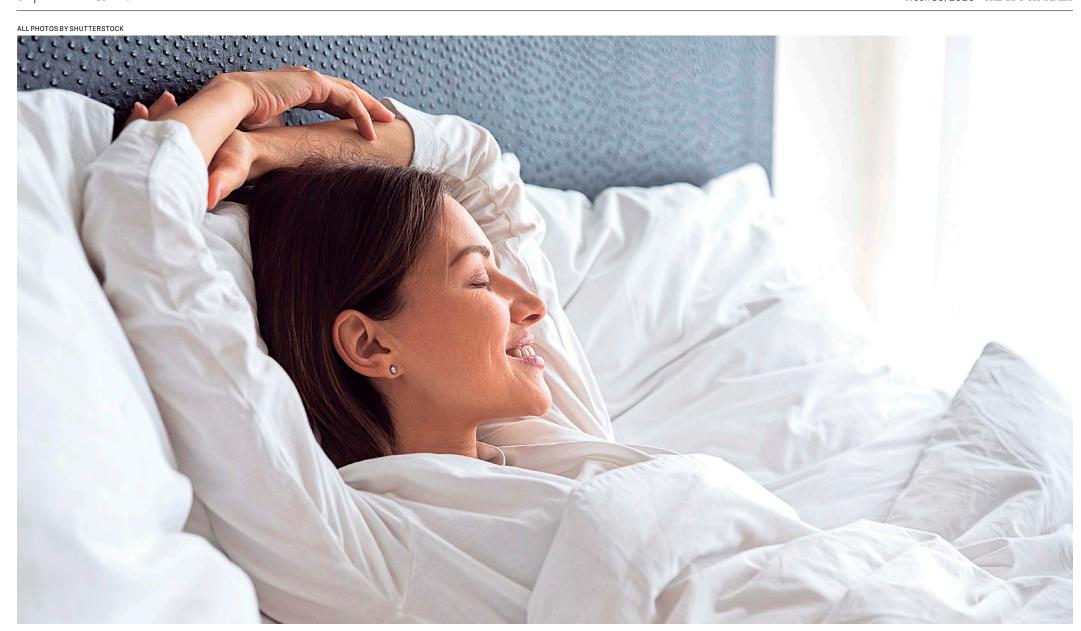
into a parasympathetic state. Give yourself permission to recover and metabolize that anxiety out of your body. Otherwise it starts to stack up, especially if you have to deliver a lot of hard conversations.

Those are some tips that you can put into play right away to improve your mindset regarding hard conversations. Prepare, be direct, nest your actions in the larger purpose of the organization, be careful about damaging the person's identity, rehearse, and recover. I hope that serves you in these trying times, and remember: Fear is contagious, but so is leadership.

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

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Week 36, 2020. THE EPOCH TIMES



Stress, Sleep, and Natural Strategies That Work

A lack of sleep can feed vicious cycle that leaves you anxious, stressed, feeling terrible

LISA ROTH COLLINS

any people have experienced a rise in stress in the past few months. Sleep problems arising from that stress have some people seeking natural ways to reduce stress and enjoy the restorative sleep we all

> Self-quarantine, social isolation, closed schools, lost jobs, fears of infection, and not knowing what lies around the corner are all weighing heavily on our minds. Even the vacations that would help us unwind have been put on hold indefinitely.

Of course, for some people, the slowdown resulting from the pandemic has been a chance to unwind. But for others, it has brought on entirely new problems.

For people facing unexpected and unwelcome upheaval, stress and anxiety can take a significant toll on the body, mind, and spirit, contributing to health concerns.

Sleep deprivation, one of those problems, feeds a vicious cycle: You are stressed and anxious during the day and can't sleep, and due to lack of sleep, you are more stressed and anxious as you try to get through the day.

Strategies to Reduce Stress

It's been said that knowing other people share your suffering can help you better cope. However, the best strategy is to take action. Here are a few ways to reduce stress naturally.

Self-care: Practice some self-love routines. A massage, bubble bath, home facial, dry brushing, and selfmanicure can be a way to tend to yourself. Self-care can also mean taking the time to do something you really enjoy and makes you feel good about yourself.

Deep breathing exercises: Try this simple stress reducer several times throughout the day: Breathe in slowly through your nose to the count of eight, hold it for four to five seconds, then release through your mouth to the count of seven. Repeat three to five times each session.

Practice yoga. You don't need to put yourself into a pretzel pose. Watch a beginner's yoga lesson on video or TV and practice a few simple poses every day. The combination of controlled breathing with poses and meditation can do wonders for reducing stress.

Be mindful. Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to the moment-by-moment passage of your feelings, thoughts, and environment. Allow yourself to put the past and future aside, and focus on what is before you—and inside you.

Nourish yourself. Treat your body, mind, and spirit to nutritious, whole foods, and minimize or eliminate processed foods as much as possible. This approach will help keep you in balance.

Enjoy exercise. Physical activity releases the feel-good hormones known as endorphins. It also improves the health of your heart and nervous system, and enhances you enjoy every day, such as walking, biking, jazzercise, tai chi, swimming, or

Strategies to Improve Sleep

Relaxation

and sleep

are essen-

tal clarity

tial for men-

and physical

To really make sure you unwind and get the best sleep possible, it's a good idea to combine your favorite strategies to reduce stress with ways to improve the quality of your sleep.

Tune out. You may love your electronic devices, but they aren't sleep-friendly.

Tune out or turn them off at least one hour before retiring. Their blue light interferes with the sleep hormone

> Keep a schedule. Go to bed and get up at the same time every day, even the weekends. Resist taking a nap in the afternoon (unless it's truly needed) and avoid staying up late and then sleeping in. These habits can play havoc with your circadian

Chill out. Before bedtime, enjoy a relaxing activity, such as listening to soothing music, taking a warm bath, or drinking a cup of

chamomile tea. Meditation is a great way to deeply unwind. An essential oil diffuser with lavender, rose, or peppermint oils can help provide a calming atmosphere.

Use a natural supplement. A wide variety of natural supplements can help calm the mind and relax the body—both essential to the goal of getting a restful night's sleep. Let's look at some of those possibilities.

Supplements for Stress and Sleep

The above strategies can go a long way toward relieving stress and aiding restful sleep. However, sometimes a natural supplement can also help.

D-Stress: The key ingredient in this supplement is steam-distilled lavender oil, known for its ability to help relieve stress and restlessness. Lavender has several constituents, including linalool and linalyl acetate, which work in the body to promote

Chill Pills: This supplement contains

herbs and vitamins that may reduce irritability by promoting relaxation. Ingredients include ashwagandha, L-theanine, holy basil, and vitamins B1 and B5.

Sleep 8: This supplement includes some of the most effective natural sleep aids available, such as chamomile, hops, passionflower, melatonin, skullcap, catnip,

Allow yourself to put the past and future aside, and focus on what is before you—and inside you.

Merry Mind Omega 3: This contains the healthy essential fat known as EPA (eicosapentaenoic acid) It's called essential because the body doesn't produce EPA, so it's important to keep providing it in the form of foods, such as certain fatty fish, or

Joyful. This supplement contains 11 botanical extracts, vitamins, and amino acids that can benefit mood and cognition, and also restore calm to the nervous system. Those ingredients include 5-HTP, tryptophan, vitamin D3, methylfolate, methylcobalamin (B12), vitamin B6, L-theanine, gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), san qi, phellodentron, and magnolia.

GABA. Gamma-aminobutyric acid is an amino acid that plays a critical role in calming the nervous system. Once you take GABA, it interferes with GABA receptors, which, in turn, ultimately reduces the excitability of neurons and promotes stress

L-Theanine. Green tea is the source of this amino acid, which has the ability to cross the blood-brain barrier. This allows it to boost alpha brain-wave frequency, which in turn reduces stress. But green tea also contains caffeine, so if you are getting your L-theanine there, don't drink it close

Bottom Line

The unprecedented levels of stress that many people face today take their toll. Sleep problems are important to address because sleep is when our body restores itself: Heart rate decreases, tissues are repaired, growth hormones are secreted, immune system cells are produced, cellular waste is cleaned out, and stress hormones are turned off.

A combination of lifestyle changes is the most crucial way to ensure good sleep but high-quality supplements designed to address these concerns can also help.

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

Seeds Of Good Health

These 5 nutritional powerhouses feed your health and help fight off disease

Seeds—as the starting point for growing rich, thriving plants are a source of complex nutrition. They deliver fiber and a formidable list of good fats and nutrients with tremendous value for our health and well-being.

They are rich in minerals, vitamins, and antioxidants that protect the plant DNA from oxidative stress and help perpetuate the species. They also contain beneficial components in the endosperm to sustain the embryo's growth.[i]

There's significant evidence that increased consumption of seeds can lower the risk for cardiovascular disease, notably reducing risk factors such as high blood

Seeds played a major role in pre-agricultural diets due to their high energy content and nutrient density. But they remain a crucial part of nutrition today for their unique composition—and distinct benefits for wellness. Here are five seeds that can be a rich addition to your everyday diet.

Flaxseed

Flaxseed is a rich source of the plant-based omega-3 fat alphalinolenic acid (ALA) as well as lignans and fiber. These all enhance health through their antiinflammatory and antioxidant properties.[iii] Current evidence highlights the role of flaxseed in a range of cardiovascular conditions, breast cancer, and other cancers, gastrointestinal problems and hormonal status in menopausal women.

In a systematic review, researchers associated flax with decreased breast cancer risk, where the seed helped stunt potential cancer spread and reduce mortality risk antibacterial properties against on the GreenMedInfo.com dadisease.[iv]

Studies also concluded that flax can heal arteries, help manage weight, and reduce obesity in Hemp Seed and even help treat carpal tunnel

syndrome.[v],[vi],[vii],[viii] There are at least 150 abstracts found on the GreenMedInfo flaxseed database online.

Nigella Sativa (Black Seed) Nigella sativa (N. sativa), or black seed, has a long history of dietary and medicinal uses. It hails from the Ranunculacaeae family and is found in Southern Europe and North Africa. Due to its important attributes, it has a rich historical and religious background.[ix]

Seeds played a major role in preagricultural diets due to their high energy content and nutrient density.

N. sativa and its oil have been widely used for centuries to treat various ailments. Among Muslims, it is deemed a great miracle for healing that can remedy many illnesses, thus earning a revered place in tibb-e-nabawi, or prophetic medicine. As a remedy, N. sativa's flexible benefits have been found helpful for a variety of conditions:

Type 2 diabetes: Two grams of black seed a day led to decreased fasting glucose, reduced insulin resistance, increased beta-cell function, and decreased glycosylated hemoglobin (HbA1c) in a study with human subjects.[x] Epilepsy: A 2007 study with epileptic children, whose condition was resistant to conventional drug therapy, found that a water

extract of black cumin significantly slashed seizure activity. Black seed is traditionally known to have anti-convulsive action.[xi] High blood pressure: Using 100 milligrams (mg) to 200 mg of black seed extract twice every day for two months led to a blood pressure-lowering effect in mildly hypertensive individuals.[xii]

MRSA: Black seed has strong clinical isolates of methicillinresistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA).[xiii]

overweight subjects. It can also Hemp seeds offer a creamy, nutty protect against ovarian cancer taste and have versatile uses in the kitchen. They are a nutritious

addition to cereals and granola, salad dressings, and desserts, and more. But they are also a rich source of easily digestible proteins, along with an ideal balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fats. Hemp seeds have essential amino acids, antioxidants, and other nutrients that help us

achieve optimal health. The nutrients of help seeds have several health benefits. They can nourish hair, skin, and nails, fight dryness and inflammatory conditions such as eczema, and exhibit anti-rheumatoid arthritis properties. They also provide an abundance of fiber, and brainnourishing omega-3s and minerals such as iron, phosphorus, magnesium, and zinc.[xiv],[xv] Hemp seed can be added to your smoothies, sprinkled on

your morning bowl of granola,

or added to bread or muffins.

Sesame Seed

Sesame seeds are interesting in their variety of colors, from black to white to yellow or red. They come from the tropical plant Sesamum indicum, believed to have hailed from Africa. They are commercially cultivated today in countries like India, China, and

The magic phrase "open sesame" from "Arabian Nights" likely rings a bell for many, and it may be interesting to know that this is based on the seeds growing pods bursting open once ripe. It's just as curious to know that sesame seeds are packed with nutritious components, from vitamin B1 to minerals such as calcium, magnesium, manganese, phosphorus, and zinc.

As a therapeutic agent, sesame seeds are widely recognized for their healthful effects against cardiovascular disease and diabetes. They are thought to exert a beneficial effect on endothelial function in hypertensive males,[xvi] as well as lead to a synergistic effect with an antidiabetic medication in Type 2 diabetes patients.[xvii]

You can see more primary research on sesame seed benefits

Chia Seed

We're wrapping up this list with a superfood that's popular and has found its way to virtually everything from water and juices to salads and stir-fry to pancakes.





Nigella sativa



Chia seeds



Chia, or Salvia hispanica L., originated in Mexico and Guatemala, and has served as an integral part of people's diet for the past 5,500 years.[xviii] It was traditionally used by Aztecs and Mayans in preparing folk medicine as well as for food and canvases.

This seed is a reliable source of the polyunsaturated fatty acids omega-3 and omega-6 as well as soluble dietary fiber. It also has notable amounts of protein and phytochemicals.[xix] This nutritional profile is why chia is used to treat several diseases, including high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes.

A 2010 study probed the effects of chia on postprandial glycemia and prolonging satiety. It concluded that these favorable effects potentially explain improvements in blood pressure, coagulation, and inflammatory markers previously observed after 12-week chia supplementation in Type 2 diabetic subjects.[xx]

For links to the research studies referenced in this article, please find it online at The Epoch Times. com/author-greenmedinfo.

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is one of

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Walking–Especially After Dinner–Helps Control Blood Sugar

Researchers have discovered it isn't just how long you walk, but when, that makes the difference

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

It's really easy to make a beeline for the sofa after dinner. You've had a long day and a satisfying meal, so a little "me time" is in order. Some television time or some screen scrolling is tempt-

But before retiring to this kind of relaxation, you might want to strap on your shoes and go for a short walk.

You might have heard that exercise can help keep blood sugar under control. And it's true; exercise has been repeatedly shown to lower blood sugar. But guess what? You can get even more out of it if it's appropriately timed.

Walking for about 15 minutes after you eat, particularly after dinner, can help prevent harmful

When you walk and your muscles contract, stored glucose (glycogen) is being used.



blood sugar spikes that lead to metabolic conditions such as Type 2 diabetes.

One study from 2013 found that when people at risk for Type 2 diabetes went for a 15-minute post-meal walk, they had significantly smaller blood sugar spikes in the hours afterward. They even found the results were better than in people who went for 45-minute walks in the mid-morning or late

Your body draws on glucose sugar—from food to supply its fuel. When you walk and your muscles contract, stored glucose (glycogen) is being used. Those stores need to be refilled with blood glucose, which is shuttled to your cells by a hormone called insulin.

People with diabetes, prediabetes, or metabolic syndrome have impaired insulin activity, causing too much glucose to remain in the bloodstream. This can lead to several chronic health conditions. Other studies have shown just

10 minutes of post-dinner walking is effective in bringing down blood sugar. Walking post-dinner is likely most effective in bringing down blood sugar because it's typically the time when glucose metabolism is at its slowest. Then, as you

sleep and aren't moving, glucose can sit in the bloodstream. Going for a walk in the evening can help keep glucose metabolism at a higher level throughout the night. If you're exercising to keep on Bel Marra Health.

blood sugar under control, pay attention to timing. You could get significantly more benefit by walking after meals, particularly in the evening. Spending 10 to 15 minutes before settling down can pay big dividends.

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COVID Masks

An Environmental Menace That Can Last Generations

Discarded face masks

Discarded masks also risk spreading coronavirus to waste collectors, litter pickers, and people who come across them

KEIRON PHILIP ROBERTS, CRESSIDA BOWYER, SIMON KOLSTOE & STEVE FLETCHER

ace coverings are now a legal requirement in many public spaces that in certain conaround the world. But even beditions, the virus fore they became compulsory, can survive on a masks were causing litter problems on land and at sea.

One February beach clean in Hong Kong found 70 masks along 100 meters of shoreline, with 30 more appearing a week later. In the Mediterranean, masks have reportedly been seen floating like jellyfish.

The majority of masks are manufactured from long-lasting plastic materials, and if discarded can persist in the environment for decades to hundreds of years.

Despite millions of people being told to use face masks, little guidance has been given on how to dispose of or recycle them

down restrictions, billions of masks will be needed each month globally. Without better disposal practices, an environmental menace is looming.

The majority of masks are manufactured from long-lasting plastic materials, and if discarded can persist in the environment for decades to hundreds of years. This means they can have a number of impacts on the environment and people.

Hazardous to People and Animals Initially, discarded masks may risk

spreading coronavirus to waste collectors, litter pickers, or members of the public who first come across the litter. We know plastic surgical mask for seven

Over the medium to long term, animals and plants are also affected. Through its sheer mass, plastic waste can smother environments and break up ecosystems. Some animals also cannot tell the difference between plastic items and their prey, subsequently choking on pieces of litter.

Even if they don't choke, animals can become malnourished as the materials fill up their stomachs but provide no nutrients. Smaller animals may also become entangled in the elastic within the masks or within gloves as they begin to break apart.

Plastics break down into smaller pieces over time, and the longer litter is in the environment, the more it will decompose. Plastics first break down into microplassafely. And as countries begin to lift lock-

plastics. These tiny particles and fibers are often long-lived polymers that can accumulate in food chains. Just one mask can produce millions of particles, each with the potential to also carry chemicals and bacteria up the food chain—all the way back

Littered areas also tend to encourage further littering, making the problem worse.

What You Should Do

In March, the World Health Organization estimated that 89 million additional disposable masks were needed globally per month in medical settings to combat COVID-19. In addition, a recent work-

ing paper by the Plastic Waste Innovation Hub at University College London has put the current domestic demand for the United Kingdom alone at 24.7 billion masks a year. However, the demand for domestic face masks in the UK drops dramatically—to around 136 million a year—if only reus-

able masks are used. But even with reusable by sea creatures and masks, their specific design and how you choose to clean them makes a difference. The

University College London team examined the manufacture, use, and disposal of masks that were disposable, reusable, and reusable with disposable filters, to calculate their overall environmental impact. They found machine washing reusable masks with no filters had the lowest impact over a year.

Hand washing masks increased the environmental impact as—while machine

washing uses electricity—manual washing uses more water and detergent for each mask. Disposable filters also increase the environmental impact because the small filters are often made from plastic similar to the disposable masks, with a filter discarded after every use.

Perhaps surprisingly, the working paper estimates that hand washing reusable masks with disposable filters had the highest environmental impact overall—higher even than using fully disposable masks. With all of this in mind, we should take these steps to reduce the impact of wearing

- 1. Use reusable masks without disposable filters. Machine wash them regularly following the instructions for the fabric. 2. Try to carry a spare so if something goes wrong with the one you're wearing you don't need to use or buy a disposable
- 3. If you do need to use a disposable mask, take it home (maybe in a bag if you have to take it off) and then put it straight into a bin with a lid. If this isn't possible, place it in a proper public bin.
- 4. Don't put disposable masks in the recycling. They can get caught in specialist recycling equipment and be a potential biohazard to waste workers. 5. Whatever you do, don't litter your mask.

Keiron Philip Roberts is a research fellow in clean carbon technologies and resource management at the University of Portsmouth in the U.K. Cressida Bowyer is a senior research fellow in the faculty of creative and cultural industries at the University of Portsmouth. Simon Kolstoe is a senior lecturer in evidence-based healthcare and university ethics adviser at the University of Portsmouth. Steve Fletcher is a professor of ocean policy and economy at the University of Portsmouth. This article was first published on The





CONAN MILNER

ou can only survive a few weeks without food and just a few days without water. But without air, you'd be lucky to last a few minutes.

The link between life and breath has always been clear, but it took modern science to reveal the mechanics at the cellular level. Our cells are nourished by food and water but they need oxygen to break them down. Cells also excrete another gas, carbon di-

these gases is called respiration. If respiration is compromised, cells get weak, sluggish, and die prematurely.

Lungs are the organs best associated with respiration, but the process is crucial for all our cells. The better our cells can breathe, the healthier our entire body.

Our Lungs and Disease

Our lungs drive respiration in two ways. First, they act like bellows, mechanically pumping air in and out of the body. Second, they transfer this air into and out of our oxide, as waste. The body's circulation of blood with microscopic sacs called alveoli.

With each breath, alveoli deposit oxygen into the blood and pull carbon dioxide out of it. We have hundreds of millions of alveoli facilitating this gas exchange. If one took all the alveoli from an adult pair of lungs and spread them out, it would equal

about the size of a tennis court. According to Dr. David Beuther, a pulmonologist at National Jewish Health, lung diseases typically target one of these two functions. Asthma, for example, is a bellows problem: Airways become tight and inflamed, making it harder to inhale or

tion marked by scar tissue in the lungs, destroys alveoli.

MIND & BODY | 9

"You actually get destruction of the air sacs, so your tennis court gets smaller and smaller in size," Beuther said.

Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, pneumonia, and other lung-related issues all impair our breathing in different ways. Various heart conditions can also leave us short of breath. But Beuther says you can have a perfectly healthy heart and lungs and still be gasping for air.

exhale. In contrast, emphysema, a condi- Continued on Page 10

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The Essentials of Breathing

Big bellies, bad posture, and grief can rob our cells of air and leave us weak and emotional

Continued from Page 9

"Many times, it's just because people are out of shape," he said.

The Infrastructure of Breath
The lungs don't work alone. Air exchange at the cellular level requires a full-body infrastructure: tiny blood vessels that can reach each cell. If the infrastructure deteriorates, so does

cell function.
You may not notice the deterioration until you're required to do something particularly strenuous. When you ask more from your muscles than they're used to, they need more air circulation for the extra exertion. This is what causes all the huffing and puffing—your lungs are pumping harder to

meet the demand of struggling cells. Your lungs are working overtime, but respiration may not be able to reach the cells because there isn't enough infrastructure to service them. "Imagine a neighborhood full of houses, but no streets. Trash builds up, and packages don't get delivered," Beuther said.

If you regularly engage in strenuous activity, both your body and breathing become more efficient. Exercise doesn't just strengthen muscle tissue; it improves cellular respiration because working muscles develop a more intricate network of blood vessels.

"It's easy to deliver things to the house, and the trash gets picked up regularly," Beuther said. "You can train to do better at that."

If we're subjected to enough strenuous activity, we begin to lose fat, and it's the lungs that usher most of this fat out our body. Contrary to popular belief, fat doesn't exit the body via the colon or miraculously turn to muscle. Instead, it breaks down into basic elements and we exhale it. In a 2014 study, researchers found that when a person burns off 22 pounds of fat, more than 19 of those pounds are expelled as carbon dioxide. The rest leaves as water.

Shedding excess fat also makes it easier to breathe. Beuther says fat can constrict the space that lungs need to fully expand, thus confining our bellows.

"Those with a big belly typically have low oxygen levels at night," he said. "Gravity keeps the belly away from their lungs when they're standing during the day, but when they lie down, it pushes up against the diaphragm and makes for shallow breathing."

Breath and the Brain

Every cell needs oxygen, but those in our brain need the most. Brain cells use about three times the oxygen of muscle cells. If the brain gets just a little less oxygen than it requires, it can result in poor judgment, lack of coordination, and dementia.

Since the brain is so sensitive to oxygen levels, it's no wonder that breathing is also intimately tied to our emotional state.



If the brain gets just a little less oxygen than it requires, it can result in poor judgment, lack of coordination, and dementia.

A deep breath is often the first step we take in calming ourselves down. Short, rapid breaths may shape our mindset, too. Dr. Alex Tauberg, a chiropractor and rehabilitation specialist in Pennsylvania, says people who suffer from anxiety often have abnormal breathing patterns and tend to hyperventilate. Evidence suggests that these quick, shallow breathers may be physically triggering their emotional state. Better breathing may be able to undo it.

"There have been some studies that

show that when you retrain someone's breathing patterns, you can

reduce their anxiety," Tauberg said.
Emotions, in turn, may also influence our breathing. In traditional
Chinese medicine, a philosophy in
which each organ is associated with
a different emotion, the lungs are tied
to grief and sadness.

Grief is a natural reaction to pain and loss, but it can also be hard on the body, and the longer we hold on to it, the more damage it can do. Modern science has only recently come to understand how emotional stress can impair the immune system, but it's an idea Chinese medicine has understood for thousands of years.

In the online magazine NOVA, Australian acupuncturist and Chinese herbalist Olivier Lejus describes how this lung-grief relationship manifested in his own life following the death of his father. Lejus flew to France to attend the funeral, but fell ill as soon as he arrived. He spent most of his trip in bed with a respiratory infection.

"Being unable to express these emotions or being overwhelmed by them causes the lungs to weaken," Lejus writes. "Our immunity goes down, and we can easily develop respiratory problems."

Tips for Better Breathing

Several factors have an impact on the quality of our breathing. Fortunately, we can take steps to address these and better ensure we get the air we need.

Environment: People have long recognized that fresh, clean air is essential to good health, and the evidence to support this idea continues to accumulate. One need only consider the damage caused by activities such as smoking and huffing solvents to understand at a simple level.

But bad air isn't just a matter of our personal habits. Much of our modern airspace is filled with substances that are toxic to our cells. Emissions from industry and vehicles, synthetic fragrances, and the chemicals offgassing from numerous products in our home and office all contaminate the air we breathe.

"If you look at cities with poor air quality, the health of our lungs suffers. We need to think of lung health as a public health issue," Beuther said.

For good air, seek plants. Plants are natural breathing partners because their respiration compliments our own: They take in carbon dioxide and excrete oxygen. If you can't get in the woods as often as you'd like, invite some spider plants or mother-in-law's tongue indoors. These hardy specimens require little care, and are also some of the best growing air cleaners.

Posture: Lung function typically declines by our 30s. This may be in part because of our worsening posture. According to Dr. David A. Shapiro, a chiropractor at Complete Spine Solutions in Georgia, our upper spine, the area that surrounds the lungs, usually changes in shape as we age. As a result, we take shorter, shallower breaths. We get winded faster than when we were younger, because our body has to work much harder to get the same amount of oxygen to the blood.

"The upper back typically increases in curve by 10 degrees by 60 years of age," Shapiro said. "In addition, all our spinal ligaments typically become stiff and lose the elasticity of our youth. This combination of spinal deformity and ligament rigidity has been demonstrated in research to decrease our lung capacity, and thus has a negative impact on our endurance, strength, and health."

6

The lungs, like a lot of our body, are a 'use it or lose it' situation.

Dr. David Beuther, a pulmonologist at National Jewish Health

and stand tall.

The cure is simple: sit up straight

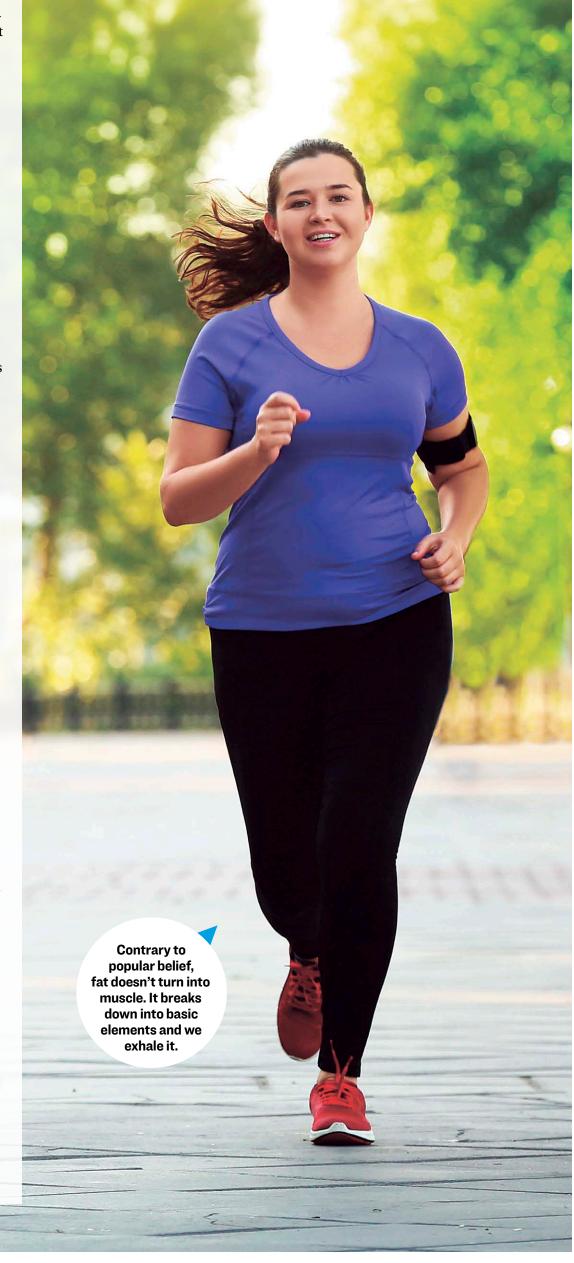
Exercise: To increase lung capacity, fitness expert Carol Michaels recommends stretching to open the chest, and putting your bellows through a bit of resistance training.

Place a hand on your abdomen. Inhale through the nose while gently pushing the abdomen out. Exhale slowly through pursed lips while gently pushing inward and upward on the abdomen with your hand, to help empty the lungs completely, pulling the navel to the spine.

"In addition to strengthening the abdominal muscles, it will help regulate breathing if one becomes short of breath, particularly during an activity. This type of breathing will also help one to get through an activity where one experiences shortness of breath," Michaels said.

Beuther believes that the most important thing for keeping lungs healthy is to stay active.

"More exercise can lead to better breathing," he said. "The lungs, like a lot of our body, are a 'use it or lose it' situation. When you go and exercise—a run, a brisk walk, or climbing stairs—you're taking deeper and more frequent breaths. Those deeper breaths stretch the lungs and that stretch is healthy for the lungs."



Potential New Asthma Treatment

A protein linked to omega-3 fatty acids shows promise in treating constricted airways

GRAEME MILLIGAN & ANDREW TOBIN

hough asthma affects almost 340 million people worldwide, there is still no cure. The respiratory disease frequently develops in childhood and can cause asthma "attacks" when the lungs become inflamed and the airways constrict, causing breathing difficulty and wheezing. These attacks are caused by a number of factors, including pollution, allergens, and smoking.

The condition is often treated by inhaling a bronchodilator drug called a beta-agonist, such as Ventolin. During an asthma attack, inhalers deliver beta-agonist into the airways. This causes the muscles in the airway to relax, allowing the patient to breathe more easily. But this type of medicine doesn't work very well for everyone—and there are limited

other options for medicines that can be used to treat acute asthma attacks.

But while researching the health benefits of eating "oily" fish such as salmon and mackerel, we found something surprising: Omega-3 fatty acids (typically found in such fish in high levels), and more directly medicines that mimic some of the actions of omega-3 fatty acids, could potentially be used to help treat asthma.

Omega-3 fatty acids have many health benefits and they generate these benefits in a number of ways, including by limiting inflammation. This happens when omega-3s interact with and stimulate a protein called "free fatty acid receptor 4." This protein is present on the surface of certain cells that control the amount of sugar in our blood. As elevated blood sugar is often associated with diabetes, medicines that activate free fatty acid receptor 4 have been considered

as a possible new treatment for Type 2

One of the joys of being a research scientist is that chance observations can lead to new insights in completely different areas to those you were initially studying. Free fatty acid receptor 4 is typically located in the gut and on white fat cells. But when our team examined where else in the body it might be located, we were surprised to find large numbers of the receptor in the lungs of both mice and humans. We reasoned that if it was there, it must have a job to do.

Asthma attacks are caused by a number of factors, including pollution, allergens, and smoking.

Asthma Treatment

Given the large numbers of free fatty acid 4 receptors in the lungs, we wondered if proto-medicines (synthetic chemicals that activate free fatty acid 4 receptor) would work just as well as beta agonists at opening up the airways and might also reduce inflammation in the lungs.

living mice and in lung tissue samples. Initially, we found that activators of free fatty acid receptor 4 did indeed open up airways that had become constricted in the lungs of mice. However, in mice whose DNA we altered to lack free fatty acid receptor 4, these proto-

We first tested these chemicals on both

We then wanted to know whether these compounds also worked effectively if we induced an asthmalike state in the mice. We did this by making them breathe the air-pollutant ozone, or making them inhale cigarette smoke. Both of these are known to induce asthma attacks in humans. Again, we saw that in the mice that had free fatty acid receptor 4, the proto-medicines

medicines didn't work.

the receptor.
Of course, mice aren't humans—and if our initial observations are to have the potential to point toward a new treatment for asthma and other diseases that affect the airways, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, we needed to show that free fatty acid receptor 4

opened up the airways. They had

no effect in mice that didn't have

is also present in human lungs.
Using tissue samples from human

lungs, we found that free fatty acid receptor 4 was also present—and that the proto-medicines that activate the receptor were able to relax the human lung and airways.

Now, we'll need to show that such treatments are equally effective in airway tissue from patients suffering from asthma, chronic obstructive

lated diseases. We'll need to show that we can produce improved versions of the proto-medicines that will be safe for use. It will also be necessary to demonstrate that they will be effective in alleviating

the broncho-constriction

pulmonary disease, or other re-

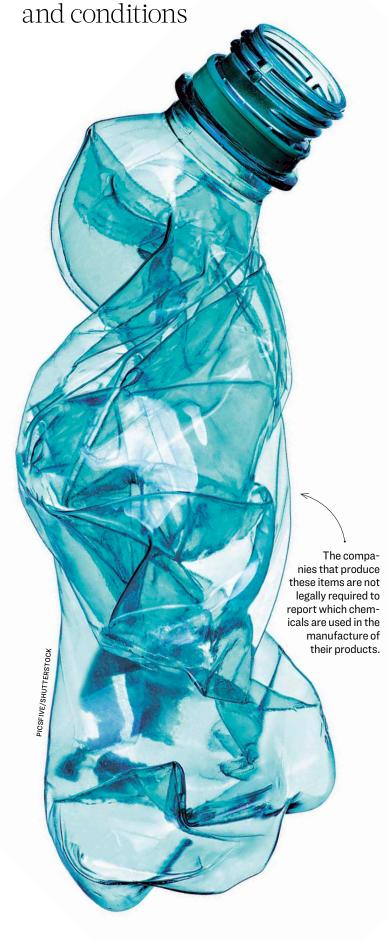
than leaves people struggling for breath.
All interesting possibilities, considering we started out by wondering how eating a portion of salmon for dinner might be good for you.

Omega-3 fatty acids have many health benefits. They generate these benefits in a number of ways, including by limiting inflammation.

fessor of research Vetering University Andrew lar photographic Glasgo

CRDKANNO/SHUTTERSTOO

Graeme Milligan is a Gardiner professor of biochemistry and dean of research at the College of Medical, Veterinary, and Life Sciences at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, and Andrew Tobin is a professor of molecular pharmacology at the University of Glasgow. This article was first published on The Conversation. Research links plastics common to many household items to several diseases



espite known negative effects of BPA and BPS in plastic, these toxic chemicals are still prevalent in many home products and food items. BPA (bisphenolA) and BPS (bisphenolS) exposure is linked with reproductive disorders, lowered cognitive function, behavioral problems in children, and increased oxidative stress.

BPA and BPS are known to mimic estrogen's effects in the body. These chemicals are found in common plastic products, including food containers. The companies that produce these items are not legally required to report which chemicals are used in the manufacturing of their products. As a result, many researchers believe that completely avoiding plastics is the best way to avoid these harmful and prevalent chemical compounds.

What Is Bisphenol A?

Bisphenol A is a synthetic phenol used in the production of plastics and epoxy resins and is one of the most widely used compounds on the planet. You are most exposed to BPA through plastic food packaging, dental equipment, children's toys, canned foods (via the lining), and receipt paper. BPA is linked to infertility in men and women, breast and prostate cancers, and metabolic disorders. BPA is considered especially dangerous due to its tendency to bioaccumulate in the body.

What Is Bisphenol S?

Bisphenol S is a chemical compound often used to replace bisphenol A in plastic products, but its effects are just as harmful to the body's hormonal system and brain development. Like BPA, BPS is an endocrine disrupter and can be transferred from mother to child via placenta and milk, as well as through exposure to BPS-containing products.

A 2020 study demonstrated that BPA and BPS exposure significantly decreased intracellular antioxidant capacity and increased damage to biomacromolecules.

As BPA's health effects have become more widely known, companies have started making products labeled as "BPA-free." Unfortunately, many companies have switched to using BPS as an alternative, despite a growing body of evidence that BPS is just as harmful as BPA.

BPA and BPS Health Risks Several health conditions have been linked with exposure to these compounds and research is still ongoing.

Behavioral and Cognitive Issues Postnatal BPA exposure has been linked to lower cognitive function and an increased likelihood of behavioral problems in children. Scientists have linked high levels of BPA in parental urine concentration with depressive and hyperactive behavior in their children, and found that prenatal exposure to BPA is linked to symptoms of depression and anxiety in boys.

Reproductive Disorders

Similar studies have shown that BPA exposure in pregnant mothers promotes fetal mutations, infections, and miscarriage, negatively impacts fertility and the endometrium lining of the uterus, and may such as polycystic ovary syndrome in female children.

These results aren't limited to female reproduction, however, as various studies have shown that BPS exposure disturbs the antioxidant balance in testicular tissue, lowering testosterone levels and negatively affecting male fertility.

Oxidative Stress

BPA and BPS have been demonstrated to increase oxidative stress and negatively impact cellular energy metabolism, and a 2020 study demonstrated that BPA and BPS exposure significantly decreased intracellular antioxidant capacity and increased damage to biomacromolecules.

These effects have been demonstrated in various tissues including the testis, brain, liver, and kidneys. Oxidative stress is associated with:

- Estrogenic effects in the testis,
- lowering testosterone levels. • Increased risk of structural and functional abnormalities in the liver, increasing the risk of nonalcoholic fatty liver disease.
- Increased risk of renal injury and chronic kidney disease.
- Increased instances of headaches, brain fog, brain aging, migraines, depression, anxiety, burnout, social isolation, and fatigue, as well as a lack of ability to combat posttraumatic stress.

Non-Alcoholic **Fatty Liver Syndrome**

(NAFLD) is a chronic liver disease greenmedinfo. people who consume little to no alcohol. Rates of this dangerous condition are on the rise, and research suggests that long-term exposure to BPS can aggravate NAFLD by affecting lipid metabolism, cell-signaling, and hormonal homeostasis. Other studies have linked perinatal exposure of BPA to increased risk of NAFLD. Given the increase in both BPA- and BPS-containing products, researchers believe these

most common cause of chronic liver disease in U.S. children and affects approximately 17.5 percent of ado-

Bisphenol S is a chemical compound often used to replace bisphenol A in plastic products, but its effects are just as harmful to the body's hormonal system and brain development.

increase reproductive disorders Reducing BPA and BPS Exposure It's important to reduce your daily toxic load and avoiding these BPA and BPS is part of that. Even if you've dramatically reduced or eliminated your plastic exposure, take the time to inventory what household items may contain BPA or BPS and follow these guidelines:

- Choose cardboard or glass containers over cans
- Avoid canned food
- Use BPA- and BPS-free baby bot-
- Avoid plastics, especially in food and skincare products, or only use plastic products with a 1, 2, 4, or 5 in their recycling symbol · Use frozen vegetables or fruits if
- fresh are unavailable • Don't print your receipts (receipts
- are usually printed on thermal papers that are coated in BPAcontaining resins)
- Use glass or ceramic dishes and
- Remove toys with 3, 6, or 7 in their recycling symbol from your home; choose toys made from organic, natural materials
- Don't use plastic wrap or plastic baggies in your home
- · Avoid plastic water bottles

For more information about bisphenol A and bisphenol S, their toxic effects and to review other research being done on these harmful chemicals, please visit the GreenMedInfo.com research databases.

For links to the studies referenced in this article, please find it online Non-alcoholic fatty liver disease at TheEpochTimes.com/author-

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 compounds may explain the rise the permission of GreenMedInfo LLC. Sign up for their newsletter at in NAFLD among children and adolescents, which is currently the www.GreenmedInfo.health

'Prehabilitation':

Training Your Body for Surgery

Improving fitness levels in the weeks before surgery can improve recovery and reduce complications

THE EPOCH TIMES Week 36, 2020

EMILY C. DUNFORD

f you've had a surgery postponed due to the pandemic, or have one on the horizon, there may be some work you can do right now to prepare and to help improve your postoperative outcome.

Prehabilitation, a strategy that uses exercise to improve patients' functional capacity before surgery and improve outcomes, is increasingly recommended for those facing scheduled surgeries. This approach is improving experiences for patients across a wide range of situations.

There's no guarantee, of course, but it gives patients much greater agency over their own health, and it's never a bad idea to do what you can to lower your risk of complications following surgery.

Postoperative Risks

Statistically, dying within a month after an operation accounts for 7.7 percent of deaths globally, which makes it one of the top three factors contributing to global fatalities, trailing only heart attack and stroke. While death is the most severe

outcome, surgery patients are also susceptible to additional postoperative complications, such as intense fatigue, longer hospital stays, or hospital re-admittance, anemia, and post-operative anorexia among a host of others. Those most at risk post-operatively are generally older adults who already live with other chronic diseases, take various medications, and have a lower fitness level.

The success of a surgical procedure depends on more than the skill of the medical staff and the complexity of the operation. It is becoming apparent that the likelihood of the patient returning to a physically and psychologically healthy state is also dependent on their health and what they do in the weeks leading up to the surgery.

Scientists have shown that an effective way of increasing chances of success is to physically train in the time leading up to a surgery. In this time of uncertainty, when many surgeries have been delayed, prehabilitation might be an opportunity to help optimize outcomes.

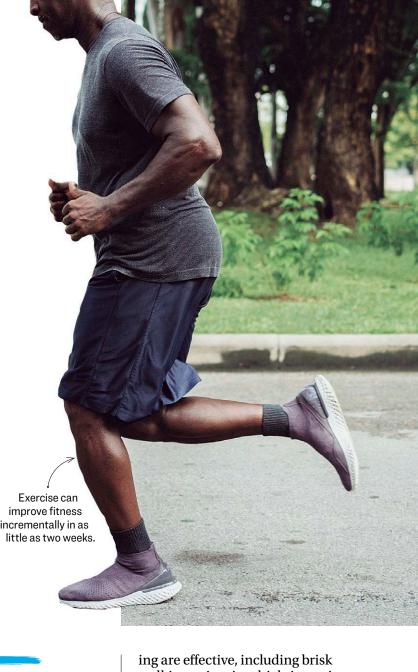
Doctors are often concerned with a patients' risk factors, such as high blood pressure, blood lipid status, or obesity, many of which are difficult to control. Physical fitness, something you can change with exercise training and impacts several risk factors, should likely be added to this list. Exercise training can improve your physical fitness incrementally in as little as two weeks, making it a viable option for people about to undergo a surgical procedure.

Prehabilitation

The concept of prehabilitation is based on the idea that patients with a higher functional capacity, or fitness level, will better tolerate a surgical procedure, have fewer post-operative complications, and demonstrate better functional, psychological, social, and surgical

Think of your fitness as a pitcher of water, and each outcome after surgery as a plant. The more water you have at the start somewhat predicts how many plants or outcomes you can care for. Critically, scientific evidence suggests that an individual's fitness level may be a stronger predictor of post-operative risk than traditional risk factors, as small improvements in fitness have been associated with substantial improvements in survival.

The great news is that we know that many types of exercise train-



Dying within a month after an operation accounts for 7.7 percent of deaths globally.

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The skill of the surgical

team is not the only

factor that affects the

outcome of surgery.

Emily C. Dunford is a

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University in Canada.

This article was first

published on The Conver-

walking or jogging, high-intensity interval training, weightlifting, breathing exercises, and muscle- or joint-specific training. The current fitness of the patient

is an important factor to consider when prescribing a pre-surgical exercise program, as someone with a higher fitness level will most likely be able to complete a more challenging program, such as high-intensity interval training combined with strength training, and will require more activity to see physical gains. By contrast, an older, frail patient undergoing chemotherapy in preparation for a surgical procedure will be more limited in their fitness level, and may only be able to complete deep breathing exercises with a focus on strengthening their inspiratory muscles, which are respiratory muscles used when inhaling, such as the diaphragm.

Preparing for Delayed Surgeries Regardless of the specific exercise program, it seems that these exercise interventions are safe,

and may be associated with improved post-operative out-Like training for a race or

sporting event, prehabilitation programs are most effective when combined with nutritional and psychological interventions. Surgery induces a stress response causing an increased need for additional energy sources, which can be relieved with nutritional supplementation, such as eating a diet higher in protein.

Addressing a patient's anxiety regarding pain management and behavioral modifications such as quitting smoking and reducing alcohol consumption have been shown to independently decrease the risk of postoperative complications. The best postoperative results have been observed when a multi-pronged approach, or a program designed to address all aspects of a patient's health, has been applied.

In health care, it's possible to switch gears. If we use prehabilitation and approach surgery like training for a race, we could see better outcomes, fewer deaths, and healthier patients. This is even more important now, amid the current pandemic. With so many surgeries delayed, many patients have some extra time for prehabilitation that could improve their outcome.

The Heart and Mind Connection in Peripheral Artery Disease

Improving blood flow to the organs and limbs can also be connected to how we feel in our daily lives

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

eripheral artery disease (PAD) can be a painful and risky ordeal. It results from plaque in the arteries blocking healthy blood flow to your head, organs, and limbs. Coming back from it is no easy task, and how you approach recovery can have a significant influence on your risk of death by heart disease or other illness.

A new study is drawing a close distinction between a person's mental state and their ability to recover from PAD optimally. The study, led by researchers at Yale University, suggests that depressive symptoms are a significant impediment to recovery.

Peripheral artery disease is most common in the legs. It can affect energy, functionality, mobility, and quality of life.

The condition can also boost the risk of illness of death from heart disease. Published in the Journal of American Heart Health, the study found that people with depressive symptoms were less likely to recover from the condi-

tion than people who didn't report such

symptoms. Depression can add stress and further pressure on your heart. It can activate your immune system, exacerbating other conditions and taxing natural bodily systems designed to keep you healthy. It can also affect outlook, making people less likely to believe they can heal.

There is no simple treatment for depression. It's not as black and white as treating physical health. Doctors know ways to encourage better circulation and treat PAD but may be unsure how to help improve a patient's overall

People with depressive symptoms were less likely to recover from the condition than people who didn't report such symptoms.

Depending on the degree of depression, a person may be served by making meaningful connections with people, adopting an exercise program, or accomplishing small goals and participating in hobbies. Others may require professional help.

When you're working on your mental state, it's important to remember to do things for your body. Exercise releases hormones and improves blood flow, both of which can give you a mental boost.

There are several things that can help reduce the risk of heart disease and promote healthier blood flow through arteries besides exercise.

Certain foods can boost blood nitric oxide levels, which helps open up blood vessels and improve blood flow. These foods include are beets, beetroot juice, garlic, leafy greens, nuts and seeds, and meats. Supplements can also be used. Meanwhile, you should limit your intake of processed foods, which can have the opposite effect.

Spending time in nature is also profoundly relaxing for many people, especially beautiful settings that give us a sense of awe.

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.

Bananas Can Help Prevent Bone Breaks, Aches, and Pain

If your body is missing key nutrients, it can draw them from your bones, leading to bone loss

DEVON ANDRE

you're making sure to get enough exercise, calcium, and vitamin D, you probably think you've got pretty strong bones. And you know what, they prob-_ ably are. Those three components are essential to bone health, but they don't tell the whole story.

Your body needs calcium for far more than keeping bones healthy. It plays a role in regulating hormones, for example. When your body needs calcium to perform various functions, it relies on what is stored in your bones—especially if you're not eating or absorbing enough of it from When your body starts drawing cal-

cium from bones, they get weaker and become more susceptible to breaks, boosting the risk for osteoporosis. High levels of calcium in the blood are generally a sign it's being drawn from the bone.

But eating bananas may help your

where it belongs.

It's estimated that very few people in North America get enough potassium. There is some evidence suggesting that as many as 98 percent of U.S. adults aren't reaching the daily recommended intake of 4,700 mil-

High levels of calcium in the blood are generally a sign it's being drawn from the bone.

Potassium plays a key role in the maintenance of bone strength by preventing calcium loss. It prevents the metabolic extraction of calcium from bones, keeping it where it needs to be and ultimately helping slow

In turn, this can help promote bones stand up and leave calcium stronger bones and a lower risk for

fractures and conditions such as osteopenia and osteoporosis.

Bananas, of course, aren't the only

source of potassium. Other foods rich in potassium include beet greens, baked yams, potatoes, avocado, sweet potato, spinach, and salmon. You could be at higher risk for a potassium deficiency if you take diuret-

ics or battle with chronic diarrhea and vomiting. Eating a healthy, balanced diet rich in fruit and vegetables can help your health in several ways, including building and maintaining strong,

healthy bones. If you're making an effort to eat more calcium and boost vitamin D intake, add potassium to the list as well. Don't let your efforts go to waste!

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.



How Journaling Can Help You in Hard Times

Stressed and isolated? Try expressing your thoughts and feelings in writing

KIRA M. NEWMAN

n April 1, I had been quarantining in my for two weeks, and it was starting to become clear that this coronavirus thing wasn't going away anytime soon

As I often do in tough times, I turned to journaling. I decided I'd keep a record of my quarantine life through the month of April, a way to remember this crazy historical moment and process my

Now it's August, and my daily journal continues. I've left my building about two dozen times since I started journaling, so its contents aren't all that exciting—tidbits of everyday life, news about social distancing rules and reopening stages, moments of worry and loneliness and cabin fever and gratitude.

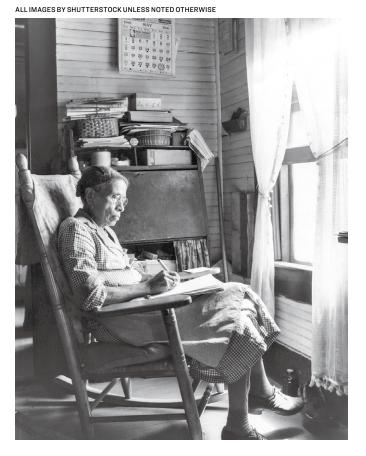
I know I'm not the only one with a pandemic journal. In fact, hundreds of people have written journal entries on the Pandemic Project website, a resource created by psychology researchers that offers writing prompts to help people explore their experiences and emotions around COVID-19.

At a time when the days blend into each other, journaling is helping people separate one from the next and clear out the distressing thoughts invading our heads (and our dreams).

Although there are some pitfalls to journaling—ways of doing it that might backfire—it's one of those rare and valuable mental health tools that doesn't require you to leave your house or even see another human being.

At a time when the days blend into each other. journaling is helping people separate one from the next and clear out the distressing thoughts invading our heads (and our dreams).

The Power of Opening Up People had been keeping diaries long before scientists thought to put them under microscopes. But in the past 30 years, hundreds of studies have uncovered the benefits of putting pen to paper with your deepest thoughts and



According to that research, journaling may help ease our distress when we're struggling. In a 2006 study, nearly 100 young adults were asked to spend 15 minutes either journaling or drawing about a stressful event, or writing about their plans for the day, twice during one week. The people who journaled saw the biggest reduction in symptoms like depression, anxiety, and hostility, particularly if they were very distressed to begin with. This was true even though 80 percent had seldom journaled about their feelings and only 61 percent were comfortable

Why do we avoid journaling? For one, it isn't always pleasant; I know that I sometimes have to force myself to sit down and do it. Cathartic is probably a better word. In fact, some research suggests that we can feel more anxious, sad, or guilty right after we write.

But in the long term, we can expect to cultivate a greater sense of meaning as well as better health. Various studies have found that people who do a bout of journaling have fewer doctor visits in the following half year, and reduced symptoms of chronic disease like asthma and arthritis.

Can Your Diary Keep You Healthy?

Other research finds that writing specifically boosts our immune system, good news when the source of so much stress today is an infec-

One older study even found that journaling could make vaccines more effective. In the experiment, some medical students wrote for four days in a row about their thoughts and feelings around some of the most traumatic experiences of their lives, from divorce to grief to abuse, while others simply wrote down their daily events and plans. Then, everyone received the hepatitis B vaccine and two booster shots.

According to blood tests, the group who journaled about upsetting experiences had higher antibodies right before the last dose and two months later. While the other group had a perfectly healthy response to the vaccine, the authors write, journaling could make an important difference for people who are immune-compromised or for vaccines that don't stimulate the immune system as well.

"Expression of emotions concerning stressful or traumatic events can produce measurable effects on human immune responses," the University of Auckland's Keith

J. Petrie and his colleagues write. Journaling could also boost our immune system once we've been infected with a virus. In another study, researchers recruited un**Journaling** is a tool to put our experiences, thoughts, beliefs, and desires into language, and in doing so it helps us understand and grow and

Joshua Smyth, a distinguished professor of biobehavioral health and medicine at

People had

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Penn State University

make sense

of them.

dergraduate students who tested positive for the virus that causes mononucleosis, which persists in the body after infection and has the potential to flare up. Three times weekly for 20 minutes, some wrote about a stressful event—like a breakup or a death while others wrote about their possessions.

Based on blood samples taken before and after, writing about stress increased people's antibodies—an indication that the immune system has more control over the latent virus in the body compared to more mundane writing. It also seemed to help them gain a deeper understanding of their stress and see more positives to it.

Why Journaling Works

What's the secret to the humble diary? It turns out journaling works on two different levels, having to do with both our feelings and our thoughts.

First, it's a way of disclosing (and resolving) emotions rather than stuffing them down. Repressing our emotions is known to be harmful for our health. Many of us have secret pain or shame that we haven't shared with others, swarming around our brains in images and emotions. Through writing, our pain gets translated into black-and-white words that exist outside of ourselves.

"I'm able to organize thoughts and feelings on paper so they no longer take up room in my head," says Allison Quatrini, an assistant professor at Eckerd College who has been journaling for years and started a COVID-19 journal in April. "If I get them out on the page and clear the mental decks,

more relaxed." On the thinking level, writing ences into a sequence, giving us a chance to examine cause and effect and form a coherent story. Through this process, we can also gain some distance from our experiences and begin to understand them in new ways, stumbling upon insights about ourselves and the world. While trauma can upset our beliefs about how life works, processing trauma through writing seems to give us a sense

"Journaling is a tool to put our experiences, thoughts, beliefs, and desires into language, and in doing so it helps us understand and grow and make sense of them," says Joshua Smyth, a distinguished

professor of biobehavioral health and medicine at Penn State University, who co-authored the book "Opening Up by Writing It Down" with pioneering journaling researcher James Pennebaker.

How to Start a Journaling

While you can journal in many different ways, one of the most wellstudied techniques is called expressive writing. To do this, you write continuously for 20 minutes about your deepest thoughts and emotions around an issue in your life. You can explore how it has affected you, or how it relates to your childhood or your parents, your relationships, or your career.

Expressive Writing is traditionally done four days in a row, but there isn't anything magical about this formula. Studies suggest you can journal a few days in a row, a couple times a week, or just once a week; you can write for 10 or 15 or 20 minutes, and you can keep journaling about the same topic or switch to different ones each time. For example, the Pandemic

inspire your writing. You can write a basic entry about your general thoughts and feelings around CO-VID-19, or dig into more specific topics such as your social life, work and money, and uncertainty.

Social Life: How is your social world changing, how does that make you feel, and how are you handling it?

Work and Money: How do you feel about your financial situation, and how has your job changed?

Uncertainty: Where is your anxiety and sense of uncertainty coming from, and how can you cope

"Many people often start writing about COVID-19 and then begin writing about other topics that are bothering them more than they thought," notes the Pandemic Project website, which was created by Pennebaker and his research team. "This is what expressive writing is good for. Use it to try to understand those problems that are getting under your skin."

In my journal, I've found myself exploring the issue of control. My constant instinct is to organize and plan out life, but that's been impossible in the midst of a massive, unpredictable crisis. Journaling also let me ponder the lessons I want to take away from this experience around flexibility, acceptance, and

The Do's and Don'ts of a Diary A 2002 study does suggest that

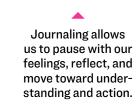
journalers should beware of rehashing the same difficult feelings over and over in writing.

In the experiment, over 120 college students journaled about a it sets up the rest of the day to not stressful or traumatic event they only be more productive but be were experiencing, like troubles at school, conflicts with their partner, or a death in the family. They forces us to organize our experi- were instructed to write for at least 10 minutes, twice a week, over the course of a month. Some students wrote about their deepest thoughts and feelings—including how they try to make sense of the stress and what they tell themselves to cope with it—while others wrote about their feelings only.

During the month, the group who wrote about feelings and thoughts experienced more growth from the trauma: better relationships with others and a greater sense of strength, appreciation for life, and new possibilities for the future. They seemed to be more aware of the silver linings of the experience, while the group who focused on emotions expressed more negative emotions over time and even got sick more often

The findings support something most of us will naturally intuit. Journaling should give us a practice of self-reflection that helps us make sense of our experience. The most effective journaling moves from emotions to thoughts over time. We start by expressing our feelings, allowing ourselves to name them. If we were to jump to thoughts too quickly, it could mean we're over-analyzing and actually avoiding our feelings. First, we must tune into ourselves and how we really experience something. Eventually, we can start to make observations, notice patterns, or set goals for the future.

This has been the case for Allison Quatrini, who usually writes for a half-hour in the morning about whatever's going through her mind—from the losses she's experiencing during the pandemic to her work or romantic relationship. It allows her to put into words how much her life has been disrupted and normalize the Project offers several prompts to range of emotions she's been feel-



ing. She can also brainstorm ways

"It helps me make sense of the

way that I'm feeling right now,"

she says. "Why do I feel not very

motivated, why do I feel bored,

why do I feel sad? It's also useful in

admitting to myself what is going

on [and] why it's been very chal-

In addition to writing, you might

also consider adding drawings

to your journal. In a 2003 study,

people either journaled, made

drawings, or journaled, and drew

about a negative experience from

the past that still upset them, such

as relationship troubles or loss.

According to surveys before and

after, the group who wrote and

drew saw the biggest improve-

ments in their mood after three

weekly, 20-minute sessions.

Drawing without writing actu-

ally made people's moods worse,

though. The researchers speculate

it may have dredged up difficult

feelings without offering a way to

If writing is challenging,

speaking your feelings aloud

may work just as well. In that

mono study, there was an-

other group of students who re-

corded themselves talking about

their stress. This group ended up

showing the strongest immune

responses to the dormant virus in

their bodies. They also seemed to

be doing the best psychologically,

gaining insight and a positive per-

spective on their stress, improv-

ing in self-esteem, and engaging

in healthier coping strategies. The

researchers suspect that talking—

even to a voice recorder—may feel

similar to sharing our feelings

Sharing with a trusted confidant

might seem even better than

writing down feelings, as it serves

a similar purpose and offers us

warmth and validation that a piece

of paper can't provide. And that's probably true, write Pennebaker

and Smyth in "Opening Up by

One study, for example, found

that people who talked to a thera-

pist for four short daily sessions

with a loved one.

Writing It Down."

Freedom of Expression

process them.

lenging to deal with this."

showed more positive emotion and less negative emotion. They gained understanding and perspective, and they made healthy behavior changes similar to people who journaled.

Therapy also seemed to be less unpleasant than writing. In fact, when Pennebaker originally envisioned journaling as a mental health exercise, he was inspired by the benefits of therapy—but mindful that not everyone has the means or the inclination to talk to a professional about their problems.

Of course, confessing to friends or partners isn't without its complications. Sometimes our loved ones are overloaded by their own

stresses, or they can't offer the right kind of support—and may even make us feel worse. Other times, our secrets feel too vulnerable to speak out loud.

No matter what, if we're talking to another human, our brains will be doing a constant calculation about what to say or not say, how they might react, and how we will be perceived, says Smyth. Confiding on paper can be a valuable alternative and a way to express ourselves with absolute freedom. Journaling lets us process secrets before we reveal them to others.

For Quatrini, who researches and teaches about China, the stress of the pandemic has an extra layer: With the disruption to U.S.-China relations and travel, she's

concerned about the fu-

ture of her research. The immensity of that loss and uncertainty—and how it was affecting her day-to-day feelings and relationships—only became clear to her when she wrote about it.

"My entire life has been turned upside down and I don't know if it will ever right itself," she says. "Without the journal, I think I would not have figured that out."

aging editor at the Greater Good Science Center. This article was originally published on the Greater Good online magazine.

Kira M. Newman is the man-



WISE HABITS

How to Say 'Yes' to Life

We can stop retreating from life by accepting more and rejecting less

LEO BABAUTA

We often reject the experience in front of us. It's usually out of habit. We may dislike the discomfort or uncertainty or be upset by the fact that we aren't getting what we want.

Consider some common scenarios.

You might not like the way other people are acting and find yourself thinking bad things about them. Or you may do this to yourself after making a mistake you've made before. You might retreat to distraction and fill yourself with TV shows or video games or simply proclaim you're done with the whole thing and retreat from difficult relationships or situations.

This rejection of our experience is why we so often get frustrated with other people, down on ourselves, or avoid the hard things.

It's why we have such a hard time with good habits like meditation, exercise, eating well, writing, reading, flossing, and so on. Good habits are often not easy, so we say "no" to them, even when we really wish we could say "yes."

It's why we turn to alcohol, smoking, drugs, junk food, TV, social media, or other distractions to numb ourselves. This is how we say "no" to life. But what if we said "yes"?

The practice is to face every thing and open up to it.

How to Say 'Yes' to Life Think about everything you complain

about. Everything that makes you want to go, "Ugh." Everything you want to avoid. Now imagine that you could be open to

You could be in a room of people you normally dislike, and be compassionate with them. You could see their beauty and goodness and appreciate them just as they were. What if you could be a "yes" to everything?

What would that change for you?

That doesn't mean that you don't fight against injustice, or don't try to help those who are suffering. It means you don't retreat from those things you care about. You don't have to love injustice—but you can love the people who are suffering, even those whose suffering leads them to commit injustice. You can be compassionate toward everyone, even if you don't agree with their actions or

This openness is a path to a particular kind of freedom. Our almost instinctual rejection of others and ourselves leaves us handcuffed. We're restrained by an inability to accept the world as it is and meet it with creativity and compassion.

But what if you could be "yes" to all of the difficult things in life: your scariest project, the hardest tasks, the most boring moments?

The practice is to face everything and open up to it. To see the beauty in the moment, even in the parts you normally reject or dislike.

To love the parts of yourself that you usually want to change. To love everything. In my experience, if you can say "yes" to life as it is, life will say "yes" to you in return.

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



See the beauty in the moment, even in the parts you normally reject or dislike.

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POSITIVE AGING

Why Social Interaction Is Essential

MARILYN MURRAY WILLISON

or years, researchers have known that everyone benefits from socialization—regardless of age or gender. We've all seen the tragic videos of neglected orphans who failed to grow and develop because they were kept in isolation and deprived of interaction with others. According to functional magnetic resonance imaging studies, or fMRI studies, it's become common knowledge that adults, particularly the elderly, need the same sort of social stimulation that infants do. In fact, feeling alone can actually be worse than feeling annoyed or harassed. Why? Feeling isolated activates many of the same areas of the brain involved in physical pain.

Unfortunately, after reaching retirement age (and when others leave the household), many seniors find themselves spending way too much time alone. This is particularly true if they are no longer able to drive or have other transportation issues. But in order to maintain a sense of belonging, stay happy, and keep their minds sharp, seniors really need to find a reliable way to socialize with others on a regular basis.

When the American Academy of Neurology examined the relationship between dementia, socialization, and stress, it discovered that "people who are socially active and not easily stressed may be less likely to develop dementia." Since it is estimated that as many as 1 in 7 Americans over the age of 71 have dementia, these findings are important. And even though some researchers feel that memory problems or symptoms of depression are more likely to appear among those over the age of 70 than among younger individuals, this doesn't have to be the case.

To avoid mental isolation, seniors must commit to remaining socially active and do whatever it takes to avoid feeling lonely. The latest research indicates that an active post-retirement social life can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, boost the immune system, lower levels of depression, and minimize physiological pain symptoms—among other things. Approximately 7 million people over the age of 65 experience some level of depression. The importance of consistent human contact and interaction cannot be underestimated.

I recently experienced a very mild taste of what it feels like to be prevented from enjoying the company of others. As you know, for the past 26 years I have been wheelchair-dependent, so my transportation involves a handicap van with a ramp. As luck would have it, one night some misguided

burglars ignored the disability designation on the van's license plate and proceeded to break in and try to steal it. The good news is, their efforts to hot-wire the vehicle failed; the bad news is, they damaged both the ignition and steering column of the van. My only form of transportation was at the repair shop for two weeks, and I was unable to leave my house for physical therapy appointments, shopping, and visits with friends. Obviously, this was not a tragic situation, but everything seemed so different when I couldn't leave home and feel like I was a part of normal life. Fortunately, my van has now been fixed, and I am once again able to get out and about four days

PHOTOGRAPHEE.EU/SHUTTERSTOCK

Whatever

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The fastest-growing age group of elders in America is those who are 85 years old and older, which leads experts to conclude that community-based services must step in when or where family members cannot. According to a recent AARP article, "The number of Americans without any close confidants has increased dramatically in the past 20 years." This is a clear indication that whatever our age, we all need to

be proactive about building and maintaining social connections.

To defeat loneliness and isolation among the elderly, programs that go beyond basic meal delivery or brief impersonal visitations are needed. Today, there are approximately 15,000 senior citizen

centers scattered across the U.S. that offer programs ranging from leisure activities (journaling, singing groups, etc.) to volunteering to educational opportunities. Additionally, according to the National Adult Day Services Association, as of 2010 there were more than 4,600 adult day care centers nationwide that offer activities designed to provide social support and health services to older adults.

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The bottom line is that feeling lonely or being lonely needs to be avoided at any age, but especially at this stage of our lives.

Marilyn Murray Willison has had a varied career as a six-time nonfiction author, columnist, motivational speaker, and journalist in both the U.K. and the U.S. She is the author of "The Self-Empowered Woman" blog and the award-winning memoir "One Woman, Four Decades, Eight Wishes." She can be reached at MarilynWillison.com. To find out more about Marilyn and read her past columns, please visit the Creators Syndicate webpage at Creators.com. Copyright 2020 Creators.com

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