

THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND &

BODY

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As impactful as self-reflection is, how we view our difficulties in life is also important.

The Gift of Hardship

Our most important life lessons come when difficulties rain upon us

TATIANA DENNING

“Every defeat, every heartbreak, every loss, contains its own seed, its own lesson on how to improve your performance the next time.”
—Og Mandino, World War II bomber pilot

Tribulation. Hardship. Crisis.

What do these words bring to mind when you hear them? Do they conjure up feelings of fear and anxiety, make your armpits begin to sweat, or make you want to run in the other direction? If so, you're not alone. For many of us, that's our first reaction.

But what if we looked at our difficulties

The biggest determinant in the course of our lives is not the situation, but rather our reaction to it.

in a new light? What if, instead of fearing them and trying to avoid them, we viewed our hardships as gifts?

One of the benefits of accumulating years living on this earth is that we realize our most important lessons come not when sailing along smoothly in life, but when we hit rough, turbulent waters. This is when we pause to examine ourselves, reflect upon how we can do better, and take stock of what really matters in life.

I know, I know, I've wondered myself, “Why do I always have to learn the hard way?”

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Seniors Are Having 2nd Thoughts About Where to Live

The consequences of self-quarantine and social isolation are causing many people to rethink their golden years

JUDITH GRAHAM

Where do we want to live in the years ahead?

Older adults are asking this question anew in light of the ongoing toll of the COVID-19 pandemic—disrupted lives, social isolation, and mounting deaths. Many are changing their minds.

Some people who planned to move to senior housing are now choosing to live independently rather than communally. Others wonder whether transferring to a setting where they can get more assistance might be the right call.

These decisions, hard enough during ordinary times, are now fraught with uncertainty as the economy falters and COVID-19 deaths climb, including tens of thousands in nursing homes and assisted living centers.

Teresa Ignacio Gonzalvo and her husband, Jaime, both 68, chose to build a house rather than move into a continuing care retirement community when they relocate from Virginia Beach, Virginia, to Indianapolis later this year to be closer to their daughters.

Having heard about lockdowns around the country because of COVID-19, Gonzalvo said, “We've realized we're not ready to lose our independence.”

Alissa Ballot, 64, is planning to leave her 750-square-foot apartment in downtown Chicago and put down roots in a multigenerational cohousing community where neighbors typically share dining and recreation areas and often help one another.

“What I've learned during this pandemic is that personal relationships matter most to me, not place,” she said.

Kim Beckman, 64, and her husband, Mike, were ready to give up being homeowners in Victoria, Texas, and join a 55-plus community or rent in an independent living apartment building in northern Texas before COVID-19 hit.

Now, they're considering buying an even bigger home because “if you're going to be in the house all the time, you might as well be comfortable,” Beckman said.

“Everyone I know is talking about this,” said Wendl Kornfeld, 71, who lives on the Upper West Side of Manhattan.

Continued on Page 7

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The potential for social isolation is especially worrisome, as facilities retain restrictions on family visits and on group dining and activities.

What People Say



I read The Epoch Times daily. I still like hard papers [...] and I still like to grab that paper in my hand, but I get more printed versions of stories than ever before. You guys have done an amazing job, and really—I think there's such a void in media, especially newspapers. They slant so solidly one way that **there's very few papers that I can really feel that I can rely on, and The Epoch Times is one.**

SEAN HANNITY
Talk show host



The Epoch Times is a great place where you can understand traditional values in a way and in a tone and through content that is accessible. It's smart.

CARRIE SHEFFIELD
Columnist and broadcaster



I congratulate you and The Epoch Times for the work you are doing, especially with regard to keeping the menace of the communist threat in front of us.

DR. SEBASTIAN GORKA
Military and intelligence analyst and former deputy assistant to the president



I rely on The Epoch Times newspaper for factual and unbiased news coverage.

LARRY ELDER
Best-selling author, attorney, and talk show host



It's our favorite paper. It's the first one we read. Thank you so much for your reporting of the news.

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Fitness and Health for Older Adults

Jim Owens was falling apart at 70—and then he turned it all around

ANDREW THOMAS

When Jim Owen turned 70 years old, he was falling apart. He was suffering from severe lower back pain, his knees had been worn out, and his rotator cuff was frozen stiff. He was also about 25 pounds overweight. Instead of sitting back, he decided to make health a priority for himself.

"I had an epiphany, and I realized how quickly we age is a choice. We can either follow the path of least resistance," Owen explained, "or we can push back, and slow or even reverse the process."

The successful Wall Street professional had been on the road for 10 years giving lectures and promoting his book "Cowboy Ethics," which sold 150,000 copies. Life on the road eventually took its toll on him physically.

Owen's first 5 years involved building a physical foundation for his fitness renaissance, and ridding himself of his aches and pains. The hardest part for him was getting started, and getting himself off of the couch. According to Owen, the average adult sits between 8 and 11 hours a day whether it's watching television or staring at computer. This lack of movement leads to obesity, and 40 percent of Americans are obese.

"I cannot tell you the negative impact this has on your body. It's like smoking," Owen said.

Small Steps for Health

For the first 30 days, Owen got himself into new habits. He started by simply walking every day for 30 days. The first week he could hardly walk more than a few blocks without gasping for breath. After a month of just walking, he felt better and his mood had improved.

"I don't believe that there's such a thing as big steps. I don't believe it's



Jim Owen has produced a new documentary entitled "The Art of Aging Well," which airs on PBS.

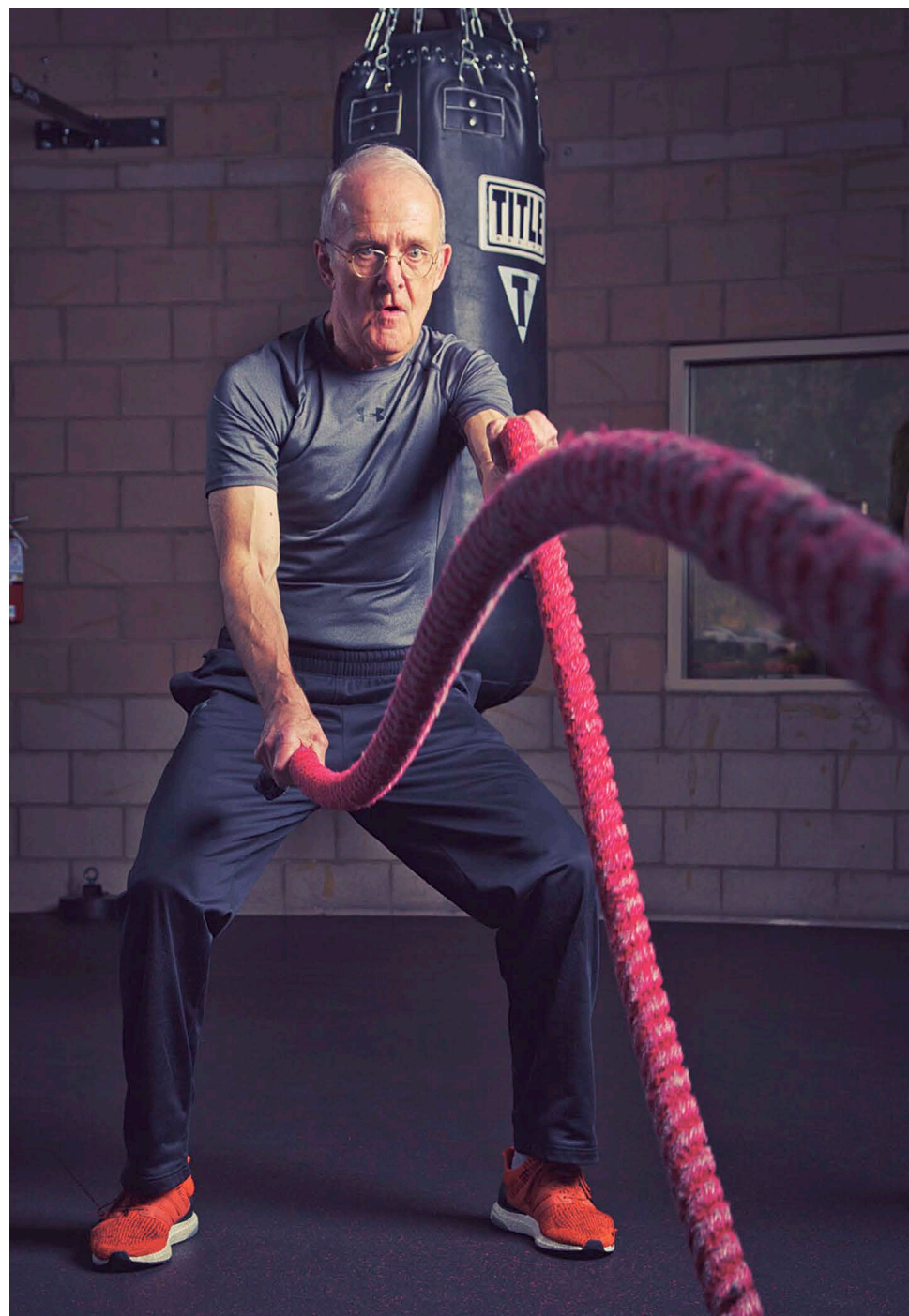
true at my age," Owen said.

Instead Owen focused on mobility, flexibility, and strength training. On day one, he could not do one single pushup. After a week or two, he could do one repetition. Slowly he built up to two, then three, and then four push-ups. He focused on five simple body-weight exercises that focused on his large muscles like his chest, legs, and most importantly his core. He didn't and still doesn't lift heavy weights, but instead focuses on the motion itself. Now he works out for an hour a day, six days a week.

"Once you build that foundation it really does become a lot of fun," Owen explained.

That's when Owen began looking more closely at his eating habits. Without obsessing, he started paying attention to his diet and portions. He also began to incorporate meditation into his routine, which improved his sleep and anxiety.

During the pandemic, fitness is particularly important, especially for the vulnerable population that is 65 or older and/or has a preexisting health condition. According to Owen (and



Jim Owen lost 55 pounds once he started exercising again.

a mountain of medical research), roughly 80 percent of these conditions are related to lifestyle.

During the pandemic, fitness is particularly important, especially for the vulnerable population that is 65 or older and or has a preexisting health condition.

For example, smoking, inactivity, excessive weight, and excessive drinking contribute to health issues such as diabetes and hypertension. Exercise and physical fitness can greatly reduce the risks of these conditions, and consequently the chance of dying from COVID-19. Fitness also benefits older adults psychologically

by giving them a sense of confidence and control.

"We're talking about a mindset as much as anything else," Owen said. "I'm going to take control. I'm just not going to be a victim."

Owen says that the motivation to get in shape and live a healthier lifestyle has to come from within. If you tell an older adult that they have to do something, they will resist. Instead, describing the benefits of fitness, the process of taking the small steps, and conveying an encouraging attitude is much more effective. Once someone notices the benefits and others tell them about how they look and feel younger, the motivation to continue is reinforced.

Keep it Simple

Owen advocates a rudimentary approach to exercise for older adults. He recommends squats, and starting out by holding onto a table or chair if the movement is initially difficult. A weak core often results in the same kind of severe back pain Owen suffered from, and he recommends the plank position to strengthening that area

of the body. Pushups and pull-ups are two other simple exercises he recommends. Many exercises like the pushup and the squat have numerous variations to increase difficulty.

"If you want to be complex be my guest. I keep it as simple as possible, and I really do the basic stuff. These exercises go back 2,000 years," Owen said.

“Once you build that foundation it really does become a lot of fun.”

Jim Owen

He also emphasizes that core strength does not mean a set of six pack abs, but a solid foundation for the rest of the body. He advises against exercises like bicep curls that focus on glamor muscles, and instead urges people to work their larger muscle groups. Owen concentrates on his legs, chest, shoulders, and back. Furthermore, he urges older adults to work on their balance, as roughly a third of older adults suffer from falls annually.

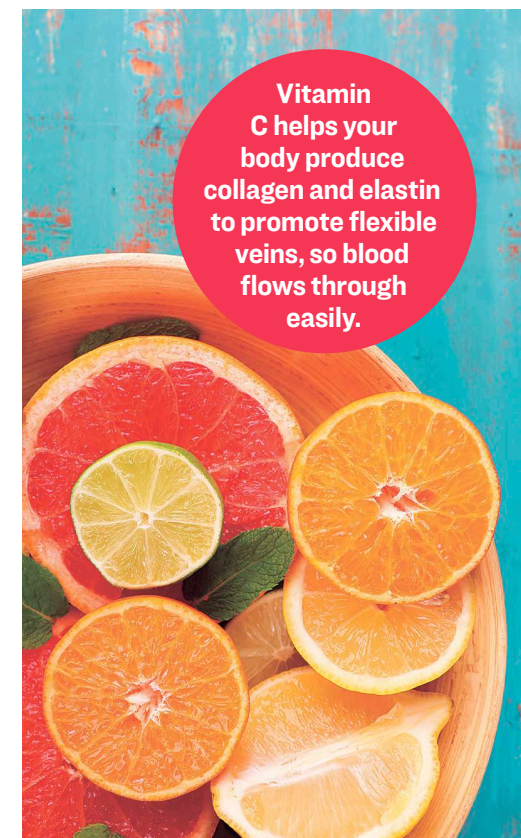
"If there's a secret, I never learned it," Owen said.

Owen has written about his fitness journey and his advice for older adults in "Just Move!: A New Approach to Fitness After 50," which the Wall Street Journal named as one of the best books for healthy aging in 2017.

However, he thought that a documentary would be an even better way to encourage older adults because of the film medium's ability to emotionally connect with an audience. Consequently, Owen has produced "The Art of Aging Well," which will debut on PBS on Oct. 31, 2020, across the country. The documentary has already aired on some local PBS channels, and has received positive reactions from audiences. He also hopes to continue with a future series.

Owen hopes viewers take away the understanding that fitness and healthy living is a choice, and that they will choose to develop positive habits. He advocates preventative measures like exercise and a healthy diet to keep an older adult out of the doctor's office and ensure a more prosperous life. Moreover, he hopes that when people see that he was able to make the change, they will realize that anyone can and that no one is too old to start taking better care of themselves.

"I think we're going to make a real difference in the lives of a lot of people, and that would give me greater satisfaction than any kind of a business deal," Owen said.



Vitamin C helps your body produce collagen and elastin to promote flexible veins, so blood flows through easily.

Foods for Healthy Veins

A few simple diet guidelines will keep your veins strong and flexible

DEVON ANDRE

How do you keep your veins healthy?

If you've never really thought about it, don't worry—you're not alone. Most people don't think twice, let alone once, about how their veins are doing.

Until it's too late. Once you've got a problem, like varicose veins or deep vein thrombosis, they might be all you think about.

Learning how to prevent vein problems can save you pain and discomfort—and promote a healthier lifestyle in the process. Maintaining a healthy weight, getting exercise, and not spending too much time sitting can all help build strong veins.

But today we're going to focus on diet. Eating might not seem like an essential component for vein health, but it is. The nutrients you consume can help keep veins open, flexible, and ready to work against gravity to shuttle blood back to your heart.

Maintaining a healthy weight, getting exercise, and not spending too much time sitting can all help build strong veins.

Fiber: Fiber helps you maintain a healthy weight and limit inflammation, both of which can influence vein health. Fiber may promote weight loss by improving satiety, thereby easing the pressure on veins that boosts the risk of varicose veins.

Popcorn, oatmeal, broccoli, beans, and apples are all good sources of fiber, as are fruits, vegetables, and whole grains generally.

Low-Sodium Foods: You need sodium and some can be good for you. Too much can be harmful, particularly when it comes to vein health. High sodium leads to water retention and makes it harder for fluids to circulate through your veins.

Vitamin C: Vitamin C helps your body produce collagen and elastin to promote flexible veins, so blood flows through easily. These compounds also allow veins to contract, so blood stays flowing in the right direction.

You'll find plenty of vitamin C in strawberries, broccoli, pineapple, dark leafy greens, and bell peppers.

Water: Water helps deliver nutrients to your veins and helps thin blood, so it flows more easily.

Next time you're planning a meal, think a little bit more about your vein health. Doing so can lead to a healthier overall diet with far-reaching benefits.

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.

POSITIVE AGING

Diabetes and You

Curing diabetes through weight loss and diet

MARILYN MURRAY WILLISON

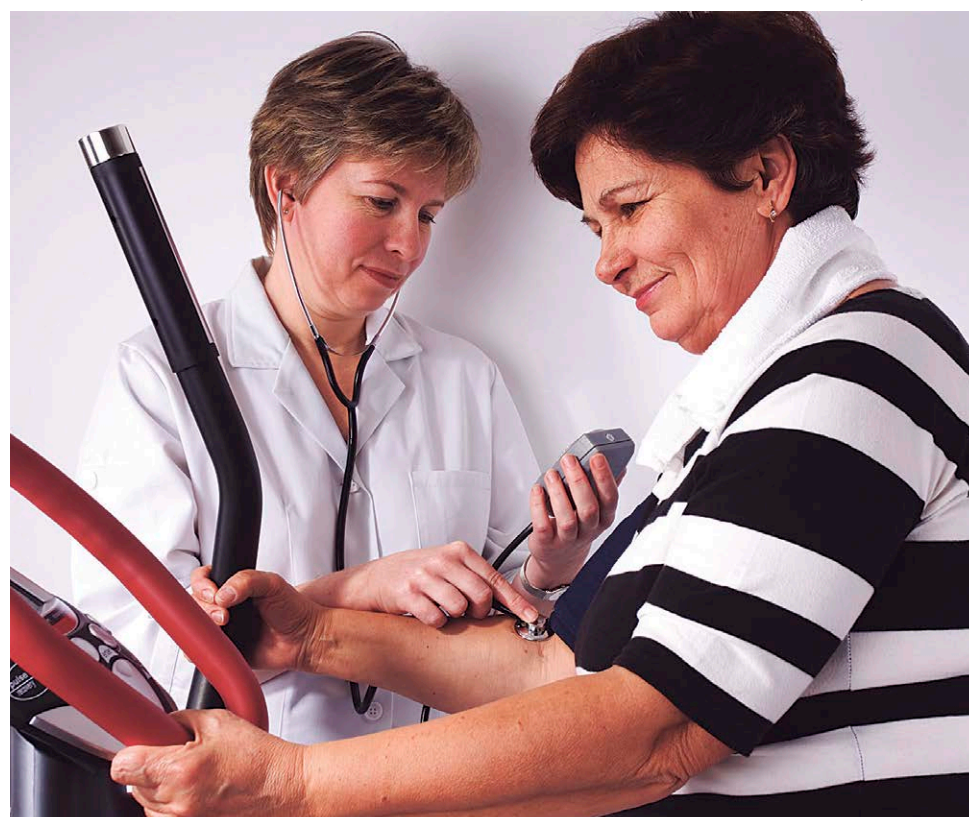
I recently wrote about the remarkable book "Genius Food," which gave me a whole new perspective on our health in general and diabetes in particular. According to author Max Lugavere and his co-author, Dr. Paul Grewal, a variety of medical issues stem from our bodies' inability to process all the sugar found in the standard American diet. Some experts have decided to label Alzheimer's disease simply Type 3 diabetes and macular degeneration little more than "diabetes of the eye."

There's no doubt that more people—including plenty of baby boomers—are diabetic today than ever before. In fact, more than 25 percent of Americans over the age of 65 have the disease, which means that those of us who were born in the 1950s have a higher likelihood of having diabetes than any other age group. For this reason alone, a British study that examined ways to self-control Type 2 diabetes is particularly noteworthy.

Researchers at the University of Glasgow and Newcastle University studied 298 adults (20 to 65 years old) who had been diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes within the last eight years. This study was labeled DiRECT, or Diabetes Remission Clinical Trial, and was designed to evaluate the possibility of lifestyle choices being able to reverse the disease, rather than relying on medication alone. Participants were divided into either regular physician-monitored diabetic care or an intensive exercise and weight-reduction program.

Close to 90 percent of the participants who had lost at least 30 pounds managed to literally reverse their diabetes.

Members of the 149-person weight management group were only allowed to consume around 850 calories per day, and for a three- to five-month period,



Diet and exercise can lower medication needs for diabetes—and even cure the disease.

their diet primarily comprised things like healthy smoothies and soups. Once this stage was complete, food was added back to their diet over a two- to eight-week transition period. To help them maintain their weight loss, group members also received cognitive behavioral therapy and advice regarding additional physical activity.

After a year, the results surprised both the participants and the study directors. Close to 90 percent of the participants

who had lost at least 30 pounds managed to literally reverse their diabetes. More than half of the participants who lost 22 to 33 pounds also achieved remission. And the reversal even worked for 34 percent of those who only lost 11 to 22 pounds.

While those in the weight management group lost an average 22 pounds during the 12-month period, members of the control group only lost 2.2 pounds. According to nutritionist Mike Lean of

the University of Glasgow, with this trial there were "much higher than usual acceptance rates for diabetes clinical trials." The success of this study could signal that dietary intervention alone could drastically change the way we treat this burgeoning disease, which for decades has been labeled a chronic, lifelong condition.

If you are diabetic, it's good to know that weight loss and exercise can lower the amount of medication you need—or if you're lucky—eliminate it altogether. In the meantime, here is a suggested list of guidelines for living with diabetes:

1. Get a yearly eye exam.
2. Have your doctor check your kidneyneys each year.
3. Keep track of your cholesterol levels.
4. See your dentist every six months to guard against periodontal disease.
5. Get your average blood sugar (A1C) measured every three to six months.
6. Monitor your skin, and be on the lookout for nonhealing cuts or bruises.
7. Check your feet every single day.

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

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Mutations are natural for any organism, including viruses.

Coronavirus Mutations: What We've Learned so Far

The virus that causes COVID-19 is changing but that's not something to fear

LUCY VAN DORP

In early January, the first genome sequence of SARS-CoV-2—the virus that causes COVID-19—was released under the moniker “Wuhan-1.” This string of 30,000 letters (the A, T, C, and Gs of the genetic code) marked day one in the race to understand the genetics of this newly discovered coronavirus. Now, a further 100,000 coronavirus genomes sampled from COVID-19 patients in over 100 countries have joined Wuhan-1. Geneticists around the world are mining the data for answers. Where did SARS-CoV-2 come from? When did it start infecting humans? How is the virus mutating—and does it matter? SARS-CoV-2 genomics, much like the virus itself, went big and went global.

The term mutation tends to conjure up images of dangerous new viruses with enhanced abilities sweeping across the planet. And while mutations constantly emerge and sometimes disperse widely—as did early mutations in SARS-CoV-2 have made their way around the world as the virus spread almost unnoticed—mutations are a perfectly natural part of any organism,

Most commonly, mutations will render a virus non-functional or have no effect whatsoever.

including viruses. The vast majority have no impact on a virus's ability to transmit or cause disease.

A mutation just means a difference; a letter change in the genome. While the SARS-CoV-2 population was genetically essentially invariant when it jumped into its first human host in late 2019, over 13,000 of these changes are now found in the 100,000 SARS-CoV-2 sequenced to date. Yet any two viruses from any two patients anywhere in the world differ on average by only ten letters. This is a tiny fraction of the total 30,000 characters in the virus's genetic code and means that all SARS-CoV-2 in circulation can be considered part of a single clonal lineage.

Slowly Mutating

It will take some time for the virus to acquire substantial genetic diversity. SARS-CoV-2 mutates fairly slowly for a virus, with any lineage acquiring a couple of changes every month; two to six-fold lower than the number of mutations acquired by influenza viruses over the same period.

Most commonly, mutations will render a virus non-functional or have no effect whatsoever. Yet the potential for mutations to affect transmissibility of SARS-CoV-2 in its new human hosts exists. As a result, there have been intense efforts to determine which, if any, of the mutations

identifiable since the first SARS-CoV-2 genome was sequenced in Wuhan may significantly alter viral function.

An infamous mutation in this context is an amino acid change in the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein, the protein that gives coronaviruses their characteristic crown-like projections and allows it to attach to host cells. This single character change in the viral genome—termed D614G—has been shown to increase virus infectivity in cells grown in the lab, though with no measurable impact on disease severity. This mutation is widely found with three other mutations, and all four are now found in about 80 percent of sequenced SARS-CoV-2, making it the most frequent set of mutations in circulation.

The challenge with D614G, as with other mutations, is disentangling whether the mutations have risen in frequency because they happened to be present in viruses responsible for seeding early successful outbreaks, or whether they truly confer an advantage to their carriers. While genomics work on a United Kingdom dataset suggests a subtle role of D614G in increasing the growth rate of lineages carrying it, our own work could find no measurable impact on transmission.

Simply Carried Along

D614G is not the only mutation found at high frequency. A string of three mutations in the protein shell of SARS-CoV-2 are also increasingly appearing in sequencing data and are now found in a third of viruses. A single change at position 57 of the Orf3a protein, a known immunogenic region, occurs in a quarter. Other mutations exist in the spike protein while myriad others seem induced by the activity of our own immune response. At the same time, there

remains no consensus that these, or any others, are significantly changing virus transmissibility or virulence. Most mutations are simply carried along as SARS-CoV-2 continues to successfully spread.

But replacements are not the only small edits that may affect SARS-CoV-2. Deletions in the SARS-CoV-2 accessory genes Orf7b/Orf8 have been shown to reduce the virulence of SARS-CoV-2, potentially eliciting milder infections in patients. A similar deletion may have behaved in the same way in SARS-CoV-2, the related coronavirus responsible for the Sars outbreak in 2002–2004. Progression towards a less virulent SARS-CoV-2 would be welcome news, though deletions in Orf8 have been present from the early days of the pandemic and do not seem to be increasing in frequency.

While adaptive changes may yet occur, all the available data at this stage suggests we're facing the same virus since the start of the pandemic. Chris Whitty, chief medical officer for England, was right to pour cold water on the idea that the virus has mutated into something milder than the one that caused the United Kingdom to impose a lockdown in March. Possible decreases in symptom severity seen over the summer are probably a result of younger people being infected, containment measures (such as social distancing), and improved treatment rather than changes in the virus itself. However, while SARS-CoV-2 has not significantly changed to date, we continue to expand our tools to track and trace its evolution, ready to keep pace.

Lucy van Dorp is a senior research fellow in microbial genomics at University College London in England. This article was first published by The Conversation.

Treatments That Are Better than Drugs or Supplements

Scientifically-proven therapies can come from many sources, including food and traditional medicine

Natural medicine doesn't just involve "nutraceuticals," but extends to modalities such as yoga and acupuncture that an increasing body of peer-reviewed research shows can be superior to drugs.

Natural medicine is an amazing field, full of inspiring stories and an ever-accumulating body of scientific research to support its views on health.

GreenMedInfo.com specializes in dredging up promising clinical pearls from the oceanic depths of the National Library of Medicine. That library contains a database of 27 million citations and this evidence indicates that not only are natural substances valuable in treating and preventing disease, but sometimes they are clearly superior to drugs. Considering correctly prescribed medications are one of the top three causes of death, what's not to like about safe, effective food-based alternatives?

But our project, and natural medicine at large, is not without its challenges, one of which is that it is quite easy to get caught up in the allopathic model of treating surface symptoms, albeit naturally.

Sometimes we do not need to take anything to stimulate our body's innate self-healing abilities.

This “natural allopathy,” if you will, entices people to look for “natural cure” shortcuts and Band-Aids (“nutraceuticals”). Instead, they need to focus on the deeper issues associated with avoiding, limiting, and addressing environmental exposures, reducing stress, and improving diet and exercise, for instance.

In a culture that pops hundreds of millions of doses of drugs and supplements on a daily basis, it is increasingly difficult to break free from the powerful psychological pull to ingest something—be it a natural or synthetic “magic pill”; its effects real or imagined—instead of addressing the under-

lying problems.

This is also why part of our project is to identify peer-reviewed published research from biomedical journals indicating that there are therapeutic actions, from walking to yoga, dietary changes to exercising, that are at least as effective and often superior to conventional drug-based treatments.

There is a good smattering of data that edifies the notion that sometimes we do not need to “take anything” to stimulate our body's innate self-healing abilities. Rather, we can use non-invasive therapies—including doing nothing (i.e. watchful waiting)—can accomplish favorable results.

Here are a few examples from research studies. For links to the studies referenced, please find this article at TheEpochTimes.com/author-greenmedinfo.

Colored light versus benzyl peroxide for acne: A combination of blue- and red-light irradiation therapy was found superior to 5 percent benzoyl peroxide in treating acne vulgaris without side effects. Another study found blue-light irradiation therapy alone as effective as 5 percent benzyl peroxide in the treatment of acne, but with fewer side effects.

Dietary changes versus drug treatment for hypertension: A high-fiber, low-sodium, low-fat diet is superior to the beta-blocker drug metoprolol in hypertensive Type 2 diabetic subjects.

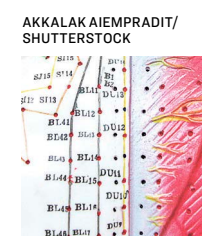
Acupuncture and moxibustion versus pharmaceutical treatment for sudden deafness: Acupuncture and moxibustion therapy was found to be superior in treating sudden deafness as compared with the routine drug-based therapy.

Acupuncture versus drug treatment for treating migraines: Acupuncture treatment exhibited greater effectiveness than drug therapy with flunarizine in the first months of therapy for migraine and with superior tolerability.

Dietary changes versus high-dose steroid for Crohn's disease: An elemental diet is as effective as high-dose steroid treatment in improving Crohn's



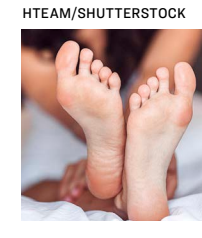
ROMAN SAMOKHIN/SHUTTERSTOCK
Dietary changes beat drug metoprolol for hypertension in Type 2 diabetics.



AKKALAK AIEMPRADIT/SHUTTERSTOCK
Acupuncture beat drug flunarizine for migraine with superior tolerability.



KOREA/SHUTTERSTOCK
Watchful waiting is often better than antibiotics for mild ear infection.



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Foot reflexology beat alprazolam (Xanax) for insomnia.

disease activity in children, while superior in supporting the growth of the children. Two additional studies found similar results in adults with mild-to-moderately active Crohn's disease.

Aromatherapy massage versus Tylenol for menstrual pain: Aromatherapy massage on the abdomen was found superior to Tylenol for alleviating menstrual pain in high school girls.

Hypnosis versus Valium for anxiety: Hypnosis during embryo transfer was found to be as effective as diazepam in terms of pregnancy ratio and anxiolytic effects, but with fewer side effects.

Yoga technique versus antidepressant drug for depression: Sudarshan Kriya Yoga (a rhythmic breathing technique) was found superior to the drug imipramine in the treatment of depression.

Yogic intervention versus drug treatment for irritable bowel syndrome: Yogic intervention consisting of poses and breathing exercises was found superior to conventional treatment in diarrhea-predominant IBS.

Foot reflexology versus drug treatment for insomnia: Foot reflexology (wooden needle technique) was found superior to the drug alprazolam (Xanax) in the treatment of insomnia.

Watchful waiting versus drug treatment for childhood ear infection: Watchful waiting compares favorably to immediate antibiotic treatment for some children with non-severe acute otitis media.

This sampling reflects only a minor subset of data within our Therapeutic Actions index, 1 of 6 databases on the GreenMedInfo.com open access site. Presently, we have 216 distinct actions indexed, which can be viewed on our Therapeutic Actions display page. You may be surprised how simple conscious acts such as chewing your food thoroughly, laughing, or a walk in the forest can produce healing responses within the human body.

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The Scourge of Tech Neck, and Some Tips to Correct It

Spinal deterioration is showing up in younger people as our necks take a tremendous strain

CONAN MILNER

Phones and laptops have become our constant companions. They provide convenience, communication, and a constant source of entertainment. They're primarily designed to engage our minds. But they may also contribute to the degeneration of our bodies.

“Tech neck” is an unofficial term to describe a very common issue. Anyone who gets engrossed in a screen can fall victim to this position: the shoulders hunch, and the neck assumes a vulture-like curve.

A few moments in this posture isn't such a big deal—the dynamic human body can take numerous positions to perform a variety of tasks without consequence—but spending too much time in a tech-neck

Anyone engrossed in a screen can fall victim to tech neck: hunched shoulders and a vulture-like neck curve.

stance takes toll.

In our device-driven culture, examples of tech neck are easy to spot. And now that so many of us are working from home, avoiding public get-togethers, and attending meetings via Zoom, doctors are seeing more problems related to this posture than ever before. One is orthopedic surgeon Dr. Brian A. Cole.

It might seem hard to imagine that a slouchy posture can really have that much of an impact, but Cole sees real evidence of damage from it in his practice. He says that spine deterioration usually starts when we're about 30 years old—50 percent of 30-year-olds have bulging discs—but patients are starting to show signs of spine deterioration at much younger ages.

“I've had a few teens come to see me recently, and when they got an MRI, lo and behold, they had herniations,” Cole said. “We may be seeing a change in the physiology because of texting.”

There are lots of reasons to adopt good posture: You breathe better, your organs have more space, you look better, and some

research says it can even impact our mood and overall health.

But when it comes to poor posture as a source of pain and a driver of spine degeneration, Cole says the problem behind tech neck is that our bodies aren't designed to hold our head at this precarious angle for extended periods of time.

An adult human head weighs about 10 to 12 pounds, but our body carries this weight best when it's directly over our shoulders. When upright, the neck is just holding that 10 to 12 pounds. But for every 10 degrees of angulation our neck falls, the weight of our head increases by 10 pounds. This is due to the increased force of the head's weight on the neck. To understand, think of how a 10 pound weight can lift a much heavier weight if it is at the long end of a teeter totter or lever. When the head tilts, it is leveraging its 10 to 12 pounds against the neck.

“So when you're in the classic texting position, your neck is flexed about 60 degrees. Therefore your head now weighs about 60 pounds,” Cole said. “If the musculature is used to 10 pounds with your head in neu-

FIZES/SHUTTERSTOCK



There are many exercises that can strengthen the core muscles that support your spine.

Years of prolonged sitting and slouching can weaken the muscles that are supposed to keep you upright.

tral position, and you throw 60 pounds on it, that vector of force is substantial.”

Build and Support Your Body Mechanics

Before your posture becomes a literal pain in the neck, learn some tips to correct it.

First, figure out what good posture looks and feels like. You can start by thinking of a straight line, where your head is directly over your shoulders, which is directly over your pelvis. Make a habit of finding this neutral position throughout the day.

“Get that neck back. Do a chin tuck.

Bring those shoulders back. If someone took a picture of you texting from the side you would see a dramatic change in your alignment,” Cole said.

Another key point to good posture is strength. Even if you make repeated efforts to sit up straight, years of prolonged sitting and slouching can weaken the muscles that are supposed to keep you upright, pulling you into a default hump-back position.

Luckily, we can build these muscles back. You can find lots of exercises to help strengthen your structure, but Cole says to concentrate on the core. When your core is strong and engaged, it can better support everything else that rests on top of it.

Another key part to keep fit is your shoulders.

“When it comes to your neck, it's really about your upper traps—your shoulders. Simply taking a 10 pound weight [in each hand] and rolling your shoulders around does a great deal for neck pain, and you'll see a substantial improvement in your ability to keep your head up,” Cole said. “It takes an effort, but it pays off dividends.”

In addition to being more mindful of posture and developing a stronger frame, you can also support your body mechanics by

changing your work environment. Raise your computer or phone closer to eye level so your head isn't forced to pitch forward. You can also try modifying your seat.

“Just by giving yourself some lumbar support you can actually correct your neck indirectly,” Cole said.

But even the most ergonomically beneficial chair and desk still is not as helpful as sitting less. While we often sit for comfort, being stuck in this position for hours on end can be hard on your spine. If possible, try a standing desk, or make a habit of getting up every half hour or so and walking around—an activity that, unlike sitting, actually improves the circulation of the spinal disks.

“The reality is that you put more stress on your low back sitting than anything else you do,” Cole said. “This is why stand up desks are very intriguing. They offer a lot of benefit for aligning your body better.”

Standing lets your spine take the load of the body properly with the least additional weight due to odd leveraged angles. Just like tech neck, slouching and other poor postures hurt the spine. Standing up, meanwhile, increases circulation and the tone of the musculature, said Cole.

“It makes a big difference.”



Tribulations can reveal parts of ourselves that we may not have even been aware of—both good and bad.

The Gift of Hardship

Our most important life lessons come when difficulties rain upon us

Continued from Page 1

I guess it's because the hard way is what makes us most solid and firm, and what brings about the greatest and most enduring changes in our character.

As impactful as self-reflection is, how we view our difficulties in life is also important. Our perceptions have a significant impact on not just our mental health, but on our physical health as well. In fact, some believe our very happiness also depends on how we view adversity.

The Root of Happiness

Stanford University's Emma Sappala writes that embracing hardship, rather than just merely accepting hardship, is actually the secret to living a happy life. "The Chinese saying 'Chi Ku Shi Fu' (eating bitterness is good fortune) highlights the idea that there is the opportunity for wisdom and growth in suffering," she wrote.

The idea that suffering leads to good things is an inherent part of ancient Chinese culture and wisdom. They believed that our difficulties come from heaven, and that hardships are the only means through which we can truly understand and improve ourselves, and thereby attain virtue and blessings. Being open to this concept is vital if we're to achieve personal growth. Sappala goes on to say, "We can either choose to let the negative experiences we encounter bring us down, or we can choose to embrace them and thereby rise above them." It's our acceptance of life and our perception of hardship, as well as our response to it, that really matters.

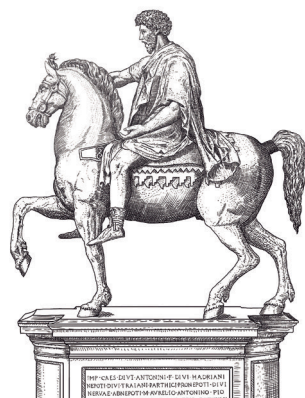
Responding with kindness and compassion, as well as self-control, no matter how we are treated, is required.

"By fundamentally understanding that our life is characterized by contrasts, we can start to experience gratitude and grow to greater levels of well-being, perspective, and wisdom," Sappala said.

In viewing difficulties this way, we attain a peace of mind and sense of serenity that may otherwise elude us. This is one of the great lessons human beings have passed down, generation after generation, for millennia.

View It Like a Stoic

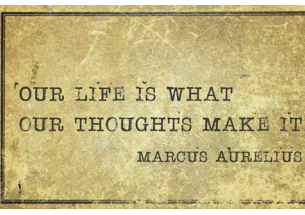
Ancient China was not the only traditional culture to embrace the inevitability of suffering. The Stoics of ancient Greece and



Marcus Aurelius Antoninus was the emperor of Rome from 161 to 180 and one of the world's best known Stoic philosophers.

We are made to face our fears and have a chance to do the right thing in spite of them.

Marcus Aurelius's writings are a critical source of our understanding of ancient Stoic philosophy.



Rome understood this as well.

Isaac Wechuli, of the site Unbounded Wisdom, discovered the importance of embracing hardship in order to obtain inner peace, which is, perhaps, a synonym for happiness.

Through experience, he came to appreciate the wisdom of Stoicism, as he discovered that no one can escape suffering and hardship, no matter how hard they may try.

"Hardships are, therefore, part of the flow of life," he said. "Accepting them results in inner peace because we'll stop worrying when we anticipate hardships, and we'll never be depressed or stressed when hardships arrive."

If we examine the lives of the Stoics, there are stories of great resilience in the face of tremendous hardship. But they understood that striving to avoid life's difficulties is futile. Instead, they searched deep within to find strength to weather the storm.

The Stoics focused on living a life of virtue and aligning with the flow of nature. They reasoned that virtue of character, something we always carry, that can never be taken from us, is what matters, while things such as money and fame, which are out of our control and fleeting, should be viewed with detachment.

Psychotherapist Donald Robertson believes that Stoicism has had such a significant impact in his field that he decided to highlight it in a book titled "How to Think Like a Roman Emperor." He seeks to apply the wisdom of Stoic philosopher and Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius to life's modern-day problems.

Robertson points out that the way we frame things plays a big role, saying, "If someone is anxious in a meeting, they'll say, 'That guy shot me down in flames.' They could just say, 'Oh, he expressed disagreement with me.' This is very obvious when you're working with clients in therapy, but when you describe the same situation in more value-free, more objective, matter-of-fact terms, it often seems much less distressing. ... The Stoics were very aware of this problem."

Do you notice how the two phrases affect you differently?

We learn from the Stoics that the biggest determinant in the course of our lives is not the situation, but rather our reaction to it. To a Stoic, nothing has any value outside of our own reasoned choice about what

it means to us personally. This approach robs external events of their power over us, and places the power in our own hands, or should we say, minds.

A Universal Tie

It may provide some comfort to know that hardships affect us all. These difficulties seem to be the great equalizer in life—no one is exempt.

Those who have achieved great success always have stories of hardship and failure, as things of true value rarely come easily.

For example, Thomas Edison endured over 10,000 failed attempts before achieving success. When asked by a reporter about his failures, Edison replied: "I have not failed 10,000 times. I have not failed once. I have succeeded in proving that those 10,000 ways will not work. When I have eliminated the ways that will not work, I will find the way that will work."

The idea that suffering leads to good things is an inherent part of ancient Chinese culture and wisdom.

Many would have given up long before 10,000 tries, but because he viewed his failures as valuable lessons, rather than failures, he kept trying.

Winston Churchill also had his share of hardship. He lost five elections during his political career, battled depression, and had a lisp that made giving speeches, and even speaking, difficult at times. However, Churchill went on to become one of the most successful politicians and orators the world has ever known.

Difficulties and hardships come in all shapes and sizes, and each of them serves as both a test and a lesson for us.

Today, we're dealing with COVID-19. And while this crisis has been devastating in so many ways, there are lessons to be learned. Adriana Bankston, the principal legislative analyst at the University of California Office of Federal Government Relations, recently reflected on this in a post on Inside Higher Ed.

"The optimist realizes that every adversity is an opportunity for personal growth and may focus more on encouraging others. The optimist also has the ability to look into the future and realize the long-term consequences of their choices," she writes.

Uncovering Our Strengths

Tribulations can reveal parts of ourselves that we may not have even been aware of—both good and bad. By acting as a catalyst to uncover these things, hardship can help us correct and improve the things that are not in alignment with our values, while strengthening what we'd like to develop.

Wechuli notes, "Epictetus, one of the famous Stoics, wrote, 'What would become of Hercules, if there had been no lion, hydra, stag or boar, and no criminals to rid the world of? What would he have done in the

absence of challenges? What would have been the use of those arms, that physique, and that noble soul, without crisis or conditions to stir him into action?"

Indeed, it's during life's difficulties that we must dig deep, find strength, and develop our wisdom. Perhaps many of our noble traits would lie dormant, or would not reach their full potential, were we not challenged to use them.

It is in times of hardship that we have an opportunity to improve ourselves. We are made to face our fears and have a chance to do the right thing in spite of them.

Perhaps no group better exemplifies this than the World War II generation. Samuel Baxter wrote in "Days of Adversity: Lessons From the Great Depression" that "those who weathered the Great Depression are famed for their work ethic, tenacity, ingenuity, and character. What about the 1930s caused this group to later be dubbed the 'Greatest Generation?'"

It's our acceptance of life and our perception of hardship, as well as our response to it, that really matters.

Alison Ensign, on Family Search, adds to the conversation, noting that despite, or perhaps because of, the hardships this generation endured, they have a strength and resilience not found in other generations. She points out that they exhibit many admirable characteristics, such as a sense of personal responsibility, humility, frugality, a strong work ethic, commitment, integrity, and self-sacrifice—all traits of a strong moral character.

Maybe enduring hardship actually is good for us. By facing our fear and pain rather than seeking a life of comfort and ease, we learn and we grow. In fact, it is the very obstacle that we see in our way that is the path—the path to letting go and attaining wisdom. When we can do this, we are free—for nothing outside of us can control us.

Embracing Adversity

When encountering difficulties, we should seek to be like nature. Even in times of calamity, when all seems lost and the destruction seems complete, sprouts shoot up through the charred forest remains. Life goes on. Nature doesn't cease pushing forward in the face of disaster, nor should we. Nature teaches us endurance and resilience, even when all hope seems lost.

When we follow what life naturally brings, rather than trying to resist, we can learn the valuable lessons contained therein. Hardships do not come without reason. We are being given a gift, a chance to improve ourselves.

I've found that when I flow with what comes, things work out best. Despite my desire to sometimes avoid difficulty, or have things go a certain way, when I can put this aside, and go with what life brings, I improve.

Like George Bailey in "It's a Wonderful Life," we may think our hardships are too much for us to bear, and feel hopeless at times. But if we take a step back, we'll find our troubles are really much smaller than we'd originally believed.

Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca understood that "a gem cannot be polished without friction, nor a man perfected without trials."

As bad as it may feel now, it won't be this way forever, and when we look back, the hardships we've endured will have lost their sting. Keeping this in mind is important, because our mind can make things much worse than they actually are. We've all overcome tough times before, and we'll do it again.

To quote Epictetus, "The greater the difficulty, the more glory in surmounting it. Skillful pilots gain their reputation from storms and tempests."

As I see it, we all have a choice. We can choose to look at hardships as failures and misfortunes, view life as unfair, and blame others for our miseries. Or, we can choose to see hardships as the opportunities that they are: opportunities to strengthen our resilience, endurance, empathy, courage, tolerance, patience, forgiveness, and our ability to sacrifice. Hardships give us our best chance to improve our character. There are just so many good things to be gained, and so many bad things to be discarded.

What path we choose is ultimately up to us.

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

Seniors Are Having 2nd Thoughts About Where to Live

The consequences of self-quarantine and social isolation are causing many people to rethink their golden years

Continued from Page 1

She has temporarily tabled the prospect of moving into a continuing care retirement community being built in the Bronx.

"My husband and I are going to play it by ear; we want to see how things play out" with the pandemic, she said.

In Kornfeld's circles, people are more committed than ever to staying in their homes or apartments as long as possible—at least at the moment. Their fear: If they move to a senior living community, they might be more likely to encounter a COVID-19 outbreak.

"All of us have heard about the huge number of deaths in senior facilities," Kornfeld said. But people who stay in their own homes may have trouble finding affordable help there when needed, she acknowledged.

More than 70,000 residents and staff members in nursing homes and assisted living facilities had died of COVID-19 by mid-August, according to the latest count from Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF). This is an undercount because less than half of states are reporting data for COVID-19 in assisted living. Nor is data reported for people living independently in senior housing. (KHN is an editorially independent program of KFF.)

Nervousness about senior living has spread as a result, and in July, the National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care reported the lowest occupancy rates since the research organization started tracking data 14 years ago. Occupancy dropped more in assisted living (a 3.2 percent decline from April through June, compared with January through March) than in independent living (a 2.4 percent decline). The organization doesn't compile data on nursing homes.

In a separate NIC survey of senior housing executives in August, 74 percent said families had voiced concerns about moving in as COVID cases spiked in many parts of the country.

Overcoming Possible Isolation

The potential for social isolation is especially worrisome, as facilities retain restrictions on family visits and on group dining and activities. (While states have started to allow visits outside at nursing homes and assisted living centers, most facilities don't yet allow visits inside—a situation that will increase frustration when the weather turns cold.)

Beth Burnham Mace, NIC's chief economist and director of outreach, emphasized that operators have responded aggressively by instituting new safety and sanitation protocols, moving programming online, helping residents procure groceries and other essential supplies, and communicating regularly about COVID-19, both

on-site and in the community at large, much more regularly.

Mary Kazlusky, 76, resides in independent living at Heron's Key, a continuing care retirement community in Gig Harbor, Washington, which is doing all this and more with a sister facility, Emerald Heights in Redmond, Washington.

"We all feel safe here," she said. "Even though we're strongly advised not to go into each other's apartments, at least we can see each other in the hall and down in the lobby and down on the decks outside. As far as isolation, you're isolating here with over 200 people: There's somebody always around."

One staff member at Heron's Key tested positive for COVID-19 in August but has recovered. Twenty residents and staff members tested positive at Emerald Heights. Two residents and one staff member died.

People are more committed than ever to staying in their homes or apartments as long as possible—at least at the moment.

Colin Milner, chief executive officer of the International Council on Aging, stresses that some communities are doing a better job than others. His organization recently published a report on the future of senior living in light of the pandemic.

It calls on operators to institute a host of changes, including establishing safe visiting areas for families both inside and outside; providing high-speed internet services throughout communities; and ensuring adequate supplies of masks and other forms of personal protective equipment for residents and staff, among other recommendations.

Some families now wish they'd arranged for older relatives to receive care in a more structured environment before the pandemic started. They're finding that older relatives living independently, especially those who are frail or have mild cognitive impairments, are having difficulty managing on their own.

"I'm hearing from a lot of people—mostly older daughters—that we waited too long to move Mom or Dad, we had our head in the sand, can you help us find a place for them," said Allie Mazza, who owns Brandywine Concierge Senior Services in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania.

While many operators instituted move-in moratoriums early in the pandemic, most now allow new residents as long as they test negative for

COVID-19. Quarantines of up to two weeks are also required before people can circulate in the community.

Many older adults, however, simply don't have the financial means to make a move. More than half of middle-income seniors—nearly 8 million older adults—can't afford independent living or assisted living communities, according to a study published last year. And more than 7 million seniors are poor, according to the federal Supplemental Poverty Measure, which includes out-of-pocket medical expenses and other drains on cash reserves.

Questions to Ask

For those able to consider senior housing, experts suggest you ask several questions:

- How is the facility communicating with residents and families? Has it had an outbreak? Is it disclosing cases and deaths? Is it sharing the latest guidance from federal, state and local public health authorities?
- What protocols have been instituted to ensure safety? "I'd want to know: Do they have a plan in place for disasters—not just the pandemic but also floods, fires, hurricanes, blizzards?" Milner said. "And beyond a plan, do they have supplies in place?"
- How does the community engage residents? Is online programming (exercise classes, lectures, interest group meetings) available? Are one-on-one interactions with staffers possible? Are staffers arranging online interactions via FaceTime or Zoom with family? Are family visits allowed? "Social engagement and stimulation are more important than ever," said David Schless, president of the American Seniors Housing Association.
- What's the company's financial status and occupancy rate? "Properties with occupancy rates of 90 percent or higher are going to be able to withstand the pressures of COVID-19 significantly more than properties with occupancy below 80 percent, in my opinion," said Mace of the National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care. Higher occupancy means more revenues, which allows institutions to better afford extra expenses associated with the pandemic.

"Transparency is very important," Schless said.

Judith Graham is a contributing columnist for Kaiser Health News, which originally published this article. KHN's coverage of these topics is supported by The John A. Hartford Foundation, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, and The SCAN Foundation.



Many people are replanning their retirement living situation to ensure they have the social connection and support they need—even amid a pandemic.

How Being in Nature Can Spur Personal Growth

Experiencing wonder and awe in nature has many benefits, new studies find

TEJA PATTABHIRAMAN

You might enjoy skiing or hiking. But do you feel at home in the mountains? Do you feel connected to the wilderness? According to a new study, that sense of being “home” in nature could be linked to your life satisfaction and personal growth, at least for young people. Another new study of older people finds that a connection to nature seems to make them happier and more willing to help others.

That sense of being ‘home’ in nature could be linked to your life satisfaction and personal growth.

In the first study, a team of researchers in Norway followed a group of college students who were training to lead wilderness expeditions in one of two settings: either in a forest in the middle of a storm or across a high-altitude plateau. The students agreed to complete a pre- and post-adventure questionnaire, which assessed their life satisfaction and personal growth.

A portion of these students also answered prompts every evening of their five-day excursion. They were asked to describe a strong experience with nature that day, trying to capture how it made them feel. The researchers divided emotional states into “hedonic” feelings—that is, ones of pleasure and enjoyment—as well as “eudaimonic” feelings—those of engagement and purpose.

Then, they answered questions probing eight “aesthetic” aspects of the experience:

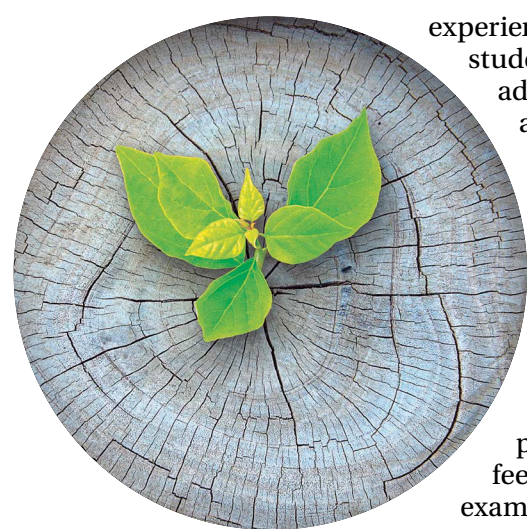
- I experienced beautiful scenery
- I was aware of small details in nature
- I appreciated variety in nature
- I felt everything was connected in nature
- I felt at home in nature
- I felt nature evokes wonder
- I felt beauty in nature evoked wonder
- I felt nature evoked awe and respect

In analyzing their responses, the researchers found that people who felt at home in nature had higher life satisfaction and personal growth. This feeling was also the most emotional aspect of the nature experience—but the results varied depending on the setting of the natural experience. In the cold plateau environment, people who felt at home in nature showed the most satisfaction and growth—and also both hedonic and eudaimonic feelings. In the stormy mountain environment, those at home in nature reported a sense of growth, but not satisfaction with their lives, and only hedonic feelings.

The researchers attribute these differences to the fact that in the stormy forest setting, students had to work hard in order to stay warm and dry, explaining that “when they succeeded in this, they felt connected to nature, which is a hedonic feeling.” The



ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK



The experience of nature connects us to something soothing and life-affirming.

experience was broader for the students on the plateau: In addition to keeping warm and dry, they skied for long distances. The physical exertion and distance covered allowed them to feel “connected to nature in more complex ways, both hedonic and eudaimonic.”

What aspect of their experiences made students feel at home in nature? By examining their daily experience narratives, researchers found that “wonder” was key to feeling at home in wilderness. Wonder can be understood in two dimensions: a feeling of surprise and fascination evoked by an element of nature, and a feeling evoking reflection on what we perceive, motivating a further search for insight. Many of the students who felt at home in nature cited at least one of these dimensions in their experience narratives.

Those results were reinforced by a new study from two University of California campuses of the impact of “awe walks” on 60 older adults.

Participants, aged 60 to 90, were asked to take a weekly 15-minute outdoor walk. Half were asked to “orient their walks to experience awe.” The other half were given no special instructions. Researchers also asked all participants to take a photo of themselves on their walk every week.

The researchers found that the participants who went on these awe walks expressed greater feelings of social connection and positive emotions compared to

their normal walking peers. In their photos, the awe walkers also included themselves less and less in the photo, which the researchers interpreted as a sense that the self was just one small part of a bigger picture. Awe walkers even displayed a greater smile intensity in the photos over the span of the eight weeks.

Together, these outcomes suggest that when people are primed to experience awe, they feel simultaneously smaller and better. In taking the focus off of themselves, they seem to get happier—and they express a greater willingness to help others.

While we know from previous studies that spending time in nature can boost our well-being in multiple ways, such as by increasing our creativity, attention, and generosity, these new studies offer insight as to what dimension of our outdoor experience actually causes the benefits we reap, how wonder plays a role, and whether our feeling is rooted in passing feelings of pleasure or deeper ones of fulfillment and connection. These results suggest that it is worthwhile to challenge ourselves in nature, from a simple walk to an outdoor activity we haven’t done before. If we can provoke a feeling of wonder within ourselves, then we’re on the right path.

Teja Pattabhiraman is a senior at the University of California–Berkeley, where she studies Public Health and Neurobiology. She is a research and editorial assistant for Greater Good magazine, does research at the Center for Environmental Research and Children’s Health, and is a program associate at the California Initiative for Health Equity and Action. This article was originally published in the Greater Good online magazine.

Seeking awe from the splendor of nature can give an outdoor walk even more healthful effects, study finds.



Emerging science finds that eating as often as we currently do could be hurting our health.

Improve Your Health With Bite-Sized Fasts

Extending our time between meals lets our body reset and helps burn fat

CONAN MILNER

Laz Versalles recently vowed to get back into shape. A former college football player, Versalles still looked strong, but with marriage and fatherhood, he’d put on some extra pounds.

Versalles wasn’t just interested in looking better, he also wanted to improve his health. One of the perks of his job at Access Labs is regular blood testing, and his initial screening revealed some unexpected problems.

“My first set of labs came back, and it was horrible,” he said. “Prediabetic, and my doctor told me I was a candidate for

a cardiac event.” Versalles knew that if he wanted to avoid a prescription, he had to clean up his diet, so he began eliminating clear offenders such as sugar and simple carbs. Soon he eliminated everything except water from most of his day.

This eating style is called intermittent fasting, or time-restricted eating, and interest in it has been growing steadily over the past decade. You can’t quite call it a diet, because it’s not about counting calories or avoiding specific foods. Instead, the focus is on how often you eat.

Track the snacks, drinks, and meals of the average American over 24 hours, and you’ll find they feed within a 15-hour window. This means that if you eat

breakfast is at 7 a.m., you’re likely still nibbling by 10 p.m.

Intermittent fasting (IF) aims to shrink this eating window by a few hours or even a few days.

In an era of 24-hour drive-thrus, plentiful snacks, and constant cues to stuff our face, IF works to impose a boundary around your eating time. Why would we want to constrain our freedom to eat whenever we’d like? Because traditional boundaries have dissolved. In 1977, eating opportunities (meals and snacks combined) averaged three per day. By 2003, that figure had grown to about six per day.

Continued on Page 3

A more restricted eating time resulted in improved insulin sensitivity, reduced levels of oxidative stress, and produced a 10-point drop in blood pressure.

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CHANNANING HIRANJAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

The old saying that eating an apple a day will keep the doctor away has gained further scientific merit, as the scientific literature on this fruit garners more findings that vouch for its healthful benefits.

Eating apples is beyond folk medicine fantasy, a study found that eating one apple a day for four weeks translated to a 40 percent drop in blood levels of oxidized low-density lipoprotein/beta2-glycoprotein I complex (which may contribute to atherosclerosis) among healthy, middle-aged individuals. Apple consumption has also been the subject of a few studies on reducing cancer risk, including liver cancer, breast cancer, and esophageal cancer. A study published in February points to apples' ability to mediate significant gut microbial metabolic activity. All it takes: two apples a day.

Study Findings

Apples are a frequently consumed fruit and a reliable source of polyphenols and fiber, important mediators for their health-protective effects.

Validated biomarkers of food intake (BFIs) have become an important tool for assessing how well study subjects adhere to dietary guidelines. BFIs offer an accurate measure of intake, independent of the memory and sincerity of the subjects as well as of their knowledge about the consumed foods. Essentially, biomarkers let researchers see how much of an active compound a subject has consumed. BFIs solve the problems that come from asking study participants to take self-reported dietary intake questionnaires that can be affected by forgetfulness, or biased self-reporting.

New biomarkers have surfaced in recent decades from metabolic profiling studies for different foods, yet the number of comprehensively validated BFIs remains limited.

Apples are a frequently consumed fruit and a reliable source of polyphenols and fiber, important mediators for their health-protective effects.

The researchers sought to identify biomarkers of long-term apple consumption, exploring how the fruit affects human plasma and urine metabolite profiles. In their randomized, controlled, crossover intervention study, they recruited 40 mildly hypercholesterolemia patients and had them consume two whole apples or a sugar and energy-matched beverage daily for eight weeks.

At the end of the trial, they found 61 urine and nine plasma metabolites that were statistically significant after comparing the whole apple intake group to the control beverage group. The metabolites included several polyphenols that could serve as BFIs.

Interestingly, the study allowed the group to explore correlations between metabolites affected by eating apples

and specific fecal microbiota—specifically interactions shared by Granulicatella genus and phenyl-acetic acid metabolites. In other words, researchers could see how one nutrient affected a specific microbe living in our gut.

"The identification of polyphenol microbial metabolites suggests that apple consumption mediates significant gut microbial metabolic activity which should be further explored," they wrote.

Gut Health Affects Your Whole Body

The link between the gut microbiota and human wellness is being increasingly recognized, where it is now well-established that healthy gut flora is a key part of your overall health. In short, the healthier the ecosystem of microbes (mainly bacteria) living in your body is, the healthier you are.

Previous studies corroborate that the richness of the human gut microbiome correlates with metabolic markers. In a study on 123 non-obese and 169 obese Danish individuals, a group of scientists found two distinct groups displaying a difference in the number of gut microbial genes and thus the richness of gut bacteria in the two groups.

Individuals with a low bacterial richness had more marked overall obesity and insulin resistance, for instance, compared with subjects who had high bacterial richness. The obese subjects among the lower bacterial richness group also tended to gain more weight over time.

A series of largely pre-clinical observations showed, too, that changes in brain-gut-microbiome communication may be involved in the pathogenesis and pathophysiology of irritable bowel syndrome, obesity, and several psychiatric and neurologic disorders.

The discovery that apples have healthy effects on the gut microbiome mean that they not only feed our body, but also feed the right kinds of bacteria our body needs.

Additional Apple Benefits

Apples are gaining a superfood and super healer status that shouldn't be missed out on.

The benefits of this fruit include providing nutrients called carotenoids that can slow aging and help with allergies, alopecia or hair loss, diarrhea, insulin resistance, radiation-induced illness, and Staphylococcal infection. In the area of cancer treatment, apples have been found to both prevent and suppress mammary cancers in an animal model, while carotenoids extracted from the fruit have been found to inhibit drug-resistant cancer cell line proliferation.

The GreenMedInfo.com database contains 156 abstracts with apple research, scrutinizing the health benefits of apples and their related compounds.

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Intermittent fasting aims to shrink this eating window by a few hours or even a few days.

Improve Your Health With Bite-Sized Fasts

Extending our time between meals lets our body reset and helps burn fat

Continued from Page 9

Emerging science finds that eating as often as we currently do could be hurting our health. One of the most influential researchers with regard to IF is biologist Satchidananda Panda of the Salk Institute.

In 2012, Panda's team examined the eating patterns of two groups of mice: one had unlimited access to food, the other had its feeding time restricted to eight hours a day. Both groups consumed the same fat- and sugar-rich diet, but the mice that ate whenever they wanted became obese and sick, while the time-restricted mice didn't.

Animal studies don't always reflect what will happen in people, but a study done with human subjects published in 2018 reveals a common theme: a group of prediabetic men was fed during a 12-hour daily window for five weeks. Later, they were fed the same meals but restricted to a six-hour window. The more restricted eating time resulted in improved insulin sensitivity, reduced levels of oxidative stress, and produced a 10-point drop in blood pressure.

It's also been successful for Versalles. Since he started IF, he's lost 16 pounds and two inches off his waist. He says he has more energy, can think clearer, and his golf game has made noticeable improvements. His blood work has shown improvement, too.

Fung believes people do best when they understand their bodies and their tolerances.

After just a couple of months, Versalles says his 46-year-old body now feels 26.

"It's really changed the way I look at food," he said.

Bingeing and Deprivation

If fasting sounds like a bad idea, you're not alone. When Versalles

first asked his doctor about doing a seven-day fast, his doctor told him it was foolish.

Yet, fasting has been used as a means of physical and spiritual purification since the dawn of civilization. And up until the beginning of the 20th century, fasting had been considered a reliable treatment for various illnesses.

New research reveals verifiable benefits, making it harder than ever to dismiss fasting's health potential.

Studies have shown that fasting for two days or more may reduce inflammation, improve immune function, and decrease the risk of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's. This has inspired the 5:2 method of IF where people eat normally for five days and then don't eat for two.

But are these benefits a unique feature of fasting, or just the product of eating less?

According to Suzanne Dixon, registered dietician with The Mesothelioma Center, the same results may be achieved by consuming smaller portions in a regular eating schedule. She cites a year-long trial comparing alternate day fasting (eat one day, don't eat the next) with regular dieting (daily caloric restriction), that found no significant differences in terms of weight loss, blood pressure, heart rate, triglycerides, insulin resistance, and more.

"Plus, the fasting group had increased LDL ('bad') cholesterol levels, compared to the regular dieting group at month 12," Dixon said. "This finding raises the question of whether there are some metabolic downsides to different types of fasting."

While Dixon isn't against fasting, she does caution that the longer we go without eating, the more discipline we need to keep from bingeing once food is back on the table.

"My observation, personally (after doing a few five-day, water-only fasts over the past couple of years) and in working with dieting clients, is this: The person who can fast aggressively and not overeat when the fast ends is rare indeed," Dixon said.

The longer you go without food, the greater the temptation becomes to gorge yourself once

the fast is finished. But bingeing can easily diminish all the health benefits from a long fast, since binge eating is a reliable way to raise cholesterol and worsen insulin resistance.

We all fast when we sleep (unless you raid the fridge several times a night), and break our fast with the first meal of the day. This regular period of non-eating serves very important biological functions: It gives our hardworking digestive organs a break and brings our hormones and lipid levels down to baseline. This is why doctors sometimes require a fasting blood test: so they can see how your body works when it's not under the influence of digestion.

Since you eat less often, meals tend to be larger to meet caloric and nutrient needs.

If we can regularly extend our non-eating time by just a bit (say 12 hours instead of the usual nine), we may be able to impact our health in a positive way without triggering a binge.

"I do believe time-restricted eating is a more feasible way to potentially improve health and possibly help with fat loss," said Dixon. "More and more data point to the connection between a longer overnight fast and improved health."

Reining In Insulin

Toronto-based kidney specialist Dr. Jason Fung, the author of "The Complete Guide to Fasting," became a strong advocate of IF by virtue of his clinical experience. The majority of Fung's patients are diabetic. Like most doctors who treat diabetes, Fung previously focused on insulin prescriptions. Today, he encourages his patients to try IF.

Fung's change of heart came as he considered the nature of insulin as a fat-storage hormone, and the vicious cycle that giving more

of it can create.

Our pancreas produces insulin when we eat. This hormone helps guide nutrition into our cells for energy. If we eat more than we need, insulin signals our body to store some of this food energy as fat for later use.

In Type 2 diabetes, patients typically make more than enough insulin, but the cells have become insulin resistant, resulting in high blood sugar because the nutrition can't enter the cells. Injections temporarily fix this problem by flooding the system with insulin, essentially forcing resistant cells to ingest what we eat. Eventually, cells become resistant to this new level of insulin, demanding that the dose is raised to keep blood sugar from surging.

In a world of culinary excess, our body's natural fat storage process—which helped our ancestors survive famine for thousands of years—has become a scourge.

Carbohydrates (especially the really sweet ones) surge our insulin the most. But every time we consume any calories, we get an insulin spike.

Fasting accomplishes two goals: It drops our insulin level to baseline, allowing previously resistant cells to become sensitive to the hormone again. And, since there are no incoming calories, our body begins to mine fat stores for energy.

Food and Time

Fung gives no hard rule on how often to fast, since individual physiology and schedules can vary so widely. But, like Dixon, Fung says that patients are typically better off restricting their eating window rather than forcing themselves through long bouts without food.

Children, pregnant women, and those with eating disorders are discouraged from fasting. But for most of the rest of us, Fung suggests a daily 16-hour fast. He says it's relatively painless because a majority of this time is spent sleeping.

However, if you're accustomed to evening treats or cocktails, even a slightly smaller feeding window may still seem like a sacrifice at first. Not only will you feel hungry, but it can also be

You can't quite call it a diet, because it's not about counting calories or avoiding specific foods.

awkward to face an empty plate when everyone around you is chowing down.

People report that the first few days on IF are the most difficult since our habits and hunger hormones take time to adjust. But we can manipulate two big factors to make it easier.

The first is time. IF is about setting boundaries, but where you draw them in your day is up to you. For 16-hour fasters who already prefer to skip breakfast and want to eat dinner with their families, an 11 a.m.-to-7 p.m. window might be a good fit.

Keep in mind that since you eat less often, meals tend to be larger to meet caloric and nutrient needs. But even with bigger portions, Fung finds the fat loss on an eight-hour eating window to be "slow and steady."

Another factor under your control is what you eat. Fung recommends a low-carbohydrate diet for his patients, but any generally healthy diet restricted by a smaller window of time can lead to fat loss.

However, in order for it to work, most of our food choices must be reasonable. According to Jake Dermer, a corporate wellness consultant and certified personal trainer, there are limits to the power of IF.

"If you fast all day and then eat pizza and donuts all night, you'll still gain weight," he said.

As far as sustainability, Dermer has many clients who have successfully used IF for years. Fung believes people do best when they understand their bodies and their tolerances.

While smaller eating windows produce faster results, they also require more discipline. Thankfully, it's not a race, and most experts agree that slower weight loss is more likely to stick. If you've previously given your appetite free reign, you can still make progress with a modest boundary.

"I am sure everyone can benefit from a 12-hour fast," Dermer said. "And studies have also shown that fasting five days a week still gives the same benefit as seven, so many people choose to fast during the week and enjoy the weekends with greater flexibility."

Collagen: The Body's Super Glue

Nurturing our body with collagen can help improve the quality of our skin

DEBORAH MITCHELL

Whenever you hear someone say they are “keeping it together,” chances are they are not referring to collagen. Yet that’s the job description of the most abundant protein in the human body: it holds the body together. Collagen is the body’s super glue. Despite the importance of this protein for your health, when was the last time you even thought about your collagen? Where does it come from? What’s the best way to support and nurture it? Welcome to Collagen 101.

Collagen 101

Collagen is a fibrous, insoluble, hard protein most commonly present in the skin, bones, and connective tissue, where it provides structural support, elasticity, and strength. Although there are at least 16 different types of collagen, 80 to 90 percent of them are either type I, II, or III. Most collagen molecules form long thin fibrils (slender fibers) which, in the case of type I collagen, are stronger than steel, gram for gram.

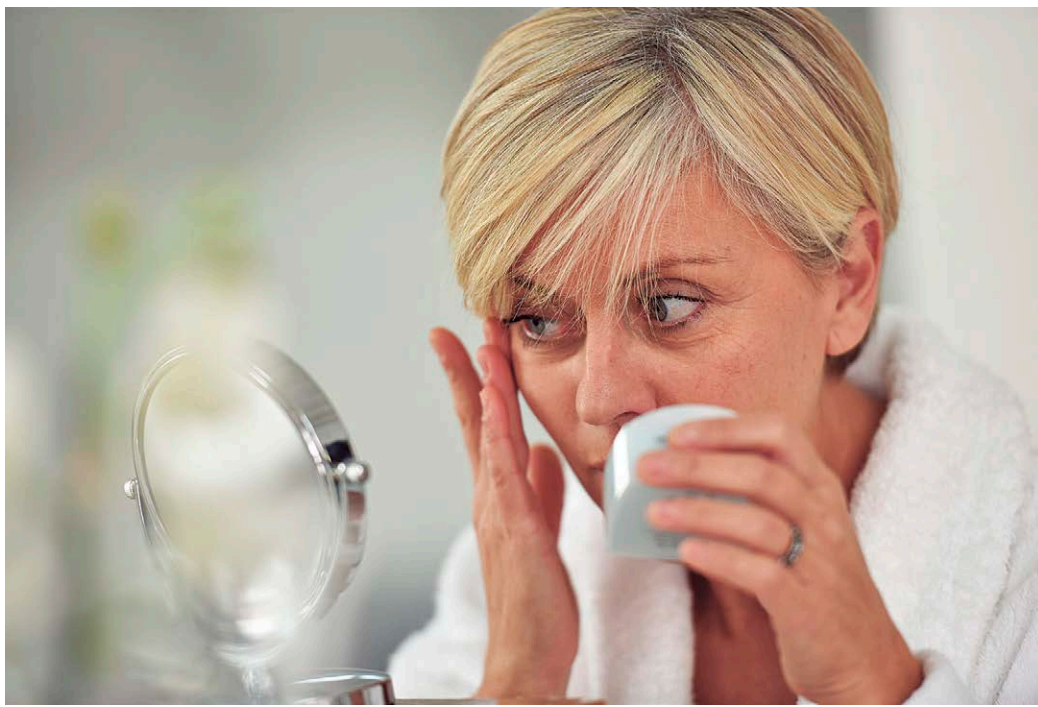
The collagen in the skin is the type we typically think about most because it is literally in front of our face and in our face, too. The collagen in the dermis of the skin (the middle layer) is part of a network of fibers where new cells grow. Collagen helps replace and restore dead skin cells. Collagen works with a substance called keratin to help keep the skin strong, smooth, resilient, and elastic. These qualities begin to change about the time production of collagen starts to decline, which occurs naturally around age 40. This is when we see a loss of elasticity to the skin and the appearance of wrinkles and sagging skin along with a weakening of cartilage in the joints.

None of this sounds sexy or appealing, but there are ways you can promote collagen production and thus slow the aging of your skin—and the bones and connective tissues you cannot see.

Collagen for Your Skin

Although no one has yet found a way to prevent collagen levels from declining naturally with age, you can take steps to protect your collagen levels. Most of us are concerned about how our skin looks and feels, and providing the body with the right kind of collagen can help. You should be aware that topical products such as lotions and creams containing collagen that say they can rejuvenate your skin may provide moisturizing benefits but cannot increase collagen levels in your skin. Why? Because the molecules are too large to be absorbed by your skin.

However, there are other ways to improve collagen in the skin. For example, you can choose laser therapy, which can stimulate



Lotions and creams containing collagen that say they can rejuvenate your skin may provide moisturizing benefits but cannot increase collagen levels in your skin.

collagen production. This requires a professional (e.g., a cosmetic dermatologist) to administer the treatments and can be costly. The two ways to promote collagen using laser are wounding the skin surface, which creates new collagen as it heals; and by stimulating the production of collagen deep in the dermis. Foods that can help support collagen production include animal-based options, such as meat, fish, poultry, and dairy. However, considerable research has demonstrated that the use of oral collagen supplements can be quite effective in improving collagen status.

Tobacco smoke contains substances that damage collagen and elastin in the skin.

Collagen Supplements for the Skin

Oral supplements of collagen hydrolysate also referred to as collagen peptides, are available to support the skin, bones, and connective tissue. Collagen peptides are made from collagen (typically bovine or marine) that has gone through an enzymatic hydrolysis process. These oral supplements have been studied extensively and the results have been positive. For example:

- In a double-blind, placebo-controlled trial, 69 women aged 35 to 55 took either 2.5 g or 5.0 g of collagen hydrolysate or a placebo once daily for eight weeks. At eight weeks, skin elasticity had significantly improved in both collagen groups

when compared with the placebo. Elderly women were found to have significantly higher skin elasticity levels four weeks after the end of the study.

- In another double-blind, placebo-controlled study, a collagen peptide supplement was tested on eye wrinkles and its stimulation of procollagen I, elastin, and fibrillin (two more proteins in connective tissue). A total of 114 women aged 45 to 65 received either 2.5 g of the collagen supplement or placebo once daily for eight weeks. Women in the collagen group showed a significant reduction in eye wrinkle volume at four and eight weeks when compared with the placebo group. This benefit was still noted four weeks after supplementation ended. In addition, there was a significant increase in procollagen type I (65 percent) and in elastin (18 percent) at the end of the study.

- Photoaging (prematurely aged skin from ultraviolet radiation from sunlight) is responsible for much of the fine lines, wrinkles, and other age-related changes to the skin. One study evaluated the use of a potent antioxidant called astaxanthin along with collagen hydrolysate in 44 healthy volunteers. They received either 3 g daily of the combination treatment or placebo for 12 weeks. Those in the supplement group had significant improvements in facial skin elasticity and water loss under the skin compared with the placebo group, as well as an improvement in factors involved with skin infrastructure.

How to Reduce Collagen Loss in the Skin

On the other side of the coin, you can help reduce loss and damage to collagen pro-

duction in a few ways.

Avoid too much sunlight. Ultraviolet (UV) rays increase the rate of collagen breakdown and damaging collagen fibers. The UV rays also contribute to an accumulation of too much elastin, a protein that provides elasticity to the skin. Abnormal amounts of elastin results in too much of an enzyme that destroys collagen.

That said, sunlight is also a critical source of vitamin D. As with most things, sunlight is healthy—unless you overdo it.

Limiting sugar intake. A high-sugar diet increases a process called glycation, which ultimately results in brittle, weak collagen.

Don't smoke. Tobacco smoke contains substances that damage collagen and elastin in the skin.

Additional Collagen Findings

Research has shown that taking collagen supplements can help in the treatment of osteoarthritis. In the double-blind, placebo-controlled, randomized trial, individuals with osteoarthritis of the knee were given collagen peptides from either pork skin or bovine bone or a placebo. After 13 weeks, patients who took the collagen supplements had experienced significant improvement when compared with the placebo group.

In a literature review, experts at the University of Illinois pointed out that oral collagen hydrolysate is absorbed via the intestine and accumulates in cartilage and that it prompts a significant increase in the production of substances that can benefit those suffering from joint disorders such as osteoarthritis. The authors' review of seven studies lead them to report that collagen hydrolysate is safe and can help improve pain and function in some individuals with arthritic conditions.

In an animal study, researchers tested the absorption of collagen hydrolysate and its impact on osteoporosis in rats. They found that the collagen had a “beneficial effect on osteoporosis by increasing the organic substance content of bone.”

Bottom Line

Collagen is critical for our skin and for holding our bodies together. To help weather the passage of time on skin, bones, and connective tissue, use collagen supplements, eat well, and drink plenty of water. The tips above can also help you avoid collagen damage in the skin.

Deborah Mitchell is a freelance health writer who is passionate about animals and the environment. She has authored, co-authored, and written more than 50 books and thousands of articles on a wide range of topics. This article was originally published on NaturallySavvy.com

and moving on through your own moves is likely to offer the same benefits for balance, multitasking, and reaction time.

But starting with a teacher or a choreographer is recommended.

Intentional focus allows dancers to make controlled movements and weight distributions, helping to build mind-body connections to lead to better balance and faster reactions when balance is lost.

The only real way to combat these realities is with better balance, improved mobility, and faster reaction times.

If dancing isn't your thing, tai chi might be. In any event, before jumping into such activities, it's best to acclimate yourself to increased activity. Start with slow, focused walks. Once mobility has improved, you can branch out more safely.

Positive associations between dance and mobility, balance, and lower leg strength all make it a great tool to reduce the risk of falls. Protect your bones by staying upright!

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 BelMarra-Health, which first published this article.

To Free Doctors From Computers, Far-Flung Scribes Are Now Taking Notes for Them

The burden of electronic record keeping is taking a toll on doctors and patient care but distant helpers may change that

SARAH KWON

Podiatrist Dr. Mark Lewis greets his first patient of the morning in his suburban Seattle exam room and points to a tiny video camera mounted on the right rim of his glasses. “This is my scribe, Jacqueline,” he says. “She can see us and hear us.”

Jacqueline is watching the appointment on her computer screen after the sun has set, 8,000 miles away in Mysore, a southern Indian city known for its palaces and jasmine flowers. She documents the details of each visit copiously and enters them into the patient's electronic health record, or EHR.

Jacqueline (her real first name, according to her employer), works for San Francisco-based Augmedix, a startup with 1,000 medical scribes in South Asia and the United States. The company is part of a growing industry that profits from a confluence of health care trends—including, now, the pandemic—that are dispersing patient care around the globe.

Medical scribes first appeared in the 1970s as note takers for emergency room physicians. But the practice took off after 2009 when the federal HITECH Act incentivized health care providers to adopt EHRs. These were supposed to simplify patient record-keeping, but instead, they generated a need for scribes. Doctors find entering notes and data into poorly designed EHR software cumbersome and time-consuming. So scribing is a fast-growing field in the United States, with the workforce expanding from 15,000 in 2015 to an estimated 100,000 this year.

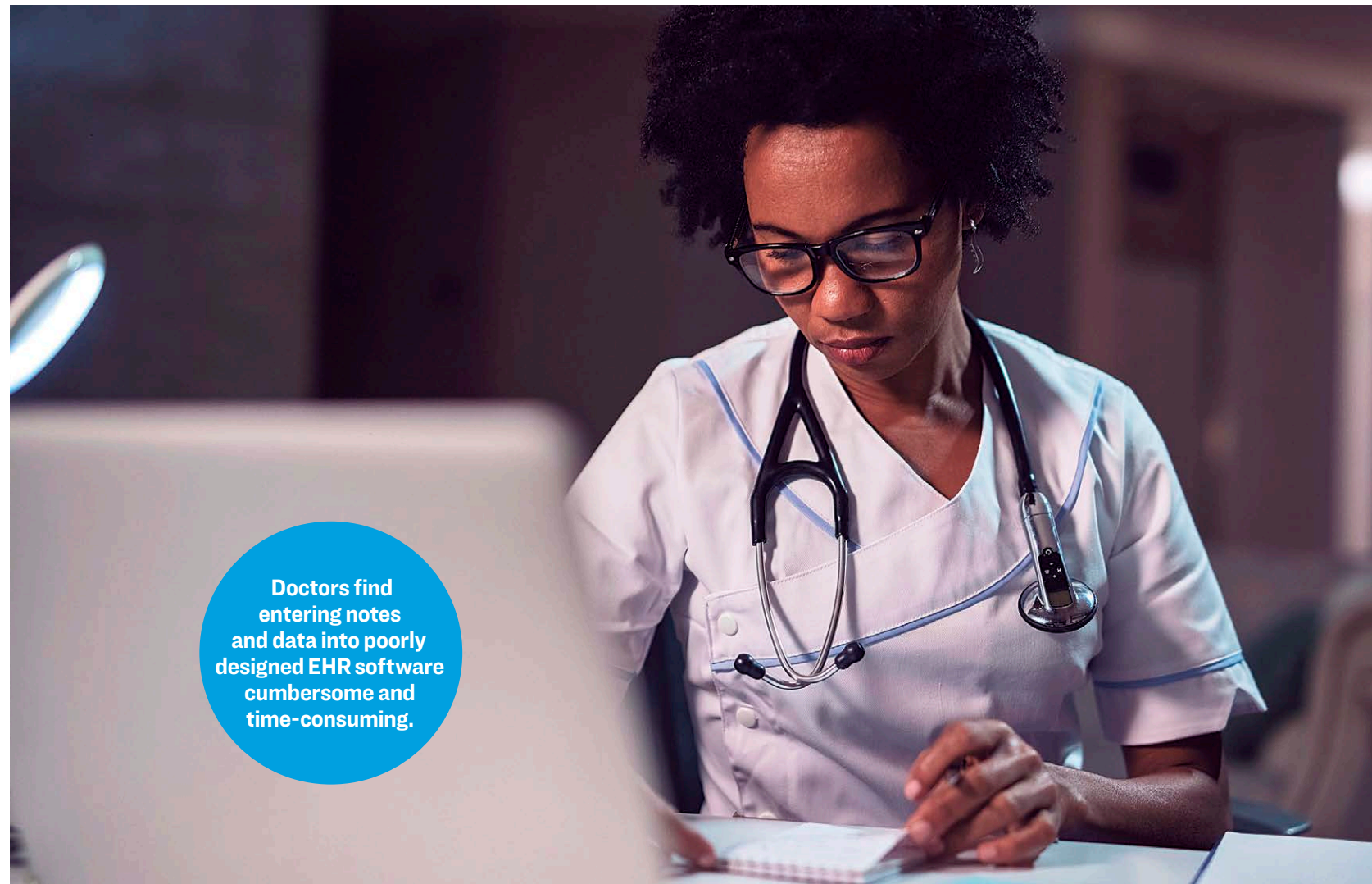
A 2016 study found that doctors spent 37 percent of a patient visit on a computer and an average of two extra hours after work on EHR tasks. EHR use contributes to physician burnout, increasingly considered a public health crisis in itself.

Before COVID-19, most scribes—typically young, aspiring health professionals—worked in the exam room a few paces away from the doctor and patient. This year, as the pandemic led patients to shun clinics and hospitals, many scribes were laid off or furloughed. Many have returned, but scribes are increasingly working online—even from the other side of the world.

Remote scribes are patched into the exam room's sound via a tablet or speaker, or through a video connection. Some create doctors' notes in real-time; others annotate after visits. And some have help from speech-recognition software programs that grow more accurate with use.

While many remote scribes are based in the United States, others are abroad, primarily in India. Chanchal Toor was a dental school graduate facing limited job opportunities in India when a subcontractor to Augmedix hired her in 2015. Some of her scribe colleagues also trained or aspired to become dentists or other health professionals, she said. Now she's a manager for Augmedix in San Francisco, and she said scribing, even remotely, makes her feel like part of a health care team.

Augmedix recruits people who have a bachelor's degree or the equivalent, and screens for proficiency in English reading, listening comprehension, and writing, the company said. Once onboard, scribes undergo about three months of training. The cur-



Doctors find entering notes and data into poorly designed EHR software cumbersome and time-consuming.

riculum includes medical terminology, anatomy, physiology, and mock visits.

Augmedix CEO Manny Krakaris said revenue has grown this year, and his sales team has grown from four to 14 members. Sachin Gupta, CEO of IKS Health, which employs Indian doctors as remote scribes for their U.S. counterparts, projects 50 percent revenue growth this year for its scribing business. He said the company employs 4,000 people but declined to share how many are scribes.

Remote scribe “Edwin” gives internist Dr. Susan Fesmire more time, freeing her from having to finish 20 charts at the end of every day. “It was like constantly having homework that you don't finish,” she said. With the help of Edwin (Fesmire said he declined to use his real name), she had the time and energy to become chief operating officer of her small Dallas practice. Edwin works for Physicians Angels, which employs 500 remote scribes in India. Fesmire pays \$14 an hour for Edwin's services.

Doctors with foreign scribes say notes may need minor editing for dialectal differences, and scribes may be unfamiliar with local vocabulary. “I had a patient from Louisiana,” said Fesmire, “and Edwin said afterward, ‘What is chicory, doctor?’” But she also praised his notes as more accurate and complete than her own.

Kevin Brady, president of Physicians Angels, said their scribes start at \$500 to \$600 per month, plus health care and retirement benefits, while senior scribes make \$1,000 to \$1,500—middle-class family incomes in India. Employers are required to provide employees with health insurance, although many scribes are contractors, and the job site Indeed.com says the average sal-

ary for a scribe in India is \$500 a month. Scribes in the United States get about \$2,500.

Remote scribing is still a small part of the market. Craig Newman, chief strategy officer of HealthChannels, parent to ScribeAmerica, the largest scribing company in the United States, said that the firm's remote scribing business has increased three-fold since the pandemic's outset but that “a large majority” of the company's 26,000 U.S. scribes still work in person.

It's a highly unregulated industry for which training and certification aren't required. The service typically costs physicians \$12 to \$25 an hour, and studies show scribe use is linked to less time on patient documentation, higher job satisfaction, and seeing more patients—which can mean more revenue.

For patients, studies suggest scribes have a positive or neutral effect on satisfaction. Some have privacy concerns, though, and state laws vary on whether a patient must be notified that someone is watching and listening many miles away.

Only 1 percent of patients refuse a remote scribe when asked by physicians at Massachusetts General Physicians Organization, said Dr. David Ting, the practice's chief medical information officer. His group, an IKS Health client, always seeks patient consent, Ting said.

Scribes aren't for everyone, though. Janis Ulevich, a retiree in Palo Alto, California, declines her primary care doctor's remote scribe. “Conversations with your doctor can be intimate,” said Ulevich. “I don't like other people listening in.”

Some patients may not have the opportunity to decline. With lim-

ited exceptions, federal laws such as HIPAA, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, don't require doctors to seek a patient's consent before sharing their health information with a company that supports the practice's work (like a scribe firm), as long as that company signed a contract agreeing to protect the patient's data, said Chris Appgar, a former HIPAA compliance officer.

About one-quarter of U.S. states require all parties in a conversation to agree to be recorded, meaning they require a patient's permission. Some states also have special privacy protections for certain groups, such as people with HIV/AIDS, or very strict informed-consent or privacy laws, said Matt Fisher, a partner at Massachusetts law firm Mirick O'Connell.

Remote scribing also raises cybersecurity concerns. Reported data breaches are rare, but some scribe companies have lax security, said Cliff Baker, CEO of the health care cybersecurity firm Corl Technologies.

Scribes are increasingly working online—even from the other side of the world.

The next step in the trend could be no human scribes at all. Tech giants such as Google, EHR companies, and venture-backed startups are developing or already marketing artificial intelligence tools aimed at reducing or eliminating the need for humans to document visits.

AI and scribes won't eliminate physician burnout that stems from the nature of the health care system, said Dr. Rebekah Gardner, an associate professor of medicine at Brown University who researches the issue. Neither can take on burnout-driving EHR tasks such as submitting requests for insurance company approval of procedures, drugs, and tests, she said.

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There are few forms of exercise that draw together so many healthy activities as dance. It is social, relaxing, mentally engaging, and requires balance, coordination, and endurance.

DEVON ANDRE

One of the most pressing health issues facing aging folks is falling. Falling can increase the chance of a severe bone break that has the potential to hinder your life.

It might be crazy to think that most people fall when out for an unassuming walk. Falls can even happen on the way from the living room to the kitchen.

Concentration can get a little tougher in older age. A slight lapse—answering the phone, chatting with a friend, or moving

your focus—can lead to a slip. A common factor in falls is medications that affect balance and coordination. The only real way to combat these realities is with better balance, improved mobility, and faster reaction times.

And in these regards, dancing could be a big help.

Dancing and similar movements can lower the frequency and risk for falls, according to a recent review published in JAMA Network Open.

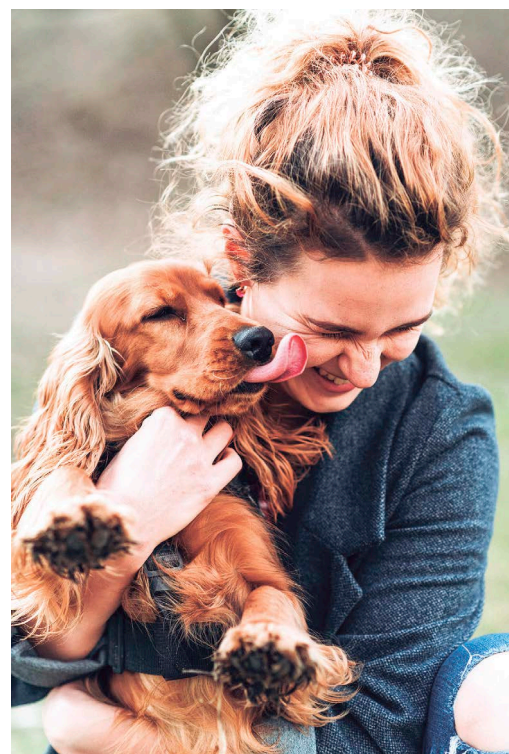
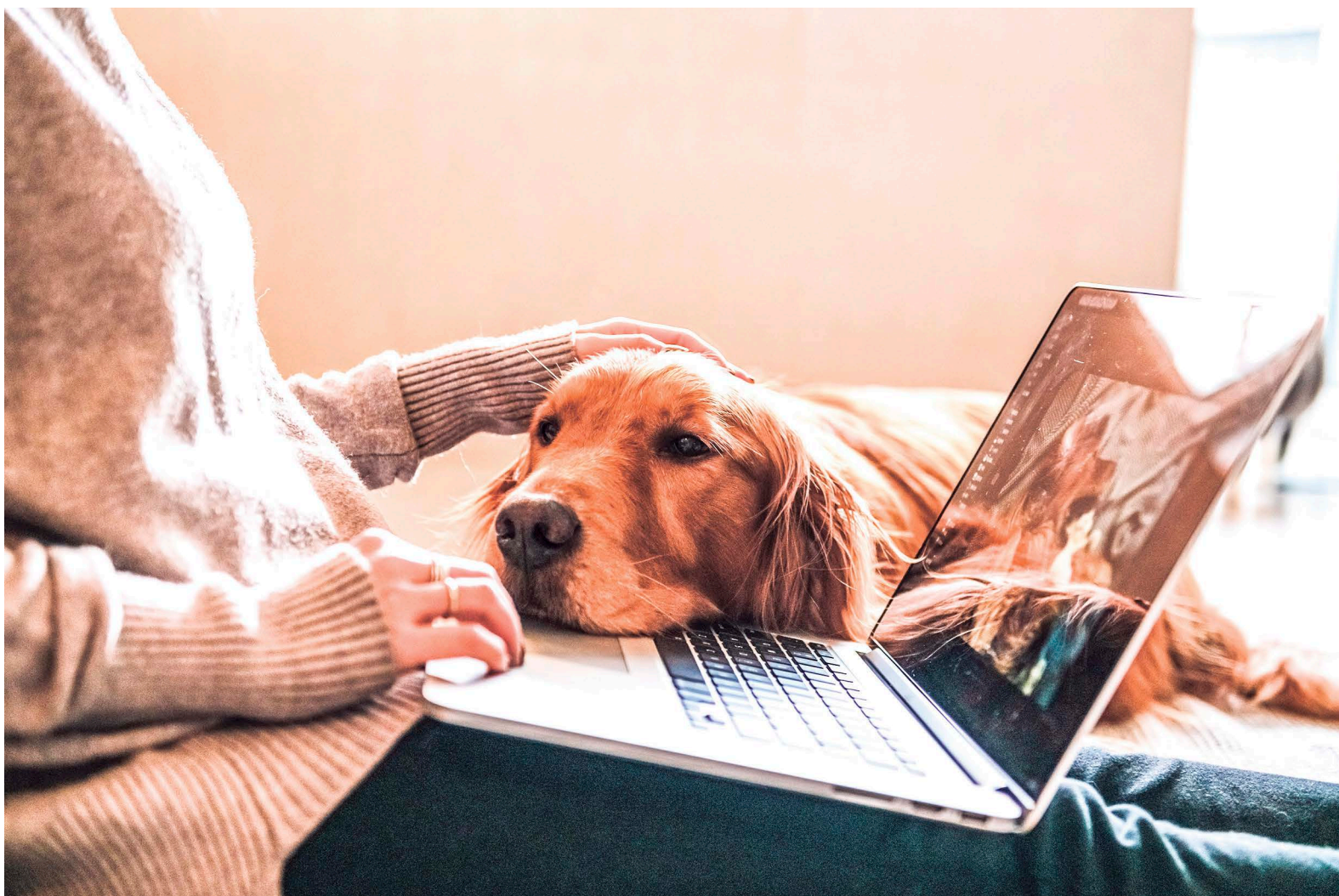
“This systematic review and meta-analysis of 29 randomized clinical trials found

that dance-based mind-motor interventions were associated with a statistically significant reduction (37 percent) in fall risk and a statistically significant reduced rate (31 percent) of falls,” wrote the authors.

Dancing and other mind-motor activities involve upright movements emphasizing balance and inner rhythm, like breathing. Instructions and choreography can help as they allow for mental focus as participants transition between movements.

Choreography, however, is likely not required to experience the potential benefits of dancing. Being up, mobile, agile,

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Nobody is as excited to see us as a dog and that kind of affection can have a healthy impact.

Research suggests that there's something about our dogs that makes us feel less lonely and anxious, and can even keep us healthier.

The Science-Backed Benefits of Being a DOG OWNER

Let's not forget to thank our dogs for all the benefits they bring us—especially through the challenges of COVID-19

JILL SUTTIE

My friend, Jan, has spent the entire pandemic in lockdown in San Francisco, unable to touch another human being. It's hard to imagine how difficult that must be. And yet she's doing OK. One big reason: her dog, Maisie.

"This cottage would feel kind of bereft of life without Maisie padding around," says Jan.

I'm sure Jan isn't alone in feeling happy to have a dog. Many of us are relying more on our pets for comfort while we face the uncertainty of the pandemic—even those of us who have human roommates to keep us company. Research suggests that there's something about our dogs that makes us feel less lonely and anxious, and can even keep us healthier.

What is that something? It's hard to put a finger on, but hormones may play a role. Petting a dog has been shown to reduce cortisol (the stress hormone), for example, and caring for a dog releases oxytocin (the bonding hormone that calms us and increases our trust in others).

Here are some of the science-backed ways that our dogs can help us cope with difficult circumstances and stay well.

1. Dogs Stave Off Loneliness

Many of us are feeling a bit lonelier than usual these days; sheltering-in-place and keeping our distance from others is hard for everyone, including introverts. Being without human

Pet owners had significantly lower heart rates, arterial pressure, and systolic blood pressure, suggesting better cardiovascular health.

It could be that adopting a needy animal confers its own benefits, as doing good deeds tends to make us happier and healthier.



touch is particularly difficult: People who are touch-deprived tend to feel more depressed, experience more pain, and even have poorer immunity. But having a pet around (including dogs or their cat rivals) can help prevent loneliness.

"I'm hugely grateful that I've had Maisie as my eight-pound, fluff-ball quarantine buddy," says Jan. "She keeps me company whether I'm reading or gardening, and cracks me up regularly with her episodes of doggy silliness."

Though the benefits of having a pet have been studied more among the elderly (who often have limited social contact), those benefits likely apply to many more of us during COVID-19. After all, we all have less social contact than we'd normally have right now, and that's got to be hard on our psyches.

Why do dogs help us with loneliness? It's probably not an accident that dogs are often called "man's best friend." Many people feel that dogs provide unconditional love and easy companionship. Plus, many of us have the sense that our dog resonates with us emotionally—a notion that some science supports. We're bound to feel less isolated with a soft, understanding, loving being around.

2. Dogs Reduce Stress and Anxiety

Many of us have been super stressed and anxious during the pandemic. We don't know when we will be able to move about freely again, our jobs may be compromised, and we're worried about contracting the virus or passing it on to others. We also can't do many of the things that usually help us manage stress better—such as going to the gym or having dinner with a group of friends.

Luckily, dogs can help, as many studies have shown and experts attest. In one study, 48 participants were given a stress test during which they had to do public speaking and then perform difficult calculations while unfriendly observers watched them. The participants were randomly assigned to have either a friend, a dog they didn't know, or no one accompany them before and during the test. Their cortisol levels and heart rates were measured before, just after, and 30 minutes after the test, and they filled out questionnaires about their anxiety.

While everyone became more anxious during the test and showed higher heart rates and cortisol levels, those participants paired with a dog had lower levels of both than those with no support or even those with a friend. This suggests that being with a dog can help us recover from stressful situations—perhaps even the stress of a pandemic—even if it's not our own dog (which may be why some colleges bring canines onto campuses during finals week).

For those who can't have a pet, there is some evidence that just seeing videos of dogs can reduce stress and anxiety. That probably explains why many of us turn to cute puppy (and cat) videos for relief.

3. Dogs Help Us Get Along With Others

While many of us are seeing our friends on Zoom and in other physically distanced ways during the pandemic, it can be hard to feel truly connected. And, as the quarantine drags on, it may be harder to get along with the people we live with, too—like our partners and our children.

But there is evidence that having a dog around can improve our ability to connect with other people. For example, one

study found that in the presence of a dog, people acted more trusting, friendly, and cooperative. Although this study was done in a work group, the same might be true for those of us working and living together in tight spaces.

Another study found that when someone is out and about with a dog, people consider them to be more approachable than someone without a dog. And, if people walking a dog "accidentally" drop some coins in the street, they are more likely to be helped by a stranger.

This is something Jan noticed during her quarantine outings. "Maisie prods me out of the house for walks around our neighborhood, where she invariably provokes friendly (socially distanced) interactions with friends and strangers alike."

It's nice to know dogs can act as a kind of social glue. In another study, researchers randomly surveyed people in the United States and Australia, asking them how much they interacted with their neighbors. The findings revealed that pet owners (in the United States, at least) were significantly more likely to know people in their neighborhoods, while dog owners in particular were more likely to consider a neighbor a friend and to feel socially supported by their neighbors.

Given that so many of us are limited to our neighborhoods or, possibly, dependent on neighbors for help during the pandemic, dog ownership may give us a slight advantage when it comes to connecting with those around us.

4. Dogs Keep Us Healthier

All of these advantages—being less lonely, less stressed and anxious, and more connected to others—also tend to make us healthier. And there is direct evidence that dog owners experience a variety of health benefits.

A review of multiple research studies found that pet owners had significantly lower heart rates, arterial pressure, and systolic blood pressure, suggesting better cardiovascular health. Some of this may have to do with the fact that most dogs need to be walked, and so people who own dogs tend to walk more. But there are probably other pieces to the puzzle. For example, one study found that people who acquired a dog reported fewer minor health problems and rated themselves as healthier than non-pet owners, up to 10 months later. Another study found that dog owners live longer and that pet owners make fewer annual doctor visits than non-owners, even after considering gender, age, marital status, income, and other health-related factors.

It could be that adopting a needy animal confers its own benefits, as doing good deeds tends to make us happier and healthier. Interestingly, during COVID-19, there has been an increase in the number of people willing to foster a pet, in part because more people are working from home and can therefore accommodate a pet's needs more easily.

It's clear that what we receive from dogs in love and care comes with many additional benefits. Perhaps, if we want to get through the pandemic in better mental and physical health, it wouldn't hurt to have a dog around.

Jill Suttie, Psy.D., is Greater Good's book review editor and a frequent contributor to the magazine. This article was originally published by the Greater Good online magazine.

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Your best mindset is when you can look at the situation objectively and decide what you really want to do.

WISE HABITS

How to Not Believe Your Ultra-Persuasive Rationalizations

No-one is as good at talking us out of our good intentions as we are—so get ready to talk back

LEO BABAUTA

I've come to realize that smart people are very good at creating super persuasive arguments for why they shouldn't do the thing they fear doing.

This past week, I've worked with half a dozen intelligent people who have convinced themselves to give in to their resistance, over and over.

They're persuasive, convincing people, and when it comes to convincing themselves, they are really good at it, as there isn't even anyone to argue back.

So they convince themselves, in the moment of fear and resistance, not to do the thing they told themselves yesterday they wanted to do. This results in not sticking to their word to themselves, not doing the habits they want, not doing the important, meaningful work they've always wanted to do.

So how do we overcome our own persuasive rationalizations? I've learned a few things working with these wonderful and intelligent people. Let me share them with you.

Start from Your Best Mindset

Mike Tyson had a famous phrase that went something like, "Everybody has a plan until they're punched in the face." While I don't love the violence of it, I do love the recognition that our best plans go out the window when we're faced with fear.

So we have to train in how we respond to the fear so that we don't collapse.

But before we do that, it's important to start by thinking about this when you're in your best mindset. Or at least a pretty good one. Not when you're in the middle of the resistance, because at that point, you'll just rationalize your way out of it.

Your best mindset is when you can look at the situation objectively and decide what you really want to do. Not what you want to do when faced with the book writing or sales call you're resisting. Not what you want to do when it's cold or you're in bed and the

alarm clock's gone off in darkness. But what you want to do when you are calm and not feeling the resistance.

What do you want? Why do you care about that? What would it mean for you and others? How important is this for you? Write down your answers and look at them when the fear punches you in the face and you want to run.

Prepare Your Counterarguments

Now that you know what you want and why, practice your counterpoints.

Start to list the reasons you give yourself not to do the thing you fear. You can add to this list later when you see them in the wild. But for now, list the ones you can remember.

Now write down a good counterargument for each one. Each rationalization will be at least partly true, which is why they're powerful. So you have to overcome it with even more truth.

For example:

- I should sleep in, I need the sleep. Yes, that's true, sleep is important—but that just means you need to start going to sleep earlier. You can wake up today and suffer a little bit, but then get very serious about going to sleep on time so you can get on the schedule you need to be focused.
- Why should I do this, I'm already happy. That's also true, but giving in to your fears doesn't lead to long-term happiness. Breaking your word to yourself doesn't lead to self-trust. Doing the thing you said you really want to do will lead to long-term happiness.
- Just this one time won't hurt, isn't a big deal. That's true, except that it is a big deal because you're breaking your word to yourself. It will hurt because one inevitably leads to another, and so you're forming a pattern that will hurt you. This is the argument I made so that I could smoke cigarettes,



Our best plans go out the window when we're faced with fear.

You need to intentionally practice in this, every day, so that you get better and better at overcoming the resistance and not collapsing when hit with fear.

and it always ended up hurting me. So look at the evidence—has believing that rationalization hurt or helped you?

• I'm too busy. Yes, you are busy—but are all the other things you're doing more important than this? Can you say that with absolute certainty? Because yesterday you decided that this was important, and the other things weren't as important. Maybe you shouldn't renegotiate with yourself right now, but wait until you're in your best mind to reprioritize.

These are just a few common ones. You can probably think of a few of your own right now. If not, watch what you tell yourself the next time you try to put off your important things, and write down the rationalization.

What would convince you not to believe your rationalization? Write it down, and tell it to yourself at the moment of difficulty.

Train in the Moment of Resistance

It's one thing to write things down and have counterarguments ready for yourself, but what will you do when fear punches you in the face? This takes training. You need to intentionally practice in this, every day, so that you get better and better at overcoming the resistance and not collapsing when hit with fear.

The training is this, in a nutshell:

1. Set a practice time for yourself, and commit to doing the training every day at that time.
2. Set something for yourself to do in that practice time—something that will bring up some resistance. Set this the day before.
3. Only do a small chunk of it. If you want to write a book, for example, only try to do 10 to 20 minutes of it (depending on how hard that is for you). Don't make it crazy difficult at first.
4. Notice what happens when the time comes to practice. What do you do? What rationalizations do you give yourself? What comforts do you turn toward? What complaints are there? Just notice, without judgment.
5. Stay for a moment with the fear and resistance. Just be with it. You don't need to run, just feel it for a moment. Maybe a couple moments. This is the training: not running.
6. See if any of your counterarguments work. Remind yourself of why this is important.
7. Put yourself in a place of love. How is doing this an act of love for yourself and others? How important is that love? Can you let yourself feel the love and compassion right now, for yourself and others? Let this move you.
8. Try to get even one minute done. See if that's possible. Maybe 10 seconds. It's an opening. Tomorrow, get a little more done if possible, or at least the same amount.

Daily training will help you not need to run. The rationalizations will lose their power with time, because the fear won't be as scary.

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

Am I Coping Well During the Pandemic?

Getting through difficult times takes different approaches

NICK HASLAM

The pandemic has posed unprecedented challenges. Many of us have lost work, gained carer responsibilities, and grappled with social isolation. Experts have warned of a looming wave of mental illness as a result.

Research suggests they're largely correct. Surveys in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States point to rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thinking substantially higher than in previous years.

But over time, people have changed how they have responded to the threat of COVID-19. Google searches have shifted from the harm of the pandemic itself to ways of dealing with it, such as exercising and learning new skills.

This pivot points to a new focus on coping with COVID-19.

Many Ways of Coping

Coping is the process of responding effectively to problems and challenges. To cope well is to respond to the threat in ways that minimize its damaging impact.

Coping can involve many different strategies and it's likely you have your own preferred ones. These strategies can be classified in many ways, but a key distinction is between problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies.

What's the difference?

Problem-focused coping involves actively engaging with the outside world. This might mean making action plans, seeking further information about a threat, or confronting an adversary.

Emotion-focused coping, in

contrast, is directed inward, attempting to change how we respond emotionally to stressful events and conditions, rather than to change them at their source.

Effective emotion-focused strategies include meditation, humor, and reappraising difficulties to find benefits.

Less effective emotion-focused strategies include seeking distractions, denial, and substance use. Although these tactics may stave off distress in the short term, they neither address its causes nor prevent its longer term effects.

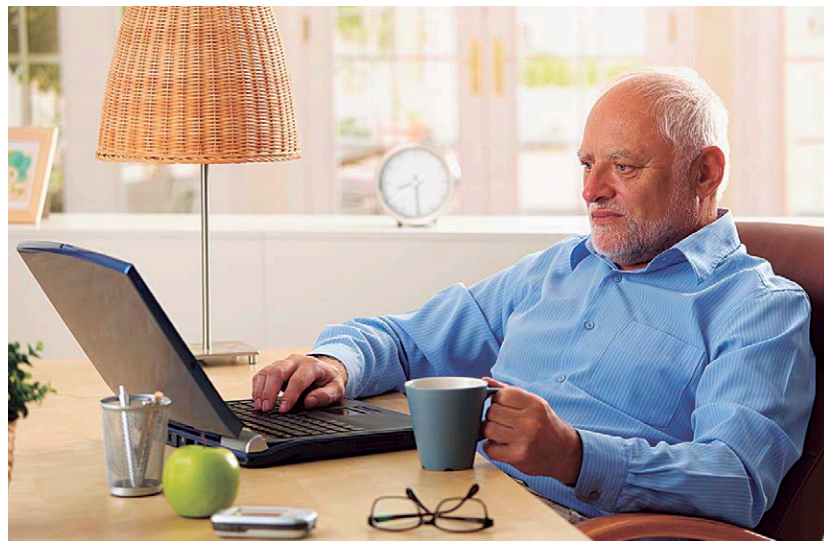
Which is best?

Neither of these coping strategies is intrinsically more or less effective than the other. Both can be effective for different kinds of challenges.

Unpleasant emotions draw our attention to problems and motivate us to tackle them, rather than just being signs of mental fragility or not coping.

Problem-focused strategies are said to work best when we can control the problem.

However, when we face an immovable challenge, it can be better to adjust our response to it using emotion-focused strategies, rather than battling fruitlessly against it.



We can expect to suffer amid the difficulties of something as trying as a global pandemic.

Coping Strategies During the Pandemic

Physical activity and experiencing nature can offer some protection from depression during the pandemic. One study even points to the benefits of birdwatching.

But there's more evidence around coping strategies to avoid. Rising levels of substance use during the pandemic are associated with greater distress.

Eating too many snacks and accessing too much COVID-related media have also been linked to higher levels of stress and depression. So these should be consumed in moderation.

How Well Am I Coping?

We should be able to assess how well we are coping with the pandemic by judging how we're going compared to our previous normal.

Think of yourself this time last year. Are you drinking more, sleeping poorly, or experiencing fewer positive emotions and more negative emotions now?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then compared to your previous normal, your coping may not be as good as it could be. But before you judge your coping critically, it's worth considering a few things.

Your coping is relative to your challenge.

The pandemic may be shared, but its impacts have been unequal.

If you live alone, are a caregiver, or have lost work, the pandemic has been a larger threat for you than for many others. If you've suffered more distress than others, or more than you did last year, it doesn't mean you have coped less well—you may have just had more to cope with.

Negative emotions can be appropriate.

Experiencing some anxiety in the face of a threat like COVID-19 is justified. Experiencing sadness at separation from loved ones under lockdown is also inevitable. Suffering doesn't mean maladjustment.

In fact, unpleasant emotions draw our attention to problems and motivate us to tackle them, rather than just being signs of mental fragility or not coping.

We should, of course, be vigilant for serious problems, such as thoughts of self-harm, but we should also avoid pathologizing ordinary distress. Not all distress is a symptom of a mental health problem.

Coping isn't just about emotions anyway.

Coping isn't all about how we feel. It's also about action and finding a sense of meaning and purpose in life, despite our distress. Perhaps if we've sustained our relationships and done our jobs passably during the pandemic, we have coped well enough, even if we have sometimes been miserable.

Coping with COVID-19 has been an uneven contest.

Social distancing and lockdowns have left us with a reduced coping repertoire. Seeking emotional and practical support from others, also known as "social coping," is made more difficult by pandemic restrictions. Without our usual supports, many of us have had to cope with one arm tied behind our backs.

So remember to cut yourself some slack. For most people, the pandemic has been a unique challenge. When judging how well we've coped, we should practice self-compassion. Let's not make things worse by criticizing ourselves for failing to cope better.

Nick Haslam is a professor of psychology at the University of Melbourne in Australia. This article was first published on The Conversation.

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