

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# MIND &

# BODY

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## The Many Dimensions of Fat

Shedding those extra pounds can be tough—especially if you try too hard

When our image fails to meet our expectations, it can fuel issues of self-worth and make us lose confidence in our ability to exercise self-control.



### CONAN MILNER

Some factors of the American obesity epidemic are obvious. We lead sedentary lives with an abundance of tantalizing calorie-dense foods made from combinations of sugar, fat, and salt.

These factors alone make losing fat hard enough. But the addition of other, more subtle factors can make the job even harder.

We're bigger than ever, but, at the same time, more image-conscious than ever. And when our image fails to meet our expectations, it can fuel issues of self-worth and make us lose confidence in our ability to exercise self-control.

Plus, we live in a world of instant gratification. This doesn't give us much practice with activities like fat loss, which take time and patience.

These social and psychological factors don't contain any calories, but they're a big reason why so many people with aspirations to slim down simply give up, or turn to drastic measures.



There are endless diet and exercise options for losing fat, but the trick is finding a method that you can live with long term.

Our feelings about fat change with the times. Throughout history, beauty standards have ranged from stick-thin to generous curves. But the problems associated with fat are much more than an issue of aesthetics.

### Consequences

Health and fat are intimately entwined. Obesity is linked to death via heart disease, cancer, and diabetes, not to mention it puts extra stress on joints having to haul that excess mass around.

Obesity also makes for more complications during surgery. Most hospitals now require three separate consent forms for anyone with a BMI over 40.

Excess fat can also weaken our immune system. Studies from France, China, and the United States have consistently found that heavier patients infected with COVID-19 were more likely to die than their leaner counterparts. And vaccines are generally less effective in people with excess fat.

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## Nutritious, Delicious Congee

Ancient Chinese medicine held congee had curative effects

### DR. HU NAIWEN

For millennia, Chinese people have relied on natural foods to strengthen immunity. This becomes especially necessary during the autumn, a drier season that's known to trigger seasonal illnesses. Since ancient times, traditional Chinese medicine has offered us an excellent preventative—congee. Often known as rice porridge, congee is praised for its effectiveness in improving health, and has a reputation as the world's best supplement.

### A Special Porridge That Does Wonders

When one boils rice for congee, a translucent layer of thick liquid forms on top, producing the "soup" of the grain. Chinese people have long known this liquid can be effective for clearing coughs and restoring energy, along with many other benefits. On the uppermost layer of this soup is a thin sheet of "rice grease," the essence of the congee.

According to traditional Chinese medicine studies, this substance is capable of improving energy circulation, nourishing the organs, and clearing internal blockages. In general terms, this is called replenishing the yin, or the vital essence, of the human body. Congee grease possesses yin-nourishing effects.

In the records of "The Collection of Compendium of Materia Medica" by Zhao Xuemin (1719–1805), congee grease also boasts cosmetic effects, smoothing one's complexion and strengthening one's physique. According to Zhao Xuemin, if a malnourished person eats congee grease, these effects will be evident within 100 days.

While its significant nutritional value and curative power are comparable to those of ginseng soup, congee's readily accessible and budget-friendly ingredients have made it a more popular choice as a source of nourishment for thousands of years.

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Seemingly ordinary yet extremely beneficial, congee is indeed a low-profile treasure passed down from ancient times.

## What People Say



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# THE EPOCH TIMES

TRUTH AND TRADITION

# COVID Disinfectants May Be Hazardous to Humans

### Exposure to disinfectants strongly linked to respiratory problems equivalent to smoking a pack a day for 10 to 20 years

Those consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic response may turn out to be worse for many people than the disease itself. Experts have predicted a coming mental health crisis in the United States, as Americans struggle with financial insecurity, job losses, social isolation, and fears about returning to public life. Privacy concerns also continue to emerge, as contact tracing apps and other methods of surveillance morph into the new "normal."

**The accelerated pace at which these toxic chemicals are now being used is causing unprecedented levels of exposure—with unknown consequences to human health.**

Unchecked disinfection procedures, including those recommended by public health agencies, are another major concern. Prior to the pandemic, chemical disinfectants had been linked to health problems, but the accelerated pace at which these toxic chemicals are now being used is causing unprecedented levels of exposure—with unknown consequences to human health.

#### 'List N' Disinfectants May Not Be Proven Safe for Humans

In response to COVID-19, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released "List N," which is a list of about 400 disinfectants that meet the EPA's criteria for use against SARS-CoV-2. To meet the criteria, the disinfectants must demonstrate effectiveness against a harder-to-kill virus or demonstrate efficacy against a human coronavirus similar to SARS-CoV-2.

"This doesn't mean that they have been approved because they're considered safe with regard to human health," exposure scientist Lesliam Quirós-Alcalá, an assistant professor at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, told Bloomberg. While studies on many of the chemicals are limited, some have been linked to asthma and other respiratory conditions, reproductive effects, and neurological and dermatological problems.

Exposure to disinfectants and cleaning products has long been linked to health risks. A 2019 cohort study of 73,262 U.S. female nurses found expo-

sure to cleaning chemicals at work was associated with a 25 percent to 38 percent increased risk of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). This included disinfectants with the active ingredients glutaraldehyde and quaternary ammonium compounds, variants of which are included on the EPA's List N.

Research published in the American Journal of Respiratory and Critical Care Medicine also found that women responsible for cleaning at home, or who worked as house cleaners, had accelerated declines in lung function and impaired long-term respiratory health 10 to 20 years after cleaning activities.

"Exposures related to cleaning activities may constitute a risk to long-term respiratory health," the study concluded, with researchers stating that the damage to respiratory function for women cleaners was similar to smoking a pack of cigarettes every day for 10 to 20 years.

"The effect size was comparable to the effect size related to 10-20 pack-years of tobacco smoking," they wrote. One "pack-year" is equivalent to smoking 20 cigarettes (one pack) per day for one year. Other common symptoms that can occur from exposure to chemical disinfectants include nausea, eye irritation, and headaches.

#### Ramped Up Disinfecting a 'Hazardous Proposition'

Health risks likely increase with increased levels of disinfectant exposure, making coronavirus disinfectants particularly risky due to the high frequency of application.

The EPA, in their guidance for cleaning and disinfecting public spaces and homes against COVID-19, recommends surfaces frequently touched by multiple people, such as door handles, desks, faucets, and light switches, be disinfected at least daily, with certain surfaces, such as shopping carts and sale keypads, being disinfected more often, including before each use.

Speaking with Bloomberg, Rich Feczko, national director of systems, standards and innovation at Crothall Healthcare, said the pace at which the company is cleaning hundreds of hospitals has accelerated. "Our frequencies have ramped up in public places like lobbies and elevators to 6-8 times per day," with restrooms cleaned every two hours.

"This is a hazardous proposition," immunologist and allergist Dr. Claudia Miller told the news outlet. "Cleaners tend to go in with hugely toxic chemicals. We're creating another problem for a whole group of people, and I'm not sure we're actually controlling infections."



Using disinfectant sprayers has become increasingly popular during the pandemic, which increases the likelihood we will breathe in harmful chemicals.

#### Spraying Disinfectants May Be Especially Dangerous

Adding to the problem is the way some of the disinfectants are being applied. Using sprayers that aerosolized disinfectants is becoming increasingly popular during the pandemic, as it allows cleaners to cover far more space in a shorter period of time. Electrostatic sprayers also add a positive charge so the chemicals stick to surfaces.

Not only have the risks of aerosolized disinfectants not been explored, but most of the disinfectants on List N have not been approved for aerosolizing, misting, or fogging. Further, it's likely that spraying the chemicals poses increased inhalation risks, as it generates micro-particles and possibly even smaller nanoparticles, which are absorbed into the body faster and in greater quantities than larger particles.

The New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) issued a health alert bulletin that fogging ambulances with toxic disinfectants may cause illness after four emergency medical technicians were diagnosed with work-related asthma.

"Fogging is not recommended in ambulances," NJDOH warned. "Often, the active ingredients are respiratory irritants and sensitizers and include chemicals such as chlorine, phenol, quaternary ammonium compounds ("quats"), alcohols, or hydrogen peroxide compounds (listed in decreasing order of toxicity)."

The World Health Organization (WHO) similarly warned: "In indoor spaces, routine application of disinfectants to surfaces via spraying is not recommended for COVID-19. If disinfectants are to be applied, these should be via a cloth or wipe which is soaked in the disinfectant." Despite this, industrial cleaning companies are moving to use spraying technologies once reserved for hospitals in school buses.

"If we can spray it in a Hershey's food plant or at a hospital, we can certainly spray it on a school bus," Bob Gorski, president of cleaning company Merrick Group, told Bloomberg. In several places around the world, including major cities and popular public areas, such as Turkey's Grand Bazaar, clouds of disinfectants are even being dispersed into the sky via drones, even though experts have warned the practice likely is not effective and could be toxic to humans.

**"We're creating another problem for a whole group of people, and I'm not sure we're actually controlling infections."**

*Dr. Claudia Miller, immunologist and allergist*

When it comes to chemical disinfectants, reducing your exposure is wise, especially if they're being used in an enclosed space such as a vehicle, elevator, or high-rise building with poor circulation. For times when cleaning is necessary, there are many natural methods available for cleaning purposes, as well as safer disinfectants such as ultraviolet light. As it stands, however, the aggressive disinfection procedures being implemented in the name of COVID-19 could end up causing far more harm than good.

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Congee grease possesses yin-nourishing effects.

# NUTRITIOUS, DELICIOUS CONGEE

Ancient Chinese medicine held congee had curative effects

*Continued from Page 1*

According to the records of Wang Shixiong, a reputable Chinese physician of the 19th century (the Qing Dynasty), congee achieved miraculous health effects for the less-affluent families, who commonly used it as a substitute for ginseng soup.

#### The Indispensable Grains

The Chinese medical classic "Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon" states that to maintain homeostasis, the human body depends on "five grains to nourish, five fruits to assist, five meats to tonify, and five vegetables to supplement." Though all are needed, the most pivotal are the five grains, namely, millet, rice, soybean, wheat, and adzuki beans (red mung beans). They serve as the main fuel for the body, as they contain the carbohydrates and fiber needed to maintain healthy bodily functions.

Today, many young people believe they need to eat less rice in order to cut back on their starch intake since starch can cause weight gain or possibly even lead to diabetes. However, consuming grains can nourish and balance the inner organs and is necessary for keeping many illnesses away.

Ancient Chinese medicine studied the interconnectedness among the body's mechanisms. It was understood that the lungs regulate the skin, the heart regulates the veins, the spleen regulates the muscles, the liver regulates the tendons, and the kidneys regulate the bones. To ensure the optimal functionality of all these elements, we must provide the nutrients needed by the respective organs.

This explains the cosmetic effects mentioned earlier. Congee boiled from white rice clears away dull-looking skin for a healthy, glowing complexion. According to ancient Chinese medicine, natural foods that are white in color benefit the lungs, thereby opening up the inner channels, unclogging and cleansing the pores, and freeing the skin from waste products while restoring the skin's vigor.

You can also rejuvenate your hair with the frequent consumption of this thick rice soup. It is held that congee helps to deliver the nutrients necessary to the different parts of the hair, nourishing it and reducing hair loss and gray hair, while also adding a natural shine. A bowl of well-made congee truly does wonders. In addition to its ability to detoxify and nourish, it can even cure illnesses.

#### Congee's Healing Attributes

Traditional Chinese medicine maintains that an unsettled stomach disrupts quality rest. Any stomach discomfort negatively impacts one's sleep quality and may even lead to insomnia. This can be resolved with a special kind of congee.

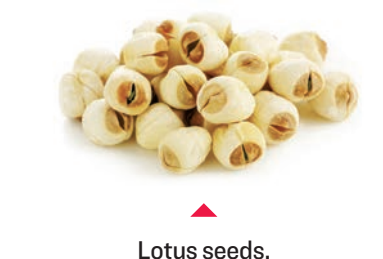
Job's tears, also known as adlay millet, is incredible for clearing internal heat and soothing one's complexion, while the lotus seed can replenish the spleen and stomach. Lotus seed has a pleasant, light sweetness, and its "cool" property invigorates the spleen and thus prevents diarrhea, while mung bean detoxifies and clears away internal disturbances. Combining these three into a congee recipe can calm the nerves, improve energy circulation, moisturize skin, and help clear edema.

Pork tenderloin is often used for stir-frying, as it possesses a delightful balance of fragrance, crispness, and taste. But the real magic comes when you shred it and cook it with congee. This recipe is especially soothing for those with a loss of appetite. Years ago, a family member who had been combating cancer for a long time, threw up everything he ate. One day a friend of his made him pork tenderloin congee, as it was something delicious while still easy to consume. "This is the most soothing meal I've had in a long while," the patient said.

Seemingly ordinary yet extremely beneficial, congee is indeed a low-profile treasure passed down from ancient times. With the busy modern life we lead today, it might be hard to take the time to boil the perfect congee, but it can be done very simply: Start cooking the night before, and then keep it overnight in a thermal cooker. By the next morning, a nutritious, tasty pot of congee will be ready for the entire family.

*Dr. Hu's Health Corner, translated and edited for clarity with permission of NTD.*

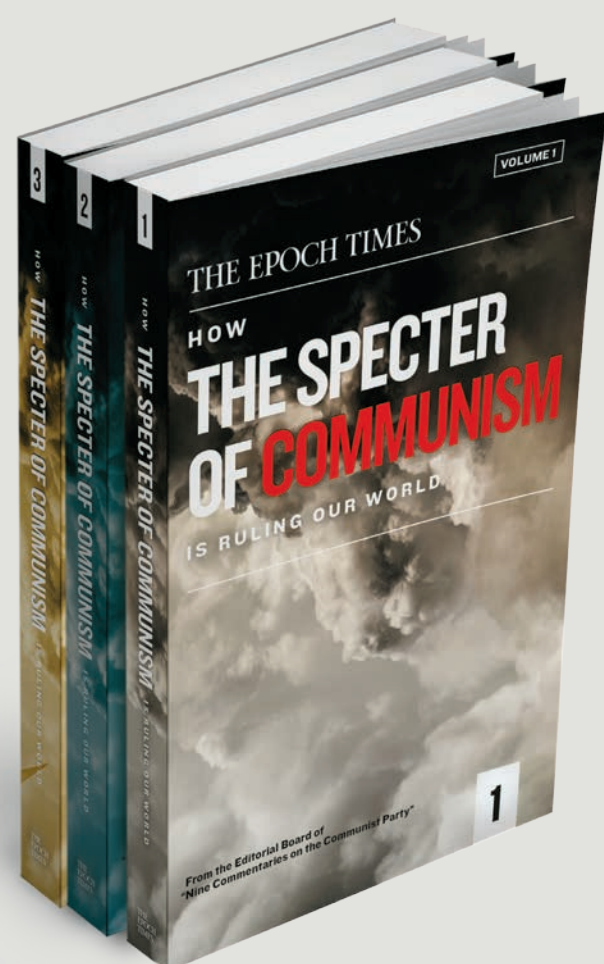
*Currently, a professor at Nine Star University of Health and Sciences in Sunnyvale, Calif., Dr. Hu Naiwen was previously a pharmacological researcher of Western medicine in Taiwan. He was also the director of traditional Chinese medicine clubs at a number of Taiwanese universities. This article was originally published by Elite Lifestyle Magazine.*



Grains.

THE EPOCH TIMES

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It is best to think of diet as an ongoing habit of eating, not a temporary change to lose weight. If you don't like the food, you will likely stray.

# The Many Dimensions of Fat

Continued from Page 1

While such health facts can occasionally help inspire us in the battle to lose fat, many of us are much more motivated to chuck our excess baggage based on how we look.

## Efforts in Vain

For New York plastic surgeon Dr. Thomas Sterry, that inspiration came when he turned 40. A friend snapped a photo of him at the beach from behind as Sterry was protecting his toddler from the waves.

"I saw the photo and said, 'Who's that fat bald guy with my kid?!' I spent the next 10 years fighting the good fight," he said.

Sterry cut out carbs and treats, and went to the gym religiously. But even after all that sacrifice, his image still fell short of expectations.

"Just before my 50th birthday—as I realized I didn't look substantially better—I called a friend and had him suck my flanks," he said.

Despite his profession and his own personal frustration, Sterry maintains that diet and exercise is still the best strategy to lose unwanted weight. It may not be the quickest, easiest, or most exciting answer to fat loss, but Sterry says this method can get to places that even the best surgeon can't touch.

"Plastic surgery is a trick on mother nature. We can get away with little things here and there," he said. "The fat that we can remove is only a small portion of what people carry inside their belly, in their liver, and in between the spaces."

There are endless diet and exercise options for losing fat, but the trick is finding a method that you can live with long term. Running five miles a day and starving yourself can certainly take off the pounds, but how long can you keep that up?

Sterry said that his routine got him close to the image he was seeking, but it required an

"unreasonable lifestyle" to maintain.

"I dropped carbohydrates completely, got up at 5:30 AM to hit the gym before my kids got up, never enjoyed an ice cream cone with them, and lived on a lot of rabbit food," he said. "Sure, I looked better, but it was unsustainable."

When sustainability is the goal, you might need to lower your expectations. Not everyone has the time, energy, or genetic disposition to look like a superhero in leasurewear.

But we can still maintain a healthier fitness level.



Sometimes the larger problem with being overweight is worrying too much about it.

"When I got my Master's Degree in Exercise Physiology, there was a lot of debate about people who were technically overweight but were still able to outperform the vast majority of the population in various exercise tests," Sterry said. "The question became which is more important—to be fit or fat?"

But people don't usually ponder this question. Instead, we're all about the numbers. What does the scale say? The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has a slightly more sophisticated metric called the body mass index (BMI). The figure is calculated by your weight relative to your height. Obesity is classified as a BMI of more than 30. Extreme or severe obesity is classified by a BMI of more than 40.

But Sterry says BMI doesn't tell the whole story.

"We know that many very muscular people have a high BMI but clearly have very low-fat content (think NFL player types). So is it the weight that matters?" he said.

Some suggest that a better gauge of health is body fat percentage—the amount of fatty tissue you carry relative to the rest of your body's mass. You can get an estimate of this figure with skinfold thickness measurements, bioelectrical impedance devices, or underwater weighing. An easier method is just to eyeball it—compare your own naked torso next to a body fat percentage chart and find your closest match. Close the door first.

According to the American Council on Exercise, an acceptable body fat range for men is between 18 and 24 percent fat, and women between 25 and 31 percent. Any more than this is considered obese.

## Techniques for Losing Fat

There's no solid consensus marking the difference between healthy and unhealthy when it comes to fat, but there are some facts that everybody generally agrees with. One is that belly fat poses more of a health risk than fat found on other parts of the body. Another is that hormones play a fundamental role in how much fat we carry.

## Avoiding Insulin Resistance

The hormone best associated with fat is insulin. This hormone unlocks the cells of our body so they can take in glucose from the food we consume.

Insulin resistance happens when our cells will no longer accept the glucose, despite insulin knocking at their door. In this case, excess calories are just stored as fat.

According to biochemist and author



Don't make exercise punishing. Do something you enjoy if possible, but do weight train to build up lost muscle.

of the Zone Diet, Dr. Barry Sears, even people with higher body fat percentages can still be healthy as long as they don't have insulin resistance. But it doesn't mean they're out of the woods.

"As long as you don't have insulin resistance, you can be considered to have metabolically healthy obesity (MHO). However, it's just a matter of time before inflammation increases in your fat stores. Now that excess fat becomes a breeding ground for the development of chronic disease and acceleration of aging."

Sears says that what makes obesity such a major health concern is the excess inflammation it can generate. Inflammation is at the heart of nearly all chronic disease, and it creates a vicious cycle with excess fat. As systemic inflammation increases, the body accumulates fat more easily and makes losing fat that much harder.

So how do we safely and reliably get rid of fat? According to Sears, the basic strategy is to reduce calories without malnutrition and hunger. You need to balance insulin to cut fat, but you also don't want to eat too little and disrupt your glucagon hormone and throw your blood sugar off.

"This balance is controlled by the protein-to-carbohydrate ratio at every meal," Sears said. "You need a calorie-restricted diet with adequate protein, moderate carbohydrate, and low fat, but rich in fiber."

## Intermittent Fasting

The Zone Diet isn't the only method to address insulin resistance. Naturopathic doctor Christian Gonzalez recommends intermittent fasting (IF). This diet is less about specific foods, and more of a timed approach to eating.

Think of IF as a daily mini-fast. Instead of a typical fast where you go days or even weeks without eating, in IF you restrict all your meals to an eight-hour block of time. The remaining 16 hours you fast, except for water.

Sugar and carbohydrates trigger the biggest spikes in insulin, but the body secretes this hormone with every snack, meal, or nibble of food we take. The idea behind IF's fat-loss power is that an extended period without insulin in the system helps make cells more sensitive to it.

"You're not eating, so you're not giving

your body that sugar or glucose that goes into your cells. When there's no more glucose for the body, then we start breaking it down from our liver," Gonzalez said. "Our bodies are so smart that they recognize you're not giving me this fuel, so let me go get fuel from somewhere else."

Another advantage of a 12- to 16-hour daily fast is that it has been shown to trigger human growth hormone, which helps the body build muscle and burn fat.

"We also see burning of visceral fat, the disease-promoting fat around the organs. Another beautiful thing that happens is the reduction of inflammation," Gonzalez said. "Lowering that inflammation is one of the number one indicators for long-term health."

## Exercise

Besides food, the other tool you control in the quest to trim fat is exercise. And, just like your diet, it has to be something that works for you so you can sustain it long term. Fitness is a lifelong process, so be kind with yourself. Try to make the journey enjoyable, even if the results are slow.

To burn off our stored energy, fat loss typically calls for cardio (exercises that get your blood pumping and make you breathe harder), but fitness experts emphasize that a complementary weight training/resistance program is a must for long term success. It may not make the numbers on the scale fall as fast, but having more muscle makes the body more sensitive to insulin, and burns more calories at rest.

Unlike muscle, fat accumulates with ease and age, so keeping it off takes sustained effort. And you're more likely to keep the effort up if you don't feel abused or deprived in the process. Although some individuals are able to take a punishing approach to slimming down, they may be hurting their health rather than helping it.

## Acceptance

Yoga teacher Jess Penesso, who designs workouts to help women lose fat, spent 15 years thinking she would be happier if she could just shed 10 pounds. Her goal was the goal of fat loss—visible abdominal muscles—anatomy that only begins to reveal itself once you fall below 15 percent body fat.

But chasing after the highly coveted "six-pack" only left Penesso miserable. "I told myself that 'I'd love my body when...'" This was from years of consuming media and stories from friends and family that I believed. It led to disordered eating, drinking too much, and low self-esteem," Penesso said.

Penesso says her life changed when she dropped the expectations, and simply fell in love with what her body could do.

"The less I obsessed about fat, the more my body seemed to change," she said. "I've made peace with the body I have and love it right now (even with some fat) while having goals to feel the best I can."



Don't buy into obsessions with being "skinny." Bodies come in healthy varieties and sometimes we just need to learn to accept ourselves.

FIZKES/SHUTTERSTOCK



A recent study, published in Scientific Reports, found that even moderate drinking is associated with decreased brain volume.

# Alcohol and Your Brain: Study Finds Even Moderate Drinking Is Damaging

TONY RAO

It's a well-known fact that drinking too much alcohol can have a serious impact on your health, including damaging your liver. But how much is too much? For conditions such as liver cirrhosis, that's usually more than 21 units of alcohol a week—around two bottles of wine a week or one and a half pints of beer a day. The United Kingdom's Chief Medical Officer recommends that adults don't drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week to keep the risk of health problems low.

**The adult brain shrinks slowly with age, and brain shrinkage is likely to be accelerated by medical conditions, such as high blood pressure and diabetes.**

However, the liver isn't the only organ that can be damaged by drinking—the brain can be damaged, too. Drinking over the current UK low-risk guidelines is associated with an increased risk of dementia. And a recent study, published in Scientific Reports, found that even moderate drinking is associated with decreased brain volume.

The researchers in this latest study looked at 300 people between the ages of 39 and 45 to understand the effects of drinking on the brain. Most people in the study reported that they drank at what was considered moderate or low-risk levels (an average of less than 14 units of alcohol a week). Even at this level, there was a reduction in the amount of total brain tissue seen on brain scans. This held true for men and women when other risk factors, such as smoking, were considered. Their brains were compared against a reference model of average brain volume.

Although the study didn't look at the physiological impact of brain tissue loss, any significant loss of brain tissue will reduce the brain's ability to function at an optimal level. The adult brain shrinks slowly with age, and brain shrinkage is likely to be accelerated by medical conditions, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, that may arise in late middle age and later life. This is important, as we now know that some of the early signs of brain damage from alcohol can be partially reversed after abstinence. This has been seen as early as six weeks after total abstinence—with more brain recovery in the frontal lobes of the brain, which play an important role in regulating behavior and our thinking.

These findings are similar to those of an earlier study that found that drinking between seven and 14 units of alcohol a week was associated with smaller brain size. This level of drinking was also associated with poorer performance on skills that involved recalling memorized words on demand.

**Frontal Lobe Damage**  
When we study the effects of alcohol on the brain, we naturally focus on dementia. This inevitably means looking for memory changes. After all, a diagnosis of dementia relies on memory loss. But we now know that the brain's frontal lobes are actually damaged by alcohol at an earlier stage than those parts of the brain associated with memory. The frontal lobes control our personality, behavior, and ability to think flexibly. These skills are not assessed by tests commonly used to diagnose dementia.

But drinking in a way that the general population believes to be sensible and moderate might be slowly damaging our brains. Given this, we need to be better at detecting damage at an earlier stage. Luckily, an eight-item test can now detect cognitive impairment early on and is used routinely by specialists in mental health services to detect brain damage from alcohol in its early stages. Other tests of frontal lobe function can also be performed in hospitals or general practices.

**Older Drinkers**  
The discovery that alcohol has the potential to damage our brains at levels at which we might find surprising, and in ways that are not usually detected, has major implications for our society. For example, baby boomers (people now aged between 55 and 74) have shown the sharpest rise in harm from alcohol compared with other generations. They are also at higher risk of dementia than younger age groups.

If we are to tackle the problem, we need to change both attitudes to drinking and how we deliver healthcare. Changing drinking behavior in older people needs to be accompanied by picking up the early signs of brain damage for all those who drink alcohol. Progress has been made in asking older people about their alcohol use within both public health and mental health policies and practices. But this not yet happened for the detection of brain damage in people who drink alcohol. Giving equal importance to both our brain and our liver can help us stay in better health. As a society, we have the potential to take care of both these vital organs.

Cutting down the amount we drink or giving it up altogether can reduce our risk of brain damage. But this can only happen if we also maintain a lifestyle that includes a healthy diet and exercise.

Tony Rao is a visiting lecturer in old age psychiatry at King's College London. This article was first published by *The Conversation*.

## WISE HABITS

# Mindfully Letting Go of Shame

Tuning into shame can reveal our beliefs about ourselves



Shame can guide us on to good behavior—or burden us with needless suffering.

## LEO BABAUTA

I was talking with a friend yesterday who is going through a very hard time, and of all the emotions that have come up during this struggle (anger, despair, etc.), shame has been the most challenging.

We all feel shame, and it's perfectly OK to feel it. There's nothing wrong with us if we feel shame—it's a very human emotion.

Shame can tell us when we've done something that falls below our own standards for ourselves, and that can

be important. But shame is easily misplaced and it isn't very helpful in many situations. To deal with this misdirected shame, we can bring mindfulness to bear on the shame and practice letting it go.

Before we can let go, it's worthwhile to mindfully work with our shame.

## What Shame Shows Us

When I said shame isn't very helpful, I didn't tell the full truth. Actually, it's very useful in showing us what we think about ourselves.

When we feel shame, it's usually because we've done something that we think says something shameful about us. And so it shows us where we believe there is something wrong about us, something inadequate, ugly, or unworthy of love.

Of course, that belief is not true. But in order to let go of that ingrained belief, we have to see it first and be rational about what about us or what action has fed that feeling. Shame can show us where a belief lies hidden.

I'll give some examples from my own life.

I've been overeating lately (an old habit of mine), which has led me to feel overweight and unattractive. This has brought up feelings of shame about my body and lack of discipline. The shame says that I believe I'm ugly and undisciplined, and therefore inadequate and unworthy of love.

I also went through a very busy period lately where I dropped all of my cherished habits for a few weeks, like exercise and meditation and accountability. This brought up shame for (again) not being disciplined, but also not practicing

what I preach. The shame says that I believe I'm undisciplined, an imposter, inadequate.

I also felt a lot of shame when I fell into debt. This brought up the shame that showed my belief of being bad at finances, bad at taking care of my family, bad at being a father, and provider. And again, it revealed beliefs about my inadequacy and unworthiness of being loved.

In the end, the core belief is usually that we're inadequate and unworthy of being loved. But the reason we believe this is that we believe we haven't lived up to some expectation: being successful, being lean, being disciplined, being generous, being a contributor to society, being environmentally conscious, and so forth. The expectations are in our minds, but they were given to us by society's messaging since birth.

While some of these expectations and beliefs are crucial to a harmonious and moral society, others are unnecessary or even fabricated by commercial interests. For example, it's healthy to feel shame if we intentionally hurt others, but makes little sense to feel shame about not achieving unrealistic beauty standards.

## Mindfully Working With the Beliefs That Cause Shame

It can be helpful to write down the beliefs that are causing us to feel shame, or to speak them aloud, perhaps to another person, such as a trusted friend or therapist. Getting them out of our heads helps us to get clear on them. And sometimes saying them out loud can make them feel a little silly. I've found that true for myself—saying a belief out loud to another person takes away some of its power and maybe shows me how hard I am on myself.

So once we've said it out loud or written it down, let's look at how to bring mindfulness practices into the equation:

## Let yourself feel the shame.

We don't often let ourselves actually feel this emotion because we don't like it. Instead, open your heart and actually feel the shame in your body. Be curious about it: what does it feel like? Where is it located in your body? What temperature, texture, flavor does it have? See it with brand new eyes, with a beginner's mind.

## Ask yourself whether the belief is true.

If you believe you're undisciplined, ask yourself, "Is it true that I'm undisciplined?" It might feel very true and solid, but in asking this question, let there be space for the possibility that

it's not true at all, or at least not completely true. Have you ever been a little disciplined? Are there examples you can point to where the belief wasn't entirely true? Let the belief feel less solid.

## See your basic goodness.

If at the heart of our shame is the belief that we're somehow inadequate or not good enough, then it's worthwhile to see that we are actually good. We have basic goodness at our core. Consider doing a meditation on your basic goodness and start to trust that this goodness is there all the time.

**While some expectations and beliefs are crucial to a harmonious and moral society, others are unnecessary or even fabricated by commercial interests.**

## Give yourself compassion and love.

If you have a belief that you are unworthy of love, you can immediately disprove that by giving yourself love. First, practice the muscle of love and compassion by feeling it for someone else. Imagine someone you love dearly, and picture them having difficulty. Send them compassion, a genuine wish for their happiness. Feel what this feels like, and where it's coming from in your heart. Next, try it for yourself: pour out the same feelings of love and compassion from the same place in your heart, but toward yourself. You're suffering as well, and deserve your own love and compassion. Feel how it feels, and let this be proof that you're worthy of love.

If you practice in this way, you might start to loosen your beliefs that cause shame, and let yourself feel trust in your basic goodness and worthiness of love. And if you do that, the shame might start to drift away, not needed any longer. What would you be left with if you didn't have the shame?

*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 Zen Habits.net*



Focusing on what's in front of us does more to enrich our lives and shape our futures than speculations about what may come.

## MINDSET MATTERS

## Booker T. Washington's Rule for Living

When we absorb our minds with the challenges of life, we forget to treasure the gifts of the moment

## BARRY BROWNSTEIN

In an 1895 speech, Booker T. Washington shared this parable about a ship lost at sea and dangerously out of drinking water. Suddenly, the lost ship sees another friendly vessel:

From the mast of the unfortunate vessel was seen a signal: 'Water, water. We die of thirst.' The answer from the friendly vessel at once came back: 'Cast down your bucket where you are.' A second time, the signal, 'Water, send us water!' went up from the distressed vessel. And was answered: 'Cast down your bucket where you are.' A third and fourth signal for water was answered: 'Cast down your bucket where you are.'

Finally "the captain of the distressed vessel, at last heeding the injunction, cast down his bucket and it came up full of fresh, sparkling water from the mouth of the Amazon River." The lost ship had drifted into safety.

Washington shared his parable as a lesson about race relations. His wisdom is also a guide to our experience of life.

In this age of COVID-19, it is easy to think life is on hold. One day, some tell themselves, when a COVID-19 vaccine is proclaimed "safe and effective," we'll get back to living a full life.

"Cast down your bucket where you are" is an admonition to be more present in this moment, in this life.

A few weeks ago, I was out walking my daily loop with an elevation gain of 450 feet. The day was hot and humid; my head filled with thoughts of how miserable I felt. Approaching the first break in the climb, I uncharacteristically turned around in retreat, my miserable thoughts intact.

Voices rang out as I started down the hill. "Barry," shouted four of my neighbors, waving me to turn around and join them.

Present, and engaging them in conversation, my thought-induced misery vanished. In her book "Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life," Winifred Gallagher offers this guidance: "Who you are, what you think, feel, and do, what you love—is the sum of what you focus on."

It was good to be reminded: The focus of my attention, not the world, creates my experience of life.

Does my life have any meaning? is a question many ponder. Today, among the young, suicidal thoughts are rampant.

What if we could find meaning in our lives by being present to what the present moment offers?

We live only in the present, but often our attention is on the past or future. If only I should have. They should have. How dare they. When will they ...?

Out of thoughts beginning with "What if ..." we spin elaborate scenarios. Polly Berends observes in her book, "Coming to Life," the "tendency is to rush ahead after a what if. What if I can't? What if they won't? These 'what ifs' lure and threaten us into the future, making us take thought for ourselves and drowning out the thoughts that God is having for us."

Often, our attention goes to forming opinions about things that are none of our business. Or we notice a slight mistake someone makes, and we're annoyed. Such mental habits mask the now. A call to "cast down your bucket" does not get through to us.

Research shows that the act of remembering is a faulty recreation of the past tainted

by our current thinking. Dealing with the future can be equally fruitless. Shifting the spotlight away from speculation and attempts to control the uncontrollable helps us embrace what's in front of us.

Berends explains what might change if we understood that our source is love: "The more we know that we are loved [by God], the more lovingly we are seeing. The more lovingly we are seeing, the more loving we are being."

Meaning is central to our sense of well being and worth, but it's a fragile thing.

"Meaning disappears when wanting takes over," says Berends. "We are just reacting to our experience ... and thinking of what we want, what we suppose we know is best."

Berends offers us a simple example of presence shared by a young mother, at a time before COVID-19:

"We were sitting in Brooklyn on the front stoop, my husband, our 2-year-old daughter, and I. My daughter was in her party dress. Amazingly, even though she had worn it to a party, it was still clean. So we thought, maybe if we put her in a raincoat to eat this ice cream cone, she can keep her dress clean for one more wearing. There she was in her raincoat in the hot sun, and the ice cream was running all over the place. She was a complete mess. And it didn't matter. It was so wonderful. You know, Mark, I said to my husband, 'I think this is as good as it gets.'"

As Berends shared the story, she anticipated what you might be thinking: "You may say, so what? Big deal! Why shouldn't she enjoy watching her daughter eat ice cream? She had no big problems to worry about." Notice your own life. Berends says we "almost always think we have something more important to worry about, so we are almost never aware of the fact that at least for this one moment, everything is perfect."

Berends gives a long list of distracting thoughts the mother could have been having. Here are a few:

What will the neighbors think of her wearing such a warm coat in August? Watch out! It's dripping! ... What am I doing wasting my time here when I have so much more important work to do before I go to the office tomorrow? ... She shouldn't have so much sugar ... What are we going to have for supper? Which of us is going to fix it? Who's going to go to the store?

The mother kept her focus on the now; her thinking was not removing her from making the most of the present. Berends encourages us to engage in prayer and "momentarily set aside all impressions" of "what seems to be going on and what we think we want and need and what we think we are for—in order to allow ourselves to be inspired."

As we set aside needless thinking, what seems meaningless becomes meaningful. No matter how much the world seems to be weighing us down, we can "cast down [our] bucket where [we] are" and find new possibilities. As we shift the focus of our attention, so changes our experience of life.

*Barry Brownstein is a professor emeritus of economics and leadership at the University of Baltimore. He is the author of "The Inner-Work of Leadership." To receive his essays, subscribe at Mindset Shifts. This article was originally published on Intellectual Takeout.*

## POSITIVE AGING

## Life Reimagined

Age can come with deeper joys if we stay engaged, choose purpose, and tune into our thoughts

## MARILYN MURRAY WILLISON

Wouldn't it be nice to think of getting older as exhilarating rather than terrifying? Learning to accept all the aspects of aging—the good, the bad, and the ugly—was the goal that inspired former NPR reporter Barbara Bradley Hagerty to write one of my favorite books of 2016, "Life Reimagined: The Science, Art, and Opportunity of Midlife."

Hagerty became deeply interested in all aspects of growing older because she was forced to face a number of physical challenges: a heart attack, a broken collar bone, and the loss of her voice—a real hurdle for a radio personality. In addition, like so many of us, she had to cope with issues connected to her aging parents' well-being.

If you'd like to feel better about the increasing number of candles on your birthday cake, this is the book for you. Hagerty wastes no time reminding readers that scientists are confirming what we all instinctively suspected: Chronology can be our friend. She urges us to incorporate three essentials into our lives.

**Engage with verve; autopilot equals death.** Choose where to invest your energy, and do so intentionally. The clearest path to a robust older life is purposeful engagement. Engaging in the things that you feel are important will lift your levels of joy and satisfaction, both in the moment as well as over the years.

**Choose purpose over happiness.** Finding a deeper purpose and pursuing it carries an unexpected bonus: It makes you robust. Researchers know that purpose in life is more important than education or wealth when it comes to long-term health and happiness. According to Hagerty, "It isn't a panacea, but it's awfully close."

**Your thinking is your experience.** While much of your life is shaped by biology, genetics, and life circumstances, how you think can shape how you experience the world. Your thoughts and attitudes today chart your destiny tomorrow, and the day after that, and the day after that.

When Hagerty's father died (at age 91), she reflected on the full life he enjoyed. She fondly remembered how he studied French every night, teaching himself grammar, spelling,

**While much of your life is shaped by biology, genetics, and life circumstances, how you think can shape how you experience the world.**

**Researchers know that purpose in life is more important than education or wealth when it comes to long-term health and happiness.**



and vocabulary. She said: "He never progressed beyond terrible at French, but he always insisted that some things are worth doing poorly. I think he meant that some things are so worthwhile that even if you have no talent, even if the results are mediocre, it is still worth your time and effort." Hagerty advises us to always remember that there are still

worthwhile things to be accomplished, regardless of our age. Quoting Howard Stevenson, she advises her readers: "Ask yourself regularly: How will I use these glorious days for the best purpose?" A few more of her suggestions include:

- At every stage of life, you should be a rookie at something.

**The clearest path to a robust older life is purposeful engagement.**

## BECOMING MINIMALIST

# How I Got Digital Minimalism Right the 2nd Time Around

When the lockdown came, screen time skyrocketed as many sought refuge in digital landscapes

LESLIE WATSON

Four months after reading “Digital Minimalism” by Cal Newport, I thought I had analog living all figured out. I spent two uncomfortable weeks detoxing from my standard American smartphone addiction until my tech cravings subsided. I was keeping so busy offline that I seldom missed my phone. Soon I was averaging just 62 minutes a day on my mobile phone, compared to the United States norm, and my own history, of 3 to 5 hours daily.

My husband and I share a computer and don't have a television, so my cell phone is often my only screen. Reducing my smartphone use did more than just free up 2 to 4 hours a day; I was less distractible and more energetic, too. My relationships improved when I stopped phubbing family and friends. Some of them even volunteered to put their phones away during our in-person visits as well.

I felt like a digital minimalism success story before quarantine, but as the pandemic emptied my schedule, my screen-free convictions faltered. According to Instagram, the rest of the world was using their time windfalls to bake bread and plant vegetable gardens, but I became glued to news headlines and Netflix.

Apparently, I wasn't the only one hooked on digital bait when the future grew more unpredictable. TV consumption reached staggering levels during the coronavirus crisis. Video game sales were record breaking as well.

In fact, I finally recognized the severity of my own personal tech relapse when my vision went blurry from playing too many rounds of My Little Pony Bubble Blast.

## The most important lesson I learned during my second digital detox is that in-the-moment willpower is fickle.

Hitting rock bottom with my unicorns and alicorns left me feeling counterproductive and lethargic. Relieving unfamiliar stressors with digital entertainment had been comforting at first but several weeks of excessive screen time sapped my motivation for any greater purpose.

Ready for healthier habits, I resolved to get back in control of my tech use—once and for all.

The most important lesson I learned during my second digital detox is that in-the-moment willpower is fickle. Mastering digital minimalism is all about setting yourself up for success in advance so you won't need to rely solely on willpower.

I also discovered the importance of modifying screen time strategies and goals during major life changes. Know-



ing several techniques ahead of time allows for a more seamless transition.

Here's a playbook of the eight practices I've found most effective in reducing my screen time.

### 1. Build a support system.

Speaking up is the first step to normalizing a screen-free lifestyle. I'm growing more comfortable talking about my need to unplug. By bringing up the issue, I've learned that my entire social circle is experiencing digital overwhelm, too. Once we broke the stigma, we were able to help each other stay on track. The best part was setting new standards for response times; nobody feels guilty for waiting until it's convenient to reply to texts and emails.

### 2. Replace some technology with analog alternatives.

Using a smartphone to update my calendar or grocery list often led to wasting time on other apps. I avoid that temptation now by using a paper notebook for planning and list making.

### 3. Turn off most notifications.

Phone calls and text messages are the only phone features I allow notifications from. I check email and other apps at my convenience instead of reacting every time a notification appears.

### 4. Use Do Not Disturb mode.

From 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. every day my phone is in automated Do Not Disturb mode. I also turn on Do Not Disturb manually while I'm working or driving. In case of emergencies, I allow text message overrides from anyone on my contact list who types “urgent.”

### 5. Unsubscribe and unfollow.

It was easy to decide which blogs, news-

## Reducing my smartphone use did more than just free up 2 to 4 hours a day; I was less distractible and more energetic, too.

Leslie Watson is an eco-minimalist from the West Coast, where she works as an elementary school teaching assistant. She shares her articles on Linktree. This article was first published on [BecomingMinimalist.com](#)

letters, and social media accounts to leave behind once I started considering how much I'd be willing to pay for their updates. Any content that I wouldn't spend money on isn't worth my time either.

### 6. Dock your phone.

Portability makes our devices even more addictive. I used to carry my smartphone around in my pocket even when I was at home. Now I keep devices near the garage door. When I get an urge to use my phone, I'm forced to pause and decide if I want to walk across the house to collect it.

### 7. Time-block online activities.

Scheduling specific time slots for all non-essential tech use makes both my online and offline time more focused. When I think of an optional online task, I write it down as a reminder for later instead of grabbing my phone right away.

### 8. Set personalized conditions for addictive apps.

Some digital minimalists have resolved to only watch Netflix with family or friends. Others won't use social media until chores are finished. The biggest game changer for me was creating a smartphone folder labeled “bike.” Apps in that folder are only options if I'm riding my stationary bike.

My quarantine experience taught me to abandon all-or-nothing thinking about technology. I now have the tools to maintain a screen-life balance even in difficult circumstances. Time for higher priorities plus a calm, focused state of mind have been my rewards for practicing digital minimalism.

I hope the eight strategies above will help you accomplish your goals as well.

# Inside the Bully Mind

Why kids pick on other kids and how to deal with it

“A lot of times parents do not even know their kids are in trouble until they're in an impatient unit for attempted suicide.”

Danielle Matthew, a licensed family therapist specializing in treatment for bully victims

CONAN MILNER

A hungry lion seeks out the weakest member of a herd. Once he spots a vulnerability, he goes in for the kill.

It's brutal, but for the lion, it's a matter of survival.

Predatory people are a lot harder to justify. Everyone knows it's wrong to pick on the little guy. So why are some people so tempted to torment someone they perceive as vulnerable?

Bullying has always been a part of life, but the concern over it seems greater than ever. Part of the reason, according to Dr. Katie Davis, a child clinical psychologist practicing in New York's Upper East Side and a researcher at John Hopkins, is that parents today are more aware of the impact bullying can have on mental health.

“With all these recent discussions of high profile suicides and school violence, parents get worried and think, ‘What if this becomes my child?’” Davis said.

Efforts toward bully awareness and prevention have increased, but in the fervor to eradicate this behavior, Davis says the term has stretched beyond its true capacity.

“If a kid is being mean to another kid in any way, shape, or form it's labeled bullying,” Davis said. “This clouds what the real issue is.”

To rightfully earn the bully label, there has to be clearly unfair. The bully has to have one up in strength, size, or social status, and use this advantage to control his or her victim.

“This is not like a regular playground fight, kids being kids, let's let them work it out,” Davis said. “This is a kid who is powerless being put in a bad situation that they can't get out of. It's a traumatizing experience.”

Bullying may incur physical harm, but it's the emotional scars that are usually more devastating, especially when victims take their abuse to heart. With repeated bullying, some kids stop seeing their treatment as an injustice, and begin to believe it's a punishment they deserve.

Danielle Matthew, a licensed family therapist specializing in treatment for bully victims, describes one client, Jeremy, who had been verbally and physically bullied for years. During the first few sessions with her, Jeremy repeatedly stated that being bullied was just part of

What kids really need is emotional support so they can formulate their own plan.

his life. He was convinced his situation would never improve.

Matthew says lots of kids share Jeremy's experience, and may even carry it into adulthood.

“I have adults who come to me who are still dealing with their childhood feelings of bullying and inadequacy, and they cannot move forward in their intimate relationships or their professional world,” she said. “They still really feel stuck.”

In some cases, bully-driven hopelessness can turn fatal. Matthew first noticed this pattern while she was working for an insurance company doing authorizations for hospital stays. In more than six years of calls for hospitalized adolescents who were either trying or threatening to kill themselves, Matthew began to see a clear connection between suicidal tendencies and experience with a bully.

“A lot of times parents do not even know their kids are in trouble until they're in an inpatient unit for attempted suicide,” Matthew said.

Moms and dads miss warning signs, according to Matthew, because kids intentionally try to hide that they're being bullied.

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Much of the mess in our home is a result of having too much stuff.

BECOMING MINIMALIST

## Messy House? Maybe You Own Too Much

It's easy to have stuff everywhere—if you have an American-average amount of stuff

JOSHUA BECKER

I work out of an office. Most days, it's just me. However, from time to time, I host a few others. For that reason, I keep a set of four coffee mugs around. I drink coffee most of the day when I'm alone. And if there's a meeting happening, I'm certainly brewing a fresh pot for anyone who wants it. Yesterday, I noticed something out of the ordinary; despite working alone all week, all four of the coffee mugs were out of the cabinet.

**The average American home has more than 300,000 items inside of it.**

One was next to me with fresh coffee, two were dirty in the sink, and the fourth was sitting on the counter, next to the sink.

It has been a couple of busy days—the first week of the Uncluttered Course I put on always requires a significant amount of my energy. Because my days have been full, I've fallen into a common trap:

I didn't need to wash my coffee mug because there was a clean one still in the cabinet, so I just left it out dirty. We do this all the time.

When life isn't busy, or my attention isn't divided, it only takes a few short seconds to handwash my coffee mug and put it away before I leave the office. So I often do.

But during this busy week, when my attention was divided, and there were other things on my agenda, it became too easy to leave the cleaning task undone—even though it would have only taken a few seconds.

This is how our excess possessions lead to a messy home. When we have more than we need, there is less incentive to clean up along the way. And when our attention is pulled from one thing to another, this excess gets left out all too often.

Much of the mess in our home is a result of having too much stuff. Just think of the different ways this plays out in our homes:

- We leave dirty dishes in our sink because we can grab a new one from

the cabinet.

- We leave out the blanket in the living room because there's another one in the bedroom.

- Our dirty clothes piles grow taller as long as there's something clean to wear in the closet.

- Our kids leave their toys all over the house because there's always another one to play with.

- Rubber bands, pens, and paper clips collect in our junk drawer—more than we'll ever use.

- Coats gather by the backdoor because everyone has a couple of extras.

- Books, magazines, and newspapers pile up because there's always a new one to read—and an old one we might still get to.

- Phone charger cords can be seen in every room of the house because we like the convenience of having them everywhere.

- Our linen closet shelves fill up with towels and sheets because there are so many that rarely get used.

And the list goes on and on: tools, board games, yarn, shoes, sporting equipment, DVDs, video game supplies, purses, etc.

For me, in this specific scenario, it didn't take long to wash and dry my coffee mugs and put them back where they belong—eliminating the small mess.

But in our homes, it's a different story.

The average American home has more than 300,000 items inside of it. That's a whole lot of excess ... and a lot of mess because of it.

If your house is messy all the time, maybe you've got too much stuff inside it. Owning less will help you keep it clean, among other benefits.

**When we have more than we need, there is less incentive to clean up along the way.**

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](https://BecomingMinimalist.com)

WISE HABITS

## How to Deal With Personal Dissatisfaction

Not loving ourselves can sap motivation we need to make changes we desire

LEO BABAUTA

I have personal dissatisfactions, and I'd be willing to bet everyone reading this does, too. The more I talk to people about their struggles, the more I realize that we all have some sense of dissatisfaction with ourselves.

We constantly have a feeling that we should be better, more productive, more mindful, and so on.

We may doubt ourselves when we have to speak in a group and wonder if we're good enough to contribute. Or maybe we are unhappy with certain aspects of ourselves, such as our bodies, the way our faces look, the ways we procrastinate, or get angry, or lose patience as a partner or parent.

In the end, this dissatisfaction spurs us to think we need to improve.

This is a constant condition, and even if we receive a compliment from someone, many of us find a way to undercut it in our minds because we think we're not good enough for that compliment.

It affects our lives in so many ways: We might not be good at making friends, speaking in public, finding a partner, doing the work we're passionate about, or finding contentment with ourselves and our lives.

And we don't like feeling this way, so we run. We find distraction and comfort in things such as food, or alcohol, or shopping. We lash out at other people when we're feeling defensive about ourselves. It's at the heart of so many of our problems.

So how do we deal with this underlying problem? The answer is profoundly simple, yet not easy to carry out.

Before I go into dealing with the problem, we should discuss something first: the idea that we need to be dissatisfied with ourselves to make life improvements.

**Unhappiness With Self as a Motivator**

I used to think, as many people do, that if we're unhappy with ourselves, we'll be driven to do better. And if we were all of a sudden content with ourselves, we'd stop doing anything.

I no longer believe this. I do think we're often driven to make improvements because we're dissatisfied with ourselves, and that's not a bad thing. We have hope for something better.

But consider the following: When we are unhappy with ourselves, it's hard to be happy when we do something good. We're still dissatisfied. So doing something good, then, isn't the reward it could be.

We also have habits of running from this bad feeling about ourselves, so procrastination and distraction become the default mode, and this gets in the way of our efforts. In fact, we'll never solve the problems of distraction and procrastination until we can learn to deal with this problem of unhappiness with self.

Unhappiness with self can get in the way of connecting with others (because we think we're not good enough, and so can feel anxiety about meeting others). We can't solve this, no matter how much we want to improve, until we address the underlying issue.

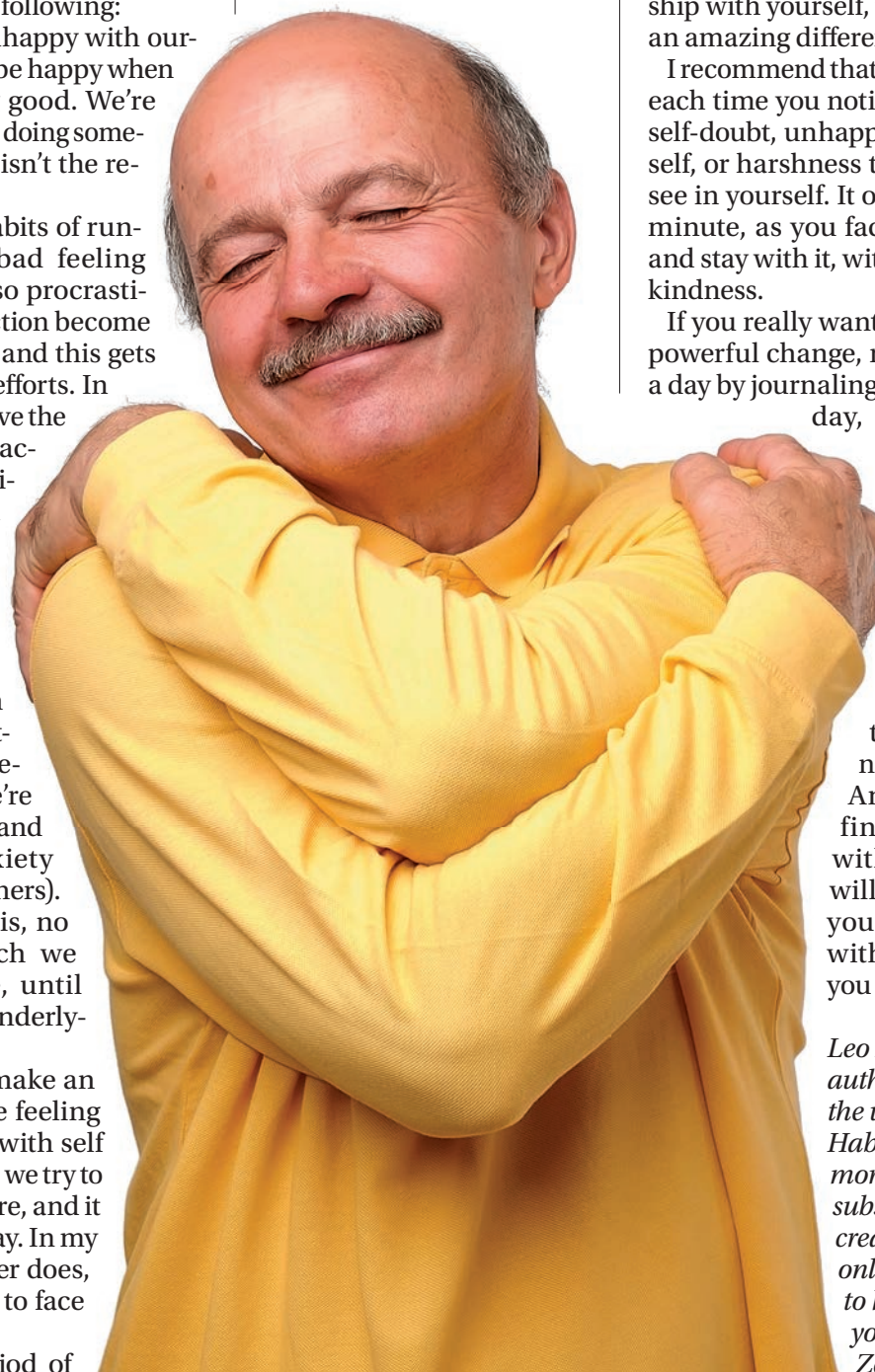
Even when we make an improvement, the feeling of dissatisfaction with self doesn't go away. So we try to improve some more, and it still doesn't go away. In my experience, it never does, until you're ready to face it head-on.

During this period of

**I think you'll find that love is a more powerful motivator than unhappiness with yourself.**

**We'll never solve the problems of distraction and procrastination until we can learn to deal with this problem of unhappiness with self.**

Smile at yourself, and cultivate an unconditional friendliness to all that you see.



self-improvement driven by dissatisfaction, we don't love ourselves, which is a sad thing.

So is it possible to get things done and make improvements without feeling dissatisfaction with self? I've discovered that the answer is a definite "yes."

You can exercise and eat healthy foods not because you dislike your body and want to make it better, but because you love yourself and want to inspire others. You can do work out of love for the people it will help. You can declutter, get out of debt, read more, and meditate not because you're dissatisfied with yourself, but because you love yourself and others.

In fact, I would argue that you're more likely to do all of those things if you love yourself and less likely if you dislike yourself.

**Dealing With Dissatisfaction**

What can we do about our continual dissatisfaction with ourselves? How do we deal with self-doubt, feeling like we're not good enough, or unhappiness with certain parts of ourselves?

It turns out that these feelings are perfect opportunities to learn about and become friends with ourselves.

Here's how:

1. Each time you have these feelings, pause and just notice them.
2. Turn toward the feeling, seeing how it feels in your body. Be curious about how it feels, physically.
3. Stay with it. Instead of rejecting it, try opening up to it and accepting it.
4. Open yourself up to the pain of this feeling and see it as a path to opening up your heart. In this way, getting in touch with the pain is a liberating act.
5. See this difficult feeling as a sign of a good heart, one that is soft, tender, and loving. You wouldn't care about being a good person, or a "good enough" person, if you didn't have a good heart. There is a basic goodness beneath all of our difficulties, and we just need to stay and notice this goodness.
6. Smile at yourself, and cultivate an unconditional friendliness to all that you see.

Now, I'm not claiming that this is an easy method, nor that it will cure our difficulties in one fell swoop. But it can start to form a trusting relationship with yourself, which can make an amazing difference.

I recommend that you practice this each time you notice self-criticism, self-doubt, unhappiness with yourself, or harshness toward what you see in yourself. It only has to take a minute, as you face what you feel and stay with it, with unconditional kindness.

If you really want to focus on this powerful change, reflect on it once a day by journaling at the end of the day, reviewing how you did and what you can do to remember to practice.

In the end, I think you'll find that love is a more powerful motivator than unhappiness with yourself. And I hope you'll find a friendship with yourself that will radiate out into your relationships with everyone else you know and meet.

Leo Babauta is the author of six books; the writer of "Zen Habits," a blog with more than 2 million subscribers; and the creator of several online programs to help you master your habits. Visit [ZenHabits.net](https://ZenHabits.net)

## Is Too Much Sleep Making Your Memory Foggy?

New research has found an association between over-sleeping, memory problems



DEVON ANDRE

Sleep and smarts go together like rest and relaxation. But can too much sleep put your memory at risk?

You've likely heard of the association between poor sleep and brain fog. Just a few hours of missed sleep can impair thinking and memory. Long-term poor sleep can boost the risk of severe memory problems and Alzheimer's.

But a new study is showing that a sleep surplus isn't much better.

The research, conducted by a team from the Peking University Clinical Research Institute in China, shows that sleeping 10 or more hours per night can lead to memory and thinking decline.

At first glance, this seems strange. Sleep is the time when your body essentially runs a maintenance crew through your brain. It clears away toxins associated with Alzheimer's and dementia, files memories, and stores new information.

It seems like sleeping longer would improve memory and brain function. But this doesn't appear to be the case.

Instead, it seems like spending too much time asleep can put your memory at risk. Of course, the study couldn't prove that too much sleep leads to memory loss and cognitive decline, just that they are associated.

The study found that, as expected, too little sleep was associated with worse brain function. Researchers pegged the ideal sleep time is around seven hours.

One issue with the study, however, was that it didn't observe sleep quality.

By only focusing on duration, it does not account for why a person may be spending 10 hours in bed. If sleep time includes hours lying awake, or a series of micro awakenings, it is not quality restorative sleep.

Researchers believe the results could have something to do with extended sleep and inflammation, but the association between more sleep and memory troubles are not well understood.

It stands to reason, however, that the association has to do with sleep quality. If a person isn't sleeping well, they are likely to sleep in and spend more time in bed (if they don't have to get up).

So, if you're spending too much time in bed, there is likely an underlying reason for it. It could also be putting your memory at risk. Addressing your sleep patterns and getting in the sweet spot could save your memory and prevent or delay cognitive decline.

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.

# Inside the Bully Mind

Why kids pick on other kids and how to deal with it

Continued from Page 9

They're deeply hurt, but they don't want to disappoint their parents or burden them with their problems. They also lack the emotional fluency needed to process their trauma or figure a way out of it. They feel trapped, isolated, embarrassed, and doomed.

"They feel like there is nothing else they can do but leave the world," Matthew said.

The effect can be magnified with cyberbullying. Before the internet age, bullied kids at least got a break from their tormentors when they came home. But now that so much of our social interaction plays out online, the modern bully has access to personal details that they can poke whenever the mood strikes. Their target is vulnerable and always in reach.

Davis doesn't believe kids have gotten meaner, but she says cyberbullying makes it a lot easier for them to be mean. It's more anonymous. There's less adult oversight. They have the freedom to say really horrible things about other kids to a wider audience, and they never have to see their victims' suffering faces.

"They're dissociated from real life," Davis said. "They don't get the negative feedback from their environment like they do if they see the kid cry. It makes it feel less real."

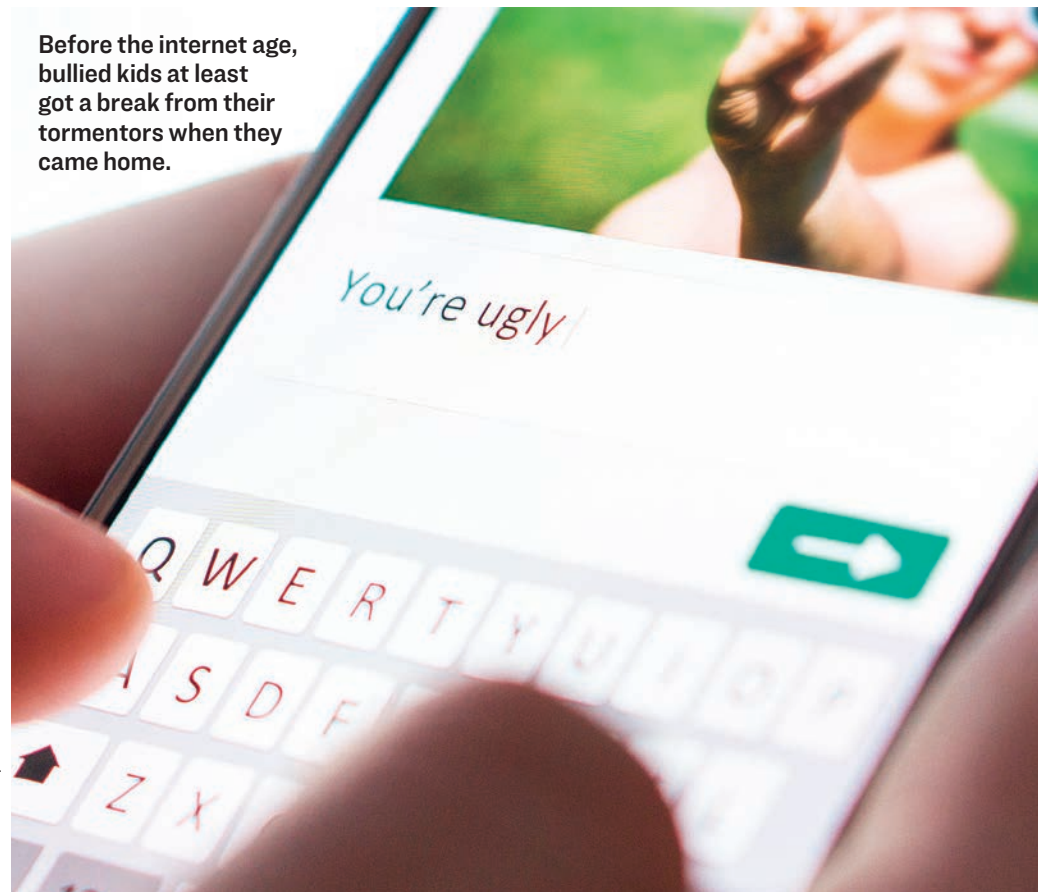
## Reclaiming Power

So what separates the kids who can cope with being bullied from those who can't? Davis says the most important factor she sees in her practice is strong social connections, where kids feel like someone—anyone—is looking out for them.

"They don't need a lot of friends, but they need one. They don't need a million supportive family members, but they need a point person," Davis said. "Kids need a few solid relationships to know that they're not alone and handling their experience in isolation. I think isolation is really damaging for kids and it makes the world seem unsafe and out of control."

At the same time, adults who get too involved can make the problem worse. Matthew finds that when parents insist on taking control, their kid typically suffers more. Often, the victim feels more powerless and the bully seeks revenge for getting in trouble and looks for covert—and crueler—methods.

"Kids want to handle their own problems. They don't want mom or dad involved, nor do I suggest it," Matthew said.



Before the internet age, bullied kids at least got a break from their tormentors when they came home.

“If a kid is being mean to another kid in any way, shape, or form it's labeled bullying. This clouds what the real issue is.”

Dr. Katie Davis, child clinical psychologist



Bullying may incur physical harm, but it's the emotional scars that are usually more devastating.

In her book, “The Empowered Child: How to Help Your Child Cope, Communicate, and Conquer Bullying,” Matthew explains that what kids really need is emotional support so they can formulate their own plan.

Bullying is basically a dirty power grab through intimidation and disrespect. For kids trying to regain their power from a bully, Matthew encourages them to consider their range of control—identifying what they can change, and what they can't. “Sometimes kids find that they have more power than they think. They realize that they can change their reactions to the bully, and the situations they're in,” Matthew said. “Because, at the end of the day, that's the only thing we have control over—how we respond, how we relate, and how we take care of ourselves.”

## Emotional Literacy

Kids bully for several reasons. Sometimes it's because someone else is beating up on them. Other times they're simply copying the aggressive behavior of their parents or other role models they admire. Some may bully because they're irritated when someone is more sensitive than they are; others lash out at those they're jealous of. Kids can act alone, or gang up on an individual—mocking, gossiping about, or ostracizing their target for entertainment and a shared sense of dominance.

But what makes someone want to make someone else suffer?

Thomas McSheehy is a social worker and founder of the Teaching Heart Institute—an organization devoted to spreading social and emotional intelligence to kids and adults. He says that anger, shame, and fear are at the core of why kids bully. They don't feel good about who they are or what they feel, so they dominate others in hopes of working out their problems and boosting their self-esteem.

“They don't know what to do with that energy and emotion. They haven't developed the skills to deal with it, so they take it out on somebody else,” McSheehy said. “The pain he makes his victim feel is probably what the bully feels inside.”

The high stress and stimulation of modern life turn this lack of emotional literacy into a pressure cooker. As an elementary school teacher for more than 20 years, McSheehy has watched as kids have been forced to navigate an increasingly complex world. Those with no impulse control or constructive outlet to vent their energy are even more driven to pick on others.

“We didn't use to have so much stimulus on our nervous system,” he said. “Kids are much more wired, and with that comes a lot more acting out behavior.”

McSheehy says that when kids are taught how to appropriately handle their emotions, they are much less likely to bully. The training also helps kids who are bullied be more resilient to taunts and jabs.

“They will have the ability to handle the stress,” he said.

## Anatomy of a Target

Most everyone knows what it's like to get picked on, but some kids seem to be bully magnets. They attract torment like moths to a flame. They switch schools to get away from one predator, only to attract another at a new location.

According to Erica Hornthal, a clinical counselor and board-certified dance/movement therapist in Chicago, these kids may be unknowingly broadcasting a signal that brings unwanted attention. “I think there are definitely postures that we take on that allow predators or bullies to spot us,” she said.

Dance/movement therapy is a modality that addresses nonverbal communication. Hornthal uses this treatment method in schools to help kids learn how to empathize and embrace compassion, and in workplaces where even adults can struggle with grown-up bullies.

Hornthal says people who get their spirit crushed easily show it in their body for everyone to see. For example, people who are hurt by a bully's words often adopt the same kind of wounded posture they might take if they were punched in the gut: hunched over, looking down, and afraid to make eye contact. It's the sign of an easy mark for an insecure, power-hungry bully.

“If somebody doesn't like who we are, we have the ability to be OK with it in our bodies,” Hornthal said. “If I can stand up for myself, be present to who I am, my beliefs, and my values, then other people's words can bounce off of me and won't impact me as much. But that's easier said than done.”

A victimized mind can be slow to change, but Hornthal believes that we can support the process with physical practice: standing tall, learning to make appropriate eye contact, and holding your ground with a firm stance. It's about feeling what it's like to be confident in your body, so your mind has a feeling to follow.

“We don't want to create overconfidence, but feel like you're taking up space,” she said. “Because often when we're bullied, we feel like we don't deserve to be in the space that we're in, and that someone else deserves it more. That's not true. We have to take it back and really own the space around us.”

Self-doubt can be particularly haunting for teenagers who are just trying to figure out who they are, but it can prey on minds of any age. A bully can exploit our insecurities, but only if we let them. Hornthal says that whenever we feel like someone has power over us, we can find a way to take it back.

“We really have to be taught to stand up for ourselves. It's not an easy thing, and it's not something that comes naturally,” Hornthal said. “Oftentimes it comes with a sense of vulnerability that we're afraid to step into.”

# Better-Designed Communities Can Help With the Rising Tide of Dementia

Green spaces, walkable neighborhoods, and life-enhancing buildings could all help in the fight against dementia

LESLEY PALMER

Thirty years ago dementia was less understood and assumed to be a normal part of aging. A condition that affects the memory, dementia can also affect sight, hearing, balance, walking, visual and spatial understanding, navigation and tonal differentiation, and can cause hallucinations.

Today, dementia affects approximately 50 million people worldwide and is predicted to double in 20 years due to an aging population and an increase in awareness and diagnosis. Dementia has become a global issue.

The design of the built environment can have a profound impact on how a person with dementia perceives, experiences, and engages with the places and spaces in which they live. Yet much of the design guidance currently available is underpinned by research undertaken in developed countries.

Research has shown that architects designing for later life are more likely to draw upon presumed needs and experiences of the older person as imagined by themselves, rather than drawing upon the experiences of older people, their families, and care professions—all of whom have personal experience with dementia.

This begs the question of who will lead the global challenge to ensure spaces and buildings support this increase in the prevalence of dementia while retaining all the beauty, joy, and quality of life that good architecture and design can bring.

## Dementia Design Principles

Dementia design is a non-medical approach to help reduce some of the symptoms associated with dementia, such as agitation, aggression, confusion, incontinence, and visual, spatial, and navigational difficulties.

There is an international consensus that agrees that dementia design should incorporate the following concepts: It should com-

pensate for disability, maximize independence, and enhance self-esteem and confidence. It should also demonstrate care for staff needs, be orientating and understandable, reinforce personal identity, welcome relatives and the local community, and allow control of stimuli—for example, reducing unwanted noises associated with alarm systems.

**Dementia affects approximately 50 million people worldwide and is predicted to double in 20 years due to an aging population and an increase in awareness and diagnosis.**

Dementia design principles came into being in the late 1980s when the development of Confused and Disturbed Elderly (CADE) units in New South Wales, Australia, established a design brief that advocated for specific principles to support those living with dementia. Soon after, the Dementia Services Development Centre (DSDC) was established at the University of Stirling, which became influential in this field.

At the time, leaders in this field called on architects to consider dementia not as a disease, focusing design on spaces that support physical decline, but rather as a disability where the design focus shifts to spaces that can maintain the everyday functions of people living with dementia. The importance of this contrast should not be underestimated. For example, some activities, like socializing, can slow cognitive decline. There has already been a great deal of experience designing housing blocks or townhouses to foster better engagement between



Dementia comes with confusion, trouble walking, and a greater need for social connection. How we design our homes and communities can all help in addressing these issues.

neighbors and this can be applied to dementia design.

## Dementia Design Today

Developments in dementia research recognize that the condition is not a natural part of aging, but that the risk of developing it increases with age. Alcohol, smoking, cholesterol, and diabetes also increase the risk of dementia, and air pollution has been also identified as impacting brain health.

There is an increasing global interest in the adoption of dementia design principles. Alzheimer's Disease International has dedicated its World Alzheimer Report 2020 to dementia-related design, and policymakers are working to embed the evidence into environmental guidelines.

There is also a growing call for intergenerational living and dementia design principles are being integrated into age-friendly projects such as retirement living and community buildings.

For the most part, this is encouraging. An age-friendly city could foster healthy and active aging by building and maintaining that capacity across the course

of people's lives. It could support the development of healthy brain function from early years, help people maintain cognition through their later years and support quality-of-life during cognitive decline as people age.

**Alcohol, smoking, cholesterol, and diabetes also increase the risk of dementia, and air pollution has been also identified as impacting brain health.**

## A Public Health Issue

Early proponents of dementia design advocated for dementia to be considered as a disability that required spaces that maintain function. I believe it would also be helpful to recognize demen-

tia as a public health issue and use design to address some of the challenges this brings.

The provision of green spaces, active travel and play, walkable neighborhoods, improved biodiversity, and air quality could all help the fight against dementia.

To fully understand the benefits, there is a pressing need for critical discussion and further research and architectural projects with briefs that challenge designers to address this important global issue. Acknowledging more than 30 years of dementia design, Stirling University's Dementia Services Development Centre has launched Architecture for Dementia: 2008-2020—a unique selection of outstanding projects from across the globe. Each one has received a DSDC “Stirling gold” for dementia-friendly buildings.

If there was ever a time to celebrate evidence-based dementia design, it is now.

*Lesley Palmer is the chief architect for the Dementia Services Development Centre at the University of Stirling in the UK. This article was first published by The Conversation.*

# Regular Hot Bath Associated With Reduced Risk Factors for Type 2 Diabetes

Japanese study finds association between blood sugar control, body mass, and regular hot baths

MAT LECOMPTÉ

Taking a long soak in a hot bath may help those with Type 2 diabetes reduce risk factors associated with the disease. New research presented at the Annual Meeting of the European Association for the Study of Diabetes (EASD) suggests that regular heat exposure through a hot bath is associated with blood sugar control.

**Increased bathing frequency was associated with decreased body weight, body mass index (BMI), waist circumference, diastolic blood pressure, and glycated hemoglobin.**

This is the first study of its kind to examine effects using a large number of

patients who have Type 2 diabetes and take regular hot baths. Previous research has suggested that heat therapy could control blood sugar and body fat percentage, suggesting it could be used as a therapeutic tool for patients with Type 2 diabetes.

The study was led by Dr. Hisayuki Katsuyama of the Kohnodai Hospital in Japan. He and his colleagues looked at the side effects of bathing for 1,297 Japanese patients with Type 2 diabetes. In Japan, most homes are fitted with a bath, and bathing is a traditional and common life habit.

A questionnaire was used to gain information from 1,297 patients with Type 2 diabetes who regularly visited the outpatient unit of Kohnodai Hospital between October 2018 and March 2019. The patients were divided into three groups according to the frequency of bathing. The first group took four or more baths per week, the second group took between one to four baths per week, and the third group took less than one bath per week.

It was determined that the mean fre-

quency of bathing was 4.2 times a week, and the mean duration of bathing was 16 minutes.

The increased bathing frequency was associated with decreased body weight, body mass index (BMI), waist circumference, diastolic blood pressure, and glycated hemoglobin.

Glycated hemoglobin (HbA1c), a measure of blood sugar control, was found to be influenced by a hot bath. Group 1 (with the highest bathing) had a mean HbA1c of 7.10 percent, group 2 7.20 percent, and group 3 7.36 percent.

Body mass index was also found to be associated with the frequency of hot-tub bathing, with group 1 having the lowest mean BMI (25.5kg/m<sup>2</sup>) followed by group 2 (26.0) and group 3 (26.7). Researchers also found that there were reductions in diastolic blood pressure associated with an increase in the frequency of bathing. All conclusions were adjusted for age, sex, and the amount of blood pressure drugs.

The authors of the study concluded: “Our results indicate that daily heat

Researchers found tub bathing could be used as a type of heat therapy to control blood sugar and body fat percentage.



exposure through hot-tub bathing has beneficial influences on cardiovascular risk factors in patients with Type 2 diabetes.”

## Far-Reaching Effect of Diabetes

The effects of diabetes can be far-reaching, according to new research presented at the annual meeting of the European Association for the Study of Diabetes (EASD). The study suggests that the life expectancy of a person with Type 1 diabetes is eight years less than a non-diabetic and that a person with Type 2 diabetes lives two years less than the average person without diabetes.

Therefore, it is imperative that research can find a range of treatments to help reduce the risks of diabetes. Using a hot bath to help reduce BMI and blood sugar is an easy way that people can reduce the risks of diabetes.

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



JAMES WHEELER/UNSPASH

## EXERCISE AND DIET Are More Important Than Ever With Virus at Large

BERNARD J. WOLFSON

If your life these days is anything like mine, a pre-pandemic routine that included regular exercise and disciplined eating has probably given way to sedentary evenings on a big chair, binge-watching reruns of your favorite TV series while guzzling chocolate ice cream or mac 'n' cheese.

But let's not beat ourselves up about it. Several doctors I spoke with recently said most of their patients and many of their colleagues are struggling to maintain healthy habits amid the anxiety of the pandemic. "The Quarantine 15" (pounds, that is) is a real phenomenon.

The double challenge of protecting our health, including our immune systems, while battling unhealthy temptations "is a struggle everyone is dealing with," says Dr. David Kilgore, director of the integrative medicine program at the Univer-

“**When I gained 10 pounds and I was 25, I just cut out the beer and ice cream for a week. When you gain 12 pounds at 62, it's a long road back.**”

Karen Clark, a resident of Knoxville, Tennessee

Whatever form of exercise you choose, remember it won't keep you healthy unless you also reduce consumption of fatty and sugary foods.

sity of California-Irvine. Well before COVID-19, more than 40 percent of U.S. adults were obese, which puts them at risk for COVID-19's worst outcomes. But even people accustomed to physical fitness and good nutrition are having trouble breaking the bad habits they've developed over the past five months.

Karen Clark, a resident of Knoxville, Tennessee, discovered competitive rowing later in life, and her multiple weekly workouts burned off any excess calories she consumed. But the pandemic changed everything: She could no longer meet up with her teammates to row and stopped working out at the YMCA.

Suddenly, she was cooped up at home. And, as for many people, that led to a more sedentary lifestyle, chained to the desk, with no meetings outside the house or walks to lunch with colleagues.

"I reverted to comfort food and comfortable routines and watching an awful lot of Netflix and Amazon Prime, just like everybody else," Clark says. "When I gained 10 pounds and I was 25, I just cut out the beer and ice cream for a week. When you gain 12 pounds at 62, it's a long road back."

She started along that road in July when she stopped buying chips, ice cream, and other treats. And in August, she rediscovered the rowing machine in her basement.

But don't worry if you lack Clark's discipline or a rowing machine. You can still regain some control over your life.

A good way to start is to establish some basic daily routines since in many cases that's exactly what the pandemic has taken away, says Dr. W. Scott Butsch, director of obesity medicine at the Cleveland Clinic's Bariatric and Metabolic Institute. He recommends you "bookend" your day with physical activ-

ity, which can be as simple as a short walk in the morning and a longer one after work.

And, especially if you have kids at home who will be studying remotely this fall, prepare your meals at the beginning of the day, or even the beginning of the week, he says.

If you haven't exercised in a while, "start slow and gradually get yourself up to where you can tolerate an elevated heart rate," says Dr. Leticia Polanco, a family medicine doctor with the South Bay Primary Medical Group, just south of San Diego. If your gym is closed or you can't get together with your regular exercise buddies, there are plenty of ways to get your body moving at home and in your neighborhood, she says.

Go for a walk, a run or a bike ride, if one of those activities appeals to you. Though many jurisdictions across the United States require residents to wear masks when out in public, it may not be necessary—and may even be harmful to some people with respiratory conditions—while doing strenuous exercise.

"It's clearly hard to exercise with a mask on," says Dr. Yvonne Maldonado, a pediatrician specializing in infectious diseases at Stanford University's School of Medicine. "We go hiking up in the foothills and we take our masks with us and we don't wear them unless somebody starts coming the other way. Then we will put the mask on, and then we take it off and we keep going."

### 'The Quarantine 15' (pounds, that is) is a real phenomenon.

If you prefer to avoid the mask question altogether, think of your house as a cleverly disguised gym. Put on music and dance, or hula-hoop, Polanco suggests. You can also pump iron if you have dumbbells, or find a cable TV station with yoga or other workout programs.

If you search on the internet for "exercise videos," you will find countless workouts for beginners and experienced fitness buffs alike. Try one of the seven-minute workout apps so popular these days. You can download them from Google Play or the Apple Store.

If you miss the camaraderie of exercising with others, virtual fitness groups might seem like a pale substitute, but they can provide motivation and accountability, as well as live-streamed video workouts with like-minded exercisers. One way to find such groups is to search for a "virtual fitness community."

Many gyms are also offering live digital fitness classes and physical training sessions, often advertised on their websites.

If group sports is your thing, you may or may not have options, depending on where you live.

In Los Angeles, indoor and outdoor group sports in municipal parks are shut down until further notice. The only sports allowed are tennis and golf.

In Montgomery County, Maryland, the Ron Schell Draft League, a softball league for men 50 and older, will resume play early this month after sitting out the spring season due to COVID-19, says Dave Hyder, the league's commissioner.

But the says it has been difficult to get enough players because of worries about COVID.

"In the senior group, you have quite a lot of people who are in a high-risk category or may have a spouse in a high-risk category, and they don't want to chance playing," says Hyder, 67, who does plan to play.

Players will have to stay at least 6 feet apart and wear masks while off the field. On the field, the catcher is the only player required to wear a mask. That's because masks can steam up glasses or slip, causing impaired vision that could be dangerous to base runners or fielders, Hyder explains.

Whatever form of exercise you choose, remember it won't keep you healthy unless you also reduce consumption of fatty and sugary foods that can raise your risk of chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and hypertension—all COVID-19 risk factors.

Kim Guess, a dietitian at UC-Berkeley, recommends that people lay in a healthy supply of beans and lentils, whole grains, nuts and seeds, as well as frozen vegetables, tofu, tempeh, and canned fish, such as tuna and salmon.

"Start with something really simple," she said. "It could even be a vegetable side dish to go with what they're used to preparing."

Whatever first steps you decide to take, now is a good time to start eating better and moving your body more.

Staying healthy is "so important these days, more than at any other time because we are fighting this virus which doesn't have a treatment," says the Cleveland Clinic's Butsch. "The treatment is our immune system."

Bernard J. Wolfson is the managing editor for California Healthline, which is published by Kaiser Health News. This article was first published by California Healthline, a service of the California Health Care Foundation.

# Depression and Dementia in the Age of COVID-19: 2 Sides, 1 Coin

As social isolation takes hold, many older people face a greater risk of these closely linked conditions

DONALD WEAVER

Every seven seconds, someone in the world is diagnosed with dementia. A typical case that I often see in my practice is as follows: A 76-year-old woman has a two-year history of progressive worsening of short-term memory and cognitive decline. She can't recall the names of her grandchildren and is devastated by her deteriorating abilities.

However, this isn't the first time in her life that she has had feelings of loss and despair. Over the past 30 years, she has intermittently struggled with depression and anxiety. Her family has many questions: Does she have dementia or Alzheimer's? Could her depression have led to a dementia diagnosis? Is it only depression and not dementia? These are all good questions and the collective answer to them is "yes."

### Dementia and Depression

Dementia and depression are the two dreaded "D" diagnoses that are increasingly robbing our aging population of health and happiness as both disorders approach near epidemic proportions, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, the prevalence of depression in people with dementia has been reported to exceed 60 percent.

Despite their obvious differences, it is becoming ever more apparent that depression and dementia may be two sides of the same coin. People with dementia often have depression; if the depression remains untreated, the associated memory and cognitive problems worsen. Conversely, a significant history of depression seems to be a risk factor for dementia; the two disorders may thus co-exist in a vicious self-sustaining cycle. A longitudinal, three-wave epidemiologic study published in 2013 concluded: "Severe depression increases the risk of Alzheimer's Disease, even after controlling for the competing risk of death."

In the age of COVID-19, these connections become even more stark—and highlight an even more dire scenario. Loneliness and isolation are already noted risk factors for both depression and dementia. That means the lockdowns preventing family and caregivers from interacting with their loved ones in long-term care could hasten their loved ones' decline. We are only just beginning to observe the grim consequences of this imposed isolation—a necessary step, taken with the goal of saving lives, but which, in the end, may cause even more destruction and despair in the lives of those living with dementia and Alzheimer's.

### Complex Connection

Clearly, the connection between dementia and depression is deep, multi-faceted, and a growing area of scientific and public health interest.

More than half of patients with dementia also suffer from depression. In the early

**We are only just beginning to observe the grim consequences of this imposed isolation.**

Depression and dementia are so closely tied together that sometimes one is misdiagnosed for the other.



DE VISU/SHUTTERSTOCK

stages of dementia, the afflicted individual realizes that they are not the same person they once were—cognition is slowed, memory is not as sharp, words don't queue up in the brain as fast as they used to. This combination of conditions serves to further compromise cognitive reserve and to allow the symptoms of dementia to be manifested earlier and with greater severity. To further complicate the relationship, many people with dementia may not be able to recognize that they are, in fact, depressed.

As well, it appears that people with a past history of depression have double the risk of developing dementia. This is true even if the depression occurred more than a decade before the onset of dementia.

There are clear mechanisms for this increased risk. Prolonged damage to a part of the brain called the hippocampus, a finding linked to depression, has been proposed to underlie this causative relationship. This is further confirmed by studies that demonstrate increased hippocampal deposits of plaques and tangles in people with Alzheimer's (the pathological hallmarks of the disease) with lifetime histories of depression. In addition, other researchers speculate that brain inflammation that often occurs when a person is depressed may be a long-term triggering factor for dementia. These explanations further demonstrate the societal need to recognize and treat depression.

### Progression of a Single Disease?

In some people, depression and dementia aren't cause and effect but maybe simply different stages of the same single-disease process.

Depression isn't only a risk factor for dementia, it may also be the start of dementia. Depression may be the early manifestation of an underlying neurodegenerative disease.

For such people, the treatment of depression would be of particular importance. However, in other people, the treatment for

depression may paradoxically worsen the symptoms of dementia. Cognitive impairment in depressed elderly can be exacerbated by the use of antidepressants, though with the use of modern SSRI-type antidepressants, this should become less likely.

### Overlapping Symptoms

Finally, the symptoms of dementia and depression can mimic each other, which means people with dementia may be mistakenly diagnosed with depression and vice versa. Early dementia symptoms include memory problems (particularly remembering recent events), increasing confusion, behavior changes, apathy, social withdrawal, and inability to do everyday tasks.

Many of these symptoms are shared with depression, in which patients experience sleep disturbances, lack of energy (so even small tasks take extra effort), anxiety, restlessness, and problems with thinking, concentrating, making decisions, and remembering things.

Obviously, the relationship between dementia and depression is complex, with the two disorders being easily confused with each other as well as being risk factors for each other. Both are devastating, both are increasing in prevalence in our aging population, and both may be significantly affected by the stresses of COVID-19.

However, there is one major difference separating the two: There are no effective therapies for dementia, whereas there are a number of potentially effective therapies for depression. Efforts should always be made to detect the presence of depression, and if present, to treat it, thereby eliminating one of the faces of this two-faced dementia-depression coin.

Donald Weaver is a professor of chemistry and director of Krembil Research Institute at the University Health Network at the University of Toronto in Canada. This article was first published by The Conversation.

## Family Experience Shapes Diabetes Management

How patients understand diabetes will affect how they manage condition, professor says

BRIAN CONSIGLIO

Watching another person experience diabetes influences Type 2 diabetics' self-management of blood sugar levels, according to a new study.

Throughout her 38-year nursing career, Laurel Despina has progressed from a bedside nurse and has worked in medical, surgical, and cardiac intensive care units. She noticed diabetes is rarely referred to as a primary cause of death in itself, yet the disease is a leading contributor to deaths involving heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

"In addition to being a contributor to cardiovascular-related deaths, diabetes can lead to a variety of negative health outcomes, such as kidney failure, arthritis, nerve issues, eye problems, and leg ulcers that can become infected," said Despina, now an assistant professor and researcher in the University of Missouri Sinclair School of Nursing.

"Therefore, creating a plan to keep blood glucose levels from getting too high or too low will help those with diabetes better manage the disease and avoid those negative health complications down the road."



NIKLAS HALLEN/AFPP/GETTY IMAGES

Understanding the complexities of blood sugar can help patients better manage their condition.

To help adults with diabetes better manage their blood sugar levels, Despina interviewed people diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes about their understanding of the disease and their approach toward self-management.

She found those who had previous life experiences watching a relative or neighbor manage the disease influenced how they viewed diabetes management themselves.

"For example, one subject grew up watching his grandpa inject insulin needles into her thigh all the time like it was no big deal, so naturally, that person did not look at diabetes as something to be overly concerned

about," Despina said.

"On the other hand, another subject saw his neighbor with diabetic leg ulcers and swore that he never wanted that to happen to him, so he was very attentive to monitoring his blood sugar levels."

To serve their patients, health care providers need to be aware of their financial resources, Despina said.

"People on a fixed income might not be able to routinely buy fresh produce instead of pasta, which can impact their blood glucose levels," Despina said. "Given the tough circumstances some people with diabetes live in, health care providers need to do an assessment of what resources patients with diabetes have available so they optimize what they can do."

Despina recommends that when health care providers collect initial quantitative data from patients such as weight, height, and age, they should also ask additional qualitative questions to get a better understanding of their knowledge of the disease.

"Asking questions like 'What do you currently know about diabetes?', 'Do you know someone with diabetes?', and 'How do you think they did at self-managing it

and does this influence the way you view your self-management plan?' will help the health care provider better understand the patient's life experiences," Despina said.

"My overall goal is to help people with diabetes better optimize their self-management, which will improve their health outcomes by avoiding negative complications in the long run."

The study appears in the Journal of Clinical Nursing.

It recommends nurses assess how Type 2 diabetes patients make sense of self-management decisions. It also suggests nurses give patients refresher diabetes education when necessary to help them manage their condition.

The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality supported the work. The content is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.

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J. JUPCO SMOKOVSKI/SHUTTERSTOCK



# Natural Substances to Reduce Facial Wrinkles

The world can take a toll on your skin—and plants can provide a rejuvenating way to repair it



It's worth knowing that many wrinkles are not permanent and may even be reversible.

**W**hile it's impossible to turn back the hands of time, there are natural ways that can help manage the effects of aging—along with the wrinkles and age spots that come with it.

Part of combating wrinkles and other age-related spots and imperfections is understanding the story of your skin: It mirrors your body's health from the inside out, reflecting all the toxins and chemicals in your food and environment, chronic stress, activity level, and other lifestyle choices you make.

It's worth knowing that many wrinkles are not permanent and may even be reversible. They are often a sign that your body needs to be better hydrated.

The jury is still out on what the actual fountain of youth is, but there are natural substances that can effectively slow the appearance of wrinkles and keep your skin looking radiant and youthful for a very long time.

Food, for instance, feeds your skin; what you eat can radically

affect the appearance of wrinkles. A study showed that women who consumed more green and yellow vegetables had significantly fewer wrinkles. Skin-friendly fats are also found in grass-fed meat and dairy, wild-caught salmon, coconut oil, and olive oil, to name a few.

Even daily consumption of almonds, a healthy snack, may reduce the severity and depth of wrinkles in postmenopausal women, highlighting almonds' potential anti-aging benefits. Further, here are additional alternatives to costly, synthetic beauty products to help zap removable wrinkles away.

## 1. Date Palm Kernel

Research shows that the date palm kernel contains phytochemicals that can potentially rejuvenate skin.

A 2019 study explored the effects of a cream containing date palm kernel extract (DPKE) on facial wrinkles and other skin parameters in healthy subjects. It found that an eight-week regimen improved facial skin hydration, elas-

ticity, and melanin concentration.

DPKE also reduced wrinkle size and depth. The cream was well-tolerated by the participants' skin, and the effects may be attributed to the major phytochemicals and phytosterols offered by the extract.

## What you eat can radically affect the appearance of wrinkles.

### 2. Green Tea and Ginkgo

A combination of green tea and ginkgo biloba extracts was found effective in enhancing skin condition and making skin more elastic.

Researchers in a preclinical study on hairless mice, as well as a clinical study on 48 human volunteers, found a combination of green tea and ginkgo extracts substantially enhanced epider-

mis thickness and the number of cell layers, suggesting a moisturizing effect in the deeper layers of skin, as well as increased cell renewal.

### 3. Pine Bark and Antioxidants

A multi-nutrient mixture made up of vitamin C, vitamin E, carotenoids, selenium, zinc, amino acids and glycosaminoglycans, blueberry extract, and pycnogenol, which is derived from the French maritime pine tree, improved visible signs of aging in a double-blind, placebo-controlled study with 62 women ages 45 to 73. Skin elasticity was raised by 9 percent after six weeks of treatment, while skin roughness was 6 percent lower after 12 weeks of treatment.

### 4. Pomegranate Cream

A study using human volunteers from February 2020 found that an anthocyanins-rich pomegranate cream as a topical formulation can have strong anti-aging activity. Anthocyanins are antioxidant compounds that offer pomegran-

ate arils their color. They can protect skin from oxidant exposure, a major factor in the acceleration of aging and skin degeneration.

### 5. Red Ginseng

Red ginseng isn't known as Panax for nothing, as the word means "cure for all." It's a fabulous herbal remedy for a wide variety of body ailments.

It has also emerged as an excellent anti-aging product. In an experiment, a 3 percent red ginseng extract cream reduced wrinkle formation, inhibited collagen degradation, and enhanced the resilience, moisture, and tone of skin.

Note that red ginseng is a form of unpeeled and steamed Panax ginseng, also referred to as Asian or Korean ginseng. It is believed to have "heating" action that improves circulation. Red ginseng is available in liquid extracts, tinctures, capsules, and powders.

These natural remedies can help you get better skin, as can making sure you stay thoroughly hydrated. It's also important to know that some wrinkle remedies come with serious side effects. The ugly side effects of botox, for example, include alterations in mind and emotion.

If you'd like a thorough list of researched skin treatments, visit the GreenMedInfo.com database for at least 157 more research abstracts dealing with aging skin.

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