

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# MIND &

# BODY

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**We, as humans, like to have the idea that we are in control of our minds and that stress isn't a big deal, but it's simply not true.**

*Dr. Jennifer Love, a California-based psychiatrist and co-author of an upcoming book on how to heal from chronic stress.*



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## Pandemic Stress Takes Its Toll

Doctors and dentists report people are suffering more sleepless nights, hair loss, and cracked teeth

Even our most familiar and meaningful comforts have changed in unsettling ways.



AL BELLO/GETTY IMAGES

### ANERI PATTANI

**I**n late March, shortly after New York state closed nonessential businesses and asked people to stay home, Ashley Laderer began waking each morning with a throbbing headache.

"The pressure was so intense it felt like my head was going to explode," recalled the 27-year-old freelance writer from Long Island.

She tried spending less time on the computer and taking over-the-counter pain medication, but the pounding kept breaking through—a constant drumbeat to accompany her equally incessant worries about COVID-19.

"Every day I lived in fear that I was going to get it

and I was going to infect my whole family," she said.

After a month and a half, Laderer decided to visit a neurologist, who ordered an MRI. But the doctor found no physical cause. The scan was clear.

Then he asked: Are you under a lot of stress?

Throughout the pandemic, people who never had COVID-19 have been reporting a host of seemingly unrelated symptoms: excruciating headaches, episodes of hair loss, upset stomach for weeks on end, sudden outbreaks of shingles, and flare-ups of autoimmune disorders. The disparate symptoms, often in otherwise healthy individuals, have puzzled doctors and patients alike, sometimes resulting in a series of visits to specialists with few answers.

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## What Is Regeneron? Trump's 'unbelievable' drug treatment uses complex process and the Chinese hamster

### CONAN MILNER

As the lockdown wears on, officials and drugmakers promise that a vaccine is in sight that may finally end this pandemic. In the meantime, other avenues of treatment have emerged that may offer some hope.

The public had a glimpse of these options following President Donald Trump's short stay at Walter Reed Medical Center, where he recovered from COVID-19.

The president's treatment regimen included the experimental

antiviral remdesivir and the steroid dexamethasone. However, Trump was keen on one drug in particular.

"I went in and I wasn't feeling so hot, and within a very short period of time they gave me Regeneron. It's called Regeneron. [I got] other things, too, but I think this was the key," the president said in an Oct. 7 video posted on Twitter. "It was, like, unbelievable. I felt good immediately."

Trump announced his authorization of free distribution of the drug (and a "very similar drug

from Eli Lilly") for hospitalized patients with COVID-19.

"And especially if you're a senior, we're going to get you in there quick," Trump said. "We have hundreds of thousands of doses that are just about ready."

So what is Regeneron? The name actually belongs to the biotechnology company that created the drug the president took. Regeneron scientists refer to the drug as REGN-COV2.

In July, Regeneron had just started phase-three testing on REGN-COV2 when the company

signed a \$450 million deal with the U.S. government to manufacture the treatment. The contract was part of the U.S. government's Operation Warp Speed program, to get safe and effective treatments to the public as quickly as possible. According to a statement from White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany, Trump received an eight-gram dose of the experimental treatment as a "precautionary measure."

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BERNARD CHANTAL SHUTTERSTOCK

Regeneron's REGN-COV2 is an antibody cocktail used to treat COVID-19. The biotech drug is made through a controversial process.

# 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.**

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Talk show host



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**CARRIE SHEFFIELD**  
Columnist and broadcaster



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

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



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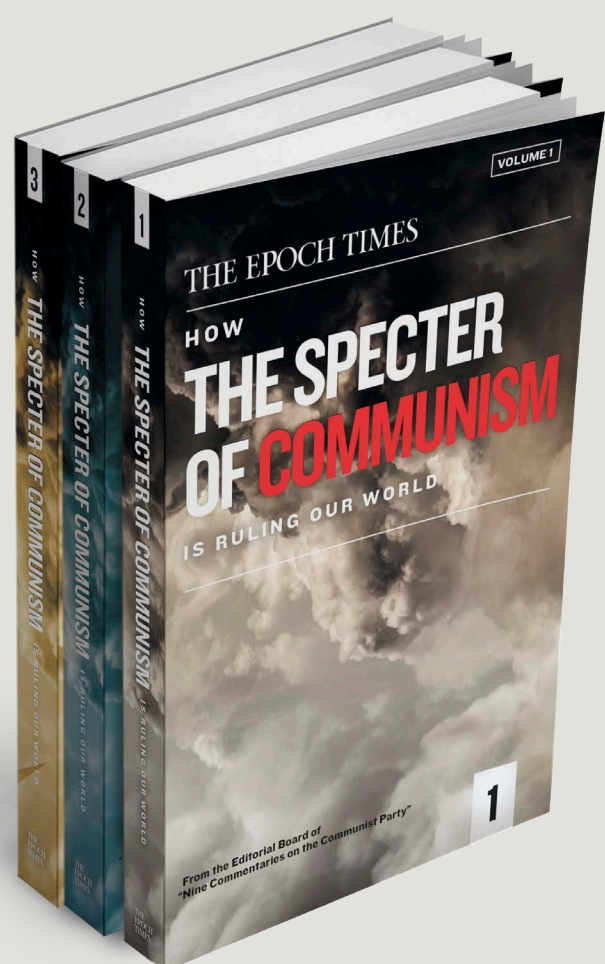
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# What Is Regeneron?

Trump's 'unbelievable' drug treatment uses complex process and the Chinese hamster

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Trump called REGN-COV2 a "cure," but even the most hopeful medical experts say it's too soon to say, since the drug is still a long way from the approval process. However, recent results have shown promise. In a Sept. 29 Regeneron press release, the company stated that late stage trials of REGN-COV2 showed that it reduced viral load and alleviated symptoms in non-hospitalized patients with COVID-19. It also showed positive trends in reducing medical visits.

According to Dr. George D. Yancopoulos, president and chief scientific officer of Regeneron, the greatest treatment benefit was in patients who couldn't muster an effective immune response themselves. He suggests that REGN-COV2 could provide a therapeutic substitute for those who are unable to produce the appropriate antibodies naturally.

"These patients were less likely to clear the virus on their own, and were at great

**REGN-COV2 could provide a therapeutic substitute for those who are unable to produce the appropriate antibodies naturally.**

er risk for prolonged symptoms," Yancopoulos said.

In these trials, doses were well-tolerated, with reactions seen in only four patients (two on placebo and two on REGN-COV2). Serious adverse events occurred only in placebo patients. There were no deaths.

### Fully Human Antibodies

Like the anti-malarial drug hydroxychloroquine—another promising COVID-19 treatment Trump highlighted early in the pandemic—REGN-COV2 has also seen a lot of controversy in a short period of time. The big issue with Regeneron's drug is the source material.

You can think of REGN-COV2 as a new twist on an older method called convalescent plasma treatment—where doctors inject blood plasma from a patient who recovered from an infection into people struggling to recover. The idea behind this method is that the blood plasma of recovered patients contains the antibodies necessary to defeat the virus.

One point of controversy with REGN-COV2 is that it was developed with the use of a cell line originally derived from aborted fetal tissue. This comes after the Trump administration in 2019 blocked government scientists from conducting studies that use fetal tissue. Critics point to Trump's hypocrisy in ingesting and endorsing a treatment that seems to go against his own policy.

To develop the antibodies for REGN-COV2, Regeneron used a cell line derived from the kidney tissue of an aborted fetus from the 1970s. Many drug makers turn to this cell line for research, including companies working on vaccines for COVID-19.

However, a statement from doctors within the pro-life Charlotte Lozier Institute insist that Trump didn't receive any treatments that go against his administration's restriction, since it doesn't contain any human embryonic stem cells

or human fetal tissue.

"Uninformed commentary has emerged this morning stating that President Trump has received a medication created with the use of human embryonic stem cells," reads the statement. "The president was not given any medicines to treat COVID-19 that involved the destruction of human life. No human embryonic stem cells or human fetal tissue were used to produce the treatments President Trump received—period."

Instead of harvesting antibodies from a human, Regeneron uses animals—specifically, a special kind of mouse that has been genetically altered to have a more human-like immune system. Company scientists say they evaluated thousands of these "fully-human antibodies" produced by the company's "VelocImmune" mice. REGN-COV2 is a combination of two monoclonal antibodies (known as REGN10933 and REGN10987) that were chosen for their ability to specifically block the virus that causes COVID-19.

Another rodent also plays part of the drug-making process. After scientists identified the target genes in the VelocImmune mice, they inserted them into Chinese hamster ovary cells to produce the antibodies.

### Future of Treatment Options

As novel as it may sound, REGN-COV2 isn't the first drug Regeneron has made in this fashion. They produced a similar drug designed to treat Ebola infection. On Oct. 14, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved this Ebola antibody treatment after it was shown to significantly reduce mortality rates in a clinical trial.

However, while Regeneron's trials on its coronavirus drug look good, Eli Lilly's single antibody counterpart recently hit a snag. The company confirmed on Oct. 14 that independent monitors have paused enrollment in a study that combined their experimental antibody therapy with remdesivir, similar to the treatment the president received at Walter Reed.

Lilly says the study had been paused "out of an abundance of caution," but gave no details about what prompted this move.

Of course, experimental, genetically altered pharmaceuticals aren't the only treatments doctors and patients are trying. Unlike her husband, First Lady Melania Trump decided to "go a more natural route" with her COVID-19 treatment, "opting more for vitamins and healthy food."

Studies are showing that certain nutrients, such as vitamins C and D, can help protect against COVID-19. Other evidence reveals that a lack of key nutrients could raise the risk of infection. But experts are quick to mention that there's no evidence that diet or supplements alone can cure or prevent this potentially deadly disease.

In an Oct. 14 statement, the first lady reflected on the pandemic, the fear and doubt that people are struggling with, and some basic things that everyone can do to stay well.

"I encourage everyone to continue to live the healthiest life they can. A balanced diet, fresh air, and vitamins really are vital to keep our bodies healthy. For your complete well-being, compassion and humility are just as important in keeping our minds strong. For me personally, the most impactful part of my recovery was the opportunity to reflect on many things—family, friendships, my work, and staying true to who you are," she wrote.

BERNARD CHANTAL/SHUTTERSTOCK



REGN-COV2 showed that it reduced viral load and alleviated symptoms in non-hospitalized patients with COVID-19.



Stress triggers the body to release cortisol, the fight or flight hormone, which does little to help people deal with the pandemic.

# Pandemic Stress Takes Its Toll

Doctors and dentists report people are suffering more sleepless nights, hair loss, and cracked teeth

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But it turns out there's a common thread among many of these conditions, one that has been months in the making: chronic stress.

Although people often underestimate the influence of the mind on the body, a growing catalog of research shows that high levels of stress over an extended time can drastically alter physical function and affect nearly every organ system.

Now, at least eight months into the pandemic, alongside a divisive election cycle and racial unrest, those effects are showing up in a variety of symptoms.

"The mental health component of COVID is starting to come like a tsunami," said Dr. Jennifer Love, a California-based psychiatrist and co-author of an upcoming book on how to heal from chronic stress.

Nationwide, surveys have found increasing rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts during the pandemic. But many medical experts said it's too soon to measure the related physical symptoms, since they generally appear months after the stress begins.

Still, some early research, such as a small Chinese study and an online survey of more than 500 people in Turkey, points to an uptick.

In the United States, data from FAIR Health, a nonprofit database that provides cost information to the health industry and consumers, showed slight to moderate increases in the percentage of medical claims related to conditions triggered or exacerbated by stress, such as multiple sclerosis and shingles. The portion of claims for the autoimmune disease lupus, for example, showed one of the biggest increases—12 percent this year—compared with the same period in 2019 (January to August).

Express Scripts, a major pharmacy benefit manager, reported that prescriptions for anti-insomnia medications increased 15 percent early in the pandemic.

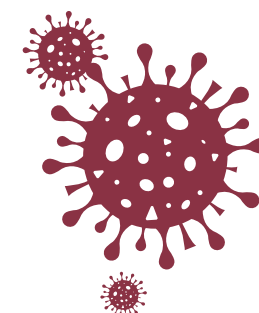
Perhaps the strongest indicator comes from doctors reporting a growing number of patients with physical symptoms for which they can't determine a cause.

Dr. Shilpi Khetarpal, a dermatologist at the Cleveland Clinic, used to see about five patients a week with stress-related hair loss. Since mid-June, that number has jumped to 20 or 25. Mostly women, ages 20 to 80, are reporting hair coming out in fistfuls, Khetarpal said.

In Houston, at least a dozen patients have told fertility specialist Dr. Rashmi Kudesia they're having irregular menstrual cycles, changes in cervical discharge, and breast tenderness, despite normal hormone levels.

Stress is also the culprit dentists are pointing to for the rapid increase in patients with teeth grinding, and teeth fractures.

"We, as humans, like to have the idea that



**People who never had COVID-19 have been reporting a host of seemingly unrelated symptoms: excruciating headaches, episodes of hair loss, upset stomach for weeks on end, sudden outbreaks of shingles, and flare-ups of autoimmune disorders.**

we are in control of our minds and that stress isn't a big deal," Love said. "But it's simply not true."

### How Mental Stress Becomes Physical

Stress causes physical changes in the body that can affect nearly every organ system.

Although symptoms of chronic stress are often dismissed as being in one's head, the pain is very real, said Kate Harkness, a professor of psychology and psychiatry at Queen's University in Ontario.

When the body feels unsafe—whether it's a physical threat of attack or psychological fear of losing a job or catching a disease—the brain signals adrenal glands to pump stress hormones. Adrenaline and cortisol flood the body, activating the fight-or-flight response. They also disrupt bodily functions that aren't necessary for immediate survival, such as digestion and reproduction.

When the danger is over, the hormones return to normal levels. But during times of chronic stress, such as a pandemic, the body keeps pumping out stress hormones until it tires itself out. This leads to increased inflammation throughout the body and brain, and a poorly functioning immune system.

Studies link chronic stress to heart disease, muscle tension, gastrointestinal issues, and even physical shrinking of the hippocampus, an area of the brain associated with memory and learning. As the immune system acts up, some people can even develop new allergic reactions, Harkness said.

The good news is that many of these symptoms are reversible. But it's important to recognize them early, especially when it comes to the brain, said Barbara Sahakian, a professor of clinical neuropsychology at the University of Cambridge.

"The brain is plastic, so we can to some extent modify it," Sahakian said. "But we don't know if there's a cliff beyond which you can't reverse a change. So the sooner you catch something, the better."

### The Day-to-Day Impact

In some ways, mental health awareness has increased during the pandemic. TV shows are flush with ads for therapy and meditation apps, like Talkspace and Calm, and companies are announcing mental health days off for staff.

But those spurts of attention fail to reveal the full impact of poor mental health on people's daily lives.

For Alex Kostka, pandemic-related stress has brought on mood swings, nightmares, and jaw pain.

He'd been working at a Whole Foods coffee bar in New York City for only about a month before the pandemic hit, suddenly anointing him an essential worker. As deaths in the city soared, Kostka continued riding the subway to work, interacting with co-workers in the store, and working longer hours for just a \$2-per-hour wage increase. (Months later, he'd get a \$500 bonus.) It left the 28-year-old feeling constantly unsafe and helpless.

"It was hard not to break down on the subway the minute I got on it," Kostka said.

Soon he began waking in the middle of the night with pain from clenching his jaw so tightly. Often his teeth grinding and chomping were loud enough to wake his girlfriend.

Kostka tried Talkspace, but found texting about his troubles felt impersonal. By the end of the summer, he decided to start using the seven free counseling sessions offered by his employer. That's helped, he said. But as the sessions run out, he worries the symptoms might return if he's unable to find a new therapist covered by his insurance.

"Eventually, I will be able to leave this behind me, but it will take time," Kostka said. "I'm still very much a work in progress."

### How to Mitigate Chronic Stress

When it comes to the consequences of chronic stress—such as stomach pain, headaches, or skin rashes—seeing a doctor may address those physical symptoms. But the root cause is mental, medical experts say.

That means the solution will often involve stress-management techniques. And there's plenty we can do to feel better:

**Exercise:** Even low- to moderate-intensity physical activity can help counteract stress-induced inflammation in the body. It can also increase neuronal connections in the brain.

**Meditation:** Research shows meditation can lead to positive structural and functional changes in the brain.

**Social connections:** Talking to family and friends, even virtually, or staring into a pet's eyes can release the hormone oxytocin that may counteract inflammation.

**Learn:** Whether it's a formal class or taking up a casual hobby, learning supports brain plasticity, which is the ability to change and adapt as a result of experience. Brain plasticity, in turn, can be protective against depression and other mental illness.

"We shouldn't think of this stressful situation as a negative sentence for the brain," said Harkness, the psychology professor in Ontario. "Because stress changes the brain, that means positive stuff can change the brain, too. And there is plenty we can do to help ourselves feel better in the face of adversity."

*Aneri Pattani is a KHIN correspondent who reports on a broad range of public health topics, with a focus on mental health and substance use. This article was originally published on Kaiser Health News.*



Research shows meditation can lead to positive structural and functional changes in the brain.

# Babies Born by Caesarean Develop Slower

New study finds babies born via vaginal delivery develop more quickly in first year

OLA ANDERSSON & MEHREEN ZAIGHAM

The number of cesarean sections being performed globally every year is increasing. But while cesarean sections can be lifesaving for both mother and baby, an increasing number of them aren't being performed for a medical reason.

Fear of pain and misconceptions that cesarean sections are safe for the baby and more convenient are just some of the reasons women may opt to have one. But there are of course risks with having one—and our recently published study found that planned cesarean sections appear to have a negative impact on the baby's development between four and 12 months of age compared to babies born naturally.

We looked at 66 babies born by planned cesarean section and compared them with 352 babies born vaginally. The babies were enrolled at birth, and the first evaluation of their development was performed at four months. We then followed up when they were 12 months. To understand the impact the delivery method has on the infant's development, we had parents answer questions using the "ages and stages questionnaire."

This questionnaire contains 30 questions that score infant development in five areas: communication, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, problem-solving, and personal social ability. So for example, at four months of age, the questionnaire asked parents whether their baby grabs or scratches their clothes, or if the baby looks at the toy when it's put in their hand. This questionnaire has been shown to have a good correlation with developmental testing performed by medical professionals and is commonly used by both researchers and child health care centers.

We found that babies born via planned cesarean section had poorer scores in all five developmental areas at four months of

age. The largest differences were noticed in fine motor skills, while the smallest differences were reported in communication as compared to vaginally born babies. However, at 12 months of age, these differences diminished for all but gross motor skills (such as whether the baby could walk with or without support) which remained better in vaginally born babies.

Our findings are in line with previous research from the United Kingdom, the United States, Sweden, and Australia, which have all shown that children born via planned cesarean section have a small, elevated risk of poor development and/or reduced performance at school age. Other studies have found that babies born by planned cesarean have an increased risk of breathing problems after birth, and an increased risk of childhood obesity, asthma, and diabetes.

But one problem when studying child development is that many factors—such as when the tests were performed, and the mother's age and weight—can impact the results. In the vaginally born group, the tests were performed two days later at the four months testing, and three days later at the 12 months testing. As such, we had to adjust for this in the study. This reduced the difference between the groups, especially at 12 months.

The mothers who had a cesarean section were also on average 1.9 years older and had a higher body mass index (BMI). But these differences didn't affect the baby's development. The relatively small sample size in the cesarean section group was another limitation of the study.

## Brain Development

One explanation for the differences that we found may be because of how cesarean sections change the way the baby adapts its blood circulation and breathing to live outside the mother's womb. Babies born via cesarean aren't subjected to the strain or



## Babies born via planned cesarean section had poorer scores in all five developmental areas at four months of age.

stress of vaginal delivery. This stress helps the baby to adapt its circulation and breathing outside the womb.

Vaginal birth also seems to program the genes of the baby through the process of DNA methylation. DNA-methylation is part of the system which directs which genes are switched "on" in the body, and which are "off." Researchers don't yet know why this process doesn't take place the same way during a cesarean section.

The baby also doesn't come into contact with the mother's natural bacterial flora during a cesarean. In recent years it's been shown that gut bacteria affect development as well as behavior through the so-called "gut-brain axis."

While our research shows that birth method can affect early brain development, other factors such as genetics, nutrition, and the child's experiences all have an impact too. Even the timing for planned cesarean sec-

tions is crucial. These operations are usually booked 10 to 14 days before the due date so women don't spontaneously go into labor.

In our study, babies born via cesarean were delivered on average 8.4 days earlier compared to babies born naturally. So the difference in questionnaire scores could be due to earlier delivery. Waiting a few more days before performing a planned cesarean may improve scores. Currently, there's no consensus among obstetricians on the optimal timing of cesareans. However, one study of 153,730 infants found that development was affected in all children born before week 39—with the effect more pronounced in babies born via cesarean section.

Our study adds to the growing body of evidence highlighting the potential negative effects of non-essential planned cesareans. And though our study was small, these findings do show development differ-

ences evident even as early as four months. More research will be needed to confirm if these findings are shown on a larger scale and if any developmental differences persist after 12 months.

Mothers requiring a cesarean for medical reasons shouldn't worry as these are performed to protect their health and the health of their child. It's also important to remember that many factors affect development—including nutrition, childhood experiences, and genetics—and are all key in helping babies keep up with others their age.

*Ola Andersson is an associate professor and neonatologist at Lund University/Skane University Hospital at Lund University in Sweden, and Mehreen Zaigham is a postdoctoral research fellow in obstetric and gynecology at Skane University Hospital at Lund University. This article was first published on The Conversation.*

The study found fine motor skills were the most significant developmental delay.

# Chemical Exposures Influence Aging, Immune System, and Metabolism

Only a tiny fraction of the chemicals we are exposed to are tested for toxicity despite a rise in disease linked to these everyday exposures

ALEXANDER SUVOROV

People are routinely exposed to thousands of man-made chemicals, some with known health effects, but most are far from fully understood.

In 2020, the number of registered chemicals reached 167 million. Every day people are exposed to them through food, water, contaminated air, drugs, cosmetics, and other man-made substances.

Only 250 of the 84,000 chemicals registered for commercial use in the United States have been tested by government agencies, according to research by the Center for Effective Government.

I am an environmental toxicologist studying the effects of man-made chemicals on our health. I decided to develop a computational approach to objectively compare the sensitivity of all genes to all chemicals and identify the most vulnerable biological processes.

## Unbiased Approach

For our study, my research colleagues and I used data from the Comparative Toxicogenomic Database. The database collects information from thousands of published studies on how chemi-



Complex chemical ingredients go into virtually every product we use.

icals change the activity of genes. Genes are sections of DNA that encode proteins that perform a broad range of functions in cells, from building tissues to metabolizing nutrients. When chemicals affect genes, that results in increased or decreased production of proteins.

Modern methods of molecular biology can detect changes in the activity of all genes in the genome in response to a chemical insult. I developed an approach that overlays lists of altered genes from different studies to calculate how many times each gene was affected. The resulting numbers reflect sensitivities of genes to chemicals generally.

Using 2,169 studies on mice, rats, humans and their cells, my research group ranked the sensitivity of 17,338 genes to chemical exposures. These studies tested the impact of 1,239 diverse chemicals ranging from prescription drugs to environmental pollutants.

At the next step, we ran tests to ensure that this sample of more than 1,000 chemicals was large enough to reliably represent all classes of man-made chemicals people are exposed to. To do so, we measured the sensitivity of genes for one half of this list and then for another to test if even a smaller number of chemicals can reliably identify sensitive genes. The results were encouraging—the values of gene sensitivities were almost identical in the two trials.

## Cellular Defense System Responds to Chemicals

Our cells aren't completely helpless when exposed to chemical insults. In fact, they possess strategies for dealing with stress and damage induced by chemicals. Our data confirm that these safeguards become active in response to exposures.

This line of defense includes enzymes that eliminate toxic chemicals, alleviate oxidative stress (the accumulation of reactive radicals in cells), repair damaged DNA and proteins, and identify highly damaged cells to trigger their death and prevent them from turning cancerous.

## Metabolism of Lipids and Carbohydrates Is Vulnerable

Surprisingly, we found that mo-

lecular networks involved in the regulation of cellular metabolism are most sensitive to chemical exposures. One of them is PPAR signaling. PPARs are a group of proteins that regulate energy balance and metabolism of lipids and glucose.

Rises or falls in PPARs activity contribute to obesity, metabolic syndrome, diabetes, and fatty liver disease. The ability of some environmental chemicals to affect PPARs was shown before. However, we didn't expect to see the sensitivity of PPARs to a very broad range of compounds.

We also discovered that genes involved in the development of pancreatic beta cells, which secrete insulin and play a key role in glucose metabolism, are suppressed by a majority of chemicals in our list. The dysfunction of beta cells results in diabetes. Thus, cumulative chemical exposures may be a significant risk factor for diabetes.

Today, an epidemic of metabolic disease is a major public health issue. The prevalence of obesity nearly tripled between 1975 and 2016. Approximately 40 percent of Americans will develop Type 2 diabetes during their lives, and 33 percent to 88 percent have fatty liver. The connection between exposures and metabolic diseases was shown before for some chemicals with endocrine disruptive properties. However, the role of the broadest range of man-made chemicals in this epidemic was not recognized before but can be significant.

That significance comes in large part because of the influence chemicals have on our biologi-

cal pathways. These pathways are the series of actions that molecules in our cells use to create a change in the cell. For example, biological pathways can spur the assembly of new molecules, such as a fat or protein. They can also turn genes on and off, among countless other functions. In a very real sense, our body lives through a process of actions and reactions that happen throughout these biological pathways.

## Growth, Aging, and the Immune System

Two hormones involved in growth—growth hormone (GH) and insulin-like growth factor (IGF1)—are also affected by exposures to chemicals.

IGF1 is a hormone secreted mostly by the liver. It is recognized as a major regulator of body growth. Additionally, multiple mouse experiments show that decreased GH-IGF1 signaling results in a longer lifespan. This biological pathway also determines if cells will use energy to build new molecules the body needs, or if they will break down existing molecules to release energy for the organism to use. The ability of chemicals to affect this central regulator of growth and aging is a novel finding. What health problems may be due to the sensitivity of GH-IGF1 is yet to be uncovered.

Our analysis indicates that genes that control the immune response are also highly sensitive to chemicals.

Two major outcomes of a dysfunctional immune system are



Man-made chemicals interfere with the internal chemistry our body depends on.

## Only 250 of the 84,000 chemicals registered for commercial use in the United States have been tested by government agencies.

allergy and autoimmunity. Prevalence for both conditions follows upward trends. Food allergies increased from 3.4 percent to 5.1 percent between 1997 and 2011 among children in the United States. Skin allergies increased from 7.4 percent to 12.5 percent during the same period. Another study showed a 5 percent increase in blood marker of autoimmune disease in Americans during the period 1988 to 2012.

## All Molecular Pathways Are Sensitive to Chemicals

Overall we found that almost every known pathway may be affected by chemicals. That finding has significant implications for regulatory toxicology.

With ever-increasing numbers of man-made chemicals, society needs to develop rapid and cost-efficient methods of toxicity testing.

One important question that remains unanswered is what pathways should be covered by testing to ensure that regulators don't approve chemicals that harm or disrupt critical molecular circuits. Our data suggest that we need to develop tests that cover every known molecular pathway without exception.

Our study outlines new priorities for toxicological research, including the role of chemical exposures for metabolic health, immune system, development, and aging.

*Alexander Suvorov is an assistant professor at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. This article was first published in The Conversation.*

## CHINESE WISDOM FOR SEASONAL LIVING

# Plants Reveal Hardship Is Not Always a Bad Thing

Solar Term: 'Frost Descent' (Oct. 23 to Nov. 6)

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.



Some plants die when it gets cold, some create their finest tea and wine.

PAUL ANISZEWSKI/SHUTTERSTOCK

or snow, the farmers can see if the tea trees have survived or been killed. The quality of the tea that survives becomes superb. It is sweeter and more aromatic, though the overall yield is greatly reduced. These factors have made this type of tea pricey.

Frost-hardy plants teach us that if we can endure the hardships in our lives, we can transform our suffering into wisdom and positive energy.

Solar Term: 'Frost Descent'

2020 Date: Oct. 23 to Nov. 6

Frost Descent is the last solar term of autumn, and in the northern hemisphere, the first frost of the season is quickly approaching, if it hasn't happened already. In the natural realm, it is the last period of time for things to grow or develop before the weather makes living conditions too difficult.

Frost Descent is the last solar term before winter. Symbolically, it's time to look within, review one's life, and make improvements.

This turning point in the weather is caused by cold overnight temperatures that freeze the morning dew and blanket the earth with frost.

## Impact on People

The majority of our bodily functions—such as appetite and energy—are regulated by enzymes. Our enzyme activity slows down, and can even be impaired, by the temperature drop.

With the solar cycle of Frost Descent, a huge turning point has taken place in the weather, and our bodies have to adjust. During this time, blood vessels tend to contract and muscle tendons may tighten.

People who have joint problems may find themselves with aching joints during this time.

Those who suffer from any kind of ulcers or inflammation are going to feel more uncomfortable now than at other times of the year. Young people may find their acne flaring up if they don't keep a healthy diet and routine.

## Living in Harmony with 'Frost Descent'

As yin energy starts to become heavier, the coldness and humidity in the air take their toll on our bodies, especially on the lungs and respiratory system.

Stay warm, and those who catch a cold or a cough easily should wear a face mask that covers both the nose and mouth.

Ancient Chinese people had a saying: Supplementing food in winter is not as beneficial as in Frost Descent.

Now is the time to nurture the digestive system by avoiding cold foods, as well as spicy foods. Root vegetables, beans, quality vegetable oils, and lean meats are all helpful.

Eating the right diet to prepare our bodies before winter arrives will set a good foundation to protect against diseases that may hit us hardest in the colder months to come.

This period of time is also the best time to make preserved food from vegetables, fruit, or meat.

The beneficial enzymes and quality nutrients in these foods promote vitality in the cold winter days until spring arrives.

## Seasonal Foods to Eat

Food that is white in color, and apple, pear, citrus, cashew nuts, beans, dates, mushrooms, olives, onions, pine nuts, soya beans, and yams.

Avoid alcohol, hot chilis, and deep-fried or greasy food.

Seasonal herbs and essential oils that are helpful at this time are aniseed, basil, dill, eucalyptus, niouli, sweet fennel, and turmeric.

*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*

## MINDSET MATTERS

# Must We Always Be Striving for a Better Life?

Shifting from the 5-year plan to the right-now plan can get us to our most important destination

NANCY COLIER

The workshop started with a simple question: "What do you want?" That question was followed with "What is your deepest intention?" And then, "What do you want to create in your life?" Out then came the magic markers, poster boards, glue sticks, glitter, and all sorts of other art supplies. We were to start drawing, mapping, and fleshing out a future life and future self, complete with the action steps that would lead us to our deepest wants and intentions. From the time we're very young, we're conditioned to be strivers. We're trained to want and keep wanting for more and better. Better versions of ourselves and better experiences for ourselves. This is where we're supposed to aim our attention.

**To arrive here and stop trying to get somewhere else may be the most difficult and remarkable achievement of our lifetime.**

Truth be told, when confronted with these kinds of broad, future-oriented questions, I often find myself blank, unable to identify what I want for my future in any real detail. I usually use magic markers and glitter to make a picture for my daughter. It's not to say there aren't things I want to do and create: I want to spend more time in the desert, I want to build my speaking business, and I want to do more silent retreats. But mostly what I feel in the face of these five-year-plan questions is a big fat "should" with a sprinkle of confusion and a splash of fogginess. The strong sense is that I should have a clear plan and an overarching vision of the future. And that there's something wrong if I don't, or don't even want to participate in the exercise. But then I remember: We take our progress-oriented, "more and better" mindset and apply it to ourselves and our time on the planet. We relate to ourselves as an object in our model of unending progress. We focus on the future, where we want to get to, what else there could be, and what we are aiming for. At the end of the day, we assume that wanting means wanting for something—or more specifically, something else, something external, and something new and different.

After years of asking myself these sorts of well-intentioned questions, I discovered



We are taught to strive, but that can cost the awareness and joy of this precious moment.

that they're not the right questions for me or for many of my clients. The question "What do you want?"—while wonderfully helpful in some ways—can become another demand on us, another thing we're supposed to accomplish, another bar to reach. We're supposed to have a to-do list for our future and a plan to get there, and if we don't, we're certain to miss out on that future of our dreams.

After thousands of workshops and too many hours spent journaling, talking, meditating, singing, and every other "ings," I realized that what I really want is to get to be here. That is, to experience this moment, this—dare I say—ordinary moment. To experience it as enough. The intention I hold is to stop trying to get to somewhere else.

We're trained to think of time and our life as something that's moving forward on a horizontal line, hurtling into the future. Progress is our north star. It gives us a place to move toward, and with it, a sense of purpose and meaning. At a deeper level, the idea of progress protects us from our existential fear of meaninglessness, from the vastness that comes with just being here, one now at a time. If we are not heading somewhere else, somewhere better, then we are left simply with this moment, heading nowhere in particular. If now is all we have, then what? Can we bear that existence?

But what's remarkable is that when we enter this present moment fully, dive completely into now, with no next, and nowhere else to get to, we discover that time feels more like a vertical experience than a horizontal one. With each now, we drop into a kind of vertical infinity that is its own destination.

After diligently searching for an impressive "board" that would warrant a giant poster board and bright green sparkles, I discovered that what I want is far simpler than what I thought I should want. What I want is to be

completely where I am, and to stop having to want something else all the time. I want for this moment to be everything, whatever it is. Furthermore, I want to feel a more consistent sense of awe for the fact that I get to be here at all.

I offer my own experience here so that you may know of an alternative to the habitual striving and wanting that we're encouraged to participate in. But please, if these sorts of intentional inquiries are useful, if they help you gain clarity and move the dial forward in your life, then use them without hesitation. But if you find yourself feeling blank when asked about what you want to be, become, or achieve, then perhaps you can give yourself permission to stop striving to get somewhere better and strive to just be here.

Getting off the five-year-plan highway can feel like getting off the "normal" grid, opting out of the way we do life in this society. But that's okay. Getting off the striving highway and turning your attention to where you are can lead you to a far better and richer life, which paradoxically, is exactly the kind of life you are supposed to be striving toward.

To arrive here and stop trying to get somewhere else may be the most difficult and remarkable achievement of our lifetime. In a society that values striving above all else, we can add "striving to be in our life (as it's happening)" to our wantlist. We can add "here" to our list of sought-after destinations. At the end of the day (and the beginning and middle too), the journey to where we are is the most important journey we will ever embark on. What do I want? Truth be told, I want to be here.

*Nancy Colier is a psychotherapist, interfaith minister, public speaker, workshop leader, and author of "The Power of Off: The Mindful Way to Stay Sane in a Virtual World." For more information, visit NancyColier.com*

## Chatting Your Way to a Better Memory

New study finds social engagement associated with healthier brains as we age

FIZESKES/SHUTTERSTOCK



(Top) Face-to-face conversation is a dynamic emotional-mental experience.

(Bottom) Older people who socialize more retain more cognitive function.



DEVON ANDRE

Socializing may benefit the brain like exercise benefits the heart.

New research published in *The Journals of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences* has shown that older people who get together with friends, volunteer, or go to classes have healthier brains, and that could help them delay dementia.

Engaging with others, even moderately, was found to activate parts of the brain that play key roles in memory. Socializing may help maintain brain regions associated with emotions, recognition, decision-making, and

**Like your muscles, the brain requires use to stay engaged.**

feeling rewarded.

Staying connected with others, even those in your household, may help stave off depression, memory loss, and potentially put off dementia.

Like your muscles, the brain requires use to stay engaged. Put simply, if you're not using it, you're losing it. Talking to friends and engaging with other people requires it to fire on a number of cylinders to keep neural pathways open.

Several causes can kill brain cells, and inactivity is one of them. When too many brain cells die, dementia can follow. Socializing may help keep brain cells alive.

The results in the new study were based on looking at nearly 300 seniors with an average age of 83. The intricacies of how so-

cializing improved brain health still need to be ironed out.

Researchers still need to explore if social engagement keeps the brain healthy or having a healthy brain leads to more social engagement. Regardless, there is a clear association between brain health and social engagement.

Dementia has no cure, so prevention is essential. Socializing is free and has no adverse side effects. And you don't need a vast network either. You can reap the benefits by simply talking more to your husband, wife, or child.

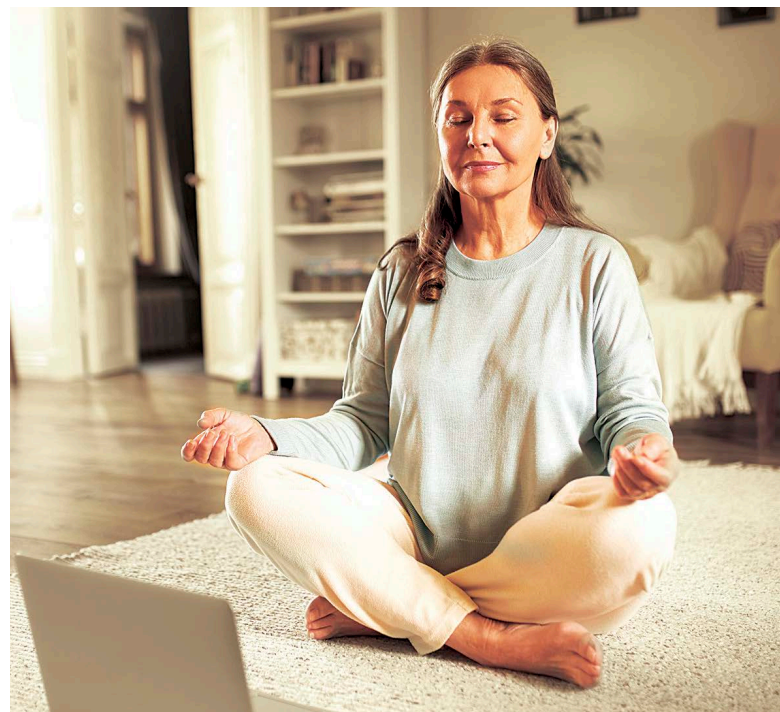
The pandemic, of course, has made in-person socializing much more of a challenge. But talking on the phone, using virtual tools, and finding other ways to stay engaged can all offer benefits.

So get chatting! It could be the best way to keep your brain healthy with age.

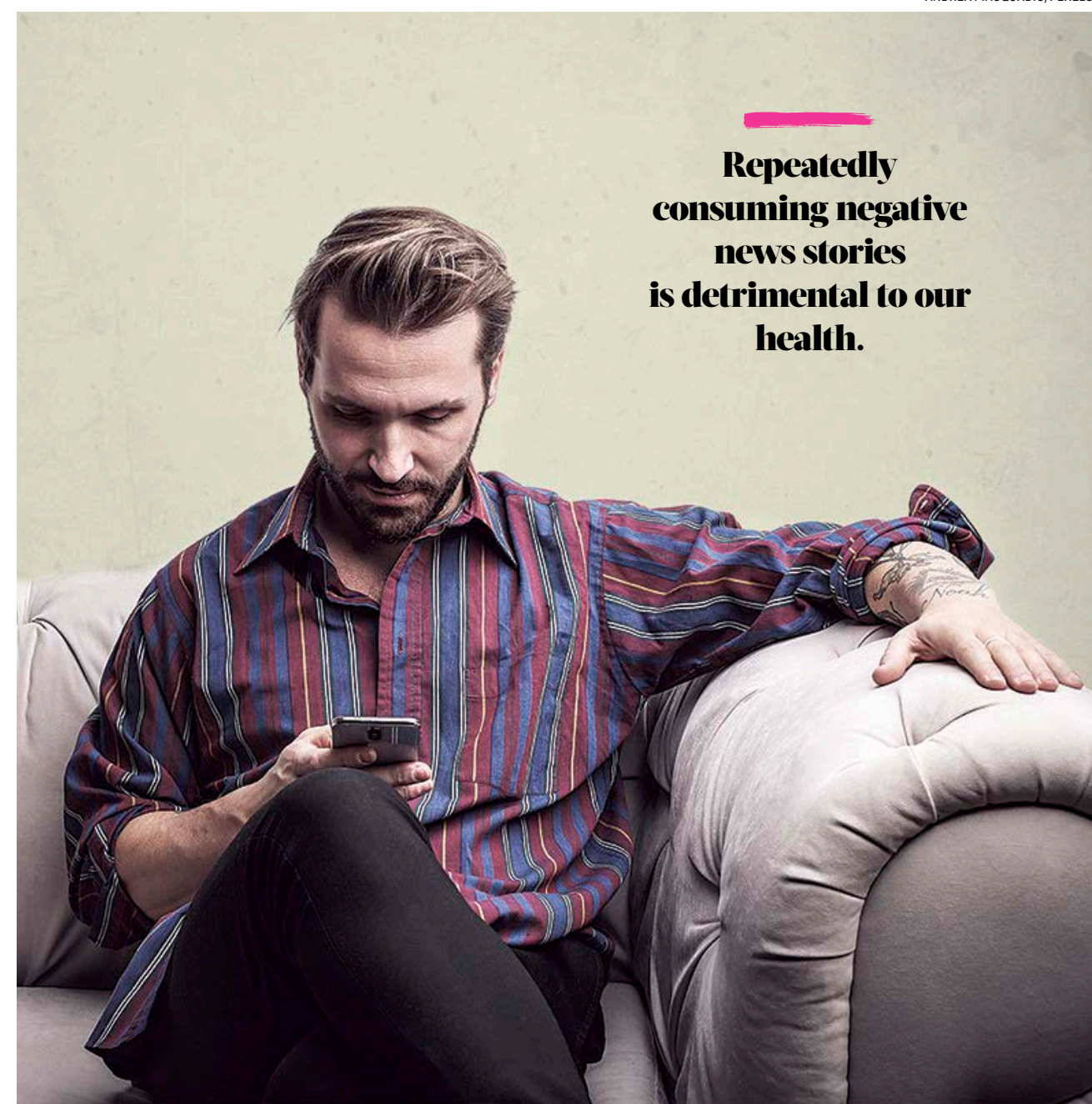
*Devon Andre holds a bachelor's degree in forensic science from the University of Windsor in Canada and a Juris Doctor degree from the University of Pittsburgh. Andre is a journalist for BelMarraHealth, which first published this article.*



ANDREA PIACQUADIO/PEXELS



SHURKIN, SON/SHUTTERSTOCK



**Repeatedly consuming negative news stories is detrimental to our health.**

Many news sources assume there's more money to be made by featuring alarmist headlines, which, due to our brain's negativity bias, end up hijacking our attention.

## 8 Questions That Can Help You Survive Election Stress

JEREMY ADAM SMITH &amp; JILL SUTTIE |

How are you doing?

For Americans facing the COVID-19 lockdown and economic instability through the spring and summer, that became a difficult question. Things were already pretty bad. And then the presidential election began.

A new survey from the American Psychological Association finds that this election is a significant source of stress for more than two-thirds of American adults—up from half during the 2016 presidential election. According to a new report based on three surveys by the nonpartisan organization More in Common, "About 7 in 10 Americans are worried about the risk of widespread violence breaking out across the country after election results are announced."

A lot of us are feeling scared and helpless. And there's good reason to believe we might look back on the election as a traumatic event.

What can we do to stay resilient in the face of this election? One way is to check in with ourselves daily to make sure we're doing the things that sustain our health and well-being. To come up with reflective questions to ask yourself, we looked back on our articles about surviving stressful times and consulted psychologists affiliated with the Greater Good Science Center. We hope these questions will help you make it through the election—and beyond.

### 1. What's Happening in My Body and Mind Today?

Sometimes our feelings sneak up on us, and our body can experience emotions before our conscious mind is aware of them. That's no surprise: The body is a big place, with a lot going on inside of it. So you might break your inquiry down into even more specific questions, as suggested by UC Berkeley's Dacher Keltner and Colorado State's Michael Steger:

- Is the election disrupting my sleep?
- Is it interfering with my ability

to concentrate?

- Do I feel breathless, or feel any pressure in my chest?

You can also look to your mind for information:

- Is the election bringing back bad memories?
- Do thoughts of the election intrude or arise when you wish they wouldn't?
- Do you find yourself thinking of the election even when you would rather be thinking about other things?

Answering these questions for yourself—or perhaps with another person, such as your spouse or a good friend—will help you to understand what you're feeling, particularly if those feelings are happening below conscious awareness. This allows you to name emotions like anger, grief, or anxiety—and naming them is the first step toward feeling more in control of your life.

### 2. What Can I Do to Soothe Myself?

When you have named your negative emotions, it's important to not feel bad about having them. When UC Berkeley researchers studied more than 1,300 adults in a 2017 study, they found "that people who commonly resist acknowledging their darkest emotions, or judge them harshly, can end up feeling more psychologically stressed."

In other words, please try to avoid feeling bad about feeling bad about the election. Instead of pushing down any negative feelings, ask what you can do to soothe yourself. Therapist Linda Graham suggests these techniques for calming yourself down when everything feels like too much:

- Breathing. Deep belly breathing activates the parasympathetic branch of your autonomic nervous system and slows down your reactivity. Breathing slowly, deeply, can deescalate a full-blown panic attack in a matter of minutes. Remembering to

breathe throughout the day destresses you, and helps you instill calm as your real baseline, not stress as the new normal.

- Hand on the heart. Neural cells around the heart activate during stress. Your warm hand on your heart calms those neurons down again, often in less than a minute. Hand on the heart works especially well when you breathe positive thoughts, feelings, images of safety and trust, ease, and goodness into your heart at the same time.

Meditation. Sylvia Boorstein's book "Don't Just Do Something, Sit There," speaks to our instinctive and socialized tendencies to do something. This is often an expression of the fight or flight response. Boorstein encourages us to get away from doing, and focus on being with instructions on compassionate mindfulness meditation. Meditation is a gentle way to calm the mind and body and let things simply be, over time generating a steady inner calm that sustains you over the long haul.

You can also do things like just asking for a hug from someone in your pandemic pod. "We are hardwired to be soothed by touch," writes Graham. "Warm, safe touch is a stress reducer because it primes the brain to release oxytocin, the hormone of safety and trust, of calm and connect. Oxytocin is the brain's direct and immediate antidote to the stress hormone cortisol." If there is no one you can touch right now, call a friend—they might be struggling, too.

### 3. Am I Getting Enough Good News?

We may think that by staying abreast of the latest news developments we get a clear-eyed picture of the world. But there's a problem: The news is overwhelmingly negative. Worse, many news sources assume there's more money to be made by featuring alarmist headlines, which, due to our brain's negativity bias, end

up hijacking our attention. Repeatedly consuming negative news stories is detrimental to our health, too. It keeps us in a constant state of alert, which is damaging to our bodies. It can also tear at our social fabric, leading to more distrust and negative feelings about other people and communities. We can also miss a lot of good in the world.

To keep up with what's happening in the world without being overwhelmed by it, we need to be conscientious about counterbalancing negative news with more positive, hopeful news.

Of course, Greater Good, the original source of this article, should be on your list, as we tend to feature the more positive aspects of human nature (and how to decrease the negative).

### 4. When Do I Feel Good About the Election?

Here's another way to counter all the negativity: Michael Steger suggests searching for evidence in the news, or in the world around you, that there are still good people. When do you find yourself tearing up, or smiling? Who is working for goals that you think are important, who seems to be effective and successful? Where are the solutions? Perhaps you heard a speech that inspired you—or maybe you read about a court decision that makes you breathe a sigh of relief. It could be that a candidate's platform gives you hope, but hope could also come in a gracious moment, when you see a candidate do or say the right thing.

When you find good news, then let yourself feel good about it. You're searching for "moral elevation"—that's the warm feeling we get when we witness someone engage in courageous acts.

"Moral elevation not only boosts our positive emotions, but it also promotes our love for our fellow human and inspires us to be better people," says University of Portland researcher Sarina Saturn. "Indeed, making an effort to experience more moral elevation will restore our faith in humanity and encourage us to help other people."

*Continued on Page 8*

DRAWAN PATTARAWIMONCHA/SHUTTERSTOCK

# 8 Questions That Can Help You Survive Election Stress

Check in with yourself—and perhaps boost your resilience—by asking yourself some empowering questions

Continued from Page 7

Moral elevation is also contagious. In one 2011 study, for example, participants read articles and watched videos depicting acts of common or uncommon kindness—and the results show that hearing about these good deeds made the participants more likely to give away their money.

“Moral elevation has been shown to promote altruism,” Saturn says. “So make an effort to shine some light on some of the wonderful things the human condition is capable of doing.”

## 5. What Am I Grateful for Today?

This may seem like the wrong question for the times. With so much negative stuff going on, why focus on what we're grateful for?

But, as gratitude researcher Robert Emmons writes, “In the face of demoralization, gratitude has the power to energize. In the face of brokenness, gratitude has the power to heal. In the face of despair, gratitude has the power to bring hope.”

**At its core, the tend-and-befriend response is a biological state engineered to reduce fear and increase hope.**

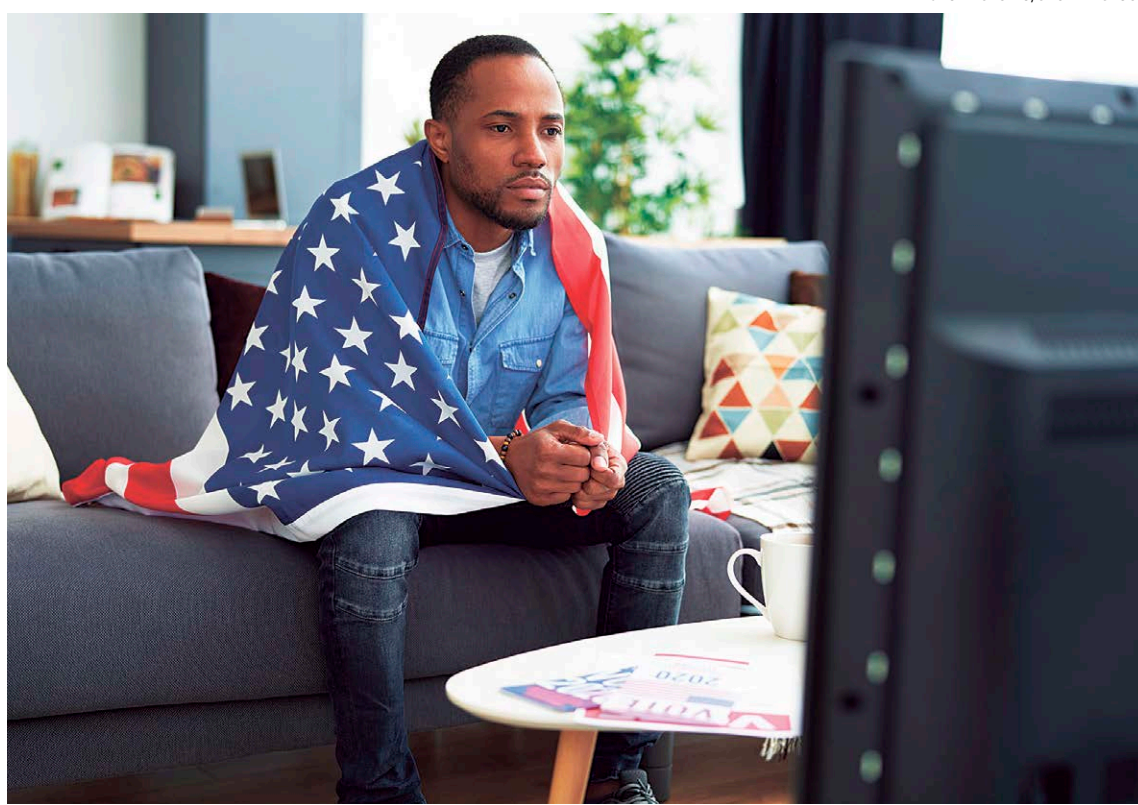
Focusing on what we're thankful for helps us be more resilient when times are tough. If we turn toward appreciating the good in our lives, it lessens our anxiety and depression, so we can stay calmer in the face of uncertainty. And it can keep us from burning out.

Gratitude is also a premier social emotion that binds us to other people, strengthening our relationships. Cultivating it in ourselves inspires us to help others in need, even when giving help is costly to us—something we could use in these difficult times when we need to come together.

## 6. How Can I Connect With People?

Yes, this election is stressful—and stress can trigger the fight-or-flight reaction. It's natural to feel angry or defensive, or to simply want to run away, but there's more to stress than this simple dichotomy.

Researchers Laura Cousino



About 7 in 10 Americans are worried about the risk of widespread violence breaking out across the country after election results are announced.

Klein and Shelley Taylor have identified another kind of response to stressful events: tend-and-befriend, in which people can become more trusting, generous, and willing to risk their own well-being to protect others. Why would stress lead to caring? As Kelly McGonigal writes in *Greater Good*:

We have the tend-and-befriend response in our repertoire first and foremost to make sure we protect our offspring. Think of a mama grizzly protecting her cubs, or a father pulling his son from the wreckage of a burning car. The most important thing they need is the willingness to act even when their own lives are at risk.

To make sure we have the courage to protect our loved ones, the tend-and-befriend response must counter our basic survival instinct to avoid harm. We need fearlessness in those moments, along with confidence that our actions can make a difference. If we think there's nothing we can do, we might give up. And if we are frozen in fear, our loved ones will perish.

At its core, the tend-and-befriend response is a biological state engineered to reduce fear and increase hope.

In facing this year's election—and the barriers imposed by COVID-19—don't let your stress cut you off from others. Allison Briscoe-Smith, a clinician at the Wright Institute, suggests aiming to move “from self-care to community care.” In other words, yes, take care of yourself first, but when you feel strong enough,

reach out to those in need—and ask, “What is one small, tangible thing I can do to help someone feel better today?”

## 7. How Can I Make a Difference in the World?

When UC Claremont's Kendall Bronk and her colleagues studied youth during the 2016 election, they found that the election actually inspired purpose. “People saw problems in the broader world and they were inspired to take action,” she says.

Jim Emerman of *Encore.org*, an organization that helps seniors find new purpose in life, suggests asking three questions to help you find your own sense of purpose:

- What are you good at?
- What have you done that gave you a skill that can be used for a cause?
- What do you care about in your community?

Purpose—the drive to make a difference in the world—is intimately related to meaning—a sense that what's happening to you, and around you, matters in some way. While the ultimate outcome of the election will change its meaning, we won't stop trying to make sense of what happened. When Michael Steger studied college students' experiences from the 2016 election and the 2018 midterm elections, he found that their sense of meaning did decline if their candidate lost—but then seemed to rebound within a week. There's meaning in a loss—and purpose, too if you can find a

way to put your talents to work in making a difference beyond just one election.

## 8. What future Would I like to See and Make Happen?

GGSC Senior Fellow Christine Carter suggests thinking now about how you're going to take care of your own well-being over the long run: What healthy habit are you nurturing now that will be with you after the election? What do you have in your life right now because of this tumultuous time that you hope to still have in your life later?

Those might seem like hard questions to ask yourself, and it might seem even harder, right now, to think of our collective well-being in the future. But when we look to the future—a process scientists call “prospaction”—the present moment actually becomes more meaningful. Though it might be hard right now to think beyond November 3, it's worth trying. Numerous studies show that envisioning a positive future makes it more likely to come to pass—and prospaction can make us more resilient in the present.

But how? In Greater Good's Purpose Challenge, designed by Bronk and her team, high school seniors were asked to think about the world around them and visualize what they would change if they had a magic wand. Afterward, the researchers asked the students to map out steps they could take toward that ideal.

What would you change, if you had a magic wand? Perhaps you wish people would just be kinder to each other. A positive future depends on many different people working for many different goals for the betterment of humankind.

We don't have a magic wand—and we don't know what will happen on November 3. But we do know that there will be a November 4, and we know that we are all going to have to get out of bed and do what we can to make the world a better place, no matter who is in the White House. We might feel powerless, but we're not.

*Jeremy Adam Smith edits the GGSC's online magazine, Greater Good. He is also the author or coeditor of four books, including The Daddy Shift, Are We Born Racist?, and The Compassionate Instinct. 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.*



Boredom isn't up to a kid to figure out anymore, it's now a parent's issue and a parent's problem.

MINDSET MATTERS

# Let Your Child Be Bored

Why boredom is essential to healthy development

The most common question I get in my talks to parents around the country is this: What should I do when my kid says he's bored? Recently, one mom told me that her son is always asking her: “What should I do next? I'm bored.” This mom, like many parents these days, feels a tremendous pressure to occupy her son's every moment—to immediately get rid of his boredom and provide activities to quell his discomfort.

Many children these days have remarkably busy schedules; their time is filled up to the last second of the day. Their attention is unceasingly attended to and for: after-school classes, sports, tutors, playdates, the list goes on. Even at birthday parties, when a dozen kids are gathered together, parents often feel responsible to entertain them every moment.

Being bored has become this frightening and dreaded experience that parents must respond to immediately. Boredom isn't up to a kid to figure out anymore, it's now a parent's issue and a parent's problem—and allowing our kids to experience it, or not taking it seriously, might even be seen as a sign of parental neglect.

As we mistakenly imagine it, boredom



In boredom lies the possibility that we can become a worthy destination for our own attention.

is a case of a moment not fully lived; as if it's a missed opportunity. We relate to it as an absence, a state of nothingness: There's nothing to do, nothing to learn, nothing to experience. Boredom, as we see it, is emptiness.

As a result of our fear of boredom, we're encouraging our children to be perpetually focused on some object of attention. At the same time, technology has made constant engagement the new normal. With tech has come the expectation that our kids (and us adults) should live in a state of uninterrupted entertainment and pleasurable busyness at all times. We even get to congratulate ourselves for this under the guise of learning more, doing more, communicating more, and what we've convinced ourselves is living more.

Sadly, we no longer trust our kids' ability to tolerate or even survive open, unfilled time. We've stopped seeing the profound possibility and potential of boredom. Instead, we've learned to relate to time without an object of attention as nothing—as opposed to nothing, yet. The underlying truth is we've lost faith in our kids' imaginations and the power of human creativity to adapt to its environment.

Continued on Page 10

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MINDSET MATTERS

# Let Your Child Be Bored

Why boredom is essential to healthy development

Continued from Page 9

**The Benefits of Boredom**

Two things of great value happen when we're bored. First, we have to use our imagination; we have to invent. This is a skill that can't be underestimated. Regardless of how plentiful the opportunities to avoid boredom have become, the ability to create, generate, and self-engage is still profoundly important in the development of a healthy human being.

It's our responsibility as parents to build the skills of imagination and creativity. We do this by planting the seeds when our children are young—by giving them the chance to play, evolve, do their work, and become who they were meant to be. Boredom is water for these seeds. When we're supplying all the goods for our kids' attention, we're actually encouraging their imaginations and creative capacities to atrophy and die.

Secondly, when a child says "I'm bored," it's because he can't find anything that interests him. But where is he looking? Usually, outside himself. When we say we're bored, it's because we have nothing to distract ourselves from ourselves. Unfortunately, we're being conditioned to experience our own company as nothing interesting. When we frantically shove an activity in front of our child when he's bored, we're creating (and supporting) his belief that without something added to himself, he's nothing.

The remarkable invitation that boredom offers is the invitation to spend time with, take interest in, or at the very least, learn to tolerate our own company. It's in the gaps between focused activities that we can turn our attention to our own thoughts, feelings, and maybe even to the experience of boredom itself.

Even if technology now makes it pos-

sible for our children to outrun themselves all the way to the grave, the ability to not fear their own company is still the most valuable skill they will ever learn. In boredom lies the possibility that we can become a worthy destination for our own attention.

So we return to the question, "Is it OK to let my child be bored?" It's not only okay but also paramount that you do so. When your child complains of being bored, you can simply say, "It's OK to be bored now and then. It won't hurt you and it will help you in ways you can't yet know." And then, bask in the satisfaction of knowing that their boredom just means you're doing your job as a parent.

**With tech has come the expectation that our kids (and us adults) should live in a state of uninterrupted entertainment and pleasurable busyness at all times.**

*Nancy Colier is a psychotherapist, interfaith minister, author, public speaker, workshop leader, and author of several books on mindfulness and personal growth. Colier is available for individual psychotherapy, mindfulness training, spiritual counseling, public speaking, and workshops, and also works with clients via Skype around the world. For more information, visit NancyColier.com*

EVGENY ATAMANENKO/SHUTTERSTOCK



We're being conditioned to experience our own company as nothing interesting.



FIZKES/SHUTTERSTOCK

WISE HABITS

# How to Cope With Addictions Mindfully

Transform bad habits into healthy choices with these strategies

LEO BABAUTA

Despite our best intentions, it's often painful and difficult to change our habits, addictions, and strong urges. The things we want to quit and the urges we want to overcome can span a wide gamut, from drugs and alcohol to online shopping and nail biting.

Not all the things want to quit are horrible, but any can easily be taken to excess. Many of us would like to have more control in certain areas but find our urges difficult to resist.

So how can we find success with real, lasting change? I've found that it takes a combination of mindfulness and behavior-changing strategies. The following is a multipronged approach to changing unwanted urges and addictions.

**Urge Surfing**  
A mindfulness technique that has proven effective for dealing with addictions is called "urge surfing," a widely used technique developed by psychologist and addictions pioneer Alan Marlatt.

It's something that helped me quit smoking cigarettes more than a decade ago, and I've used it many times since then.

Here's how to practice it:

1. Notice when you have an urge. Pause instead of acting on it, and just sit with it mindfully.
2. Notice where the physical sensation of the urge is located. Is it in your stomach? Chest? Mouth? Focus on that area of your body and try to mindfully observe the sensations you feel.
3. Allow the sensations to rise and peak then crest and subside. Just watch them, as if you're watching a wave. It's not anything to panic about, it's just a sensation of rising and falling. You can do this for a minute or two, or even longer. After the urge subsides, it might come back, and then you can repeat the exercise.

**Why this works:** We interrupt the part of our brain that just acts on urges automatically and shift to a new part of our brain. This pattern interruption is crucial to dealing with urges. We also learn that the urge isn't a command, but rather an interesting sensation that we can distance ourselves from.

**Change the Environment**  
Another strategy that works incredibly well is changing your environment. There are several ways to achieve this:

4. Remove temptations from your environment. When I wanted to change my diet, I tossed out all junk food. Keeping temptations around

**Increasing your emotional baseline means you're going to be stronger and more resilient when dealing with your urges.**

makes it a lot harder to be successful—willpower only goes so far. 5. Remove yourself from the environment. Don't go into your office kitchen area if you want to avoid the snacks, for example. At an office party, you can move away from the cake area. 6. Change the environment. Set up the environment so that you're less likely to give in to temptation. For example, at a burger restaurant, I might tell my kids that I'll give them \$20 if they see me eat a french fry. I never eat fries when I do this. Telling other people about your intentions to change can also make you more accountable.

**Why this works:** If there aren't any temptations around, or they're hard to get to, the urges are much weaker. Seeing cake in front of you, or being around people smoking or drinking makes you much more likely to want those things too. If we can engineer our environment to mitigate temptations, we'll have fewer urges to deal with, and the sense of control can motivate us further.

**Coping Abilities**  
Addictions are often our way of coping with stress, pain, or other difficulties. If we get into an argument with our spouse, lose a loved one, get yelled at by our boss—whatever it is—we may need a way to cope.

Over the years, we learned to use the addiction as a coping mechanism; when



CHRISTIAN MUELLER/SHUTTERSTOCK

the stress comes up, we get a strong urge to indulge. So when we try to quit an addiction and stress comes up, we need a new healthier coping mechanism to deal with it. We need to start replacing the old habit with the new coping mechanism.

Here are some examples of healthy coping activities:

- Meditation
- Going for a walk, a run, or playing sports
- Talking to someone
- Taking a bath
- Having tea
- Doing yoga

Pick one, and try to do it whenever you have a stressful experience. Soon you'll have a healthier way to cope.

**Why this works:** If you put another coping mechanism in place, you'll need your addiction less, and the urges will be weaker over time.

**Raise Your Emotional Baseline**

When we're tired, depressed, or lonely, we just don't have the willpower or emotional baseline to deal with stress, urges, and addictions. We'll give in and forget about changing our environment or trying a new coping mechanism—nothing seems to matter.

So, here's a few ways to raise your baseline:

7. Get adequate sleep and rest. Make this a priority, or none of the other efforts will matter. Shut off devices at a certain time each night, write out your to-do list for tomorrow, brush and floss, and then meditate before going to sleep.
8. Get some support. Find friends you can talk to, professional support, or a support group online. Lean on them; talk about your difficulties and listen to them in return. Creating this kind of connection means you're less likely to feel isolated.
9. Deal with feelings of depression, loneliness, and sadness. Solutions to these feelings is a whole book in itself, so I won't cover them here. But if you're not emotionally healthy, the addictions are much more likely to stick around (or relapse). Make working on your emotional health a priority. A great way to start is to get adequate sleep and find support and healthier coping mechanisms.

**Why this works:** Increasing your emotional baseline means you're going to be stronger and more resilient when dealing with your urges.

**Putting It All Together**  
With all of that in mind, here's a simple plan you can experiment with. Each week, pick one or two of these to focus on:

10. Get good sleep. Make it a priority.
11. Get support. Friends, online support groups, local support groups, professional help—whatever works best for you.
12. Practice 'surfing the urges.' You don't have to be perfect at this, just practice.
13. Change your environment. Toss out the stuff that makes you tempted, or remove yourself from tempting environments.
14. Work on your emotional health. A gratitude practice is a good start for many people, though professional help might be recommended for some.
15. Pick another coping strategy. Choose a few to try out: deep breathing, yoga, meditation, going for a walk, talking to someone, hot tea, self-massage. Experiment with these and other healthy activities to see what works best for you.
16. Find your weak points. Change the environment to mitigate your weaknesses, or create a strategy to deal with them. For example, can you enlist the help of others to stop you from giving in to temptation?

Again, don't worry about doing this all at once. Pick a few each week and work on them, then try others the next week, and so on. Revisit ones that need more practice or fine-tuning. Look at this as a learning exercise where you're not going to just quit a habit overnight, but get better and better at dealing with the urges and addiction over time.

You can rest assured—success is possible. Especially once you realize how much damage these habits and addictions can cause you in life. Your effort to change these and stop hurting yourself is a truly loving thing.

Leo Babauta is the author of six books and the writer of "Zen Habits," a blog with over 2 million subscribers. Visit [ZenHabits.net](http://ZenHabits.net)

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## BECOMING MINIMALIST

## Do Not Declutter These Areas First

When it comes to owning less, some jobs are more exhausting and less rewarding

JOSHUA BECKER

Without a doubt, the most common mistake I see people make on their journey to a minimalist life is to start decluttering in the wrong place. Too often, we choose a difficult first step, rather than an easy one.

Now, just to be clear, I'm fine with whatever method works for you to minimize your possessions and free your life for more important pursuits. And if starting in a really difficult area and working backward works for you and your family, go for it. But for most people, the most effective strategy to minimize possessions is to start easy and work your way up to decluttering harder areas and harder spaces.

That's the process my wife and I used years ago. And that's the process I recommend on this blog and in the Clutterfree app. So if you are ready to go, start decluttering with your easiest step, like a cluttered countertop that will give you an immediate sense of the benefit of owning less.

And if you are wondering where not to start, I thought it might be helpful for me to write down some of the places people are tempted to declutter first, even though they probably shouldn't. So I sat down and wrote out this list of 10—they appear in no particular order.

Starting at any of these spaces tends to end in frustration and exhaustion—and too quickly leads to failure rather than success.

## 10 Things NOT to Declutter First

## 1. Photos

Many people have boxes and boxes of old family photos that need to be curated, but spending hours and hours flipping through old family photos usually just leads to hours and hours more as memories surface.

Save this project for later. When you do, keep only the best.

## 2. Sentimental Items

Sentimental items may be around for any number of reasons—to remember a past season of life, a relationship, an experience, or an accomplishment.

Holding onto the best is a fine idea—less is different than none—but wait for this step until you've experienced and noticed the benefits of owning less in your life. You'll find it easier to accomplish.

## 3. Paper

Paper clutter is a real issue, no doubt about it. But you can spend hours working through just one small pile of paper and still see no



significant difference in your home.

Instead, spend those hours removing larger possessions from your home first. You'll notice the progress easier and will be encouraged to continue.

## 4. The Garage

Similar to paper, large cluttered spaces take a lot of time and a more noticeable change in your home can be better found elsewhere. Additionally, not many people spend considerable time in their garage (they drive in and drive out).

Beginning in an easier room you spend considerable time in (such as a bedroom or living room) pays off greater dividends quicker.

## 5. Kids' Toys

I speak to a lot of parenting groups. When I open the discussion for questions, the first one is always the same: "This minimalism thing sounds great. How do I get rid of my kids' toys?" And my answer is always the same, "It is entirely unfair for you to begin your journey into minimalism by forcing your kids to get rid of their stuff. You need to go first."

When your kids see you removing the possessions from your own room and closet first, they'll be more prepared for when you eventually get to theirs.

## 6. Your Partner's Stuff

Similar to kids' things, you should never begin your decluttering journey by getting rid of your spouse's stuff. In fact, I'd counsel you, in almost every case, not to remove your partner's stuff without including them in the process.

It is simply too easy to see everyone else's clutter than it is to see your own. You do your

work, you set the example, and when your partner sees the benefits, he or she will be ready. And you'll be there to help.

## 7. Drawers

I think it is important to move through your home room-by-room decluttering your unneeded things. I also think it is important to start in visible areas first because seeing progress is important (especially if you have a lot of work to do).

When minimizing a new room, break each into smaller projects if you need to. But start in visible areas, not hidden clutter like drawers and cabinets. You'll get to those spaces eventually, but start with the visible stuff in your line of sight already.

## 8. Your Collections

Your collections probably need to be decluttered, but there are some questions that need to go into this process first. Do I have too many collections? Am I going to continue collecting these things? Is there a better way to store or display these items?

Personally, I found that my opinions on these matters changed significantly as I pursued minimalism. As I saw the benefits of owning less, I began to question my collections in ways I hadn't before—I believe you'll find the same to be true for you.

## 9. Digital Clutter

Don't start your minimalism journey by deleting emails. Again, you should do that (and almost certainly unsubscribe from them as well). But digital clutter is different than physical clutter.

Physical clutter carries more weight and burden than digital clutter. So, you should declutter your digital files, but it's a terrible place to start. Start with your physical objects.

## 10. Books

I'm going to include books on this list—not because it is a problem for everyone, but because it is a difficult task for many.

If you love books, no doubt you own quite a few. You may even have the sense that you should own fewer of them. But if you feel an emotional attachment to books, you should hold off on this step—similar to the reasons listed in sentimental items above.

The decluttering process I recommend the most is to work through your home easiest-to-hardest, starting with the most lived-in areas first. It's the method that is the most effective for the most amount of people.

By not starting in the areas listed above, you will avoid frustration and fatigue at the beginning.

You'll love owning less. You can do it.

*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](http://BecomingMinimalist.com)*

When you decide to declutter, avoid starting with the tough jobs like getting rid of photographs or books.

For most people, the most effective strategy to minimize possessions is to start easy and work your way up to decluttering harder areas and harder spaces.

ence of aging.

Fortunately, we have this cheerful paperback full of advice to help us meet the milestone birthday without freaking out. Every essay contains kernels of experience, optimism, and wisdom. And many of the contributors have written their own books about the complexities of growing older. The youngest contributor is Gwen Weiss-Numeroff, the author of "Extraordinary Centenarians in America: Their Secrets to Living a Long Vibrant Life," who wrote her essay when she was just 49 years old. She gleaned information from many men and women and profiled them in her book. She tells readers that her subjects "must have been doing something right, since they lived for an additional three joyful decades." According to her, when you turn 70, you need to do three essential things: have a purpose; explore new places and hobbies; and go with the tide and be grateful. She is convinced that this mindset makes it possible to triumph over life's challenges with dignity, grace, joy, and strength.

Rick Kimball is a Maine-based writer and photographer who has issued what he calls "The Septuagenarian Challenge." He strongly believes that creativity "gives us connective reason for continuing life." He challenges us to create something new and different. "If

you are already a writer, sculpt," he says. "If you are already a musician, dig a garden plot. If you are already a cook, go to an art museum and buy a set of paints in the gift shop. Channel Grandma Moses."

**When you turn 70, you need to do three essential things: have a purpose; explore new places and hobbies; and go with the tide and be grateful.**

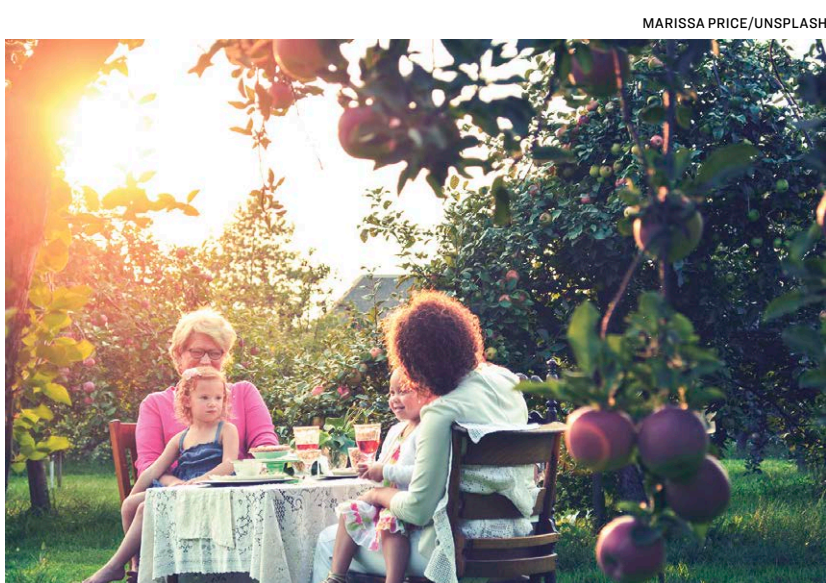
Susan Kersley is a retired doctor who, upon retiring, decided to explore a different avenue of medicine. She has written articles for The British Medical Journal and books about how doctors can improve their work-life balance. She says: "Be a mentor to those of a younger generation: let others benefit from your experiences while at the same time recognizing that the world is a different place from when you were their age. ... [Society] is a chance to open new doors and enjoy life to the fullest in whatever way you want, so recognize with gratitude that you are able to have opportunities to make a difference both in your own life and

in the lives of those around you."

The contributor whose essay surprised me the most was Mark Twain, who delivered his 70th birthday address at Delmonico's restaurant in New York City on Dec. 5, 1905. He regaled the audience with examples from his own life about how to reach one's 70th birthday. Who knew that he had incorporated intermittent fasting into his personalized health regimen long before the method of dieting became popular? He noted: "For 30 years I have taken coffee and bread at 8 in the morning and no bite nor sup until 7:30 in the evening. Eleven hours. That is alright for me, and is wholesome, because I have never had a headache in my life."

This lighthearted but very sincere book truly is the perfect gift for anyone who is turning or has already turned 70 years old.

*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](http://MarilynWillison.com). To find out more about Marilyn and read her past columns, please visit the Creators Syndicate website at [Creators.com](http://Creators.com)*



## POSITIVE AGING

## 70 Years and Going

A collection of essays can help guide you to a rich and fulfilling life as you reach 70 and beyond

MARILYN MURRAY WILLISON

For four very happy decades, a substantial part of my career was spent critiquing recently published books. I'm one of those people who just can't stop recommending titles to others—which now includes you.

One particular book was pub-

lished seven years ago, but it is as up to date as if it just rolled off the presses last night. "70 Things To Do When You Turn 70," which was edited by Ronnie Sellers, is a collection of 70 essays by a variety of high-achieving people who have passed this age milestone and have valuable insights and advice, as well as information on the sci-

## FOOD AS MEDICINE

## High Doses of Omega-3s May Slow Alzheimer's Progression

Recent study finds link between genetic Alzheimer's risk and low absorption of healthy fats

Omega-3 fatty acids are known to be good for heart health, but did you know that in high doses they may also slow cognitive decline?

Omega-3 fatty acid supplementation has been studied extensively as a therapeutic intervention, demonstrating promise in the treatment of neurological conditions such as bipolar disorder and severe depression.

In a quest for safe, effective treatment options for cognitive decline, researchers at the University of Southern California (USC) tested omega-3 supplementation for potential value in slowing the onset of Alzheimer's disease (AD) in a first-of-its-kind clinical trial.

According to senior author of the study Dr. Hussein Yassine, associate professor of medicine and neurology at the Keck School of Medicine of USC, there is significant extant research supporting the preventive potential of omega-3 fatty acids, however, there is no data on the specific dosage required to achieve benefits in the fight against cognitive decline.

"Trials have been built on the assumption that omega-3s get into the brain," Yassine said in a news release. "Our study was specifically designed to address this question."

## Brave Volunteers Help Science to Slow Alzheimer's

Yassine and his team of researchers conducted a small-scale clinical trial in which participants made a brave sacrifice on behalf of scientific advancement.

To determine how much omega-3 supplement is absorbed by the central nervous system versus remaining suspended in the bloodstream, in addition to blood draws, study volunteers were required to undergo two lumbar punctures, or spinal taps, in which a hollow needle pierces the lower back.

One procedure was performed at commencement to establish baseline levels, with another performed upon completion of the study period. Researchers gathered these samples of blood plasma and cerebrospinal fluid in order to gauge whether omega-3s had reached the brain, and if so, in what amounts.

Scientists measured levels of two different omega-3 fatty acids: docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA). The trial consisted of 33 participants with risk factors for Alzheimer's disease, including a family history of AD, a sedentary lifestyle, and a diet low in fatty fish. At the time of the intervention, none of the participants were cognitively impaired.

Out of the 33 total participants, 15 carried the gene variant APOE4, which

is linked to inflammation in the brain and increases the risk of developing AD by a factor of four or more.

The other 18 participants were non-carriers of this variant. Participants were organized into two groups: control and treatment. The treatment group took supplements of more than 2 grams daily of DHA for six months. The control group took identical daily placebo capsules over the same time period. Both groups took daily B-complex vitamins for optimal metabolic processing of omega-3s.

**The research team concluded that even higher doses of omega-3 fatty acids may be required to slow signs of declining brain health in carriers of the APOE4 gene.**

## Genetics May Affect Omega-3 Absorption

After the six-month intervention period was complete and analysis of biofluid samples were finalized, the treatment group participants who took omega-3 supplements had 200 percent more DHA in their blood compared to the control group.

DHA levels in cerebrospinal fluid were 28 percent higher in the treatment group than the control group, indicating a far lower absorption rate of omega-3s in the brain than is detectable in the bloodstream.

Among the individuals in the treatment group without the APOE4 genetic mutation that heightens the risk for Alzheimer's, there was three times as much anti-inflammatory EPA detected in cerebrospinal fluid than in those with the APOE4 variant. This finding indicates that individuals with risk factors for AD may require higher doses of omega-3 fatty acids in order to achieve therapeutic levels in the brain.

"[APO]E4 carriers, despite having the same dose, had less omega-3s in the brain. This finding suggests that EPA is either getting consumed, getting lost, or not getting absorbed into the brain as efficiently with the E4 gene," Dr. Yassine stated. The two-gram dose of omega-3s used in this trial doubles the typical one-gram dose used in prior major clinical trials on omega-3s for AD prevention.

Yassine warns that using a one-gram omega-3 supplement correlates to a

less than 10 percent increase in omega-3s in the brain, a dose that he says, "may not be considered meaningful" in the fight against Alzheimer's disease progression.

The research team concluded that even higher doses of omega-3 fatty acids may be required to slow signs of declining brain health in carriers of the APOE4 gene.

The USC research team's results were published in July in the journal EBioMedicine. Yassine has obtained additional funding for a larger, longer trial on whether high doses of omega-3s can slow cognitive decline in carriers of the APOE4 gene.

The two-year study, to be conducted on 320 participants, has a near-term goal to establish proof-of-concept that the drug is getting into the brain and positively affecting the biomarkers of disease. Researchers ultimately hope to identify and develop therapies for preventing AD.

## Omega-3s Provide 60 Known Health Benefits

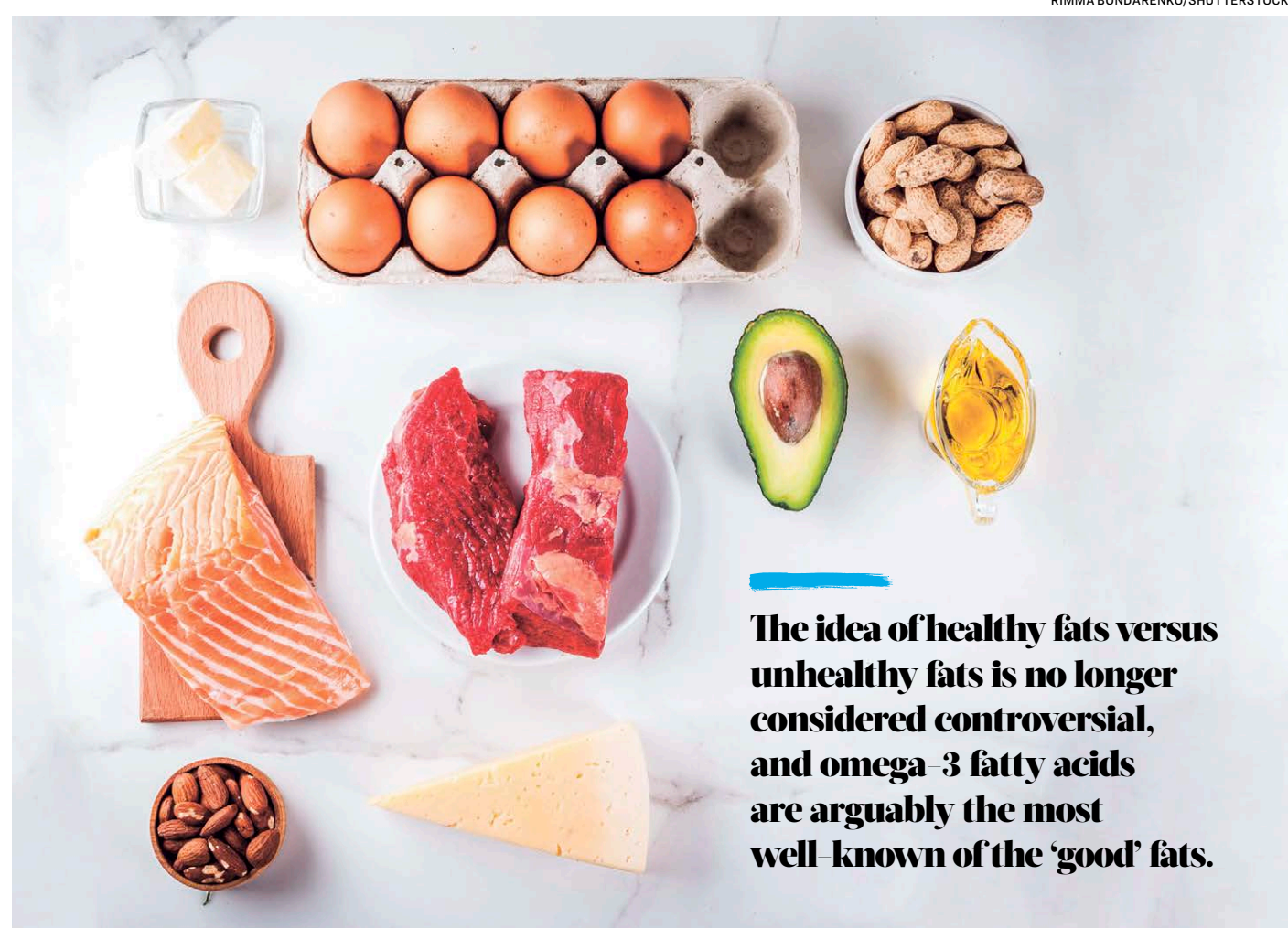
Fatty food is a frequent topic of food wars among health-conscious people. The idea of healthy fats versus unhealthy fats is no longer considered controversial, and omega-3 fatty acids are arguably the most well-known of the "good" fats.

If you prefer to obtain healthy fats from food sources rather than supplements, fish such as mackerel, sardines, and salmon are among the best sources of omega-3 fats. Besides the brain health benefits, eating fish and foods high in vitamin D and omega-3s may help you prevent heart attacks and stave off cancer.

There are more than 60 known health benefits of omega-3 fatty acids. A high-quality EPA supplement may even provide a boost to mood. Studies have shown EPA to be as effective as Prozac in treating major depressive disorder.

To learn more about the health benefits of omega-3s and to uncover natural ways to support brain health, consult the GreenMedInfo.com natural health database.

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**The idea of healthy fats versus unhealthy fats is no longer considered controversial, and omega-3 fatty acids are arguably the most well-known of the 'good' fats.**



Berries, leafy greens, apples, carrots, and green tea offer healthful antioxidant compounds.

## FOOD AS MEDICINE

## Fight Chronic Inflammation With Antioxidants

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

There's a common denominator for most common chronic illnesses: inflammation. Low grade, chronic inflammation to be precise.

This type of inflammation is always there, running in the background. It makes your body less efficient by mounting an attack against itself. It can be very harmful and contribute to serious illness.

For example, chronic inflammation is almost inseparable from heart disease conditions, diabetes, arthritis, ulcerative colitis, and Crohn's disease. Chronic inflammation can also leave you susceptible to other forms of illness, and it limits immune strength.

So, how do you get your body to stop attacking itself? Unfortunately, there is no one-size-fits-all approach. However, some significant steps to reduce inflammation include weight loss, increased activity, and a healthy diet.

## You get antioxidants from the food you eat.

Antioxidant intake can help, too. Antioxidants are compounds that help cells stay strong. They fight oxidative stress and inflammation and are associated with a host of health benefits. These benefits are generally related to lowering the risk of chronic inflammation.

You get antioxidants from the food you eat. There are several you may have heard of, such as vitamin C and vitamin E, that have daily recommended intakes. Others, such as polyphenols, don't have the same recommendations.

But that doesn't mean they aren't healthful. There are a number of plant-based antioxidants that contribute to lower inflammation and healthier cells. Even though researchers are looking at all of them, with limited data on many, there is evidence that antioxidants of any variety can have health benefits.

You can generally find these antioxidants in high amounts in colorful fruits and vegetables that are easily added to your diet. Berries, leafy greens, apples, carrots, and green tea can all offer these healthful compounds.

If you're working on getting inflammation under control to improve your overall health, don't overlook these valuable nutrients. Try to include as many as possible to encourage cellular health and stable immune function.

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

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

# Eating Right at Home

A conversation with Laureen Asseo, CEO of meal delivery service Fresh n' Lean



Home delivery used to mean greasy food in a box. Now it means healthy meals that make it easy to eat well.

BARBARA DANZA

The ways we procure groceries, patronize restaurants, and prepare meals have seen a shift amid the measures put in place to combat a pandemic. Fitness routines have been upended and stress and anxiety have skyrocketed, making nutritional choices ever more important. Some people ensure they have nutritious meals at home by using the services of a meal delivery company. I asked Laureen Asseo, the 29-year-old founder and CEO of Fresh n' Lean, an organic meal delivery service, about her company and her thoughts on eating well in uncertain times.

Here's what she said:

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What inspired you to start your organic meal delivery company, Fresh n' Lean?

**LAUREEN ASSEO:** I started Fresh n' Lean as an 18-year-old college student in 2010, and family was my inspiration. My father faced a health crisis—I was so worried he wouldn't be around much longer. Thankfully, he was able to regain his health by making diet and lifestyle changes, replacing heavily processed fast food with nutrient-rich, vitamin-packed organic meals. I saw what a nutritious diet had done for him, and I wanted to give everyone the same opportunity, and Fresh n' Lean was born.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** People are finding themselves eating at home more often these days. What nutritional consider-



“**Superfoods like fish and blueberries have been shown to boost mental health—they're said to improve our memory, metabolism, and even our skin along with being tasty.**”

Laureen Asseo

ations would you recommend focusing on at this unique time?

**MS. ASSEO:** Balance is key to a healthy diet. A balanced meal should include vegetables or fruits, grains, and lean protein. It's important to consider the ingredients that make up your meal—even those that you would consider healthy, like yogurt or frozen vegetables, might contain added sugar, salt, or processed ingredients. If you have trouble staying on track with your eating, feel free to add meal breaks to your schedule to make sure you're not skipping them, which could lead to overeating later. Pay attention to your body. Your body sends signals when it's full from a meal, and you should listen to those signals. And when you're thirsty, you can never go wrong with water instead of reaching for sugary drinks and alcohol.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** Recent studies have pointed to a possible link between what we eat and emotions such as anger, anxiety, and depression. Do you believe food can be an effective tool to cope with uncertain times?

**MS. ASSEO:** I think food could definitely help. Food is fuel for your body, but it's crucial to choose the right fuel for optimum performance. We're all used to “stress eating,” of digging into a pint of ice cream after a bad day, but eating for comfort doesn't need to be unhealthy. Superfoods like fish and blueberries have been shown to boost mental health—they're said to improve our memory, metabolism, and even our skin along with being tasty. Swapping out usual snack foods like

potato chips or ice cream with crunchy carrots or air-popped popcorn can give you something to munch on while helping you stay on track with your health.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What has been the most rewarding part of running Fresh n'Lean?

**MS. ASSEO:** It's been so rewarding to help redefine fast food, which doesn't need to be greasy and full of cholesterol; it can also be nourishing and flavorful. Fresh n' Lean provides busy people a chance to maintain their diet. Where many direct-to-consumer food services offer meal kits, Fresh n' Lean meals are pre-prepped, so all customers need to do is heat and eat—there's no meal assembly required. It's rewarding to help people get the most of their time while also getting the most out of their meals.

**THE EPOCH TIMES:** What advice would you give an aspirational entrepreneur?

**MS. ASSEO:** Believe in yourself! It's easy to get discouraged by day-to-day frustrations and naysayers. Not everyone is going to buy into your vision, and that's OK. Consider what makes your company unique, and what need it serves—you should be clear about the mission and goals.

You'll also need lots of patience, because many of the changes you'd like to make could take months or years to implement. If you stick with it, weather the tough times, stay on top of industry trends, and work very hard, you'll put yourself in a good position to succeed. Running a company isn't easy, but it can be very rewarding to turn your dream into reality.

# Lost Your Motivation to Work Out? Here's Why

And don't worry, you can get back on track with a better understanding of motivation and a few good tips

IAN TAYLOR

In the early phases of lockdown, the streets were teeming with runners, and living rooms were a blur of uncoordinated star jumps and lunges. In fact, physical activity levels in the United Kingdom peaked around mid-to-late May, just before lockdown restrictions began to be eased. Now, after months of fluctuating social restrictions, many people are reporting on social media that they've suddenly lost their motivation to exercise.

The truth is that motivation is simply returning to normal. Weather in the UK was ideal for exercise in April and May, and many of us had more time available to squeeze in a workout. Two major barriers to exercise were removed. Usually, motivation is a battle of different choices. In normal circumstances, exercise fights against many other appealing leisure pursuits, such as going to the pub, the cinema, or spending time with friends. But during the most severe part of the national lockdown, the choice was either to go outside for exercise or stay home all day. The motivational odds shifted in favor of exercise.

Lockdowns around the world also acted in a similar way to a new year, new school term, or birthday. Significant dates and events can disrupt routines and provide a chance to make a fresh start, so many of us began to exercise. But, like new year's resolutions, our motivation steadily faded over time.

The type of motivation needed to start a new behavior is often very different to the motivation needed to sustain one. Most people start exercising because they know it's good for them, and outside pressures (such as from TV adverts, or friends) tell them they should. “Should-do” motives are an effective way to start a new behavior.

But as lockdown eased, barriers to exercise appeared again—such as being able to spend time with friends at the pub, or the need to get one's chil-

**People who exercise to seek approval from others or to boost their self-esteem often report increased anxiety and body dissatisfaction, despite high levels of exercise**

dren ready for school again. Relying on “should-do” motives in these scenarios requires considerable mental effort and willpower. Unfortunately, one of the most interesting aspects of human motivation is that we dislike the feeling of effort and willpower and tend to avoid it. The pub, the kids, tiredness, and work all win the battle against exercise. “Should-do” motives are terrible at sustaining exercise behavior.

Even some people who exercised religiously are reporting loss of motivation. But again, the type of motivation driving their exercise may explain why this has happened. People who exercise to seek approval from others or to boost their self-esteem often report increased anxiety and body dissatisfaction, despite high levels of exercise. Lockdown (and gym closures) may have increased these negative feelings because the situation meant that people weren't getting the compliments and boost to the ego that they sought.

To stop these motivational declines, a dual approach is needed that makes exercise easy in the short term while developing strong long-term motivation. When it comes to long-term motivation, many psychologists believe your identity is one of the most resilient motivational systems. Identity can often be a vague term and difficult to describe, but put simply, “be” goals are more motivating than “do” goals. So instead of “doing” exercise, focus on “being” someone who exercises.

These “be” motives require much less mental effort to act on and you will naturally seek opportunities to demonstrate your “exerciser” identity. It's less mentally exhausting “being” an exerciser, compared to continuously trying to “do” exercise because attention is naturally drawn to opportunities to exercise and away from other temptations. In some ways, this isn't fair. Those people who have exercised for years and see themselves as an exerciser find it very easy to be motivated to exercise.

Those of us who don't view ourselves as exercisers, but want to exercise,

require a lot of mental effort and willpower to leave the house.

This process takes some time, so we also need quick motivational fixes while our healthy exerciser identity develops. In the short term, the guiding principle should be to minimize the effort required to exercise:

1. Plan your exercise for when it's easiest to do. For many, this may mean exercising as soon as possible in the day before temptations and obstacles that require effort to overcome begin to appear.
2. Make it easy to exercise. Get your sportswear out of the drawer and ready the evening before. Plan exercise that does not require travel to a specific venue. Do as many things as you can beforehand so that, when the time comes, starting your workout is easy.
3. Break the process of exercising into chunks. For example, getting changed into sportswear only require a little effort. Stepping out the door only requires a little effort. Before you know it, it's harder to not exercise than to exercise.
4. Do what you enjoy. It's simple and requires minimal motivation to repeat exercise that felt good. If you find yourself wanting to jump rope or dance instead of lifting weights or jogging, it's better to do what you want to do and requires a lot less mental effort than trying to force yourself to do something you think you should do.

While many of us aren't looking forward to further social restrictions, this might give us another opportunity to develop a healthier lifestyle. A focus on “being” an exerciser and minimizing mental effort will lead to fewer sudden declines in exercise motivation over the long term.

*Ian Taylor is a senior lecturer in psychology at Loughborough University in the UK. This article was first published on The Conversation.*

LUIS MOLINERO/SHUTTERSTOCK



If you can't seem to care enough to workout, it could mean you've fallen victim to an inferior form of motivation. If so, it's time to reimagine yourself.

# FDA Warning to Pregnant Women Highlights Pain Reliever Risks

Mounting research reveals risk of commonly consumed over-the-counter pain relievers



Common over-the-counter pain relievers are often thought of as a risk-free way to resolve minor pains, but that is not the case.

C. MICHAEL WHITE

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a warning on Oct. 15 to health care professionals and women about the use of nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) after 20 weeks of pregnancy.

The warning comes after the FDA added its post-marketing surveillance data to the accumulating information appearing in medical journals. Consumers spent \$4.3 billion on more than 760 million bottles of NSAIDs in 2019. This includes those bearing the brand names Motrin, Advil, Aleve, Ecotrin, and Bayer Aspirin and generic versions of ibuprofen, naproxen, and aspirin.

Those numbers are in addition to the millions of prescriptions written for pain medications containing NSAIDs or NSAID-

opioid combination products written for each year. All of this makes the warning a significant move, especially considering that pregnant women often experience aches and pains that might be alleviated by these drugs.

I am a pharmacist and cardiovascular pharmacologist specializing in avoiding or reducing drug-induced diseases. A successful pregnancy is vital for a child's eventual health, so it's important that pregnant women are aware of this newly discovered danger.

**What Is The Issue?**

Doctors and pharmacists have known for some time that NSAIDs can decrease kidney function in adults and permanently damage some people's kidneys. Higher-dose NSAID therapy, longer-term treatment, and use in pre-existing kidney

dysfunction are especially dangerous to adults. The FDA now believes that this kidney risk extends to the fetus as well if the mother uses NSAIDs.

The fetus is surrounded by a protective amniotic sac filled with fluid. This fluid is made by the mother up to the 20th week, but after that, the fetus's own kidneys create a majority of the protective fluid. The FDA is aware of dozens of cases where physicians have detected low and possibly dangerous levels of amniotic fluid in mothers who were taking NSAIDs. In many of these cases, when the mother stopped taking the NSAID, the levels of amniotic fluid started going back toward normal but went down again when the NSAID was restarted.

In some of those same mothers, low amniotic fluid levels were detected after the use of NSAIDs for only two days. But for other pregnant women, it took several weeks before low amniotic fluid levels were detected.

In five cases, the FDA is aware of newborns who died of kidney failure shortly after birth. While this is a small number of cases overall, the FDA believes there are likely many other cases in which NSAID-induced reductions in amniotic fluid levels aren't being detected because both patients and physicians are unaware of the risk.

**When the mother stopped taking the NSAID, the levels of amniotic fluid started going back toward normal but went down again when the NSAID was restarted.**

**What Should Pregnant Women Do?**

The FDA recommends that health care professionals limit prescribing NSAIDs or recommending over-the-counter NSAIDs to women between 20 to 30 weeks of pregnancy and avoid it altogether after 30 weeks if at all possible. If NSAID treatment is necessary, they should use the lowest effective dose for the shortest duration possible. Health care professionals should consider ultrasound monitoring of amniotic fluid if NSAID treatment extends beyond 48 hours, and discontinue the NSAIDs if the amniotic fluid level is reduced.

The best thing a pregnant woman considering an over-the-counter NSAID for pain can do is discuss it with her obstetrician first. Her obstetrician may recommend acetaminophen (Tylenol) as a viable alternative. Even then, however, there is some preliminary evidence that use of a higher dose or prolonged therapy with acetaminophen during pregnancy is linked to attention deficit disorder or autism as the child develops.

Pharmacists are a wonderful resource to help patients identify which over-the-counter products contain acetaminophen or NSAIDs. This can sometimes be tricky because, in addition to regular pain re-

lievers, they also exist in some over-the-counter cold and flu products and some sleep aids.

**What About Non-Drug Options?**

The use of dietary supplements for pain relief could be risky because the FDA doesn't adequately ensure manufacturing quality and the products could contain heavy metals, bacteria, or mold. Dietary supplements are simply not regulated for safety and efficacy in the way that drugs are. In addition, the lack of safety data with dietary supplements doesn't mean that issues will not occur, just that the risks are unknown.

Other non-drug therapies for aches and pains include hot packs, stretching exercises, massage therapy, visualization therapy, and other techniques. Even if these non-drug techniques don't eliminate the pain, they could reduce the dose of the pain reliever or the length of therapy that is needed. Pregnant women can try some of these options and see what works for them.

*C. Michael White is a distinguished professor and head of the department of pharmacy practice at the University of Connecticut. This article was first published on The Conversation.*

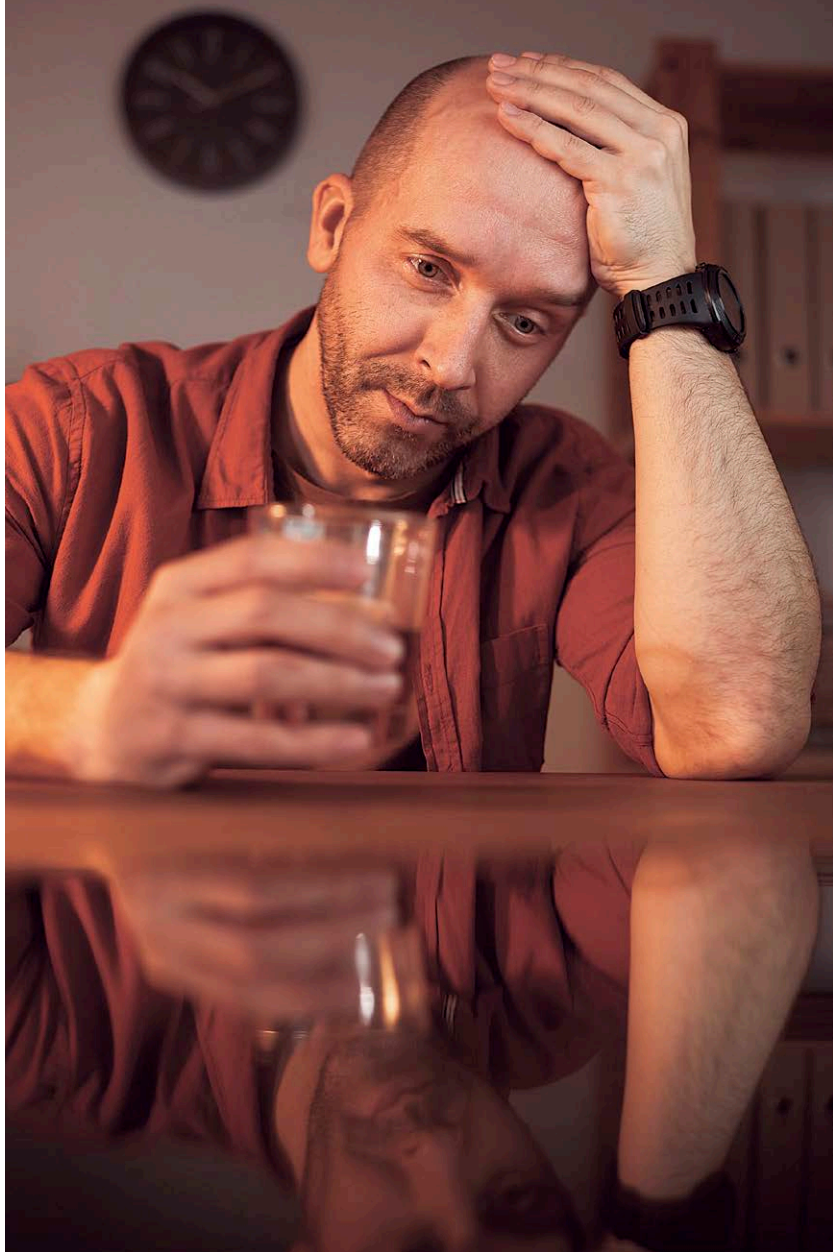


## TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

# What Chinese Medicine Says About Alcohol

These beverages have a range of effects on the body that can be both helpful and harmful

ANNASTILLS/SHUTTERSTOCK



Alcoholic drinks loosen you up and can help you let go of the beast of a day you just had. But drinking too much comes with a range of potential problems.

LYNN JAFFEE

I have had a number of memorable drinks in my life: a vodka gimlet sipped while gazing at the waters of Crater Lake in Oregon, or some pinot noirs enjoyed at a small vineyard tucked into the Willamette Valley countryside.

While alcohol is certainly part of my good memories, the core of these experiences was a celebration of fine moments in life.

As a society, we are mixed in our feelings about alcohol. We want to label it good or bad. A little is good, right? Since there's resveratrol in red wine, does that make it OK? Should I cut drinking out altogether? The ups and downs of food fads and research highlighting different aspects of alcohol make it hard to know whether alcohol is an angel or a demon.

In Chinese medicine, alcohol also has been stereotyped as leaving your body damp and hot.

Dampness causes you to be unable to metabolize food and fluids well, so your body gets boggy and retains pockets of water or moisture. (Excess fat, edema, and even athlete's foot are considered to be damp conditions.)

Alcohol also is considered hot, which means that the energetic end result of drinking it is that it warms you up, which can leave you restless, irritable, dried out, and too warm.

However, the nature of alcohol in Chinese medicine isn't all bad.

**Beer**

Let's start with beer. Beer is actually energetically cool. Its flavor is considered to be bitter and sweet. And while beer has the potential to be very dampening, the more bitter it is, the less dampening it actually becomes.

Regardless of how light or dark your beer is, too much can overwhelm your spleen and kidneys and the energetic systems associated with them. This messes up your digestion and water metabolism, and leaves you with dampness issues. In Chinese medicine, fat is also seen as a form of excess dampness, which is an interesting way to think of a "beer belly."

This damp overwhelm may take a little longer to happen if you drink really dark beer, but can still arise. Over time, this dampness has the potential to turn into heat in your body, regardless of beer's cooling nature.

There is good news for beer drinkers, though. Bitter dark beers are actually considered to be slightly nourishing for your body—but should not be considered as nutritional as say, um, a meal. And, because beer is considered cool, it's an ideal choice in the summer and in warm climates.

**Wine**

Wine is considered to energetically warm, with red wine being warmer than white. I can confirm this, as after I've had a glass of red wine, my ears turn red and hot. Wine, like all alcoholic drinks, stimulates the movement of qi, but the light nature of wine is helpful in stimulating digestion after a heavy or rich meal.

Red wine is known to have resveratrol, a powerful antioxidant. However to reap the benefits found in wine, you would have to drink a lot, so many people

simply resort to supplements to get enough resveratrol to affect their health.

In Chinese herbal medicine, some herbs and formulas are prepared with wine to add wine's warming, sweet, sour, or bitter properties to the mix.

**The ups and downs of food fads and research highlighting different aspects of alcohol make it hard to know whether alcohol is an angel or a demon.**

**Hard Liquor**

Spirits, such as gin, vodka, scotch, and tequila, are a different story from beer and wine. They are very good at moving stagnation and very dispersing.

Think of stagnation as your energetic engine seizing up. Spirits definitely get things moving. That said, spirits are hot and damp, and too much can quickly be toxic to your body. In Chinese medicine, overconsumption of spirits stress your liver and create a great deal of heat.

All alcoholic drinks are moving and dispersing in general. They loosen you up, give you a sense of well-being, and help you let go of the beast of a day you just had.

However, like everything in Chinese medicine—and life in general—a little is OK, but too much is overwhelming.

*Lynn Jaffee is a licensed acupuncturist and the author of "Simple Steps: The Chinese Way to Better Health." This article was originally published on AcupunctureTwinCities.com*

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