

THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND & BODY

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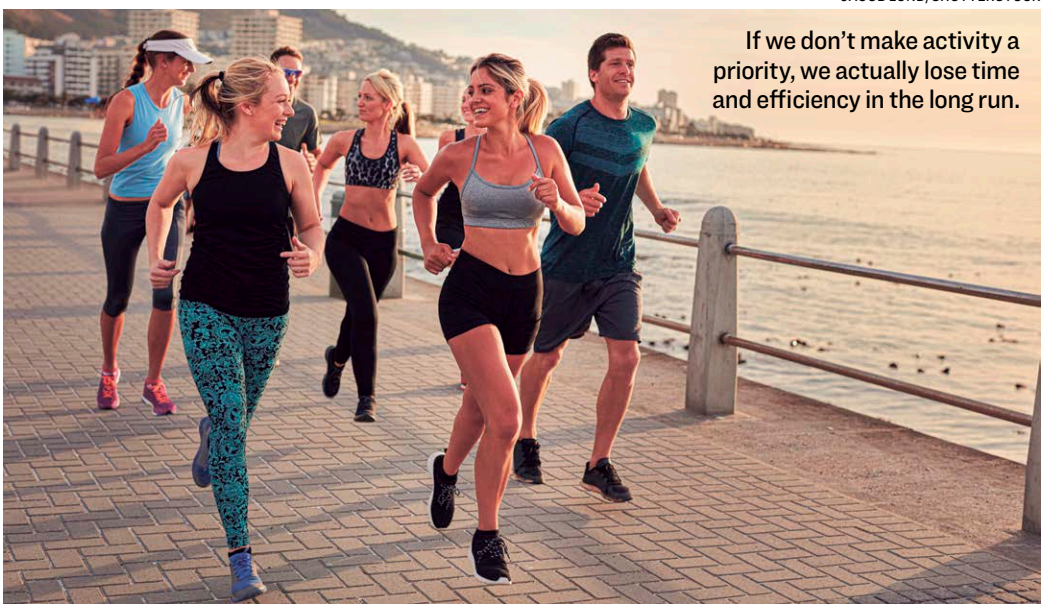


When we don't get enough activity, our bodies break down, resulting in a loss of bone density, stiffer joints, and weaker muscles.

The Body's Need for Movement

Why we get so little, and where to find motivation

The quality of our lives improves with exercise, and so does our longevity.



JACOB LUND/SHUTTERSTOCK

If we don't make activity a priority, we actually lose time and efficiency in the long run.

CONAN MILNER

People today move less than ever before. The decline has been swift: In just under two generations, physical activity has fallen 20 percent in the United Kingdom and more than 30 percent in the United States, according to one report. In China, physical activity has dropped nearly 50 percent in less than one generation.

The trend is costing us in dollars and disease. According to a 2018 report in the Journal of the American Medicine Association, the lack of physical activity in the United States alone is linked to \$117 billion in annual health care costs.

The science is clear: When we don't get enough activity, our bodies break down,

resulting in a loss of bone density, stiffer joints, and weaker muscles. Organ function declines, and our cells produce less energy. The more we stagnate, the more we're prone to injury, exhaustion, and chronic illness.

Move more, and your body gets healthier. Exercise has been shown to reduce stress, as well as improve mood and mental acuity, not to mention giving us a fitter and more functional physique.

The quality of our lives improves with exercise, and so does our longevity. A recently published study from the Cleveland Clinic looked at more than 122,000 patients for 23 years and found a strong correlation between higher physical activity levels and longer life.

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8 Ways Your Perception of Reality Is Skewed

A new book explains the sometimes-unconscious forces that shape what we see, feel, and think



ALE KUP-SHUTTERSTOCK

JILL SUTTIE

Seeing is believing. To some extent, that's true, of course: Our eyes allow us to see what's around us, helping us navigate our world.

But it turns out sight is much more complicated than that, according to the new book "Perception: How Our Bodies Shape Our Minds," by University of Virginia psychologist Dennis Proffitt and Drake Baer. What we perceive in any given moment is not only determined by sensory input, but by our personal physical abilities, energy levels, feelings, social identities, and more.

"It's common sense to believe we experience the world as it objectively is," the authors write. "Even though our naive in-

tuitions are that we see the world as it is, we do not."

It's not just our eyesight that's influenced by unconscious processes, either. Proffitt and Baer's book is chock full of fascinating research findings that challenge not only the things we perceive, but the judgments and decisions we make based on what we perceive. Things that seem true and universal are often just our own unique experience of the world.

This is useful to know—especially now, when we are fighting a deadly pandemic and mired in political and social turmoil. If we understand what irrelevant factors manipulate what we see and think, we can perhaps find ways to overcome these influ-

ences and make better decisions as a society.

That means having humility. Here are eight of the many interesting take-home messages from their book.

1. Our Energy and Abilities Impact Our Perspective

Several studies by Proffitt and others show that our physical bodies and our ability to move influence how we view our surroundings. For example, researchers have found that if you are obese or tired, distances look farther to you. People wearing heavy backpacks see steeper hills in front of them than those without backpacks.

Continued on Page 6

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



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



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



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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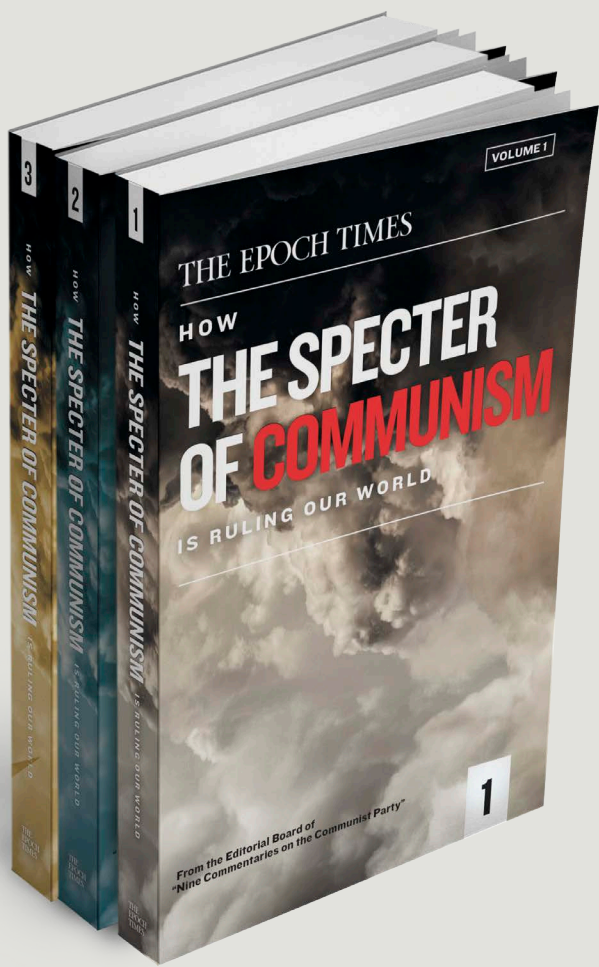
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CHINESE WISDOM FOR SEASONAL LIVING

As Autumn Cools, Seek Heights and Humbly Reflect

Solar Term: 'Cold Dew' (Oct. 8–22)

MOREEN LIAO

A solar term is a period of about two weeks and is based on the sun's position in the zodiac. Solar terms form the traditional Chinese calendar system. The calendar follows the ancient Chinese belief that living in accordance with nature will enable one to live a harmonious life. This article series explores each of the year's 24 solar terms, offering guidance on how to best navigate the season.

"Cold Dew" is the 17th solar term. It begins when the sun reaches the celestial longitude of 195 degrees and ends when it reaches the longitude of 210 degrees.

It is particularly important to maintain good circulation and hydration, to keep the immune system functioning well.

It might sound confusing that there was a White Dew in early September. What's the difference between White Dew and Cold Dew? White dew is the reflection of the increasing moisture in the air and looks misty while the temperature is not yet so cold; and cold dew refers to when the temperature has dropped dramatically so it stays in water droplet form, or even becomes frost in the northern part of the world.

Markers of Cold Dew

Several events mark the passage of Cold Dew: Geese migrate south for warmer weather, clam season arrives, and chrysanthemums bloom yellow.

It was during this term that Chinese people once celebrated the Double Ninth Festival, as first recorded more than 1,700 years ago. It was a time when people believed they should leave populated cities and hike high into the hills, as ancient Chinese people believed this was the time when things reach an extreme, including viruses or bad fortune.

The idea behind it is based on an ancient understanding of numerology. The number nine is, of course, the largest number between zero to nine; after nine, it goes back to zero, so it's a risky moment and a time to review with humility. Also, according to the ancient Chinese prophetic Book of Changes, odd numbers belong to yang, while even numbers belong to yin. Thus, nine is the biggest

number in yang, and double nine makes the power even stronger.

On the ninth day of the ninth month in the traditional Chinese calendar, ancient Chinese believed it was easy to attract bad things. Going hiking in the mountains and avoiding crowds was not just to avoid disease, but to show respect to heaven and to review one's behaviors. October is also normally a peak season for flu and pandemics.

This year the Double Ninth Festival comes a little bit later than normal, falling on Oct 25. But still, due to COVID-19 this year, we'd be wise to be careful and protect ourselves well.

Traditionally, ancient Chinese people used water from deep wells to make wine and medicinal pills with seasonal herbs on the date of the Double Ninth Festival.

Living in Harmony With 'Cold Dew'

Although we have to be careful with the flu and similar types of infections, we still want to enjoy some nice activities that can achieve the desired results. Here are some tips:

Drink lukewarm or room temperature water. It is particularly important to maintain good circulation and hydration, to keep the immune system functioning well. Then, if a virus or bacterial infection hits, the body can eliminate it efficiently.

One should also cover the neck and chest to protect them from temperature changes.

If we get caught by rain at this time of year, we can use a hair-dryer to dry the area. This trick also can work for those having respiratory or circulation problems; point the hairdryer at the center of the chest to warm it.

Seasonal Foods to Eat

The best foods to eat at this time include goji berries, ginkgo berries, white asparagus, yams, chestnuts, walnuts, almonds, white fish, chicken, rice, oatmeal, celery, soya milk, and coconut milk.

Essential Oils

Beneficial oils for this period include eucalyptus, peppermint, cedarwood, niaouli, cyress, chamomile roma, and chamomile german.

Epoch Times contributor Moreen Liao is a descendant of four generations of traditional Chinese medicine doctors. She is also a certified aromatherapist, former dean of the New Directions Institute of Natural Therapies in Sydney, and the founder of Ausganica, a certified organic cosmetic brand. Visit LiaoMoreen.com

CORY GOMEZ/SHUTTERSTOCK



As the temperature drops, dew lingers and begins to frost, giving this solar term its name.

ALL IMAGES BY SHUTTERSTOCK



The presence of molds in a person's environment can be a significant factor in many conditions that doctors may struggle to diagnose.

THE ROOT CAUSE

Chronic Inflammatory Response Syndrome: A Possible Cause for Many Illnesses

Exposure to toxic molds is a potential cause of disease though scientific debate remains over the full impact of these biotoxins

ARMEN NIKOGOSIAN

Thousands of Americans every year suffer from a disease impacting their everyday function bouncing from doctor to doctor without being given a clear diagnosis. While there may be a variety of causes behind these undiagnosed illnesses, some of these patients may be suffering from Chronic Inflammatory Response Syndrome (CIRS) which is also known as Toxic Mold Illness.

CIRS is a complex and controversial illness caused by the malfunction of the immune system following exposure to an organism which produces a toxin also known as a biotoxin. The various systems affected by this syndrome are broad including the brain, the gut, hormones, and the musculoskeletal system.

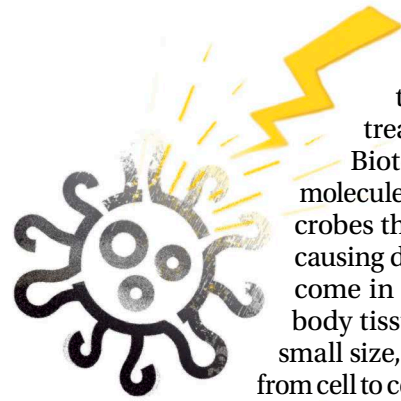
According to those who work with CIRS patients, biotoxins can produce a variety of symptoms including brain fog, fatigue, digestive issues and chronic pain. The immune dysfunction results when the body is incapable of removing the biotoxin, which can then cause a state of chronic inflammation.

While toxicity from mold has been well publicized, it's important to note that these toxins can come from other organisms including pathological gut microbes, Lyme, chronic viral infections, sinus infections, and other sources.

CIRS is commonly misdiagnosed as fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome, stress, allergies, and depression.

Once this inflammatory cascade begins, extensive treatment may be needed to bring the patient back to a state of well-being. CIRS is commonly misdiagnosed as fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, irritable bowel syndrome, stress, allergies, and depression.

The term CIRS was coined in 1997 by Ritchie Shoemaker, MD after an investigation of a "mysterious illness" in the residents of the Eastern Chesapeake Bay following a Pfiesteria outbreak in the local fish population. In the following decades, he has dedicated much of his career towards better characterizing the mechanism, diagnosis, and treatment of this multifaceted and multi-systemic disorder. While Shoemaker's findings have been challenged, he has defended them and continues to publish his research in scientific journals. He has also trained physicians in the identification of



Biotoxins can produce a wide variety of symptoms.

CIRS and the implementation of his 12 step treatment protocol. Biotoxins are small molecules produced by microbes that are capable of causing disease when they come in contact with the body tissues. Due to their small size, they move easily from cell to cell and store in the fat and nervous tissue. The most important point in treatment is to identify and remove the source of the biotoxin if possible. Even when this is done successfully, some patients can continue being ill for months to years as a result of the accumulated biotoxin stored in their body tissues.

Diagnosis is complex due to the generalized nature of complaints the patients have. While certain symptoms such as fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and depression are common, other complaints can be as diverse as increased thirst, joint pain, blurred vision, and gut problems. It's because of this broad diversity of symptoms that the diagnosis of CIRS is difficult and often missed by doctors unless they have been specifically trained to look for it. A very objective set of laboratory abnormalities have been documented that are indicative of some particular types of immune dysfunction and chronic inflammation unique to CIRS. A specific set of criteria combining the subjective clinical symptoms and objective lab abnormalities are needed to make the diagnosis of CIRS.

The neurotoxic effects of long-standing and severe cases of CIRS can now be imaged by MRI using a computer program called NeuroQuant. This program gives very precise measurements of various brain regions which may be smaller or larger than normal as a result of persisting exposure to the biotoxin. Treatment consists primarily of dramatic lifestyle changes, supplementation, and the use of medication or hormones when necessary.

The first and most important step in the treatment is to remove the source if possible. In the case of mold toxicity, this usually means the labor and cost of remediating your home from mold infestation or in extreme cases even leaving your home.

In cases where the biotoxin producing organism is within the body, "removing the source" translates into eradication of the responsible organism. Lyme disease and other tick-borne microbes can be a causative agent in CIRS. Once that has been achieved, the next steps in all cases are to clear the existing biotoxin out of the body while trying to calm down the inflammation and better regulate the immune system.

In a step-wise approach where the success of one treatment becomes the foundation for the next, you slowly bring the patient back to their prior healthy state.

It's suspected by many practitioners who treat CIRS patients that it may play a causative role in the development of such chronic conditions as ASD, Alzheimer's dementia, and some autoimmune diseases, though this is speculative and lacks research.

CIRS should always be a diagnostic consideration in patients presenting with multi-system disease without a clear cause.

Some medical researchers doubt the existence of CIRS and don't acknowledge the long-term effects of low-level biotoxin or mold exposure. Some of the controversy on whether this problem indeed exists stems from the fact that some people will have completely different symptoms after exposure to the same toxins—even within the same household.

On the one hand, this variation can be simply explained by individual variability to disease. More specifically it can be explained by differences in Human Leucocyte Antigens (HLA) variability. Certain HLA types have been found to respond very poorly to biotoxin exposure. Reviews of international HLA registries found that up to 24 percent of the population was susceptible to mold toxins and 21 percent of the population was susceptible to Lyme toxins. Two individuals in the same household with the same exposure but different HLA types will have very different responses to exposure.

Despite the feedback of thousands of successfully treated patients and two decades worth of peer-reviewed medical journal articles documenting its existence and evolving treatment, CIRS is still considered a controversial topic in conventional medicine.

Increasing awareness on the part of patients and medical professionals that CIRS exists and can be successfully treated has increased over the past decade, but the full acceptance by the conventional medical community and health insurance companies still awaits.

Special thanks to Dr. Jennifer Smith, NMD at Silver Tree Wellness who provided me with information to prepare this article.

Dr. Armen Nikogolian practices functional and integrative medicine at Southwest Functional Medicine in Henderson, Nev. He is board-certified in internal medicine and a member of the Institute for Functional Medicine and the Medical Academy of Pediatric Special Needs. His practice focuses on the treatment of complex medical conditions with a special emphasis on autism spectrum disorder in children, as well as chronic gut issues and autoimmune conditions in adults.

Feeling a Little Down in the Winter, Gentlemen? You're Not Alone

DEVON ANDRE

Do you feel a little different when the temperature drops? Do the layers of clothing and shorter days suck your energy and motivation?

There are definitely psychological effects associated with cooler, darker temperatures. But these seasonal changes might be affecting men physically, too. It's possible that when temperatures drop, testosterone does as well.

A study published in the Central European Journal of Urology found a correlation between testosterone and the season. The small study found testosterone levels were higher in the summer and dropped in the winter.

The study really highlights how relative testosterone levels can be. For example, testosterone remained in the "normal" range for participants throughout the year, but relative drops elicited differences in sexual thinking, behavior, and mood.

If you lack energy and your typical vigor since temperatures have fallen, and have noticed this trend in the past, you can work to stay ahead of it.

Keeping testosterone levels from dropping in the winter involves maintaining activity levels and finding ways to work out despite the temperature.

Being that we're caught up in a pandemic, working out at home is essential. Lifting with resistance bands and dumbbells a few times per week can help maintain muscle and stabilize testosterone. If you have the space for more heavy-duty equipment, consider it a smart investment.

Doing cardiovascular activity may help, too. This could involve getting out for fall hikes or winter snow-shoeing expeditions. You could also shovel your neighbor's driveway.

Exercise can do double-duty for testosterone levels because it can also help minimize and control stress.

Exercise can do double-duty for testosterone levels because it can also help minimize and control stress. Stress can contribute to lower testosterone, so find ways to keep it in check. Better sleep, exercise, and mindfulness can all help with stress management.

Your diet plays a role, too. Keep eating healthy, and put a little bit of focus on getting plenty of protein—about 1 gram per pound of body weight per day—and include healthy fats from places such as fish, avocado, nuts, and olive oil.

Vitamin D supplements may play a big role in maintaining stable testosterone levels, and zinc might help, too. Consider a multivitamin for the winter months to help top up any additional nutrient requirements.

Don't let testosterone's potential seasonal wave suck your energy away as the temperatures trend downward. Try these natural methods to keep it steady and make the most of the season.

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.



People are often resistant to exercise because they aren't approaching it intuitively.

MADE TO MOVE

The Body's Need for Movement

Continued from **Page 1**

We all know we should be moving more. So what's holding us back? Why do only about 20 percent of Americans meet the minimum daily physical activity requirements that experts say we need to stay healthy? The most common reason is a lack of time. For our ancestors, physical activity was baked into their day. The demands of life forced them to stay active. Today, as cars and trains carry us back and forth to mostly sedentary jobs, our physical demands are minimal, yet our time to pursue exercise is scarce.

Certified personal trainer and fitness instructor Sylvia Nasser says that modern life pulls us in so many directions—our jobs, our families, and even our social media—that exercise becomes an inconvenient chore that we lack the time or energy to meet.

"People's energies are just not there," Nasser said. "They are so stressed and over-committed, so food and drinking become their comfort."

Time may be tight, but ignoring the body's need for movement is a foolish scheduling strategy. If we don't make activity a priority, we actually lose time and efficiency in the long run. Our bodies become less able to meet the demands of life, and we develop a higher risk for cardiovascular disease, Type 2 diabetes, cognitive decline, cancer, and early death.

"Lack of exercise literally brings on the deterioration of the body, the mind, and the mood," Nasser said. "If people exercised more, they'd be more creative, efficient, and productive in their jobs."

So how do we juggle a long commute, longer work hours, and the rest of our busy lives both on and offline while still finding time to exercise? Meghan Lyle, a registered dietitian, nutritionist, and personal wellness coach, knows it's tough to fit activity into our day. So she recommends finding ways to make it personal. For inspiration, Lyle encourages us to "look far and look inside."

"By 'look far,' I mean look far ahead in the distance to envision what you want to be doing and experiencing in the decades at the end of your life," she said. "What will exercise change about that experience? Being more fit and healthy will probably have far-reaching impacts, no matter how you want to spend your later years."

By looking inside, Lyle means becoming mindful of what exercise does for you in the moment. When you finish a good workout, consider how you feel.

"How's your mood? Do you feel empowered and accomplished? Do you have more energy? Remembering this feeling could motivate you for next time," she said.

Small Effort, Big Impact

Once you're ready to take on some exercise, experts stress starting small. Lyle recommends little things such as taking the stairs instead of the elevator or finding a parking spot a little further from the store. For the next step, try fitting in a 10-minute walk, or simple exercises at home.

"You don't need a full home gym," said

The lack of physical activity in the United States alone is linked to \$117 billion in annual health care costs.



Just adding a little extra exercise to our day can have a profound effect on our future health.

Lyle. "Many resistance exercises require only body weight, like planking."

People who have been sedentary for years may have to start really slow. But you have to start somewhere. Lori Zabka, a certified personal trainer and nutritional coach, says that even if it seems like we have little time (or energy) to spare, we can turn things around by seizing the moment.

We may not see a point in exercising unless we have a full 45 minutes or more to devote to it. While an extended period of activity is great, Zabka urges us to drop the all-or-nothing mentality and accept the fact that a few moments devoted to movement can still have value.

For example, instead of scrolling through your phone or flipping through channels, try getting up and walking around, or do some light stretching. These simple gestures can start a positive cycle. The more you move, the more your body starts to crave movement.

"I truly believe that energy begets energy, and movement begets movement," Zabka said. "You don't even need to break a sweat. Just move that body."

Just adding a little extra exercise to our day can have a profound effect on our future health. It may also positively impact the health of the next generation.

In a 2018 study published online in the journal *Diabetes*, researchers concluded that parents who started exercising could prevent obesity and diabetes from being passed to their children. The study looked at male mice who began a moderate exercise routine just three weeks prior to conception. Their offspring were born with better glucose metabolism and increased insulin sensitivity compared to mice sired from sedentary dads.

Kristin Stanford, assistant professor of physiology and cell biology at The Ohio State University Wexner Medical Center who led the study, previously witnessed similar results of improved metabolism with female mice who exercised before conception. However, the physical activity of each parent also brought different benefits to the table. Active moms gave birth to children with better liver function, and active dads saw offspring with better skeletal muscle function. These results were seen in both male and female offspring.

Based on the results of her study, Stanford believes it wouldn't take much extra activity for human parents-to-be to make a major difference in their child's well-being.

"Exercise is just incredibly important for both your short-term and health and the long-term health of your children," Stanford said. "It doesn't have to be running a marathon. It's just about getting off the couch and doing something. Anything seems to make a difference."

Find Your Motivation

Regular exercise is like a health insurance policy. But instead of paying for it with money, we shell out time and effort.

Greg Pignataro, a certified strength and conditioning specialist, explains that the state of our health owes to something called the SAID principle. SAID stands for specific adaptation to imposed demands.

It's a fancy way of saying that the body adjusts to the level of activity it's asked to perform.

If we run, jump, and lift weights, our bodies develop strength and endurance to adapt to physical stress.

"The human body is very much a use-it-or-lose-it machine," Pignataro said. "This works in people's favor when they regularly exercise because they are routinely asking their bodies to be able to do things that are more challenging than normal activities of daily living."

However, you spend most of your day sitting, your body adjusts accordingly. You might not notice these problematic adaptations until you have to do something a little more strenuous.

"In this case, you are much more likely to injure yourself while carrying heavy grocery bags or doing yard work," Pignataro said.

Some benefits of exercise are immediate—one great workout can noticeably brighten your mood and lift your spirits. But a lot of the payback we get from physical activity takes time to emerge. Muscles can take months to grow; fat can take years to lose. And in a world of instant gratification, not everyone is prepared to wait.

Jeanette DePatie, a self-described plus-sized certified fitness instructor and regular exerciser for 30 years, says people can lose their motivation because the results they're hoping for don't come as fast as they would like.

"So often we mess people up with unrealistic expectations about how exercise will make them look," DePatie said. "And what happens when after six months of your brutal 'look like Angelina Jolie by summer' plan you still look like Angela Lansbury?"

To help avoid this pitfall, Courtney Donaldson, owner of One Fit Mom Fitness, advises her clients to ditch the scale. She says that many people get frustrated after a few weeks at the gym because their weight stays the same, and that's when they give up on their fitness journey.

We all want to see results from our hard work, but Donaldson recommends following other indicators to measure your progress, such as your energy levels and sleep patterns.

"Sure, weight loss is a big motivator for most people, but there is so much more to this lifestyle," Donaldson said. "The internal benefits of exercising far outweigh anything, in my opinion."

Stacey Rosenfeld, doctor of psychology and fitness professional, says regular exercise can enhance our self-esteem, help us to feel strong and empowered, and give us a sense of mastery.

But Rosenfeld says people are often resistant to exercise because they aren't approaching it intuitively.

"They're forcing themselves to do activities they don't want to do. Not surprisingly, motivation is low, and the behavior isn't sustainable," she said. "If the gym isn't your thing, why go? Find what is your thing."

According to Rosenfeld, the best way to start is to find an activity (or activities) that you truly enjoy. This might be gardening, a dance class, or perhaps roller skating. Find something that you can do again and again. Next, create a sustainable routine. Once you're going strong, remember to allow yourself days to rest so you don't burn out.

Another tip toward a sustainable exercise routine is to be realistic. Know your limits, and don't set yourself up for failure.

"If you don't think you're going to get up at 5 a.m. to exercise before work, don't set that goal," Rosenfeld said. "Find a way to incorporate movement into your schedule in a way that feels reasonable."

Belly Fat Linked to Higher Risk of Premature Death, Regardless of Your Weight

Not all fat is the same and the health outcomes based on where we store our fat can be dramatically different

REBECCA DUMBELL

It's well known that carrying extra fat around your waist can be harmful to your health, bringing greater risk of developing illnesses such as Type 2 diabetes and heart disease. But a recent study found that, regardless of weight, people who carry more fat around their abdomen had a higher risk of dying sooner—in fact, there was an 11 percent increase in death during follow up with every extra 4 inches (10 cm) of waist circumference.

The researchers included 72 studies in their review, which contained data on 2.5 million people. They then analyzed the combined data on body shape measures, looking at waist-to-hip ratio, waist-to-thigh ratio, and waist and thigh circumference—in other words, all the areas where a person naturally stores fat.

Besides the finding on belly fat, the researchers also found that people who tend to store more fat on the hips and thighs—instead of their abdomen—had a lower risk of dying sooner, with each extra 5cm thigh circumference associated with an 18 percent reduced risk of death during the follow-up period (between 3-24 years, depending on the study). But why might this be the case? The answer has to do with the type of fat tissue we tend to store in certain areas of our body.

Body fat (known as adipose tissue) plays an important role in our physiology. Its main purpose is to take glucose from the blood and safely store this energy as lipid inside our fat cells, which our body uses later for fuel. Our fat cells also produce hormone signals that influence many body processes, including appetite. Adipose tissue is therefore important for good metabolic health.

But having too little adipose tissue can affect how well blood sugar levels are regulated in the body. Insulin regulates healthy blood sugar levels, telling fat cells to take up glucose from the blood and store it for later. Without enough adipose tissue (a condition known as lipodystrophy), this process can't work properly—resulting in insulin resistance, which can lead to diabetes.

Although fat is important for good metabolic health, where we store it (and the kind of fat tissue it is) can have different health consequences. Research shows that people of the same height and weight, but who store their fat in different places have dif-



People who tend to store more fat on the hips and thighs—instead of their abdomen—had a lower risk of dying sooner.

ferent risks of developing certain metabolic diseases, such as Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Visceral Versus Subcutaneous

Body shape is influenced by where fat is stored in our bodies. For example, "apple-shaped" people store more fat around their waist and are likely to store more fat deeper in the body surrounding their organs as visceral fat. "Pear-shaped" people have larger thighs, and store more fat more evenly around their body just under the skin as subcutaneous fat.

These different fat depots have different physiological properties and express different genes. It's thought that different visceral and subcutaneous fat depots develop from different precursor cells—cells that can become fat cells.

Visceral fat is considered more insulin resistant, and so carries a higher risk of type 2 diabetes. Body fat stored around the waist also releases more blood triglycerides in response to stress hormone signals compared to hip and thigh fat. High blood triglyceride levels are associated with a greater risk of heart disease. This is partly why visceral fat is seen as more harmful than subcutaneous fat.

On the other hand, hip and thigh subcutaneous fat can better take up these triglycerides from the blood and store them safely, preventing the body from incorrectly storing them in the muscles or liver, which can cause liver disease. Subcutaneous fat tissue can even develop specialized "beige" fat cells that are able to burn fat. For these

Our fat cells produce hormone signals that influence many body processes, including appetite.

Body fat (known as adipose tissue) plays an important role in our physiology.



reasons, subcutaneous fat is thought of as safer—even protective against metabolic disease.

It's thought that in some people subcutaneous fat stores run out of storage space (or the ability to make new fat cells) sooner than in others. This means more fat will be stored in the less safe visceral depots. Visceral fat can cause inflammation, eventually leading to metabolic and cardiovascular disease. And if fat can no longer be stored in adipose tissue, eventually lipid can accumulate elsewhere—including the heart, muscles, and liver—which again can lead to disease.

As with height, your genes play a large part in weight and body shape. Large genetic studies have identified over 400 of the tiniest genome differences that might contribute to body-fat distribution. For example, people who have a mutation in the LRP5 gene carry more fat in their abdomen and less in their lower body. However, these tiny genetic differences are common in the population, affecting most of us in one way or another and may explain why humans have such a range of different body shapes.

Unfortunately, this means that it might be more difficult for a person who naturally stores fat around their waist to maintain good health. But research also shows that weight loss can reduce visceral fat and improve metabolic health. So what is important to remember is that body shape is only a risk factor, and even with these differences you can still lower your risk of chronic disease if you maintain a healthy lifestyle.

Rebecca Dumbell is a lecturer at Nottingham Trent University in the United Kingdom. This article was first published on The Conversation.

Topical Lemon Balm Lotion for Alzheimer's

Just as our minds respond to sights and sounds, they also respond to scents

MICHAEL GREGER

Improving cognitive performance with aromatherapy in young, healthy volunteers is one thing, but how about where it really matters?

A group of Japanese researchers had a pie-in-the-sky notion that certain smells could lead to "nerve rebirth" in Alzheimer's patients. Twenty years ago, even simply raising such a possibility as a hypothetical was heretical. Everybody knew that the loss of neurons is irreversible. In other words, dead nerve cells are not replaced, an important factor in neurodegenerative diseases. That's what I was taught and what everyone was taught, until 1998.

Patients with advanced cancer volunteered to be injected with a special dye that's incorporated into the DNA of new cells. On autopsy, researchers then went hunting for nerve cells that lit up in the brains. And, there



A study found beneficial effects of rubbing a lemon balm-infused lotion on the arms and face of patients twice daily by caregiving staff, compared to a lotion without the scent.

they were: new nerve cells in the brain that didn't exist just days or months before, demonstrating "that cell genesis occurs in human brains and that the human brain retains the potential for self-renewal throughout life"—something in which we can take comfort.

It still doesn't mean smells can help, though. An aromatherapy regimen of rosemary, lemon, lavender, and orange essential oils was attempted for a month. You can see the trajectory of the subjects' cognitive function and their ability to form abstract ideas starting six weeks before the treatment. Prior to the aromatherapy regimen, there was a rather steady decline, which was reversed after the aromatherapy. The researchers concluded that aromatherapy may be efficacious and "have some potential for improving cognitive function, especially in AD [Alzheimer's disease] patients"—all, of course, without any apparent side effects.

What about severe dementia? We always hear about the cognitive deficits, but more than half

of patients with dementia experience behavioral or psychiatric symptoms. Thorazine-type antipsychotic drugs are often prescribed, even though they appear to be particularly dangerous in the elderly. "Antipsychotic medication may be viewed as an easier option than non pharmacological alternatives," such as aromatherapy. Another study examined the effect of rubbing a lemon balm-infused lotion on the arms and face of patients twice daily by caregiving staff, compared with lotion without the scent. "During the 4 weeks, significant improvements were seen" in agitation, shouting, screaming, and physical aggression, as were improved quality of life indicators, with patients less socially withdrawn and more engaged in constructive activities, compared to the unscented control.

This is important because antipsychotics cause patients to become more withdrawn and less engaged. They are like a chemical restraint. The drugs can reduce agitation, too. So, aromatherapy with lemon balm "is safe, well tolerated, and highly efficacious, with additional benefits on key quality of life parameters." These findings clearly indicate the need for longer-term multicenter trials, but we never had any, until...never. We still don't have any. This study was conducted in 2002, and there have been no follow-ups. Is that a surprise? Who's going to fund such a study: Big Balm?

Michael Greger, M.D., FACLM, is a physician, New York Times bestselling author, and internationally recognized professional speaker on a number of important public health issues. He has lectured at the Conference on World Affairs, the National Institutes of Health, and the International Bird Flu Summit, testified before Congress, appeared on "The Dr. Oz Show" and "The Colbert Report," and was invited as an expert witness in defense of Oprah Winfrey at the infamous "meat defamation" trial. This article was originally published on NutritionFacts.org



8 Ways Your Perception of Reality Is Skewed

A new book explains the sometimes-unconscious forces that shape what we see, feel, and think

Continued from Page 1

“Put another way: Our walking ability shapes the apparent walkability of the hill, which determines how we see it. You do not see the hill as it is but rather as it is seen by you,” write Proffitt and Baer.

If you are holding something that extends your reach—like a grabber—things appear closer to you, too. In sports, successful baseball batters literally see bigger balls coming at them from the pitcher, and golfers who putt well see bigger holes.

This phenomenon is obvious even in young babies. That’s why, in one experiment, crawling babies showed fear when they were lowered onto a platform with a fake cliff (an apparent drop-off that was actually see-through plastic), but babies who couldn’t crawl didn’t show that same fear. They didn’t see it as scary, because, as non-crawlers, they didn’t need to worry about cliffs yet.

2. Our Body Awareness Affects Our Decisions

In one experiment, researchers studied hedge fund managers who have to make quick decisions about stock trading under intense pressure. Their strange finding? Managers who could more accurately count their own heartbeats without touching their bodies were more successful traders.

People who were more confident in their accurate count, however, were not more successful, and the bigger the gap between their confidence and accuracy, the higher their anxiety. This suggests that actual awareness of your body can be useful in high-stress work situations.

While it’s uncertain why that would be, it’s possible that people who are more aware of their heartbeats are better able to calm themselves under stress and, therefore, make cooler decisions. Or it could be that successful people who are more attuned to their bodies interpret their perceptions more accurately, understanding how the two interact. Either way, these findings make a case for cultivating greater body awareness.

3. Being Hungry (or not) Changes Our Choices

Our body’s energy levels also impact decision-making. In one experiment, participants who drank a sugary drink made better decisions and delayed immediate gratification longer than people who gulped down a sweet-tasting drink

without glucose. Similarly, when judges make parole decisions just before their lunch breaks or the end of their day, they tend to deny parole. That’s because a decision to grant parole requires more careful consideration—and, so, more energy.

Studies have also found that people who’ve enjoyed a tall, sugary glass of lemonade tend to be more helpful to others. And children who eat breakfast do better in school and have fewer behavioral problems.

“The way you think is endlessly tied to how you physically feel,” write the authors. So, it’s important to make sure we (or others we rely on) are not too depleted when hard decisions need to be made.

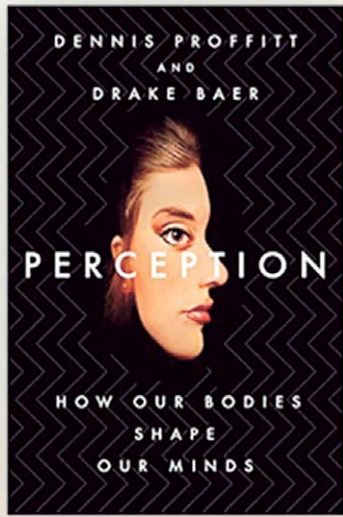
All in all, reading about this research should humble us. Clearly, many forces below our conscious awareness affect our perceptions, thoughts, and decisions—and errors abound.

4. Easy-to-Read Statements Seem More True

Our beliefs about the world also depend on seemingly irrelevant influences. In one experiment, when researchers asked participants to determine the truth of a statement—like “Lima is in Peru”—written in different colors, participants agreed more with easy-to-read statements than less easy-to-read ones. Likewise, statements made in a rhyming scheme—like “Woes unite foes”—were considered truer than statements without a rhyming scheme—like “Woes unite enemies.”

This tendency can be undone if you simply point it out to people. But, otherwise, these forces operate below conscious awareness, and we can be duped by how easy something is to believe or retrieve in our minds.

“Our penchant for fluency makes us susceptible to bulls—t—if it feels right, it is right—and when that vulnerability is scaled up to the level of media, you get truthiness and fake news,” the authors write.



“Perception: How Our Bodies Shape Our Minds.”

5. Our Feelings Affect Our Political Views

It’s probably not surprising that our feelings affect our perceptions and thoughts. Still, even for someone like me who knows this research well, Perception held some surprises.

In one study cited in the book, researchers found that people who are more easily disgusted—when imagining things like a garbage pail filled with maggots or a piece of chocolate cake in the shape of dog poo—tend to be more conservative politically. And they tend to have stronger negative feelings about people who support sexual freedoms they disagree with—like gay rights or the right to an abortion.

Feelings like disgust—which come out of the limbic system of our brains, often below conscious awareness—guide our reactions and evaluations, making them less than impartial.

“Emotions allow us to perceive good and ill in a world filled with both. They may seem to come unbidden, but they are, in fact, of our own creation, and they possess both the wisdom and vicissitudes of our oldest and most fundamental brain structures,” write Proffitt and Baer.

6. Feeling Bad Makes Things Seem Harder

Anyone who’s ever felt sad or depressed knows it’s hard to face the world when you’re down. But it’s interesting to note that these feelings also change our sensory perceptions. For example, people listening to melancholic music tend to think a hill looks steeper than people listening to happy music.

“Emotions . . . have the job of giving a red or green light toward approaching or avoiding objects, people, and situations, and shape perception accordingly,” write Proffitt and Baer. That means that nurturing our positive emotions may help us to approach difficult tasks more easily—an

idea that at least some research bears out.

7. Having Other People Around Make Things Seem Easier

The presence of other people affects our perception in difficult situations, too. Holding hands with someone while experiencing a painful event can lessen the pain. Anticipating having to carry a heavy load with someone else (as opposed to alone) makes it appear lighter, and just thinking about a friend can make hills seem less steep.

Our social connections seem to play a role in reducing stress, which might be why being with others changes our perception of pain or difficulty, making them both easier to bear. These studies and more point to the centrality of our social relationships for resilience when things are hard.

8. Our Political Beliefs Affect Our Math Skills

Another fascinating finding is how our group affiliations, like the political party we belong to, affect our perceptions. For example, in one study, people were asked to solve math equations to verify the truth of a research finding—like whether a vaccine is effective or whether banning guns saves lives. As predicted, people with greater math skills were able to figure out the answers more easily—but only when the result of the calculation didn’t contradict their political beliefs. If it did, everyone’s math was worse: They solved the problem correctly 25 to 45 percent less often.

This flies in the face of the idea that people just need more information to figure out the truth of a situation. “Thinking—even doing math—is not a process happening in isolation but is instead embedded in our personal thoughts and group identities,” the authors write. “We literally become flummoxed, stupefied, and incapable of wielding our full faculties when confronted with facts that threaten our social identity.”

All in all, reading about this research should humble us. Clearly, many forces below our conscious awareness affect our perceptions, thoughts, and decisions—and errors abound. Becoming cognizant of those influences could keep us from making costly misjudgments or creating unnecessary conflicts with others who see things differently. The ultimate benefit of that? Hopefully, having a little humility might help all of us to act with less hubris and be more open to other points of view.

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.



Nobody is as successful as Instagram makes them look.

There Are No Perfect People

We all fall short, and that’s why we strive to be more

JOSHUA BECKER

I’m not sure who needs to hear this today, but in case it’s you who needs to be reminded: There are no perfect people.

There are lots of people trying to better themselves and improve their lives, but none of them are perfect. It’s important for us to remember that, because sometimes, from the outside looking in, it’s easy to think otherwise.

I was recently reading a magazine profile piece of a well-known family. It was in one of those magazines you’d find in a grocery store check-out—complete with beautiful photos of the family and their gorgeous home on the cover.

Based on the article, it would appear this family was picture-perfect. The home was immaculate. The marriage was honest, authentic, built on nothing but love. The children were impressive. Even the couples’ careers were taking off based on the author’s description.

It would be easy for someone reading the article to become quickly jealous and envious of the two in the article.

Because from everything written, it appeared, their lives were perfect.

But I know better. Oh, I don’t know the two in the article, but I know life and I know human beings well enough to know that their life isn’t nearly as perfect as it appears on the pages of this glossy magazine.

I know, when the journalist and photographer aren’t there, that the couple argues at times, the kids aren’t always behaved, and the kitchen isn’t always clean. Because I know people, I know each of us struggles with self-doubt, or pride, or selfish ambition, or fear of never measuring up to someone else featured in the same magazine.

That’s what life looks like—trials, temptations, mistakes, regrets, always falling a little bit short. That’s what life looks for me, for you, and everyone else.

Over the years, I’ve gotten to know quite a few well-known writers in the self-help field. They write fabulous books with wonderfully helpful ideas. But I think, at times, we can read these books and begin to incorrectly assume that each author has life entirely figured out.

Again, I can attest (firsthand this time), that is not the case. They struggle with the same issues as all of us—divorce, fear, addiction, pride, lack of discipline, just to name a few.

Now, that’s not to say their books aren’t helpful or true. It just means

that nobody is perfect. Life never is.

Again, I don’t know who needs to hear this today. But I feel compelled to write it. It is too easy to get frustrated with our own life when we place others on a pedestal assuming they’ve got everything figured out.

Trust me, they don’t. Nobody is as successful as Instagram makes them look, nobody is as beautiful as filters make them seem, nobody is as disciplined as their writing describes them, and nobody is as put together as their social media portrays.

There are lots of people trying to better themselves and improve their lives, but none of them are perfect.

That being said ...

I do know a whole lot of people who are working their tail off to become their best selves.

They are working to declutter their possessions.

They are trying to become more intentional with their finances.

They are striving to be better parents, better spouses, or better mentors in their community.

They are working to overcome addiction or unhealthy habits.

They are studying in a field, developing a craft, reading books, or listening to podcasts in areas they desire improvement.

They are waking early or staying up late.

They are hitting the gym, changing their diet, or testing out the newest productivity hacks from the seminar they attended last month.

There are people in this world working hard to become better. They are not perfect, but they are striving to be better than the person they were yesterday.

And you should be one of them—no matter your current season of life. You should strive for more.

Precisely because: There are no perfect people.

We all have room to grow.

Joshua Becker is an author, public speaker, and the founder and editor of “Becoming Minimalist,” where he inspires others to live more by owning less. Visit [BecomingMinimalist.com](#)

POSITIVE AGING

Multigenerational Living: Families

Rules for living better as more generations of one family come together under one roof

Both grandparents and grandchildren benefit when they can do enjoyable activities together.

MARILYN MURRAY WILLISON

Ever since the 2008 Great Recession, large numbers of young people have chosen (or been forced because of finances) to move back home and live with Mom and Dad. But according to a 2013 Pew Research Center survey, nearly half of Americans who are in their 40s and 50s have a child or support an adult child and also have a parent who is 65 years older. No wonder these understandably overwhelmed people are called members of the “sandwich generation.”

Professional observers of this phenomenon refer to these households as either “intergenerational” or “multigenerational.” Back in 1980, an estimated 28 million Americans—about 12 percent of the population at that time—lived in households with at least two adult generations (or a grandparent and at least one other generation). By 2018, that figure had increased to 64 million Americans, or 20 percent of the total U.S. population.

There are, of course, natural and understandable stressors involved whenever three generations live under a single roof. But there are also a variety of both personal and social benefits. Dr. Joshua Coleman, a private psychologist in the San Francisco



There are, of course, natural and understandable stressors involved whenever three generations live under a single roof.

Bay area, told U.S. News and World Report that adults who share living accommodations need to be “able and willing to communicate what they want, what they’re willing to do, and what they’re not willing to do.”

There are over 6,000 books available on Amazon that deal with the issue

of multigenerational living. Many of these volumes are first-person accounts of families that share living spaces, and some are how-to books regarding sensible ways to bridge the generation gaps. AARP has developed a nine-point checklist specifically designed to help families,

especially older family members, live together with as little complication and conflict as possible.

These guidelines are a great place to start if you are considering sharing a home with an older—or even younger—family member.

1. Prepare your home. We all have

certain basic needs when it comes to our living spaces. Make sure that bathrooms, kitchens, and stairs will not present “physical barrier issues.”

2. Prepare your family. The time to ask everyone concerned about their expectations and how they’d like to see everything work out is before additional family members move in together.

3. Space allocation. The living spaces in your home need to be “defined and delineated” ahead of time to avoid territorial misunderstandings later.

There are over 6,000 books available on Amazon that deal with the issue of multigenerational living.

4. Let them live their lives. New household members need to maintain the activities and friendships they’ve always had if possible. “Compulsory” social family schedules need to take this into account.

5. Be consistent. It can help everyone if daily routines (like meal-times and bedtimes) are relatively predictable.

6. Instigate play dates. Both grandparents and grandchildren benefit when they can do enjoyable activities

together.

7. Don’t run interference. If you are living with your parents as well as your children, make sure that they don’t look to you as the intermediary. It’s not your job to settle every squabble.

8. Keep it real. Accept that there will be inevitable irritants when generations are adapting to one another. Teenagers’ needs will naturally be different than those of their grandparents, for example. Don’t expect everyone to mesh immediately and effortlessly.

9. Make memories together. One of the benefits of multigenerational households is that everyone has opportunities to receive additional love, solace, and support. This is also the perfect time for youngsters to learn more about the older adults in their lives and their family history.

In many cultures, intergenerational living is the norm and has made families more resilient and financially successful. Some of us might discover the same.

Marilyn Murray Willison has had a varied career as a six-time non-fiction 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](#). Copyright 2020 Creators.com



WISE HABITS

Relax Into Structure in Your Day

There is freedom in surrendering your focus to the tasks you’ve deemed important

LEO BABAUTA

There’s something in many of us that resists structure—we want the freedom of not having to do something, of being able to just relax.

There’s something to that: having freedom and going through our day feeling open and relaxed is really nice!

Unfortunately, that’s not actually how things usually go for most people. We rebel against any structure we create for ourselves, and then things get messy. This isn’t necessarily a problem—until that messiness causes anxiety and then we run to distractions and comforts. This all leads to a huge mess.

That mess is an opportunity—to practice with the messiness and discomfort, to create structure that will serve you, and to relax into that structure so that it

doesn’t have to feel suffocating.

Creating Structure to Serve You

If you’re someone who doesn’t like structure—for example, having a rigid schedule gives you the howling fantods—then you might question why you need to structure your day at all.

The answer, my friend, is that the structure can serve you and what you’re doing in the world. If you’re a leader, if you’re a creator, if you’re doing anything meaningful, then ask yourself if what you’re doing is served from having no structure.

Let’s take a couple of examples. For myself, I know that writing gets pushed back when I have a lot of smaller things that feel more urgent, like responding to emails and messages. So I have to block off the writing time. (I’m in my writing block as I write this.) You, my amazing reader, are served

by the structure I create for my writing.

Another example: I know a nurse who’s an administrator at a hospital, and her days are filled with crazy busyness. Her problem is not having enough space to breathe, not enough space for self-care. That will inevitably undermine her ability to serve others. So her team (and the patients at the hospital) would be best served by her creating structure to deal with everything, like messages, budget concerns, and specific projects, but also blocks of time for meditation, going for a walk, resting, and so on.

What kind of structure would serve you and what you’re doing? What do you need to make space for that isn’t getting done now, but that you are fully committed to doing?

Creating Sacred Blocks

Once you’ve gotten clear on what needs some space in your day, block it off on your calendar.

For me, things I’ve created structure for include writing, meditating, inner work practices, reading, exercise, answering emails and messages, and project work.

Create the space for it in your day. Maybe it will be daily at the same time, or daily at different times depending on the day of the week. Maybe it only needs to be once a week, or three times a week.

Once you’ve created the space in your day, treat it as sacred. This is a space you’ve set aside to serve you and the people you care about. Don’t treat it lightly. Treat it as something that is unmissable and that you care deeply about.

Also think about the space where you’ll do it: Do you need a

quiet space? Do you want to play music, or have candles, or declutter the space?

Set a reminder so you don’t miss it. And when you start, set an intention for how you’d like to be during the time you’re doing this. Fully present, open-hearted, etc?

Relaxing Into Structure

Now that you’ve created this sacred structure... you might notice yourself resisting it. Something about this feels restricting, perhaps.

This stems from our beliefs about structure. Maybe we feel that structure is rigid, restricting, suffocating, unnecessary, joyless.

Instead, can we look at it as an opportunity to bring joy and delight into our day? Can we feel the freedom in creating this sacred space for ourselves?

Can we practice relaxing into this structure, so that it can be one of the only places in our day when we don’t have to decide what to do, we don’t have to have doubts or debate ourselves, a time we can just do what we’ve already decided is important?

Try it out: What would it be like to relax into the structure you’ve created, to find the freedom and joy in the structure? See what it’s like to bring the fullness of your being into your commitments.

If you’d like to train in this, join my Fearless Training Program online—we’re going to dive into a challenge on this in October.

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

We rebel against any structure we create for ourselves, and then things get messy.



The Life-Enriching Opportunity of a Stop-Doing List

When we choose what we don’t want, we get the freedom to choose what we do want

JOSHUA BECKER

Over the summer, my brother convinced me to try intermittent fasting. He’s lost a fair amount of weight using the method, as have other people I know.

Now, let me be clear, this is not an article recommending intermittent fasting (or any diet technique). This post is about something bigger.

Back to my conversation: My brother was recommending intermittent fasting. I’m not in a place where I’m trying to lose a lot of weight, so that wasn’t a selling point for me. But I continued to ask him questions because I’m always interested.

One answer he gave to a question of mine piqued my interest.

I asked him: “Seems like eating only a few hours each day would result in lower energy levels. Have you found that to be true?”

His response, which convinced me to give intermittent fasting a try, was this: “No, not at all. I have as much energy as ever. In fact, I often

feel more productive during the day because I’ve cut out an entire meal.”

It was enough, at the very least, for me to give it a try. Three months later, I’m still intermittent fasting. Again, not necessarily because I’m losing a whole lot of weight, but because I enjoy the lifestyle change (at least for now).

Because I have stopped doing one thing (eating breakfast), it has changed my entire morning routine—to something I prefer much more.

I used to spend a good portion of my morning cooking breakfast, eating breakfast, cleaning up breakfast, all while listening to the news. When I was finished, I would jump into some work projects—always a little bit distracted by the news I had just heard while drinking coffee and eating eggs.

But removing that one meal has entirely re-oriented my morning.

Now I begin the day, because of the extra available time, with solitude, meditation, and faith reflection. That small change has brought new meaning to my morning.

The removal of one practice/habit sparked a significant change in my life.

As I began to reflect on how removing a meal has transformed my morning, I began to notice

Three weeks will give you enough time to see what you think about your new normal, but it won’t seem overly excessive.

elsewhere in my life that this has happened.

When I first began this blog, I had two young children, was working full time, and had just begun minimizing the possessions in my home, room-by-room. And yet, I felt compelled to write and document my journey (that was the original intent of this blog by the way).

To find time to journal our progress, I almost entirely cut television out of my life. Rather than sitting on the couch in the evening to watch a sporting event or entertainment series, I sat down to write.

The removal of one habit sparked a new one. Additionally, as I minimized my possessions and freed up time that was previously spent cleaning or organizing, I began going to the local gym to get my physical body in a healthier place.

Or, when I took on a 40-day experiment to not use my phone for anything but actual phone calls, I freed up countless hours in my week that were normally wasted scrolling social media or playing apps on my phone. In the time recovered from the removal of those habits, I became more attentive to the people and conversations around me.

Continued on Page 10

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The Life-Enriching Opportunity of a Stop-Doing List

Continued from Page 9

It's an interesting reality that happens every day. We always trade one activity for another—but we rarely actively and intentionally apply the principle to our lives. Stopping one low-value action results in a life-enriching opportunity to add new ones.

How Do We Go About Making This Change?

1. Recognize the importance of having a Stop-Doing List. Warren Buffett once said, "The difference between successful people and really successful people is that really successful people say no to almost everything."

He's right. And that truth summarizes the importance of removing activities that do not contribute to our success in life, which I don't confuse with financial wealth, by the way.

The first step to intentionally removing an action, for the sake of replacing with another, is to know it's worth the effort.

The first step to intentionally removing an action, for the sake of replacing with another, is to know it's worth the effort.

2. Choose an action to remove that doesn't add value. I listed several examples above: television, phone games, possessions, even breakfast. My opening story talked about removing breakfast—but that may not be appropriate for you (or even healthy).

Instead, think through your day or week. What is one low-value activity you could remove for a period of experimentation? Question everything. Maybe it's something you've never considered removing. I certainly never thought I'd skip breakfast for four months in a row.

Or maybe it's something you genuinely enjoy. I certainly thought I liked watching television in the evening. Question everything.

3. Remove one piece rather than the entire activity if that's easier. This doesn't need to be an all-or-nothing proposition. When I cut out breakfast, I didn't cut out eating entirely. When I cut out television in the evening on weekdays, that didn't mean I wouldn't still watch football with my son on Sunday afternoons.

When I cut out games from my phone for 40 days, I didn't ditch the device entirely.

If you're struggling to place an item on your Stop-Doing List, try thinking smaller.

Maybe cut out television on Mondays and Wednesdays. Stop checking email in the morning. Cancel just one social obligation. Or avoid

just one time-wasting website during the week.

4. Commit for 21 days. Add that low-value activity to your Stop-Doing List and commit to it for a short, 21-day experiment.

The 21-day experiment approach will further your resolve. "The habit change isn't forever," you'll tell yourself, "it's just for 21 days."

Those three weeks will give you enough time to see what you think about your new normal, but it won't seem overly excessive. If, after 21 days, you want to keep the new habit, you've basically laid the tracks already.

5. Fill your opening with a worthwhile activity. Remember the purpose of this exercise. Stopping one action results in a life-enriching opportunity to add a new one. So, don't just remove an activity, fill that new time with something valuable and productive to the life you want to live.

Replace that removed habit with reading, exercising, solitude, writing, or art. Start a new hobby or pick up an old one. The choice is yours, just be sure to be intentional about picking something.

6. Don't forsake rest. Just to clarify here, I'm not talking about removing all aspects of rest or relaxation from your life so you can fill your life with even busier pursuits.

I'm talking about removing a low-value activity (however you define that) with a more healthy and productive habit in your life.

Rest and relaxation are still essential to intentional living.

7. Re-evaluate after 21 days. After the 21-day experiment has concluded, reassess. Are you happy with your new habit or daily structure?

After a month of intermittent fasting, I could recognize that I enjoyed my mornings (and rest of the day) more without breakfast. Who knew? Now, that doesn't mean I'll never return to it. B'ut it does mean, for today, I am happier and more grounded than I was before. And for that, I am thankful.

We always trade one activity for another—but we rarely actively and intentionally apply the principle to our lives.

You may have a different experience, but you can always return to the way life used to be.

I just want to encourage you today, to try something new in your life by intentionally removing something else. That is, after all, the very essence of minimalism.

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



Those who had more weak-tie interactions, independent of interacting with people they knew well, tended to be happier and more satisfied with their lives.

Weak ties offer stimulation and novelty, which is something you won't get as often from people you know well.

How to Keep Connecting With Strangers During the Pandemic

Fleeting, everyday social interactions matter for our well-being, research suggests

JILL SUTTIE

I love my husband and my son. But I never expected that they would be practically my only companions for seven months in a row. Since COVID-19 hit, we've been cooped up at home together, barely going out of the house except for groceries and exercise. I've not hugged another person besides them; I've barely even seen other people, except for a few close friends.

Though I appreciate that I'm not living alone, as others are during this pandemic, I'm still getting tired of the claustrophobic feeling of only interacting with the same two people day after day. I miss freedom of movement and the people I'd bump into—the woman who manages my office building, the counter-person at my favorite lunch place, and even just smiling strangers I once passed on the street. It feels the loss—and research suggests that it really is, for many of us.

Those small, passing social interactions we have with acquaintances or strangers—what social scientists call "weak social ties"—do make a difference in our well-being. We get a little hit of happiness when we connect with those folks, and it helps us to feel part of our community. Over time, some weak ties can become stronger and we gain friends. When the pool of strangers who can become friends shrinks, we can experience a feeling of stagnation.

"We have a need to belong, and I think we get more of that than we realize from all the other people in our lives—the people we see when we're out in the world," says researcher Gillian Sandstrom.

While the virus may have made it more difficult to connect with people outside our pods, there are still ways to build on and enjoy these connections. First, though, we must recognize their importance so that we are willing to take the extra measures to nurture those peripheral ties in a safe way.

The Role of Weak Ties in Our Lives

Researchers believe that weak ties serve many important functions. They stabilize our social networks, allowing us to be more resilient when our communities are stressed. They can expand our opportunities to find work, meet potential mates, attain difficult-to-find items, and more. They also help us to learn from people who have different viewpoints, at least if we can diversify the people with whom we connect.

Researcher Karen Fingerman notes that weak ties offer stimulation and novelty, which is something you won't get as often from people you know well. They can also be a source of comfort, as in when you go to the pharmacy and know the pharmacist or converse regularly with the clerk at your local market.

For older people, connecting with weak ties is associated with more mobility, says Fingerman, which may be one reason that having an expanded social network is tied

to better health, too.

One study found that the number of social roles people had above and beyond their intimate relationships, such as being an employee or a volunteer, contributed to better lung health. In another study, people had greater longevity if they had a larger number of weak social ties, independent of whether or not they had close, intimate ties.

In terms of everyday life, people are happier and feel more life satisfaction and a sense of belonging when they interact with people they don't know well. In one experiment, Sandstrom had people carry around two clickers for six days over a two-week period to keep track of when they interacted with either a weak tie or a close tie. Then she asked them about their mood, happiness, satisfaction with life, and sense of social support and belonging before and after.

She found that those who'd had more weak-tie interactions, independent of interacting with people they knew well, tended to be happier and more satisfied with their lives. She also showed that people's moods improved after interacting with a stranger, too, suggesting that extroverts aren't the only ones who benefit.

"If you have more weak-tie interactions on a given day than you usually do (compared to your personal average), you tend to be happier on that day, and you also have a greater sense of connection and belonging," says Sandstrom.

Unfortunately, people often undervalue weak ties, she says. In another study, people about to board a commuter train or bus (notoriously unsocial settings, where most people avoid eye contact) were asked whether or not they'd enjoy interacting with a stranger during their commute. Then, they were randomly assigned to either start up a conversation, sit quietly, or do "whatever they normally do" while commuting. Those who interacted with a stranger were happier, enjoyed their commute more, had more energy, and had no drop in their productivity—whether they expected to enjoy it or not.

Sandstrom thinks that people tend to forget how good it makes them feel when they talk to strangers. They worry conversations could prove awkward or embarrassing ... especially if there are long silences. Or, she says, some people are concerned that talking with a stranger will lead to more closeness than they really want.

But in normal times, these concerns shouldn't stop people from reaching out, she says.

"There've been so many studies where I've had people have a conversation with a stranger and they always go better than people think they will," she says. "All the things they worried about didn't actually happen."

How to Maintain Loose Ties During a Pandemic

Of course, now that COVID-19 has hit,

we can't just expect people to go out and interact with strangers in the same way. In fact, Greater Good created a video to encourage small talk with strangers as a happiness practice (below), but decided to hold off on releasing it as a standalone video until after it's safer to take public transit and talk to random strangers.

However, even if opportunities for real-life interactions have become more limited, there is evidence that weak ties can be facilitated online. Recently, Sandstrom has been studying online meetups with strangers and finding that participants are reacting pretty much the same way as they did pre-COVID-19. After talking to a stranger online, people feel less lonely, more trusting in others, and better about the world.

"It was a really lovely thing to be working on during COVID and facilitate some positive conversations between people," she says.

People interested in connecting online during COVID-19 can sign up for Quarantine Chat, an app that connects you with a stranger anywhere in the world. It's free, and it doesn't allow you to "swipe left or right"; so, it really is about conversing with random people just for the pure pleasure that brings.

Fingerman recommends a program called Big and Mini, which matches younger adults and older people who want to have companionship with someone of another generation. One of the organization's goals is to help stave off loneliness and build community across generations—something that research suggests is good for our well-being.

But, if programs like these don't interest you, there are other ways to augment weak ties. Sandstrom notes that neighborhood WhatsApp groups have been gaining in popularity, allowing people to check in with neighbors and share information or company. There are multiple gaming sites that allow people to play with people they don't know. And there are always online workshops or classes that can provide some

socialization between strangers. Many real-life communities, like parenting groups or choirs, moved to online meetups after COVID-19.

While interactions like these can help stave off loneliness, build social trust, and bring little doses of happiness, that doesn't mean we can only connect with our weak ties online, says Sandstrom. Now that many of us have some more freedom of movement, we can connect with people we don't know well while wearing masks and keeping a safe distance (at least six feet apart, according to most recommendations)—maybe sharing small talk in line at the grocery store or nodding as we pass people on the street. It just takes looking up from our devices—and then making an effort. Fortunately, she adds, it's easier than ever to strike up conversations with strangers.

"We're all going through something together, something we have in common," she says. "With so much uncertainty around the pandemic, we all want to know how people are doing, how they're coping, and if they have any good ideas around handling the challenges."

Sandstrom also recommends practicing more gratitude as a way of building social capital. She recounts a story of her mother running out from her house, mask on, to thank her garbage collector for picking up the trash before he drove past. Showing appreciation for people in our community and not taking them for granted builds goodwill and a sense of benevolence, says Sandstrom, and we could all use more of that.

"Maybe this is an opportunity to think about how those people matter more and provide more meaning in our lives than we realized," she says.

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.



For older people, connecting with weak ties is associated with more mobility.



MADE TO MOVE

Brain Benefits of Yoga Comparable to Aerobic Exercise

An ancient practice for body and spirit also comes with neurological gains among older adults

GREENMEDINFO

Think you need to pound the pavement in order to obtain the benefits of exercise? Studies show yoga may be just as good as aerobics when it comes to maintaining a healthy brain. A research article published in the journal *Brain Plasticity* has revealed that regular yoga practice may impart the same functional benefits to your brain as aerobic exercise. The review, led by University of Illinois professor Neha Gothe, in conjunction with Wayne State University professor Jessica Damoiseaux, examined the findings of 11 prior studies examining the effects of yoga practice on the structures, function, and cerebral blood flow of the brain.

The health benefits of exercise continue to be validated by science. Now the virtues of yoga, specifically for the brain, have begun to draw interest from neuroscientists. With periods of focused concentration on the breath and incorporation of meditative practice, yoga engages the mind in ways that other physical fitness activities don't. Gothe and Damoiseaux sought to understand the effects yoga has on the brain, specifically through assessments done with brain scans performed with MRI, fMRI, and SPECT devices.

Is Yoga as Beneficial as Aerobic Exercise?

There is considerable debate as to whether yoga should be classified as an aerobic or anaerobic form of exercise. Anaerobic, meaning without air, pertains to exercise conducted in short, intense bursts, such as weight lifting and stretching. Yoga is generally not considered an aerobic activity, but this can vary depending on the style and intensity of an individual's practice.

Previous studies on yoga have produced results indicating that yoga may impart similar benefits to the body as aerobic exercise. Gothe's team set out to understand yoga's structural and functional effects on the brain.

The styles of yoga practiced in the studies were Hatha yoga, Kundalini yoga, and combined methodolo-

gies. All forms of yoga studied integrated physical postures, breath control exercises, and meditation.

Of the studies reviewed, five involved individuals who were new to yoga and engaged in one or more yoga sessions per week for a period of 10 to 24 weeks. Functional MRIs were done on the brain prior to beginning yoga practice and at the end of the study period, with comparisons of the "before yoga" brain and the "after yoga" brain.

Six studies engaged participants with a regular yoga practice, defined as three or more years of practicing yoga for at least 45 minutes per session, three to four times per week. Their brain health was compared against individuals who were "yoga naïve," having no yoga or meditation experience, to detect cross-sectional differences between the groups.

None of these cross-sectional studies offered a standardized definition or specific criterion to define a yoga practitioner. Per the review, "[A] yoga practitioner was defined as an individual who had consistently practiced yoga for at least 3 years on a weekly basis." Each of these studies used brain-imaging techniques such as MRI, functional MRI, or single-photon emission computerized tomography, and all were conducted on older adult populations, with five of the studies having a mean age of greater than 65 years for the subjects.

Yoga: A Brain-Healthy Alternative to Intense Aerobic Exercise

After analysis was complete, researchers determined that, collectively, the studies demonstrated a positive effect of yoga practice on the structure and/or function of the hippocampus, amygdala, prefrontal cortex, cingulate cortex, and brain networks, including the default mode network (DMN).

Specific study findings include greater cortical thickness among female adults over the age of 60 with eight or more years of yoga experience compared to a non-practitioner control group. Additional findings showed that the volume of the left hippocampus was

“The practice of yoga helps improve emotional regulation to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, and that seems to improve brain functioning.”

Neha Gothe, University of Illinois professor

RUSLAN INZAU/SHUTTERSTOCK



Yoga may mitigate age-related and neurodegenerative decline, according to a review of related studies.

significantly greater among yoga practitioners compared to age- and sex-matched controls with similar "non-yoga" physical activity and fitness levels.

The brain changes observed in what was collectively called "the yoga group" are associated with better cognitive test scores and improved emotional regulation. While these types of neurological functions are generally associated with age-related decline, this study suggests that yoga may reverse this effect in older female subjects.

According to Gothe, behavioral mind-body interventions such as yoga may be linked to these beneficial anatomical changes in the brain. In a brief released by the News Bureau at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Gothe stated: "Many studies looking at the brain effects of aerobic exercise have shown a similar increase in hippocampus size over time. Yoga is not aerobic in nature, so there must be other mechanisms leading to these brain changes."

While Gothe said we have not identified what those mechanisms are, she believes that the key to yoga's positive effects on the brain lies in enhanced emotional regulation. "The practice of yoga helps improve emotional regulation to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, and that seems to improve brain functioning."

This research offers promising early evidence that behavioral interventions such as yoga may hold promise to help mitigate age-related and neurodegenerative decline. Gothe and Damoiseaux have called for further research involving larger, longer studies with more direct measurement of changes in the brain and cognitive performance, as well as standardized approaches that allow for better comparison against other forms of exercise.

Yoga Benefits Your Body and Mind

Yoga is an ancient science of mind-body integration that connects you with your own deeper truths. It also draws out your innate wellness by tempering the body and calming

the mind. While yoga's age-defying effects have been confirmed by science, this may not be the practice's most profound health benefit.

Yoga's stress-relieving ability may be its most popular virtue, making it an ideal form of exercise for stress-junkies and anyone with a hectic lifestyle. Yoga can also be called upon during uniquely challenging times, such as during menopause or peri-menopause, or when you want to devote additional focus to your mental wellness.

With periods of focused concentration on the breath and incorporation of meditative practice, yoga engages the mind in ways that other physical fitness activities don't.

Kundalini yoga, a practice that works directly on the central nervous system, has shown promise for treating veterans with PTSD and offers a hopeful natural alternative to often-risky pharmaceutical interventions.

To learn more about how yoga can benefit your body and mind, check out more than 300 abstracts on the GreenMedInfo.com yoga research database about this ancient therapeutic intervention.

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The Aching Blue: Trauma, Stress, and Invisible Wounds Among Those in Law Enforcement

LEV RADIN/SHUTTERSTOCK



▲ The trauma that inevitably comes from being a police officer can sometimes require outside help that too many officers hesitate to get.

Routine exposure to death, injury, and serious trauma can take a toll on first responders who don't get the help they need

ARASH JAVANBAKHT

Steve has been a police officer for 24 years. He's also been a SWAT team member for years. Those years have come with traumatic experiences. In our work together on these traumas, he told me that in a given day a police officer might have to deal with 2 to 3 overdoses and do CPR.

He told me in one session: "What you see is someone lying on the ground, with things coming out of their mouth. Imagine trying to help them while their family is screaming and begging you to do it 'quicker, quicker.' Sometimes you cannot bring them back, and you witness families mourning someone they love. On the same day you come across a traffic stop where teenagers are actively shooting heroin into their arms, and you have to deal with an overdose situation again."

"The most traumatic are the ones [when] you cannot save people." Steve remembered a train accident where he noticed the driver's "complete brain" on the back seat of the car. A similar experience happened the next day at a suicide scene where someone had shot himself in the head.

I am a trauma expert who works with traumatized civilians, victims of torture and human trafficking, refugees, and first responders. These days are tough for our nation, including for those who work in law enforcement, because of the recent terrible incidents of police shooting, and contentious politicization of law enforcement.

The nation is expressing intolerance for unjustifiable brutality, racism, and suffering caused by some in law enforcement. At the same time, I hope to also shed light on the tough experiences that cops and other first responders experience. I believe empathy is the key to mutual understanding.

Stress and Trauma Among First Responders

Steve's stories echo those I have heard from other law enforcement officers, emergency medical staff, and firefighters. They are regularly exposed to serious injury, death, immediate threat to themselves, their colleagues and civilians, and very stressful decision-making situations. While people may have heard more about trauma in veterans, they may be less aware of first re-

sponder trauma. Others might think post-traumatic stress disorder happens only to those who were directly traumatized.

However, PTSD also happens in those who witness trauma, like exposure to violent crimes or serious accidents, or their aftermath. These events deeply affect the day-to-day lives of first responders, including police officers. In one study published in 2013, about 80 percent of officers reported seeing dead bodies or severely assaulted victims in the past year.

The trauma can become cumulative for those in this line of work, or those who are repeatedly exposed to trauma for other reasons. Such cumulative trauma among first responders—and groups like veterans, refugees, and victims of human trafficking—makes the impact worse, and may impede recovery.

PTSD is only one consequence of trauma exposure, which switches the brain to fight-or-flight mode with quick survival-related decision-making. The brain stays on alert, trying to prevent the recurrence of trauma. Those with PTSD experience nightmares, flashbacks, intrusive memories, anger, insomnia, avoidance of any reminder of the trauma, social withdrawal, and other symptoms. Approximately 15 percent of police officers in the United States and globally experience symptoms of PTSD. Numbers can be much higher based on exposure to natural disasters or tragedies like 9/11.

Police officers show both high levels of PTSD and high levels of depression, anxiety, and suicide. More police officers and firefighters die by suicide than in the line of duty, and unfortunately, the number of suicide deaths among police officers seems to be rising. While many may not meet all the criteria for PTSD, they still suffer from symptoms such as insomnia, nightmares, and isolation.

The Challenges and Solutions

There are challenges specific to addressing trauma among police and first responders, such as the stigma, and the "tough men/women" mentality. By nature, these jobs require authority and control, and some

police officers, or their superiors, see vulnerability or seeking help as a weakness.

The truth, however, is that all humans are vulnerable. We are not made to have such horrific experiences on a regular basis. Based on our unique biology and the severity and repetition of trauma, many of us will feel an impact; this is just how the human body and brain react to trauma and stress.

Part of the blame is on those of us in medical and mental health fields because we may sometimes create a perception that a condition such as PTSD is a label the person has to live with forever. Denial is often a response to believing the illness is one's new identity.

Steve once told me that what he found most empowering in our first visit was when I said "We can fix this." I was being honest with him; we can help a lot. One need not forever suffer the impact of trauma and the toll it takes on mental health, the body (higher levels of obesity, chronic pain and fatigue, and cardiovascular disease), career, and family life.

PTSD is only one consequence of trauma exposure, which switches the brain to fight-or-flight mode with quick survival-related decision-making.

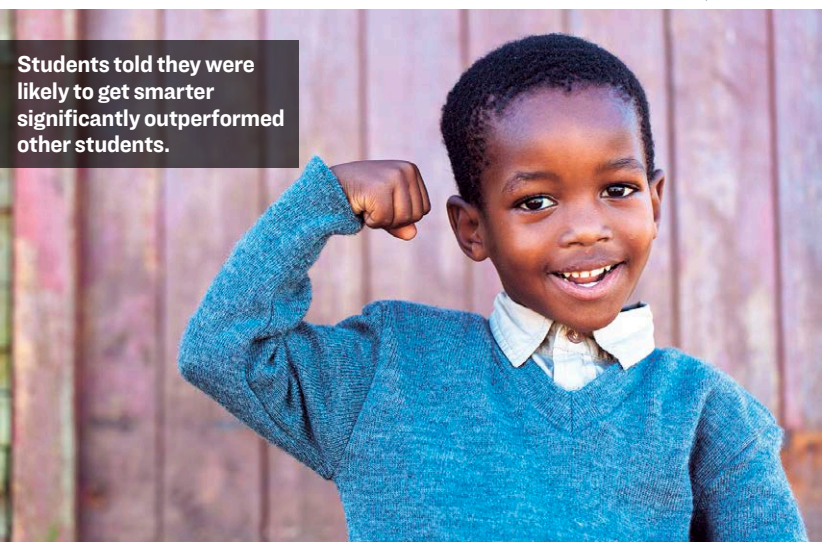
We have effective interventions for trauma and stress. Psychotherapy helps with learning adaptive ways of coping with stress, freeing memories from intense negative emotions, and redefining the meaning of the traumatic experience. Medications can help with insomnia, nightmares, and flashbacks, and reduce the intensity of negative emotions, allowing the use of the rational brain in stressful situations.

Steve and I worked together for some time. Steve is now enjoying work and family life again, and we just catch up once in a while. He now leads a peer-to-peer team that provides support and education to other officers after critical incidents, and provides mental health referrals when needed.

If you are a first responder reading this and feel the weight of your experiences, or are losing sleep to nightmares, please reach out. Call your doctor, employee assistance program, or a mental health expert. You and your family deserve to be happy. We can fix this.

Arash Javanbakht is an associate professor of psychiatry at Wayne State University in Detroit. This article was originally published on *The Conversation*.

NOLTE LOURENS/SHUTTERSTOCK



Students told they were likely to get smarter significantly outperformed other students.

memory and overall smarts. There is evidence of that from a study researchers at Georgetown University Medical Center published in *The Journal of Neuroscience* in 2012. It concluded exercise increases brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), which promotes the growth and formation of new neurons.

That link has been researched repeatedly since.

A more recent review study published in *Ageing Research*

Reviews in 2018 suggested that "the proposed link between BDNF, exercise and cognition may have critical therapeutic implications for the prevention and amelioration of memory loss and cognitive impairment in Alzheimer's disease and associated dementias."

4. Drink Coffee or Tea

Daily caffeine consumption may also boost focus and improve long-term memory. This

may work by caffeine's effect on stimulating and releasing dopamine and norepinephrine while blocking adenosine.

Just be sure to limit consumption in the afternoon and evening. That's when you'll want the opposite effects. Otherwise, you could have trouble sleeping, which can lead to other cognitive issues and undermine all your efforts to get smarter.

And no matter your age, there are things you can do to keep your brain sharp or make yourself smarter. These four daily habits can help, and also help you remember more and keep your brain healthy into the future.

Mohan Garikiparathi holds a degree in medicine from Osmania University (University of Health Sciences). He practiced clinical medicine for over a decade. During a three-year communications program in Germany, he developed an interest in German medicine (homeopathy) and other alternative systems of medicine. This article was originally published on *Bel Marra Health*.

The Things You Can Do Every Day to Make Yourself Smarter

MOHAN GARIKIPARATHI

Can you improve your memory and make yourself smarter? It's very likely. Your IQ is not static, and incorporating a few routines into your day might be able to improve memory, cognitive function, and intelligence.

Brain games might be fun, but they are unlikely to do a lot to make you smarter or keep you ticking. Instead, try these things to help slow down brain aging.

1. Believe You Can Get Smarter

It appears that believing you can get smarter is important in actually getting smarter. That's common sense, perhaps, but it is affirmed by research as well. One longitudinal study and intervention published in the journal *Child Development* in 2007 showed that students told they were likely to get smarter significantly outperformed the control group of students who did not receive this same message.

Just how much did self-belief work? On tested material, the group believing they could get smarter retained 85 percent of what they

learned. The control group of students recalled only 54 percent of tested material.

It's very likely that the brain takes cues from beliefs, so they work cooperatively.

2. Socialize

It's difficult to do these days, but talking to friends and family may help with memory. Talking on the phone or using video chats can provide some very important communication.

One study published in *American Journal of Public Health* in 2008 followed participants from 1998 to 2004 and found that people who had higher levels of social interaction scored higher on memory retention tests taken at two-year intervals. Interestingly, what you're talking about doesn't matter—just that you're engaging in a back and forth dialogue with others.

This cognitive benefit is unlikely to occur with social media use. Instead, look to real socialization involving two-way communication.

3. Exercise

Daily exercise may also help boost

FOOD AS MEDICINE

How to Treat Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) With Diet

Food plays a definitive role in the amount of glycotoxins our body must try to nullify

Spinach, arugula, or red leaf lettuce may provide twice the antioxidants as butterhead lettuce.



STOLYEVYCH YULIYA/SHUTTERSTOCK

MICHAEL GREGER

One reason fruits and vegetables are so good for us is that they contain antioxidant compounds that combat the oxidant free radicals linked to aging and disease. But all plants are not equal, in this healthy regard, and some have far more antioxidant content. When making a salad, for example, spinach, arugula, or red leaf lettuce may provide twice the antioxidants as butterhead lettuce. Choosing purple cabbage over green, or red onions over white can also boost the salad's antioxidant power.

Fresh herbs are so powerful that even a small amount may double or even quadruple the antioxidant power of the entire meal. For instance, the total antioxidants in a simple salad of lettuce and tomato jump up by adding just a tablespoon of lemon balm leaves or half a tablespoon of oregano or mint. Adding marjoram, thyme, or sage not only adds great flavor to the salad, but effectively quadruples the antioxidant content at the same time, and adding a little fresh garlic or ginger to the dressing ups the antioxidant power even more.

Some herbs are so antioxidant-rich that researchers decided to see if they might be able to reduce the DNA-damaging effects of radiation. Radioactive iodine is sometimes given to people with overactive thyroid glands or thyroid cancer to

destroy part of the gland or take care of any remaining tumor cells after surgery. For days after the isotope injection, patients become so radioactive they are advised not to kiss or sleep close to anyone, including their pets. If they breathe on a phone, they're advised to wipe it "carefully" or cover it "with an easily removed plastic bag." Other recommendations include "avoid[ing] splatter of radioactive urine," not going near your kids, and basically just staying away from others as much as possible.

The treatment can be very effective, but all that radiation exposure appears to increase the risk of developing new cancers later on, according to a 2007 study published in the journal *Cancer Cytopathology*.

In order to prevent the DNA damage associated with this treatment, researchers at Tabriz University of Medical Sciences in Iran tested the ability of oregano to protect chromosomes of human blood cells in vitro from exposure to radioactive iodine. In vitro means the study used cells, or biological molecules outside their normal biological context. Think petri dishes.

At baseline, about 1 in 100 of our blood cells show evidence of chromosomal damage. If radioactive iodine is added, that jumps to about 1 in 8. What happens if, in addition to the radiation, increasing amounts of oregano extract are added? Chromosome damage is reduced by as

PCOS affects up to 1 in 8 young women and is characterized by excessive male hormones, resulting in excess body or facial hair, menstrual irregularities, and cysts in one's ovaries that show up on ultrasounds.

much as 70 percent, found the researchers. They concluded that oregano extract significantly protects against DNA damage induced by the radioactive iodine in white blood cells.

This was all done outside the body, though, which the researchers justified by saying it wouldn't be particularly ethical to irradiate people for experimental research. True, but millions of people have been irradiated for treatment, and researchers could have studied them or, at the very least, they could have just had people eat the oregano and then irradiate their blood in vitro so the blood samples had an accurate amount of oregano compounds that actually make it into the bloodstream from eating.

Other in vitro studies on oregano are similarly unsatisfying. In a comparison of the effects of various spice extracts, including bay leaves, fennel, lavender, oregano, paprika, parsley, rosemary, and thyme, oregano beat out all but bay leaves in its ability to suppress cervical cancer cell growth in vitro while leaving normal cells alone. But people tend to use oregano orally—that is, they typically eat it—so the relevance of these results are not clear.

Similarly, marjoram, an herb closely related to oregano, can suppress the growth of individual breast cancer cells in a petri dish, according to a 2013 study published in *PLOS One*. That same cancer suppression was seen in human breast cancer

tumors grown in chicken eggs (which is something I've never seen before).

Are there any clinical trials on oregano-family herbs on actual people? The only such clinical, randomized, control study I could find was a study on how marjoram tea affects the hormonal profile of women with polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS). The most common cause of female fertility problems, PCOS affects up to 1 in 8 young women and is characterized by excessive male hormones, resulting in excess body or facial hair, menstrual irregularities, and cysts in one's ovaries that show up on ultrasounds.

Evidently, traditional medicine practitioners reported marjoram tea was beneficial for PCOS, but it had never previously been put to the test. Drinking two daily cups of marjoram tea versus a placebo tea for one month did seem to beneficially affect the subjects' hormonal profiles, according to a 2015 study by researchers at the University of Jordan. This seems to offer credence to the claims of traditional medicine practitioners. However, the study didn't last long enough to confirm that actual symptoms improved as well, which is really what we care about.

Is there anything that's been shown to help? Well, reducing one's intake of dietary glycotoxins may help prevent and treat the disease, according to researchers at the University of Athens. That finding was echoed in a 2015 review

published in *Advances in Nutrition*. Glycotoxins are created when we smoke or cook food at high temperatures. Animal fats are particularly prone to becoming glycotoxins, also known as advanced glycation end products (AGEs), when they are cooked. And it turns out, these glycation end products are linked to well-known contributors to disease.

That 2015 review noted the connection: "Over the past two decades there has been increasing evidence supporting an important contribution from food-derived advanced glycation end products (AGEs) ... [to] increased oxidative stress and inflammation, processes that play a major role in the causation of chronic diseases."

In other words, the researchers linked these glycotoxins to oxidative stress and inflammation, which are major contributors to disease, including polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), according to researchers in Greece.

Women with PCOS tend to have nearly twice the circulating AGE levels in their bloodstream. PCOS may be the most common hormonal abnormality among young women in the United States and is a common cause of infertility, menstrual dysfunction, and excess facial and body hair.

The prevalence of obesity is also higher in women with PCOS. Since the highest AGE levels are found in broiled, grilled, fried, and roasted foods of "mostly animal origin," it is possible that this causal chain starts with a bad diet. For instance, eating lots of fried chicken leads to obesity, which in turn contributes to PCOS. But it is diet, rather than obesity, that appears more strongly linked to PCOS. That's because researchers found the same association between high AGE levels and PCOS in lean women as well, according to a 2008 study published in *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism*.

"The role of AGEs as inflammatory and oxidant mediators, may be linked with the metabolic and reproductive abnormalities of the syndrome," the study noted.

In other words, even though obesity raises baseline inflammation, which contributes to many diseases, it is the AGEs present in food that appear to be the greater cause of PCOS. Further, the buildup of AGE inside polycystic ovaries themselves suggests the potential role AGEs have to contribute to the actual disease process, beyond just some of its consequences.

RAGE—the Receptor in the body for Advanced Glycation End products—is highly expressed in ovarian tissues. This may make ovaries particularly sensitive to the effect of AGEs and thereby contribute to the cause of PCOS and infertility.

Does this mean we have to cut down on AGE-rich foods, such as meat, cheese, and eggs? Or can we just come up with

drugs that block AGE absorption? We know AGEs have been implicated in the development of many chronic diseases. Specifically, food-derived AGEs play an important role because diet is a major source of these pro-inflammatory AGEs.

We know cutting down on these dietary glycotoxins reduces the inflammatory response, but people often prefer fried chicken to stewed chicken. So why not just take an AGE-absorption blocking drug every time you eat KFC to reduce the absorption of these toxins? What's more, AST-120, a drug typically given to patients with chronic kidney disease, actually lowers AGE blood levels. This oral absorbent drug is just a preparation of activated charcoal, like what's used for drug overdoses and when people are poisoned. It does come with side effects, including constipation, appetite loss, nausea, and vomiting.

Fresh herbs are so powerful that even a small amount may double or even quadruple the antioxidant power of the entire meal.

But taking a drug to combat toxic substances in our food doesn't seem entirely rational. Especially since some foods contribute to a wide range of diseases, while others contain phytonutrients that heal and nourish us.

The other way to reduce absorption of AGEs, largely through diet, is the long-term and fundamental solution. It's simple, safe, and feasible. And since the foods that are high in AGEs are linked to many other disease profiles, there are clearly problems with eating high volumes of certain foods.

Diet isn't the only or even the worst source of AGEs for some people. For some, the first step is to stop smoking. The glycotoxins in cigarette smoke are also believed to contribute to increased heart disease and cancer in smokers. After smoking, the main thing is to decrease your intake of high-AGE foods, and increase your intake of foods that may help pull AGEs out of your system, like mushrooms. And eat foods high in antioxidants, like berries, herbs, and spices.

We can easily eat less AGEs by simply changing the method of cooking from a high dry heat to a low heat with high humidity. In other words, boil instead of broil, stew instead of sear, and steam rather than fry.

What we eat, however, may still be more important than how we cook it. The

amounts of AGEs vary widely in different foods. For instance, boiled chicken contains less than half the glycotoxins of roasted chicken, but even deep-fried potatoes have less than boiled meat. We can also eat foods raw, which doesn't work as well as for blood pudding, but raw nuts and nut butter may contain about 30 times less glycotoxins than roasted, and we can avoid high-AGE processed foods, like refined carbs mixed with sugars and salts.

Why does it matter? Because study after study has shown that switching to a low-AGE diet can lower inflammation within our bodies. Inflammation is an immune response gone awry and it contributes to virtually every disease. Even just a single meal high in AGEs can profoundly impair our arterial function within just two hours of consumption, according to a randomized controlled trial conducted in 2007 by researchers in Germany.

Do we have evidence that reducing AGE intake actually helps with PCOS? Yes. Within just two months, researchers at the University of Athens found differences from subjects' baseline diets switched to a high-AGE diet and then to a low-AGE diet, with parallel changes in insulin sensitivity, oxidative stress, and hormonal status. The take-home message? Those with PCOS may want to try a low-AGE diet, which, according to the above study, meant restricting meat to once a week and eating it only boiled, poached, stewed, or steamed, as well as cutting out fast-food-type fare and soda.

What if instead of eating steamed chicken, we ate no meat at all? Rather than measuring blood levels, which vary with each meal, we can measure the level of glycotoxins stuck in our body tissues over time with a high-tech device that measures the amount of light our skin gives off because AGEs are fluorescent. And, not surprisingly, this turns out to be a strong predictor of overall mortality, note researchers in a 2015 study published in the *British Journal of Nutrition*.

The "one factor that was consistently associated with reduced [skin fluorescence]: a vegetarian diet." This "suggests that a vegetarian diet may reduce exposure to preformed dietary AGE ... potentially reducing [tissue AGE]."

Michael Greger, M.D., FACLM, is a physician, New York Times bestselling author, and internationally recognized professional speaker on a number of important public health issues. He has lectured at the Conference on World Affairs, the National Institutes of Health, and the International Bird Flu Summit, testified before Congress, appeared on "The Dr. Oz Show" and "The Colbert Report," and was invited as an expert witness in defense of Oprah Winfrey at the infamous "meat defamation" trial. This article was originally published on NutritionFacts.org

Peanut Allergy Anaphylaxis Spikes in Kids on Halloween

Halloween and Easter present unique risks to children with known and unknown food allergies

SANDRA SCIANGULA

Peanut and tree nut anaphylaxis in children spikes at Halloween and Easter, research on holidays and allergies finds.

Most were previously unknown allergies, according to the Canadian study, which compares Halloween, Easter, Christmas, Diwali, Chinese New Year, and Eid al-Adha.

"Identifying certain times associated with an increased risk of anaphylaxis—a serious and life-threatening allergic reaction—could help to raise community awareness, support, and vigilance," write Melanie Leung, a fourth-year medical student at McGill University, Moshe Ben-Shoshan, a pediatric allergist and immunologist at the Montreal Children's Hospital of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC), and coauthors.

"This information would identify the best timing for public awareness campaigns to prevent allergic reactions."

The study looked at 1,390 patients visiting participating pediatric emergency departments between 2011 and 2020 in four Cana-



CONNOR BAKER/UNSPLASH

Halloween is a uniquely dangerous time for children with allergies, and a good time to raise allergy awareness, say researchers.

dian provinces: British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, and Newfoundland and Labrador. The median age of patients was 5.4 years and 62 percent were boys.

For peanut-triggered anaphylaxis, there was an 85 percent increase in daily average cases during Halloween and a 60 percent increase during Easter compared with the rest of the year. For anaphylaxis triggered by unknown nuts, there was a 70

percent increase during Halloween and Easter compared with the rest of the year.

However, the researchers did not find an increase at Christmas, Diwali, Chinese New Year, or Eid al-Adha.

"The difference in the anaphylaxis incidence among holidays may have been due to the social setting in which each holiday takes place," Leung said. "At Halloween and Easter, children often receive candies and other

treats from people who may be unaware of their allergies. The absence of such an association at Christmas may be because Christmas is a more intimate celebration among family members and close friends, who are more vigilant regarding allergen exposure."

Canadian labeling may also be a factor, as individual packages of one-bite candies and snacks, which are exempt from labeling requirements listing ingredients, are popular at Halloween and Easter.

Identifying certain times associated with an increased risk of anaphylaxis—could help to raise community awareness, support, and vigilance.

Melanie Leung, a fourth-year medical student at McGill University

"Our findings suggest that educational tools to increase vigilance regarding the presence of potential allergens are required among children with food allergies, their families, and lay people interacting with children who have food allergies. Newer strategies targeting intervals associated with high anaphylaxis risk are required," Ben-Shoshan said.

The findings appear in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. A grant from AllerGen Canada supported the work.

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Antipsychotics for Depression May Come With Higher Death Risk

Researchers find antipsychotics often used even though safer antidepressants not prescribed long enough to work

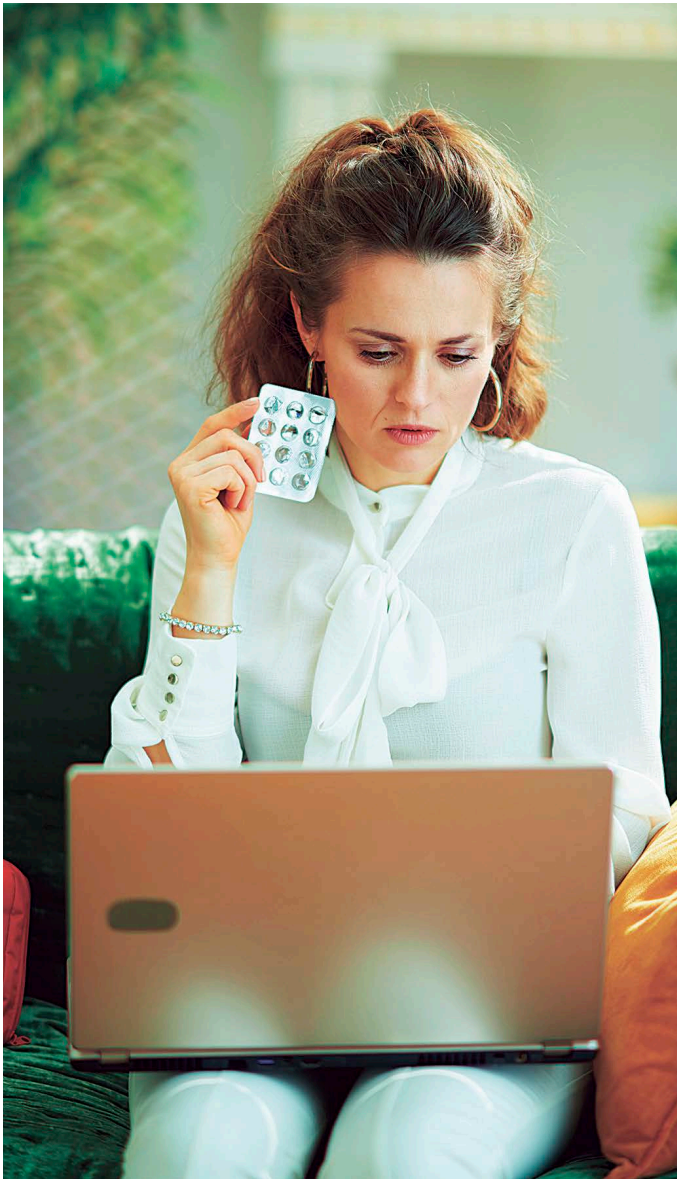
PATTI VERBANAS

In a new study, adults with depression who added newer antipsychotic medications to their treatment had an increased mortality risk compared to a control group that added a second antidepressant.

Physicians managing adults with depression should be aware of this potential for increased mortality, the study finds.

Although antidepressants are the first-line pharmacological treatment for depression, many people don't respond to the first course of treatment. Subsequent treatment options include switching to another antidepressant followed by various augmentation strategies, including prescribing a second antidepressant and newer antipsychotics, such as aripiprazole, quetiapine, and olanzapine.

"Antipsychotics have well-recognized and often serious adverse effects, including a more than 50 percent increased mortality risk in older adults



ALLIANCE IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK

Researchers found a 45 percent relative increase in mortality risk for those initiating a newer antipsychotic.

with dementia," said lead author Tobias Gerhard, an associate professor at Rutgers University's Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy.

Antipsychotics have well-recognized and often serious adverse effects, including a more than 50 percent increased mortality risk in older adults with dementia.

Tobias Gerhard, lead author, associate professor at Rutgers University's Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy

"It had been previously unknown whether this mortality risk applies to nonelderly adults using newer antipsychotics as augmentation treatment

for depression. The clinical trials that led to the approval of various newer antipsychotics for depression were just too small and too short to be informative for this question."

For the new study in *PLOS ONE*, researchers looked at data of 39,582 Medicaid beneficiaries ages 25 to 64 from 2001 to 2010, linked to the National Death Index.

After a period of treatment with a single antidepressant, study patients received prescriptions for a newer antipsychotic or a second antidepressant. The researchers found a 45 percent relative increase in mortality risk for those initiating a newer antipsychotic, which for the study cohort translated to one additional death for every 265 people taking the antipsychotic for one year.

"Our results require replication, ideally with a publicly financed pragmatic randomized controlled trial. However, in the meantime, our study suggests that physicians should consider prescribing antipsychotics to

adults with depression carefully, as the potential health risks are substantial and the benefits are quite modest and controversially debated," Gerhard said.

"Of particular relevance for our results is a finding from our previous work. It is well-known that most antidepressants take about four to six weeks to be fully effective. However, contrary to the drug label and treatment guidelines, many patients in the United States initiate antipsychotic treatment for depression without having completed an adequate prior trial with a single antidepressant," Gerhard said.

"Our results emphasize the importance of considering newer antipsychotics only after non-response to less risky, evidence-based treatment options has been established."

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DEBORAH MITCHELL

Changes in sleep patterns occur as we get older, with the most common ones being more trouble staying asleep and a harder time falling asleep than during younger decades. These sleep challenges, says the National Sleep Foundation, are part of the normal aging process. Now researchers say they may have a solution to these problems, and it may even boost your memory as well: pink noise.

You have probably heard of white noise, which is thought of as comforting sounds that help us block out the surrounding environment, like a fan humming away just loud enough that we don't really hear doors closing or a dog barking outside. In more technical terms, white noise is a random signal that has an equal intensity at different frequencies. White noise is like white light, which contains all visible light at an equal intensity. Fracture that light, and you get a rainbow.

Sound engineer Stéphane Pigeon explains white noise as "hundreds of musicians playing every single note you can hear at

once at the same volume."

What Is Pink Noise?
Pink noise is a soothing, gentle sound composed of octaves possessing equal energy. In white noise, the power of each frequency is constant, but in pink noise, as frequencies get higher, the difference in power of the associated sounds becomes smaller. The effect is that higher-pitched sounds are softer.

This is essentially the nature of background noise we are used to hearing every day. High-pitched sound waves don't carry as far and are more easily absorbed by whatever they land against, while lower-pitched sounds can penetrate through and carry further. This is why you can hear the bass of a passing car's stereo more easily than the treble. Pink noise emulates the normal pattern of sounds in our environment.

It turns out, this aspect of pink noise has benefits.

Researchers at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, discovered that if they synced pink noise to the brain waves of older men and women while they slept, the subjects experienced better quality of deep sleep as well

as an improvement in memory.

"During sleep, a real-time algorithm using an adaptive phase-locked loop modeled the phase of endogenous slow waves in mid-line frontopolar electroencephalographic recordings," wrote the researchers, explaining how they synced the noise to the participants' brainwaves. The study was published in *The Frontiers of Neuroscience* in 2017.

Essentially, they used a machine to monitor brain waves and adjusted the sound to match.

It's been shown in numerous studies over the years that sleep is critical for converting short-term memories into long-term memories. The type of sleep necessary for this conversion is deep sleep, aka slow-wave sleep or non-dream-state sleep, which is part of the non-rapid eye movement sleep cycle. As we get older, the quality of deep sleep declines, which in turn can have a significant impact on memory as well as sleep quality.

Deep sleep is also important because it's the stage when the body's cells increase production, and there's a reduction in the breakdown of proteins. Thus this is a time of tissue repair, giv-

ing meaning to the term "beauty sleep." Other benefits of deep sleep are a slowing of activity in the areas of the brain involved with emotions, social engagement, and decision-making, which suggests that deep sleep helps people maintain an emotional balance.

How Scientists Used Pink Noise
Previous studies in young adults found a link between acoustic (sound) stimulation of deep sleep brain activity and an improvement in memory. These findings prompted Dr. Phyllis Zee, professor of neurology at the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern, and her colleagues to try acoustic stimulation in a group of older adults to see how it affected sleep and memory.

The study group consisted of 13 men and women ages 60 to 84 who each were subjected to one night of acoustic stimulation (involving pink noise synced to the participants' brain waves) and one night of sham (placebo) stimulation. Each of these sessions were conducted one week apart. Before and after each of the sessions, the participants completed two memory recall tests.

The researchers found that:

- Memory recall was three times better after acoustic stimulation with pink noise than it was with the placebo stimulation.
- The improvement in memory correlated with a boost in the quality of deep sleep and therefore an improvement in sleep quality.

Bottom Line
Dr. Zee stated that the use of acoustic stimulation with pink noise "is an innovative, simple, and safe non-medication approach that may help improve brain health." Use of pink noise could be a "potential tool for enhancing memory in older populations and attenuating normal age-related memory decline." The next step is to use this approach over a longer time period and in in-home environments.

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

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