

THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND & BODY

Researchers have affirmed what ancient people knew: Music can heal the body and sharpen the mind.

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Healing More Than Just the Soul

RESEARCH AND HUMAN EXPERIENCE AFFIRM THAT CERTAIN KINDS OF MUSIC CAN HAVE A PROFOUND EFFECT

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Classical Music—Healing More Than Just the Soul

Research and human experience affirm that certain kinds of music can have a profound effect

TATIANA DENNING

“Mozart makes you believe in God because it cannot be by chance that such a phenomenon arrives into this world and leaves such an unbounded number of unparalleled masterpieces.” —Georg Solti

It seems like only yesterday that I first heard it. It was so beautiful, so stirring, I was moved down to my very soul.

It was the summer before my third-grade year, while I was visiting family in Morgantown, West Virginia, that my aunt Veronica sat down to play the piano. I hadn't even known she could play, but boy, could she ever!

What came forth amazed my ears! I'd grown up listening to music, but nothing like this. As my aunt's fingers so nimbly glided across the expanse of the keyboard, the sounds of Mozart and Tchaikovsky filled the air with a lightness and airiness that's hard to put into words.

I was hooked from the first moment I heard it.

When I returned home, I told my mom I had to learn to play the piano. It was something I felt driven to do, though we didn't even own a piano at the time.

Of course, I didn't want to play just any music—it had to be classical music. This was something that thrilled my eventual piano teacher, Mrs. Rinehart, as all her other students wanted to play pop music. But the pop and rock music I was accustomed to just couldn't compare, couldn't produce the same sense of wonder and majesty, that classical music could.

Many prominent medical institutions include music in their treatment plans.

Thus began my journey into the world of classical music.

It Moves the Soul

Just what is it that makes classical music resonate so much with us, that moves us in a way no other music has the power to do?

Clemency Burton-Hill, the author of “Year of Wonder: Classical Music to Enjoy Day by Day,” says, “I believe the greatest works of music are engines of empathy: they allow us to travel without moving into other lives, ages, souls.” She says classical music has benefited her life in a myriad of ways.

Vardinistar says on the website My Story that “Classical music touches a human's heart and soul, makes him better, gives him ideas and peace. Why do churches like classical music so much? Because it helps to find the connection with God. Not without a reason, people say that classical music is divine.”

He agrees with what the ancients knew to be true, that “classical music can heal your soul and mind because your body reacts to its vibrations, rhythm, tempo.”

The Ancients Views on Music

Ancient cultures were well aware of music's healing abilities.

Composer Gao Yuan, of the Shen Yun Symphony Orchestra, explains the importance of music in ancient China.

“Our ancestors believed that music has the power to harmonize a person's soul in ways that medicine could not. In ancient China, one of music's earliest purposes was for healing. The Chinese word, or character, for medicine actually comes from the character for music.”

Interestingly, this character also is related to the word happiness. Dimitrios Dermentzioglou, on the site Uplifters, explains how the two relate.

“Medicine is characterized by bitterness, yet a patient is able to regain health and happiness only after suffering its bitterness.”

He notes that the Great Yellow Emperor, known as the forefather of the Chinese people, developed a deep understanding of the power of music after being inspired by a divine fairy in a dream no less—to use drums to defeat his enemies in battle.

Gao says it was during the Yellow Emperor's rule that “people discovered the relationship between the pentatonic scale, the five elements, and the human body's five internal [organs] and five sensory organs.”

He notes that music was also used to influence a person's behavior.

“During Confucius's time, scholars used music's calming properties to improve and strengthen people's character and conduct.”

Music was also understood as divinely inspired in ancient Greece. The word “music” comes from the Muses, the patron goddesses of creative endeavors. Music and healing were also tied together. The ancient Greeks put one god, Apollo, in charge of both music and healing, demonstrating their belief that the two are closely related.

Hektoen International, the humanities journal owned by the Hektoen Institute of Medicine in Chicago, notes that “The Odyssey told of the bleeding of Odysseus's wounds from a wild boar only being stopped with a musical incantation, and the poet Pratinas in the 6th century B.C. recorded plague in Sparta being quelled by the music of the composer Thaletas.”

The Greeks believed that music had to resonate with the body and soul in order to be beneficial, and viewed music as a way of connecting the soul of man with the universe.

Modern medicine is rediscovering the many health benefits of music, and particularly, those of classical music.

Modern Medicine and Music

Today, a number of prominent medical institutions incorporate music into their treatment plans.

For example, Johns Hopkins Center for Music and Medicine has formed a choral group called ParkiSonic, where participants with Parkinson's disease demonstrate improvement in both movement and vocal expression, which are often impaired in Parkinson's.

“It's fascinating and powerful to think that music, something that has been floating around in our environment forever—that this natural, omnipresent human activity has demonstrable benefit as treatment,” says Sarah Hoover, co-director of the center, on the center's website.

Weill Cornell Medicine, a graduate college of Cornell University, has developed a music and medicine program and even formed its own orchestra. They've also collaborated with Juilliard to provide mini-concerts for patients and their families, hospital staff, and the surrounding NYC community. They plan to offer a semester-long course to medical students on music and medicine in the future.

Claudius Conrad, M.D., Ph.D., of MD Anderson Cancer Center, is a pianist and surgeon who believes in the healing power of music. He notes on the center's website, “In the Middle Ages, popular prescriptions involved specific musical combinations. The example he offers involves alternating between playing the flute and harp to alleviate gout.”

During his fellowship in ICU medicine, Conrad conducted a study on his patients and found a novel stress pathway that mediates music relaxation. He discovered that some intensive care patients could be spared sedative medication when listening to classical music.



Classical music has been shown to improve concentration and productivity.

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Classical music reveals a more sophisticated intelligence than most modern music.

The medicinal effects of classical music have been studied by researchers for more insight into their healing potential.

Decreased Blood Pressure and Heart Rate

There are several studies showing that classical music can decrease both blood pressure and heart rate.

One study in the British Journal of Health Psychology compared the effects of classical, pop, and jazz music. It showed that “participants who listened to classical music had significantly lower post-task systolic blood pressure levels than did participants who heard no music. Other musical styles did not produce significantly better recovery than silence.”

A 2015 study by professor Peter Sleight of Oxford University found that listening to slower pieces by Verdi, Beethoven's 9th symphony, as well as Puccini, significantly lowered blood pressure, confirming other findings.

In another study, Hans-Joachim Trappe and Gabriele Voit demonstrated that music by Mozart and Strauss markedly lowered not just the subjects' heart rate, but also their blood pressure by nearly five systolic points, which is better than some medications. By comparison, music by ABBA didn't demonstrate any improvement. Mozart's Symphony No. 40 in G minor demonstrated the strongest effect.

A study by Ito, Komazawa, and Kobayashi in Scientific Research Publishing revealed that classical music improved heart rate variability, indicating lowered autonomic nervous system activity, and thus, lower stress levels. Classical music also increased blood flow, as well as body surface temperature, both signs of a state of relaxation.

Improved Mood, Memory, and More

So what else can classical music do for your health?

Studies show that classical music can help not only relieve stress and anxiety but listening to 50 minutes a day has even proven

more effective than psychotherapy in treating low- to medium-grade depression, according to a small study published in The Arts in Psychotherapy.

Classical music has been shown to improve alertness and concentration, leading to greater productivity. Memory is also enhanced when listening to classical music, with some studies even showing benefits in improving dementia.

In addition, improvement in ADHD, particularly when listening to pieces such as Handel's “Water Music” or Bach's “Brandenburg Concertos,” has been demonstrated. Classical music helps put the brain into “alpha mode,” thereby improving focus, concentration, and the ability to learn. It's even been shown to regulate genes responsible for brain function, according to research at the University of Helsinki.

Studies have demonstrated that classical music also improves the quality of sleep, helps with patient self-disclosure (something useful when discussing traumatic events), and even aids in decreasing pain.

A study in the International Journal of Critical Illness & Injury Science found that classical music aids in ICU patient recovery.

“The most benefit from music on health and therefore on the intensive care patient is seen in classical and in meditation music, whereas heavy metal or techno are ineffective or even dangerous. This kind of music is effective and can be utilized as an effective intervention in patients with cardiovascular disturbances, pain, and intensive care medicine,” the study reads.

But not all music is therapeutic. The negative effects of certain types of music has been demonstrated in various studies.

One of the most fascinating studies was done by a Virginia high school student, David Merrell, in 1997. His award-winning science experiment was covered by Virginian-Pilot, the state's largest daily newspaper.

“The rising junior captured top honors in regional and state science fairs and earned accolades from the Navy and the CIA,” the Pilot reported.

Merrell looked at the effects of music on mice as they moved through a maze. After establishing a baseline of 10 minutes to navigate the maze, he found the control group of mice, which weren't exposed to music, were able to cut five minutes off their time. That feat was beaten by mice that listened to classical music, and managed to cut their time by eight and a half minutes.

Meanwhile, mice that were exposed to hard-rock music took 20 minutes longer to navigate the maze.

“I had to cut my project short because all the hard-rock mice killed each other,” Merrell said at the time. “None of the classical mice did that at all.”

Merrell isn't the only researcher to notice that classical music improved maze times among mice. In fact, in a study published in Neurological Research in 2005, the effect was described as the “generalized Mozart effect.”

Some ICU patients could be spared sedative medication when listening to classical music.

“The Mozart group exhibited significant enhancements compared with the control mice,” the researchers noted.

However, it doesn't seem others have repeated Merrell's hard rock comparison.

Let Classical Music Brighten Your Life

With so many benefits to mind, body, and soul, it's unfortunate that we aren't being exposed more to classical music. My son said a teacher told the kids that classical music is “just boring.”

What a shame. My guess is that she was never exposed to it enough to develop an appreciation.

So, just how can we increase our appreciation for classical music?

First, visit your local symphony, whether in person or online. I've taken my son to our Richmond Symphony since he was 5, and he's especially enjoyed a series called Lollipops, which introduces kids to classical music in a way that's fun and entertaining.

There are a variety of books and movies on classical music and composers. “Beethoven Lives Upstairs,” which Lollipops adapted from a 1992 HBO original movie, is one of my son's favorites.

There are also many courses out there. Coursera offers one on the wonders of classical music, while Udemy offers classes on ear training and adventures in classical music. And to explore some of classical music's best works, Classic FM has compiled a list of pieces that “will 100 percent change your life.” And don't forget to check out your local libraries and museums for talks and live performances.

So what if you really want to get to know a piece of music? Chad Hagy, on the website Our Pastimes, suggests researching the history of the piece, learning a little about the composer's life, and then finding a quiet place to listen to the piece—over and over again. Then watch as your blood pressure comes down, and your mood improves, all while your knowledge expands.

To help kids develop an appreciation for classical music, check out Charlene Habermeyer's book, “Good Music Brighter Children,” and her website Good Parenting, Brighter Children. She offers a music course along with a guide geared toward kids, from grade school through college.

Habermeyer recognizes the power of classical music in helping children study and learn, noting that “the American Psychological Association (APA) found in 20 different studies that elementary school children listen, focus, and learn better when listening to certain pieces of classical music.”

There seems to be something special about classical music.

My aunt Veronica knew this. Unfortunately, she died last year. I'd never thought to tell her she was the reason I'd learned to play classical piano. When I mentioned this on her memorial page, her husband and children said she would've been so happy to know she'd inspired her same love of classical music in me.

While it may seem like a simple thing, classical music can bring so much to our lives. Even the composers recognized there was more to their music than meets the eye. As Johann Sebastian Bach said, “I play the notes as they are written, but it is God who makes the music.”

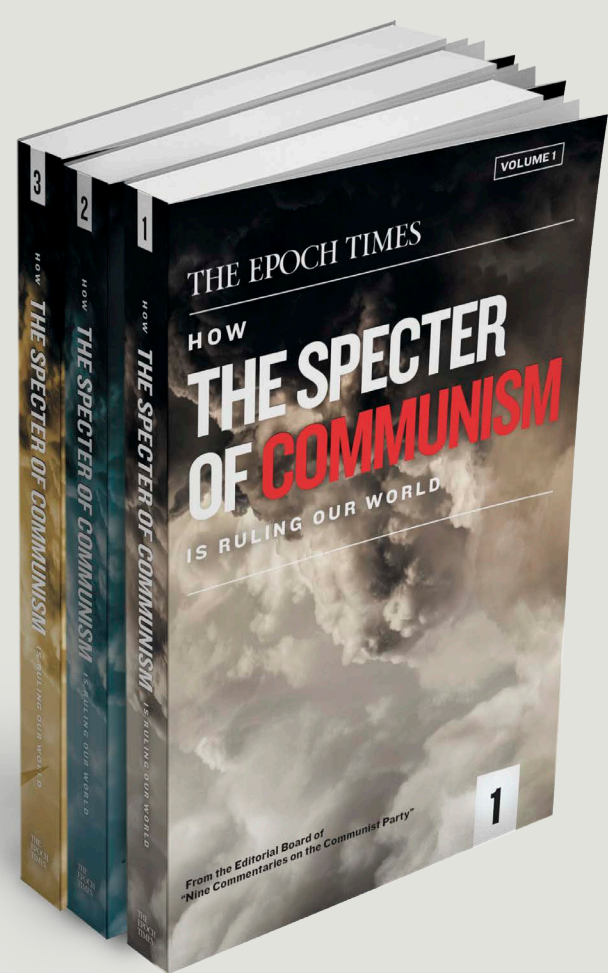
Ludwig van Beethoven concurred, saying, “Music is the language of God.”

So why not tap into this source of joy sent down from the heavens? It may change your life in ways you never imagined!

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

THE EPOCH TIMES

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Sometimes our conversations with others are driven mainly by a need to be listened to and affirmed.

MINDSET MATTERS

What's Really Driving You in Conversation?

When we seek validation from others, we surrender essential powers to external forces

NANCY COLIER

When in conversation with other human beings, most of us are inclined to offer an uh-huh, hmmm or head nod every now and again, to let the other person know we're hearing them and receiving their information. These gestures are a way of maintaining a connection in the interaction and assuring the other person that we're with them in their story.

Without being aware of it, we're trying to get something from our listener, to elicit a certain response, and ultimately, make something feel better in ourselves.

One friend, whom I've known for many years, simply doesn't participate in this customary behavior. These normal symbols of acknowledgment don't happen and never have. When I share thoughts or experiences with this friend, I don't receive any clear signal that he's receiving them, much less absorbing my experience in any meaningful way. I assume that he's hearing me, given that he's in the room and not deaf, and also because he will often allude to what I've shared in a later conversation. But in the actual interaction, there's nothing to affirm the fact that I'm being listened to. And often it feels as if I'm speaking to no one.

In a recent "conversation" with this friend, I noticed that I was growing increasingly anxious and even low-grade frantic. In

the absence of any acknowledging words or gestures from him, in the silence, I felt increasingly unmoored, ungrounded, off-center, and no longer in touch with my own experience. I was losing connection with myself. The words that were coming out of my mouth were still telling the story I wanted to tell, but the one saying them (me) had left the scene. I was disconnected from what was important to me about what I was sharing. Imperceptible though it may have been externally, internally I was on a feverish chase, fixated on eliciting a response from him, on getting him to hear me, validate my experience, and ultimately, show me that I existed.

Regardless of what you or I might think about my friend's behavior, or my choice to be in a relationship with him, the experience points us toward a larger issue. If we stop and check in with ourselves, take note of our internal state while in conversation with friends and significant others, frequently we find a background feeling of anxiety, struggle, or effort. Without being aware of it, we're trying to get something from our listener, to elicit a certain response, and ultimately, make something feel better in ourselves.

Often, we need something from our listener that we're not even aware of needing. We're trying to get the other person to make us feel heard, to give us the feeling that our experience is understood, that we are understood. We award the other person with the power to fulfill or deny us this primal craving, the most basic of all human longings. And because this longing to be heard is so deep and profound, so painful when it doesn't happen, giving it away to our conversation partner creates a sense of stress and even desperation in us. Without knowing it, we render ourselves powerless in the fulfillment of one of our most basic needs.

Sometimes, in addition to trying to be heard, we're struggling to get support or validation, to get the other person to make us feel okay about something we said or did, to confirm our rightness. Sometimes we're trying to elicit a response

that will assuage our guilt, shame, or fear, and quiet our own negative thoughts. At other times, we're trying to get the other person to see us in a particular light, as smart, impressive, good, or any other positive identity; we're trying to elicit a response that will make us feel like we're enough.

No matter what we're trying to get from the other person—and usually, it's something—we suffer if we don't get it.

Trying to elicit a response is a normal part of every human interaction. But at a subtle and not so subtle level, this often hidden intention creates a background feeling of stress and struggle.

In order to free ourselves from this way of relating, we need awareness.

First, we need to become aware of when we're internally caught in an interaction and being driven by the need to get something from our listener. We need to be able to stop right there, in that moment of caught-ness, and pull the lens back. Then we can observe our own internal condition.

We need to become conscious of what's really driving us, what response we're trying to get, and most importantly, what such a response would satisfy or ease in us.

With awareness, we can step out of the struggle, step back from the relentless effort. We can turn our attention away from the other and toward our own longings. Then we can begin feeding ourselves in ways that we can control. The heavy lifting required to get someone else to give us what we need can then melt into a compassionate presence within ourselves.

In a recent conversation with my aforementioned, non-responsive friend, my body alerted me to the fact that I was in a state of intense anxiety and distress. I became aware that my shoulders were up by my ears and my breathing was rapid. My voice was growing louder and there was a boulder-like tightness in my chest. As soon as I became aware of these physical sensations, I stopped the chase, unhooked from the conversation, from the trying to get him to hear me, and took a slow conscious

breath. I paused and turned my attention from outward to inward. I literally and figuratively gathered up all the energy I was launching outward, at my friend, and brought it back into myself. Through this process of awareness, I was once again at the center of my own universe. I had stopped orbiting around his planet and settled back home on my own.

I then continued to tell the same story, but instead of telling it to and at him, I told it to myself. I began, not just to speak, but also to listen and receive my own words. Rather than sending my energy out into the ether, giving away my words, hoping to get some signal back from space that would prove I existed, I consciously became my own destination and mirror.

What's most important is that we stay in touch with ourselves, stay internally conscious and connected when interacting with others. At any moment, we can check in with ourselves and notice our state of being. Are we feeling anxious or disconnected? Are we chasing after something, trying to elicit a certain response from the other? Are we blindly striving to get some need fulfilled?

Whatever we discover can then be an opportunity, not for criticism or judgment, but to know ourselves better, to uncover what's driving us and what we really need and want.

Such an inquiry is an invitation not just to become more self-aware, but also more self-compassionate. Through this process, we acknowledge our own struggle and the suffering that comes when our own needs go unmet.

We self-inflict suffering when we abandon ourselves and award others with the power to fulfill or deprive us of our deepest needs. Here's the good news: We can change the way we experience basic human interactions. Awareness is the door to freedom.

Nancy Colier is a psychotherapist, interfaith minister, author, public speaker, and workshop leader. A regular blogger for *Psychology Today* and *The Huffington Post*, she has also authored several books on mindfulness and personal growth. Colier is available for individual psychotherapy, mindfulness training, spiritual counseling, public speaking, and workshops, and also works with clients via Skype around the world. For more information, visit NancyColier.com

WISE HABITS

The Power of Changing Your Self Perception

Things that you have to debate yourself about, like waking up early or not eating a cheeseburger, cease to be a question.

If our identity is defined by what we do, then we can become the person who does those things

LEO BABAUTA

One of the most powerful switches I ever made was switching up my self-perception, the identity I held for myself. I didn't do it overnight, but I did do it in multiple areas.

I changed to being a non-smoker from a smoker—and once I did, I stopped thinking of smoking as something to do when I was stressed.

I went vegetarian (and later vegan) from being a meat-eater. It literally took meat off the menu for me, so that I didn't even consider eating it.

I thought of myself as a marathoner, and later, as just someone who exercises regularly to stay fit and healthy. It meant that there was no question I was going to exercise, even if I fell out of it for a bit because of disruptions.

I became a meditator (and later, a Zen student). That means even if I stop meditating for a little bit, I'll always come back to it.

I became a writer. Sure, before this change, I did write, but not daily (join my Create Daily Challenge in Sea Change if you want to change this one).

I became a minimalist. Actually, before I decided to call myself that, there wasn't really anyone else who called themselves "minimalists." This purposeful change in identity allowed me to free myself of clutter and enjoy a life of less.

There are dozens of other examples: as a father, unschooling parent, early riser, reader, teacher, speaker, entrepreneur, someone who takes meticulous care of his finances—every time I've made a major (or minor) life change that stuck, I changed my identity.

It's more powerful than most people realize, and it's doable.

Benefits of a New Identity

While it takes a little work, if you can shift how you see yourself, you'll gain several benefits, including changing your behaviors.

Things that you have to debate yourself about, like waking up early or not eating a cheeseburger, cease to be a question. This saves you a lot of mental energy. It becomes much less of a daily struggle.

A more subtle change is a shift in long-standing beliefs about yourself. These are usually limiting beliefs such as, "You can't do this, you're no good at this, you aren't someone who does this."

If they're not serving you, toss these beliefs aside.

With this approach, you begin to get a mindset that you can change anything. You're not stuck in old ways, but someone who can grow and become new with possibility.

How to Change Your Identity

Unfortunately, changing yourself

isn't as easy as flipping a switch. It is, however, eminently doable. It can be done a million different ways, but here are some points I've found to be important:

Do it consciously. We can change our identity without doing it intentionally, but I've found that it works much better if you do it intentionally. Doing it accidentally is like blindly stumbling upon something amazing. It's not a sure thing. Instead, make it an intention to consciously shift your identity in this area.

If you can shift how you see yourself, you'll gain several benefits, including changing your behaviors.

Think about who you want to be. Do you want to be a person who writes every morning? A person who only eats plant-based foods? Someone who buys very little? Write it down: "I am a morning meditator."

Intentionally start doing the actions. Set up visual reminders, phone reminders, whatever you need to do, but start doing the things that you would do if you're this new version of yourself. If you're a runner, go run.

BE the new version of you. Doing the actions is one thing, but you might be doing it while thinking that this is so not you. Instead, do the actions as if you were already that person. See yourself as the runner, the early riser, the vegan. Feel it in your being. Stand as this person.

Reinforce it by appreciating yourself. Each day, take a minute where you look back and see what you did. And appreciate this about yourself. See that you're already shifting. "Yeah, this is happening, good job me!" We tend to focus on the bumps in the road rather than the progress we're making.

When you falter, think about what this new version of you would do. Notice I said "when you falter," not "if." Even a Zen teacher misses a day of meditation sometimes. That's a part of life. We don't always do things "perfectly" but a Zen teacher wouldn't miss a day of meditation and then just give up. She'd just sit the next day. A runner will get back into it even after a week of disruption (maybe due to visitors, illness, travel, injury, etc.). Don't think of the disruption as proof that you're not a runner, but instead approach the disruption as if you are a runner.

Don't Become Rigid It's important to note that creating a new identity for yourself—seeing yourself in a new way—can also have some pitfalls. A big one is that you might create a fixed, rigid view of yourself.

For example, if you create a new identity of yourself that you're an early riser, that could come with the rigidity that you'll never stay up late or sleep in a little. And if your family has a gathering that's later in the evening, you might just pass—not because it will affect anything important, but because of a rigid view of yourself.

There are lots of other possible examples: "If I always work hard, then I can't take a rest;" "If I am an expert in my field, then I can't ever admit I'm wrong."

We don't want our view of ourselves to limit us. Some limits are helpful, if they're chosen consciously (i.e., a limit of eating processed foods). Other limits can be unhelpful if they don't let us do what would be beneficial in a situation.

So while shifting identity can be helpful, I encourage you to not be too rigid. Think of your identity as fluid, something you can shift as needed, consciously.

Next Steps

I encourage you to pick one area at a time. Don't try to shift everything about yourself. Choose one, and apply the steps above.

I am compassionate about myself.

I write every day.

I am a loving parent.

What would you like to try?

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

In Peacock's 'Brave New World,' Everyone Is Very Happy, or so It Seems

One key component that confers true happiness is missing from even the most perfectly engineered society

JEN MAFFESSANTI

What do people need to be happy?

In the new Peacock original series "Brave New World," as well as the 1932 Aldous Huxley novel it's based on, happiness in the fictional society of New London is mandated by the powers that be.

Everyone in New London is genetically engineered and psychologically conditioned to be suited to, and satisfied with, a specific role in their society. They're encouraged to the point of compulsion

Adversity actually makes us stronger.

to engage in every kind of hedonistic indulgence imaginable. There are no difficult decisions to be made. And for those pesky times when discomfort or anxiety rear their ugly heads, the perfectly effective, perfectly side-effect-free drug Soma is there to smooth it away.

Everyone is happy.

Except that they're not.

But why? Why, when every physical need is amply satisfied and every pleasure available and every discomfort eased, would people not be happy? Why would a worker kill himself in the opening act? Why would

some citizens need the occasional "reconditioning" in order to bring them back in line? Why do the residents of New London feel the need for so much Soma?

Especially given that the fictional world of New London that Huxley imagined back in the early 1930s rather closely resembles the fantasies of "luxury communism" that have been recently proposed, it's an important question.

Happiness is... weird, which may seem weird to say. After all, we all know what happiness is. Don't we?

Broadly speaking, we can define happiness as a general state of contentment with one's circumstances. Generally, people who are happy know and pursue their life's purpose, they smile a lot, they're meeting their basic needs for survival, they're able to give and receive gifts and attention without resentment, and are free of strife.

Continued on Page 8

In Peacock's 'Brave New World,' Everyone Is Very Happy, or so It Seems

One key component that confers true happiness is missing from even the most perfectly engineered society

Continued from Page 7

But that's not all that we need to be happy. For many people, not having to fuss with making decisions about difficult things—or even easy things—sounds pretty relaxing. Never having to hear, see, or otherwise experience activities or ideas they find objectionable feels comforting. A place for everyone and everyone in their place with no worry about whether it's what they want to be doing with their life appears neat, clean, and ideal. Surely, this can be a way to happiness.

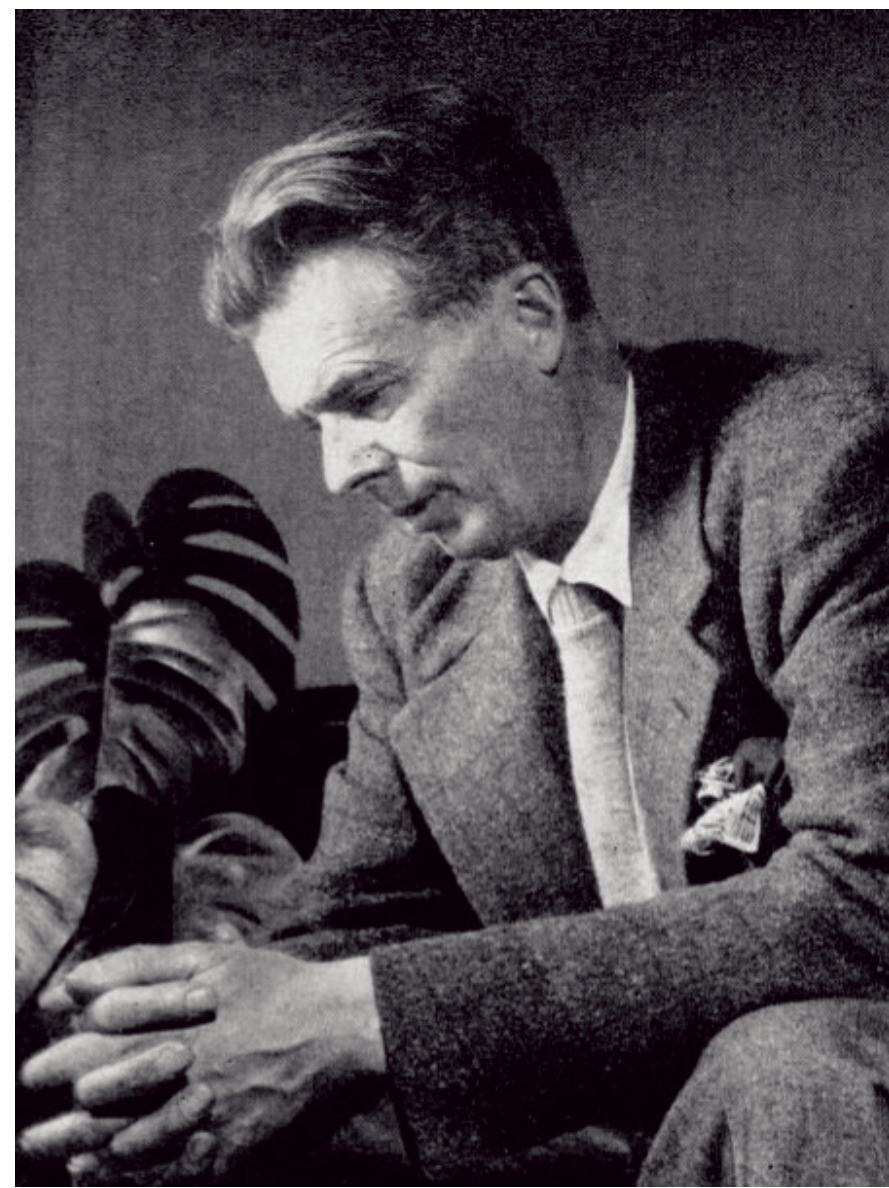
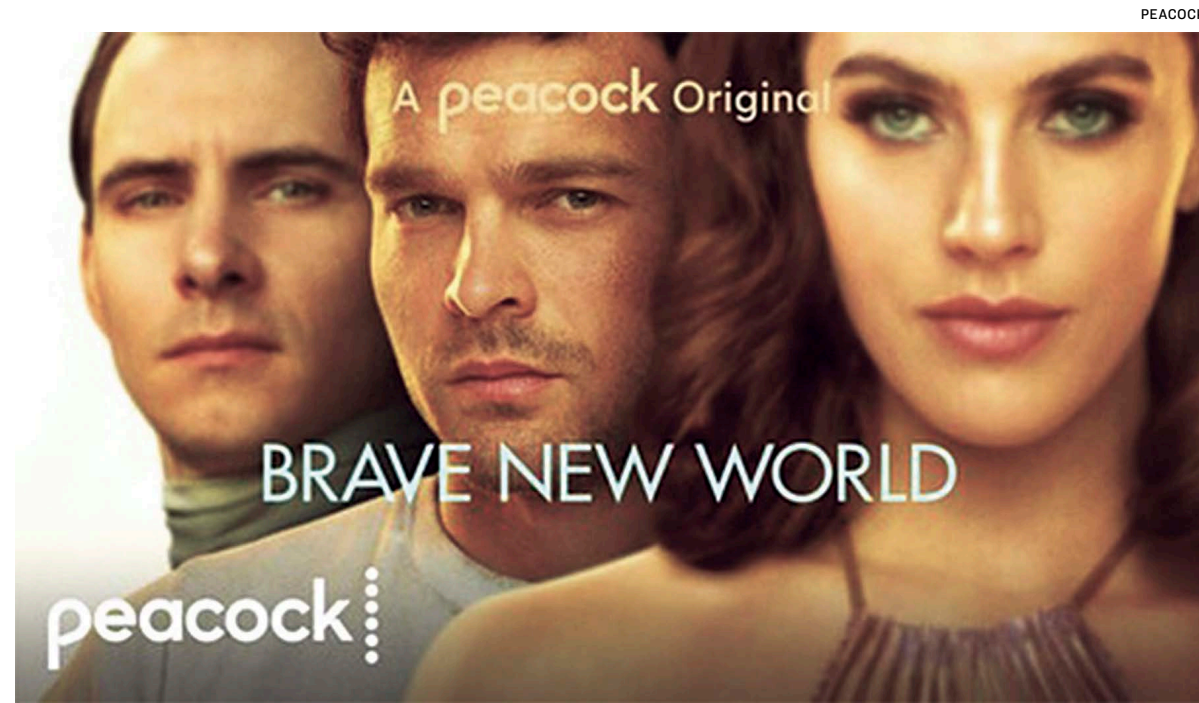
And maybe, just maybe, it would be nice, for a little while. Just like a vacation is nice, for a little while. When bills are due and stress levels are high and the kids are asking what's for dinner, yes, I certainly understand the appeal. But I wouldn't want to live my entire life that way. And in practice, highly controlled societies like the Soviet Union or modern-day North Korea, where what you do, who you do it with, what you consume, and where you go is decided by someone else, happiness tends to be in pretty short supply.

This is because happiness is intrinsically tied to personal choice and autonomy. It's about feeling like you have control over your own life. Material comforts are nice, but they don't seem to have that big of an impact on people's happiness levels. Studies have shown that autonomy is actually the number one predictor of happiness.

Our society, broadly speaking, is wealthier, healthier, and more comfortable than it's ever been, and yet more people are struggling with anxiety than ever before.

And it's autonomy that's conspicuously missing from the fictional society of New London and from real-life command-and-control societies around the world.

But maybe having an easy, cushy life would still be better, if we were able to arrange it so that a certain measure of autonomy could be accommodated. After all, it's distressing to worry about bills and dealing with people who don't agree with you. Life is filled with anxiety and pain. Wouldn't we be



(Above) Brave New World streams on NBCUniversal's Peacock online service.

(Left) Aldous Huxley published "Brave New World" in 1932. The novel described a future where marriage is taboo, babies are born in test tubes, and people are genetically engineered.

Generally, people who are happy know and pursue their life's purpose, they smile a lot, they're meeting their basic needs for survival.

Jen Maffessanti is a senior associate editor at the Foundation for Economic Education and mother of two. When she's not advocating for liberty or chasing kids, she can usually be found cooking or maybe racing cars. Check out her website at www.JenMaffessanti.com. This article was originally published on FEE.org

adventure, risk, and uncertainty. Yet, in spite of the ubiquity of the phenomenon, there is no word for the exact opposite of fragile. Let us call it antifragile. Antifragility is beyond resilience or robustness. The resilient resists shocks and stays the same; the antifragile gets better."

And the human psyche is antifragile. Even if it were possible to perfectly control our social environment to shield ourselves from conflict, and experience only pleasurable interactions like in New London—and, to be clear, it emphatically isn't possible—our world itself is a chaotic, largely unpredictable place. As we are all too keenly aware right now, disease and natural disasters are always a possibility, even if nothing else were at issue.

Disruptions to supply lines, changes in our understanding of the natural world, or simply growing up are all shocks to our systems. If we don't allow ourselves to experience and become accustomed to the discomfort of change, not only will we as individuals and as a society stagnate, we will become so fragile that a single hammer-blow of unanticipated hardship could shatter us.

Happiness cannot be engineered. Humans cannot have all—or even a slim majority—of their choices made for them and still be happy. Autonomy—that is, freedom—is necessary for human happiness.

While the psychological research on this might be relatively recent, this wisdom didn't escape early 20th-century economists. Economics is, after all, at its core, the study of human behavior and interaction. Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises wrote in his book *Liberalism* in 1927:

"It is impossible, in the long run, to subject men against their will to a regime that they reject. Whoever tries to do so by force will ultimately come to grief, and the struggles provoked by his attempt will do more harm than the worst government based on the consent of the governed could ever do. Men cannot be made happy against their will."

The tendency of so many generally well-meaning people, from academics to helicopter parents, to socially engineer a perfectly happy society with no strife, no discord, no struggle, will always have the opposite effect. The attempts to "fix" the problems with human nature will always backfire.

People can't be forced into being "better." People cannot be forced into being happy.

And while freedom is no guarantee of happiness, it is essential if we are ever to be able to find it on our own.

How Your Mindset Shapes Your Body



Studies have begun to validate an important connection between mind and midriff

CONAN MILNER

It's one of the great ironies of the modern age: We're a culture obsessed with staying slim, yet we're fatter than we've ever been. Since the 1980s, the percentage of obese adults has doubled, and the percentage of obese children has tripled.

We know what to avoid: sugar, trans fats, a sedentary lifestyle, and other factors that have been promoted as clear contributors to this epidemic. So why do we keep getting bigger?

According to health editor Nancy L. Bryan, it's because we're overlooking

the root cause: our mindset.

The impact our mindset has on our body is a subject that has fascinated Bryan for decades. Her book, *Thin Is a State Of Mind: The No-Stress Weight Loss Guide*, was first published in 1980. She says her ideas were considered "hippy-dippy" back then, but they've aged remarkably well.

Over the past 40 years, research has validated many of her observations.

"These are now mainstream ideas," Bryan said.

The title of Bryan's book doesn't mean you can simply wish yourself thin. Instead, she points to evidence that our

While it's possible to lose weight in a short span of time, experts say those who take it slowly are more likely to stay slim in the long term.

thoughts do indeed shape our body. Stress and anxiety, for example, can stimulate fat-promoting chemicals like cortisol. This stress hormone is also known as the belly fat hormone because our abdominal region often swells with chronic surges of cortisol.

Scientists aren't exactly sure why this happens. One hypothesis is that when our ancestors experienced prolonged bouts of stress, it meant their lives were in danger, so their bodies responded by creating extra abdominal fat to protect vital organs.

Continued on Page 12

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Life Is Too Short ...

Seneca told us there was enough time—unless we wasted it

JOSHUA BECKER

Seneca once wrote: "It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it. Life is long enough, and a sufficiently generous amount has been given to us for the highest achievements if it were all well invested. But when it is wasted in heedless luxury and spent on no good activity, we are forced at last by death's final constraint to realize that it has passed away before we knew it was passing. So it is: we are not given a short life but we make it short, and we are not ill-supplied but wasteful of it ... Life is long if you know how to use it."

This is a profound statement, and I would encourage you to read it again. The more I read it, the more I'm inspired by it. These phrases stick out the most to me: "It is not that we have a short time to live ... but that we waste a lot of it." "Life is long enough for the highest achievements if it were all well invested."

"It is wasted in heedless luxury and spent on no good activity." "We are not given a short life but we make it short, and we are not ill-supplied but wasteful of it." I should, perhaps, end this article right now—with Seneca's own words—rather than thinking I can improve upon them. But maybe, for just a few short sentences, I will comment.

You (the person reading these words right now) were designed to achieve great things. You are unique in your being, your substance, your abilities, and your relationships. And there is no one else on the face of the earth who can live your life and accomplish your good. Please don't forget that. There's no doubt that "success" and "achievement" are relative words, and your highest achievement is different from someone else's highest achievement. You may never lead thousands

or cure cancer. But make no mistake, there is a good that you are designed to bring into this world. And there are people in your life that you can serve and love better than anyone else. Your highest achievement will be different than mine, but we both have one. And "life is long enough for us to achieve it."

There is no one else on the face of the earth who can live your life and accomplish your good.

Unless, as Seneca wrote, "Our lives are wasted in needless luxury and spent on no good activity." It is up to us to decide, every day, to focus our energies on those things worthy of the life we've been given. Discard the inessential. Remove the distractions. Reject worthless activity. Your life is too short ... to waste accumulating material possessions. Your life is too short ... to be offended all the time. Your life is too short ... to chase accolades. Your life is too short ... to compare it to others. Your life is too short ... to watch 6 hours of television per day. Your life is too short ... to pursue riches. Your life is too short ... to not believe in yourself. Your life is too short ... to not forgive. Your life is too short ... to not speak your mind. Your life is too short ... to worry about the future. Your life is too short ... to regret the past. Your life is too short ... to live in fear. Your life is too short ... to be unhappy. Your life is too short ... to waste time on the trivial. Your life is too short ... to live like everyone else. Your life is too short ... to not be true to yourself. And life is too short to wait.

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

You are unique in your being, your substance, your abilities, and your relationships.



There is a unique goodness that each of us brings to this world—if we only make the effort to reveal it.



We don't expect our children to be able to run the moment they're born.

MINDSET MATTERS

We Weren't Always as Good as We Are Now, so What?

There's no shame in crawling before we can walk, and no sense in shaming ourselves for doing so

NANCY COLIER

There's something profoundly disturbing going on in our culture right now. Well, truth be told, there are a multitude of profoundly disturbing things going on. But at the center of our toxic culture is a rapidly metastasizing and malignant sense of entitlement—righteousness. And specifically, the right to cast judgment.

As a society, we have become astoundingly judgmental. We feel entitled and emboldened to cast judgment on absolutely everything and everyone. We not only judge what everyone is saying, doing, and believing right now, but we judge what everyone said, did, and believed throughout history. We feel entitled to criticize and condemn those who came before us, specifically, for being less aware and evolved than we are now. We shame who we used to be, and at the same time, deny that that's who we were.

We do this judging not only on a public stage, to other people, but also personally—to ourselves. We are constantly attacking, shaming, and rejecting earlier versions of ourselves, judging and blaming who we used to be. But we judge and blame through the lens of who we are now—who we've become.

Oddly, we expect ourselves to have always known and understood what we now know and understand. We shame ourselves for being works in progress, for having to grow up and keep grow-

ing up, for not coming out of the womb fully formed and perfect. As we become more awake and aware beings, sadly, we look back at less mature incarnations of ourselves with disdain and contempt.

Laura, a client, started to tell me about a recent, wonderful experience in which she did something profoundly kind for her neighbor. She felt really good about her choice, and about herself. But before she had gotten even a few sentences into her story, Laura veered off into a shaming and critical diatribe on herself—specifically, about a past experience from 20 years ago, when she had acted with less kindness and less generosity.

When it comes to our emotional and spiritual evolution, the maturation of our character and awareness, we expect perfection right out of the gate.

The opportunity to honor this lovely experience, and also fully inhabit the person she had become as a woman in her forties, was hijacked by her need to vilify and condemn who she had been in her twenties. In an instant, she

had abandoned her present-day self and was back in self-loathing and shame, caught in an old narrative, and an ocean of regret about who she used to be.

It's odd, really. We don't expect our children to be able to run the moment they're born. We all understand that, as human beings, we need to roll around for 9 or 10 months, then slide along on our butts for another few months, then crawl, then stand up and fall down, then toddle for a while holding onto something, then take a couple of steps on our own, then fall down some more, then take more steps, then fall down, and then walk.

We accept that we need to grow into ourselves on a physical level, to fail until we can succeed.

And to some degree, we hold this same acceptance with regard to our mental evolution, recognizing our need for education. And yet, for some reason, when it comes to our emotional and spiritual evolution, the maturation of our character and awareness, we expect perfection right out of the gate. We deny ourselves the right to learn and evolve over a lifetime, and similarly, to change and grow over generations, as a species.

Life is a process of endless becoming. We're never fully done growing, never done becoming. We are works in progress, throughout life. Over time and through our lived experiences, we learn who we want to be, who we are capable of being.

The truth is, we don't come out as our best self; we grow into and learn how to be our best self. Particularly if we didn't have parents or caretakers that could serve as models for our best behavior. We become more evolved and aware, and hopefully more compassionate, through trial and error, good examples, failure, time, and experience; we become the people we can respect and be proud of. That's precisely the journey of life, precisely the point of it. To deny this truth or demand that it should be otherwise is to deny reality.

When we judge and condemn our past behaviors and our level of awareness based on what we're capable of now, we not only deny

reality, but we reject and abandon our more evolved selves. We refuse ourselves the privilege to change, to become and be better versions of ourselves. We cling to our past failures in the face of our current successes as a way of holding onto an old identity, an outdated narrative on ourselves as bad or not who we should have been.

Often, at the root of our judging is shame. We shame ourselves for having to spiritually and morally mature, as if there were some other way for our evolution to happen. We condemn ourselves for having to grow into our best selves, for ever having been imperfect.

Simultaneously, we block the self we've become from becoming even more, and from fulfilling its potential.

As human beings, we are works in progress.

We grow into who we are on a daily basis.

There's no point at which we reach our final destination, a completed self. Again and again, we realize that what we thought and believed before, maybe even yesterday, we no longer think and believe now. We discover that we have changed.

The same holds true for us as a species. Who we were at other times in history is not who we are now. There's no shame in that; it's just what is. But each minute we spend condemning and judging who we were; each present moment we waste expecting and demanding a past self to have known what a present self knows, is not only complete rejection of reality, of the human condition, but it's also a moment we've lost, one that could have been spent living our life as the more evolved self we are right now.

Nancy Colier is a psychotherapist, interfaith minister, author, public speaker, and workshop leader. A regular blogger for Psychology Today and The Huffington Post, she has also authored several books on mindfulness and personal growth. Colier is available for individual psychotherapy, mindfulness training, spiritual counseling, public speaking, and workshops, and also works with clients via Skype around the world. For more information, visit NancyColier.com

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Steroids Cut COVID-19 Death Rates, but Not for Everyone

For those with less severe infections, including the asymptomatic, steroids have more side-effects than benefits

BRYAN MCVERRY

New studies show that treating critically ill COVID-19 patients with inexpensive steroids can cut their risk of dying from the illness by a third. The results are so clear that the World Health Organization changed its advice on Sept. 2 and now strongly recommends corticosteroids as a first-line treatment for the sickest patients.

Steroids aren't risk-free, however. They can have side effects, and they could do more harm than good in patients with milder cases of COVID-19.

I am a pulmonologist and critical care physician and co-author of 1 of 3 new studies that analyzed data from clinical trials involving the effect of steroids on thousands of critically and severely ill COVID-19 patients. Here's what people need to understand about steroids as a treatment for COVID-19.

Who Benefits From Taking Steroids?

It's important to understand that steroids can benefit the sickest patients hospitalized with COVID-19, but they're not a treatment for relatively mild cases.

With COVID-19 and other infectious diseases, there are two key components: the infection itself and the body's response to that infection.

In the sickest patients, the body's immune system response is so robust it can injure organs. So, calming the immune response may be important. But someone who is less severely ill may need the body's immune response to prevent the infection from getting worse. You wouldn't want to interfere with the immune response unless it was harming the patient.

How Do Corticosteroids Help Critically Ill Patients?

When an infection triggers an inflammatory response, specialized white blood cells

are activated to go find the virus or bacteria and destroy it. It's more of a bomb effect than a targeted missile strike. The immune cells attack broadly, and the inflammation created can damage other cells in the vicinity.

That response can get out of control and continue even after the infectious agent is gone. In a really exuberant immune response, the patient can have respiratory failure and end up on a ventilator, or have circulatory failure and end up in shock, or they could develop kidney failure from the shock.

In patients with severe COVID-19, corticosteroids are likely able to calm that inflammatory response and prevent the progression of organ damage, potentially in the lungs.

Scientists aren't yet certain that that is how steroids are working. What we do know from the new studies is that people with severe COVID-19, particularly those with respiratory complications, benefit from relatively low-dose courses of corticosteroids. A combined analysis of the recent studies found the death rate four weeks after infection was significantly lower in patients with severe COVID-19 who received steroids than those who did not.

Steroids Not Used in Cases That Aren't Severe

No treatment comes without risk.

Steroids are well-known immune-suppressing medications that have been used for decades. They're commonly used for treating chronic diseases that are inflammation-related, such as asthma, or autoimmune disorders such as lupus or

rheumatoid arthritis. But there may be consequences.

The potential harms from using steroids in a hospital include an increased risk of bacterial or fungal infections, hyperglycemia, acquired muscle weakness and gastrointestinal bleeding.

For people with milder cases of COVID-19, taking steroids could mean increasing their risks with little potential benefit.

Taking steroids long-term also carries other risks, including predisposition to infection and developing osteoporosis, cataracts, and glaucoma. So, to take steroids

as a potential preventive measure against COVID-19 could come with significant potential risk to otherwise healthy people. This is why the WHO recommends not using steroids in COVID-19 cases that aren't severe.

Do Steroids Carry Risks for Critically Ill Patients?

It's common for ICU patients, particularly those on ventilators, to develop hospital-acquired infections such as pneumonia or bloodstream infections related to intravenous catheters. Being on corticosteroids can increase a patient's risk of developing secondary infections, or it can contribute to muscle weakness which may impact the patient's ability to come off of a ventilator when the disease resolves.

Still, the benefits of steroids for treating critically ill COVID-19 patients appear to outweigh the harms.

How Large Should the Dose Be?

Part of the challenge in treating critically ill patients with steroids is determining the dose and timing of the medication.

In the context of this study, the dose of steroids is relatively low and it's also a short duration. The trials haven't shown a significant increase in adverse events in the context of using the short-course, relatively low dose of steroids. So, in that patient population, the benefit outweighs the risk, but the risk is not zero.

The risk profile increases with higher

doses. So, the recommendation would be to start with the relatively low doses that have been studied. The WHO recommends low doses for 7 to 10 days.

Recent studies found the death rate four weeks after infection was significantly lower in patients with severe COVID-19 who received steroids than those who did not.

Which Steroids Are Most Effective?

I don't think it matters which corticosteroid is used as long as the steroid has some glucocorticoid activity.

The REMAP-CAP study looked at hydrocortisone. Another trial involved dexamethasone. Others studied methylprednisolone, though they were smaller and provided less data. The trials all point in a similar direction, suggesting the anti-inflammatory glucocorticoid activity is the important feature and not the specific steroid.

How Will This New Advice Change Treatment?

Based on the studies to date, hospitalized patients with COVID-19 pneumonia and requiring oxygen should be started on a low-dose course of steroids. That should certainly be the case if they're in the intensive care unit and require more intensive organ support, such as being on a ventilator, receiving non-invasive ventilation, or receiving high-flow oxygen.

Importantly, however, steroids have not been shown to benefit asymptomatic patients with COVID-19 or patients with mild disease without pulmonary problems based on the data we've seen so far.

Physicians should think of steroids at low doses as the standard of care for critically ill patients with COVID-19 pneumonia.

Bryan McVerry is an associate professor of medicine at the University of Pittsburgh. This article was first published by The Conversation.



Steroids are now a first-line treatment in cases of severe COVID-19 where patients require oxygen or being put on a ventilator.

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