

MIND & BODY

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LIFE AND DIET

Sugar on the Brain

Bursts of sugar send a surge through the body that has a major effect on the mind



Concentrated sugar has biochemical consequences.

CONAN MILNER

We crave sweetness, but it's clear that too much leads to suffering. Large-scale studies show that excess sugar consumption can significantly raise the risk of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Our chronic inflammatory reaction to sugar is one factor behind the proliferation of disease in the body, but the mind also suffers from this inflammatory process.

In addition to Alzheimer's and other degenerative brain disorders that thrive on chronic inflammation, sugar also affects your mental state. Dr. Teralyn Sell, a psychotherapist and functional medicine practitioner who specializes in brain health, says a lot of her patients' mood disorders actually stem from a high-sugar diet.

"People like to separate the brain from the rest of the body, but there is a correlation they've discovered on inflammation and mental health that needs a lot more press," Sell said. "When we're looking at inflammation as one of the root causes of mental health problems, depression, anxiety, and ADHD are the three big ones, but it stands to reason that the inflammatory nature of sugar can actually cause other mental health problems as well."

One example is a study from the British Journal of Psychiatry that showed a strong link between high sugar consumption and the risk of both depression and schizophrenia. Other research indicates that sugar impairs memory and fuels addiction.

One large, long-term study published in a 2017 edition of Scientific Reports found that men who consumed 67 grams or more of sugar per day were 23 percent more likely to be diagnosed with depression

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MINDSET MATTERS

It's Not a Rejection, Just a Redirection

Sometimes life gives you a hard 'no' that may actually be a helpful guide to something better

MONROE MANN

When was the last time you were rejected?

If you're ambitious (to any extent), you can probably remember a time over the past year when you felt rejected. Fired from a job. Never even got the interview? Dumped by a significant other. Embarrassed at work? Failed an exam. Missed an opportunity. Lost the chance of a lifetime? Twice? I know how it feels. I have expe-

rienced every single one of these "travesties." Rejection hurts.

But what if it weren't a rejection at all? What if what happened had nothing to do with that particular person, company, or situation? What if it was all meant to be? And all meant for your greater good? What if every single time you have been rejected, it was actually a redirection. From on high. From the universe. From God. From whatever. Instead of it being a cruel rejection

If you don't change your thinking, that negativity robs you of your future.



FIZKES/SHUTTERSTOCK

Turning points in life often hinge on moments of so-called "rejection."

(caused by that person, company, or situation), what if it instead was actually a life-changing redirection (forced by someone or something that knows much better than you what is best for you)?

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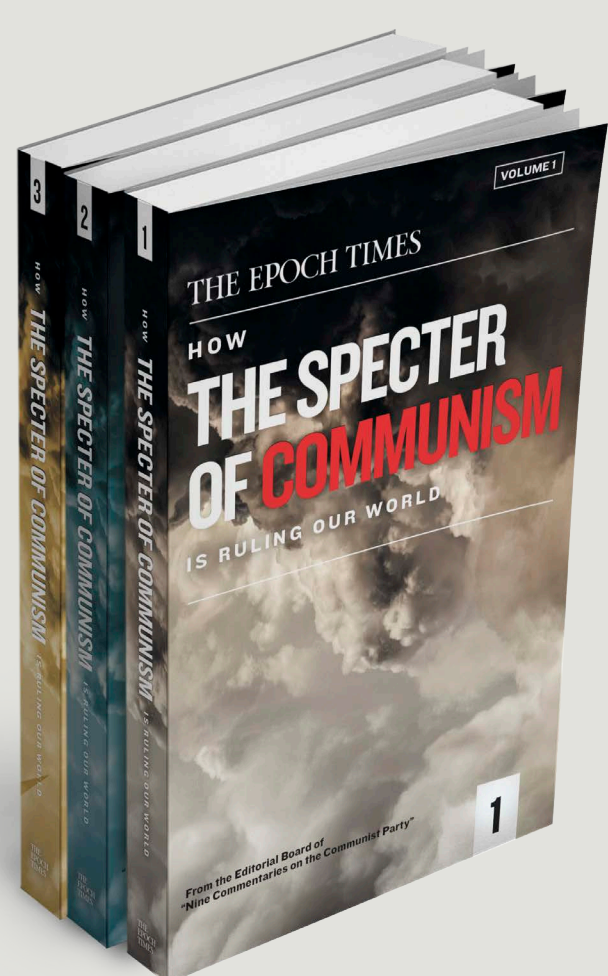
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CHINESE WISDOM FOR SEASONAL LIVING

The Little Things that Affect Your Health

We often want a magic pill to end our illness, but that's just fanciful thinking

LYNN JAFFEE

Every several weeks, I get this funky headache. Ground zero is a knot on the left side of my upper back. It tightens up and then it gets dull and achy, and after a while it becomes downright painful all the way up into my forehead. It has many of the qualities of a migraine—one-sided, beginning at a specific focal point, accompanied by chills, and pretty intense.

I used to think that these headaches were all about the knot in my back; when my back was tight (I thought) I would get a headache. Then I realized that carrying a bag on my left shoulder, wearing a tight athletic bra, or even being a little dehydrated could trigger a headache. Interestingly, it seemed that the headaches were most likely to crop up Saturdays. And then I had a very bad day at work a couple of weeks ago—and boom! There was my old pal, the headache helping to make my bad day even worse.

I have spent a lot of time working out the source of these headaches. All along I have assumed that there was only one cause. However, what I have come to believe is that what is making my head hurt is a perfect storm of several small triggers that add up to a whopper of a headache.

The combination of stress, wearing things on my shoulder, dehydration, and timing are all contributors. What I found interesting is that many of the headaches occurred on Saturdays. But when I think about it, Saturday is the day when I'm out and about with a handbag on my shoulder, right after I've done some kind of workout in a sports bra. It's an interesting fact that many people get headaches on the weekends after having kept it together throughout the workweek.

My point here is not really about headaches. It's about the fact that too often we assume that there is only one answer to our health concerns, when in reality what makes or breaks our health is the accumulation of a bunch of little things. This is true whether you are trying to figure out what's causing your symptoms or how best to treat them.

We live in a time of magic bullet thinking. We want to take a pill and have our health prob-



The mental and physical pain you suffer cannot be resolved with a magic pill—despite what drug ads may suggest.

lems go away; we want to know the one superfood to eat to be healthy forever; we want the one single diet that will make us look like we spend our days at the gym. We want the miracle cure, whether it's antidepressants, acupuncture, or acai berries—and we want it to work fast.

Unfortunately, that's not how your health works. In Chinese medicine, there are a number of causes of poor health. Among them, improper diet (eating the wrong food for your body), overeating, strong emotions, stress, overworking, not enough rest, not enough exercise, and physical trauma. However, it's rarely just one of those things that's making you sick, but a combination of several. For example, it's not just your cranky boss that's messing you up, it's the long hours at work combined with the stress, the wakeful nights, and the crappy diet that also go with the job that's really dragging your health down.

We assume that there is only one answer to our health concerns, when in reality what makes or breaks our health is the accumulation of a bunch of little things.

An acupuncture treatment or massage session may be a great place to start, but frequently it's a beginning, not the complete answer. You may also have to deal with your boss, or get a new job, get more hours of sleep, tweak your diet, and spend some downtime relaxing to really achieve the health and balance you're seeking.

Knowing that it will likely take many small changes to deal with my headaches, I will start with acupuncture. But I'll also use some heat on the knot in my upper back, stretch, get the pulse off my shoulder, drink more water, work on relaxing more during the week, and wear undergarments that don't aggravate the knot in my back. I realize that there is no magic elixir that will fix this, but rather it will take a combination of small changes that can be very effective. If your health could be better, what small changes will you make to help turn things around?

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

Healthier Sugar Swaps to Satisfy Your Craving

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

It's never easy to cut back on sugar. Even the strongest can struggle against the pull of sweetness.

But for people who seek to control blood sugar, succumbing to a sweet tooth can have devastating consequences.

Limiting sugar intake is all about finding effective ways to satisfy sweet cravings by eating



Skip the sugar and opt for cinnamon, vanilla, coconut, or even pure cocoa powder.

as little sugar as possible. It's not necessarily about eliminating sugar intake, but rather reducing the amount you get each day. Some of the easiest ways to cut back on sugar involve spices and naturally sweet foods to give your tastebuds what they need without stimulating a spike in blood sugar. The biggest sugar bombs

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than men who ate 40 grams or less.

"With a high prevalence of mood disorders, and sugar intake commonly two to three times the level recommended, our findings indicate that policies promoting the reduction of sugar intake could additionally support primary and secondary prevention of depression," researchers wrote.

In addition to inflammation, sugar influences our mental health by affecting our neurotransmitters—the chemical messengers of the nervous system. Some doctors and researchers even classify sugar as an addictive drug because this refined white crystal triggers the pleasure and reward centers in our brain much like a drug does.

"That's why people indulge in higher amounts to get the same euphoric, rewarding feeling," Sell said. "It's similar to drinking alcohol. You may have started with one drink, but now you're up to six a night."

How Much Is Too Much?

Sugar (in the form of glucose) provides the body with quick energy. But lately, we've gone way beyond the call of duty. Two hundred years ago, the average American ate about two pounds of sugar per year. Today, we each eat about 152 pounds a year, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This sharp increase in consumption is no mystery. Sugar is cheap, plentiful, and it tastes great. But why are we so blind to the damaging effects? Part of the reason is that they've been hidden.

A 2016 article from the Journal of the American Medical Association found that scientists had evidence as far back as the 1950s showing that sugar was linked to chronic health problems. However, the sugar industry buried the unfavorable findings. The cover-up was coordinated by an industry-sponsored Harvard research program in the 1960s designed to cast doubt on sugar's harm.

Now that we know better, doctors are trying to curb our out-of-control sweets habit. The American Heart Association recommends that adult men consume no more than 38 grams or nine teaspoons of sugar daily, women only six teaspoons, and children even less. The latest draft of the 2020–2025 Dietary Guidelines recommends even smaller amounts for daily consumption: no more than 30 grams of added sugar a day for an adult male.

However, Sell says these numbers fall far below what a typical American actually consumes.

"An average soda is 39 grams. A moderate bowl of cereal is 20 grams. That's without dumping more spoonfuls of sugar on top of it," she said. "If the average American is already consuming two to three times the recommended amount, is this why our depression rates are so sky high?"

Crash and Burn

Another way sugar messes with the mind is through the inevitable spike and crash it creates in blood sugar. You experience a euphoric sugar high, and then, as your blood sugar plummets, your mood and energy fall with it.

In most people's diets come from sweetened beverages, desserts, and toppings like sauces and syrups. Here are some healthy and tasty ways to enjoy typically high-sugar snacks:

Soft Drinks and Sports Drinks: These items are very high in sugar and make up a bulk of the added sugars most Americans consume each day. Instead of these beverages, try making unsweetened fruit tea, sparkling water, or fruit/herb infused tap or sparkling water.

Sweetened Coffee or Tea: It's easy to scoop a spoonful or two of sugar into your coffee or tea. But to get a little more flavor,



IGOR NIKUSHIN/SHUTTERSTOCK



Sugar consumption has skyrocketed, with the average American consuming about 152 pounds of sugar a year.

"Eventually in the process adrenaline will start to push, so your thinking brain shuts off and you start doing and saying things you wish you wouldn't have done or said," Sell said. "When it happens to a child they have a tantrum, throwing themselves on the ground, yelling, and freaking out."

How can you tell if your depression, anxiety, or other mental health issues might be sugar related? Sell recommends two simple questions: What are you eating, and when are you eating it?

"I see sugar problems all the time, but it's the one thing people don't want to

address. It's the elephant in the room. It's sad because not everything has to be so complicated," Sell said. "Are you eating food, or are you just dumping sugar down your mouth?"

Stabilizing Protein

Your relationship with sugar typically starts when you wake up. Many start the day with a sweet bowl of cereal or a muffin for breakfast. But Sell says this can set you up to fail. Her recommendation is to focus on protein.

"Protein helps to stabilize blood sugar which helps keep you out of fight or flight. And protein also provides the building blocks for your neurotransmitters, serotonin, dopamine, GABA, all of them," Sell said. "You're fueling your brain's chemical messengers. They help your body do everything."

Sell advises her patients to eat protein—such as eggs, cheese, nuts, peas, beans, or even a protein shake—at least an hour after they get up, and with every meal. If you snack before bed, make sure that it has protein, too.

"You're going to be doing your body a huge favor," she said. "If we have a snack before bed, it's usually not a protein snack. It's usually junk food or alcohol. It's the reward for the end of the day. Then we try to sleep on that and wonder why our sleep is so bad."

Of course, even if we strive to avoid sugar, sweet treats have a way of worming their way into our lives, especially during the holidays. If you have trouble saying no to sweets, Sell recommends eating protein proactively to keep temptations in check.

"Make sure your blood sugar is stable before you go to a family function," Sell said. "At Thanksgiving, for example, a lot of people think that they should not eat all day before because they're going to have such a big meal. They think they're going to 'save room.' But you're going to the dinner table in a state of hypoglycemia. You're likely to overeat and choose the more sugary foods. Stay in the protein throughout the day. Don't go in completely starving."

OLEGKOWALEVICH/SHUTTERSTOCK



Herbal and fruit teas sweetened with vanilla or cinnamon offer a safe and satisfying refreshment.

Fresh fruit can easily fit into a dessert and offer plenty of high-fiber and healthy sweetness. A few ideas include:

- Cinnamon-sprinkled apples
- Grilled peaches
- Apple cinnamon porridge
- DIY ice cream
- Dipped fresh berries in dark chocolate
- Cocoa-sprinkled berries

Syrups: You can supplement sugary sauces and syrups with mashed fruits. You can also make a fruit compote with water.

These quick sugar alternatives can satisfy cravings when they hit. Remember that if you've

been eating a lot of sugar, these options might not provide the sweetness you desire. Be patient. As your tastebuds adjust, these options will become much sweeter.

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.

Sugar is a core ingredient in products marketed with the misleading promise of carefree pleasure.

FOOD AS MEDICINE

Least Favored Veggies Are Top for Your Heart

Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, and other cruciferous vegetables have unique biochemical properties

JOSEPH MERCOLA

This likely isn't the first time you've been advised to eat your vegetables, but I'm going to add a new declaration: Eat your vegetables, especially the ones you may not particularly like. This may be one of the easiest ways to reduce the leading cause of death for men and women of all racial and ethnic groups in the United States—heart disease.

If you're not a vegetable eater, you technically may get your two to three servings per day by fitting in things like potatoes, carrots, and corn (which isn't actually a vegetable, by the way). But while those may be some of your favorite veggies, and they do have many health benefits, they're not the most nutritious options.

Cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli and Brussels sprouts (one of America's least liked vegetables), have a lot more to offer, including protection for your heart.

In a recent study published in the British Journal of Nutrition, researchers looked at data from 684 older Western Australian women and found that those who ate more cruciferous vegetables had a lower risk of extensive calcium buildup in their aortas, the main artery that carries blood away from the heart.

The women in the study who ate more than 45 grams of cruciferous vegetables every day, such as a quarter cup of cooked broccoli or half a cup of raw cabbage, for example, were 46 percent less likely to have calcium buildup in their aortas compared to women who ate little to no cruciferous vegetables.

This is significant because calcium buildup is one of the key markers for atherosclerosis and structural blood vessel disease. When calcium builds up in the arteries, it resembles bone formation (at a biochemical level) and stiffens the arteries, hinders blood flow, and reduces the amount of blood that circulates around the body. This series of physiological changes is conventionally thought to be a primary underlying cause of heart attack or stroke.

On a side note, there are other working theories, however, that discount and refute the blocked artery notion. In his 2004 book "The Etiopathogenesis of Coronary Heart Disease," the late Dr. Giorgio Baroldi wrote that the largest study done on heart attack incidence revealed only 41 percent of people who have a heart attack actually have a blocked artery.

And, of those, 50 percent of the blockages occur after the heart attack, not prior to it. This means at least 80 percent of heart attacks are not associated with blocked arteries at all.

According to Dr. Thomas Cowan, a practicing physician, founding board member of the Weston A. Price Foundation and author of "Human Heart, Cosmic Heart," three of the core, underlying issues that cause heart attacks are decreased parasympathetic tone followed by sympathetic nervous system activation, collateral circulation failure (lack of microcirculation to the heart) and lactic acid buildup in the heart muscle due to impaired mitochondrial function.

You can learn more about Cowan and his thoughts on this in the article "A New Way of Looking at Heart Disease and Novel Treatment Options" on Mercola.com.

Cruciferous Vegetables Help Keep Your Heart Healthy

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, killing one person every 37 seconds. Aside from all of the deaths attributed to heart disease, another 12.1 percent of Americans are living with some type of chronic heart condition.

You may think that a lot of this comes down to your genetics, but while you may be predisposed to certain conditions, the study confirms that the development of heart disease largely has to do with your diet. This study is groundbreaking because it shows an actual mechanism for how cruciferous vegetables help prevent



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It's currently recommended that adults eat between 2.5 and 3.5 cups of vegetables per day, which equals about three to seven servings.

While you may be predisposed to certain conditions, the study confirms that the development of heart disease largely has to do with your diet.



PIKSELSTOCK/SHUTTERSTOCK

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States, killing one person every 37 seconds.

Bladder cancer. Researchers found that the higher the intake of cruciferous vegetables, the lower the risk of bladder cancer.

Lung cancer. Researchers found that smokers with a high intake of cruciferous vegetables had a lower risk of developing lung cancer.

Prostate cancer. This study, published in PLOS ONE in 2008, discovered that just a few additional portions of broccoli each week could protect men from prostate cancer.

Colon cancer. A review of epidemiological studies found a significant inverse relationship between intake of cruciferous vegetables and colon cancer risk. In other words, prospective studies show that eating a diet rich in cruciferous vegetables helps prevent the development of colon cancer.

Other Health Benefits of Cruciferous Vegetables

While heart disease and cancer prevention are big benefits of cruciferous vegetables, they have a lot more to offer too. Studies show that eating cruciferous vegetables can also:

- Prevent metabolic disorders and reduce the risk of Type 2 diabetes
- Help control weight and reduce your risk of obesity
- Prevent respiratory complications from human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Reduce and prevent inflammation associated with respiratory disorders
- Prevent oxidative stress, which can reduce the risk of Alzheimer's disease
- Slow down cognitive decline in older age
- Exhibit antimicrobial effects against pathogenic bacteria
- Prevent asthma
- Help boost your body's natural detoxification pathways

What Are Cruciferous Vegetables?

I've already mentioned broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and cabbage, some of the most common cruciferous vegetables, but there are others, too. The cruciferous vegetables, and vegetables that belong to the cruciferous family, include cauliflower, collard greens, kale, kohlrabi, mustard greens, rutabaga, turnips, bok choy, Chinese cabbage, arugula, horseradish, radish, wasabi, and watercress.

How Many Cruciferous Vegetables Should You Eat?

It's currently recommended that adults eat between 2.5 and 3.5 cups of vegetables per day, which equals about three to seven servings. There currently is no USDA recommendation for cruciferous vegetables specifically, but adults should have one to three cups of vegetables, including cruciferous, each day, depending on your activity level.

The way that cruciferous vegetables such as Brussels sprouts are prepared matters, too. A 2011 study showed that not only can Brussels sprouts produce enzymes to detoxify your body from cancer-inducing properties but steaming them also brings out the best combination of benefits.

Boiling, on the other hand, destroys the metabolic processes that release myrosinase and activate glucosinolates, which together generate metabolites. And, should you decide to eat them raw, then just the act of chewing can activate those glucosinolates, too.

At some point, you may have heard that cruciferous vegetables can negatively affect thyroid health or even cause thyroid cancer, rather than prevent it. That's because the breakdown of glucosinolates can create a compound called goitrin, which can block thyroid hormone production and cause hypothyroidism, or a low functioning thyroid.

The breakdown of glucosinolates also creates compounds that compete with iodine, and inadequate iodine can also lead to hypothyroidism. The cancer concern was raised in a study of Malaysian women who consumed large amounts of cruciferous vegetables. The women also had a low iodine intake and mild iodine deficiency, which researchers felt contributed to their cancer.

While this is not something to ignore, it's important to remember that a balanced diet always works best. In other words, make your cruciferous veggies part of your diet, but not your main part, and you won't have to worry about negative effects on your thyroid gland.

Dr. Joseph Mercola is the founder of Mercola.com. An osteopathic physician, best-selling author, and recipient of multiple awards in the field of natural health, his primary vision is to change the modern health paradigm by providing people with a valuable resource to help them take control of their health. This article was originally published on Mercola.com, visit for sources.

MADE TO MOVE

Physical Activity Changes the Very Structure of the Brain

Researchers have found that exercise changes the brain in at least 3 desirable ways

AINE KELLY

Regular exercise changes the structure of our bodies' tissues in obvious ways, such as reducing the size of fat stores and increasing muscle mass. Less visible, but perhaps even more important, is the profound influence exercise has on the structure of our brains—an influence that can protect and preserve brain health and function throughout life.

In fact, some experts believe that the human brain may depend on regular physical activity to function optimally throughout our lifetime.

Here are just a few ways exercise changes the structure of our brain.

Memory

Many studies suggest that exercise can help protect our memory as we age. This is because exercise has been shown to prevent the loss of total brain volume (which can lead to lower cognitive function), as well as preventing shrinkage in specific brain regions associated with memory. For example, one magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan study revealed that in older adults, six months of exercise training increased brain volume.

Another study showed that shrinkage of the hippocampus (a brain region essential for learning and memory) in older people can be reversed by regular walking. This change was accompanied by improved memory function and an increase of the protein brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) in the bloodstream. BDNF is essential for healthy cognitive function due to its roles in cell survival, plasticity (the brain's ability to change and adapt from experience), and function. Positive links between exercise, BDNF, and memory have been widely investigated and have been demonstrated in young adults and older people.

BDNF is also one of several proteins linked with adult neurogenesis, the brain's ability to modify its structure by developing new neurons throughout adulthood. Neurogenesis occurs only in very few brain regions—one of which is the hippocampus—and thus may be a central

The brains makes up only 2 percent of our body's mass but consumes 15 percent of our body's blood flow—which exercise helps ensure.

It's recommended adults get a minimum of 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity aerobic exercise, combined with activities that maintain strength and flexibility, to maintain good general health.



POLBELLINI/SHUTTERSTOCK

MADE TO MOVE

People With Low Fitness More Susceptible to Anxiety and Depression

Research findings another sign that physical exercise a crucial plank in the battle against mental illness

MAT LECOMPTÉ

New research shows that people with low muscular and aerobic fitness are nearly twice as likely to experience depression and anxiety. The study by University College London researchers also found that people with low fitness levels showed a 60 percent greater chance of anxiety.

The study involved 152,978 participants who were admitted to the UK Biobank study. All participants were aged 40 to 69 years and had their baseline aerobic and muscular fitness tested at the start of the study. Stationary bikes with increasing resistance were used to test aerobic fitness levels along with grip strength tests for muscular fitness. Participants were also required to complete a questionnaire gauging anxiety and depression symptoms.

After seven years of follow-up, participants were tested again for depression and anxiety symptoms. It was found that those who had high aerobic and muscular fitness at the start of the study showed better mental health seven years later.

Compared to people with high levels of overall fitness, participants with the lowest combined aerobic and muscular fitness had

98 percent higher odds of depression, 60 percent higher odds of anxiety, and 81 percent higher odds of having either one of the common mental health disorders.

Previous studies have also found less occurrence of mental illness in people who exercise more. However, these studies rely on people self-reporting activity levels, which can be less reliable than using physical fitness measures.

People with low fitness levels showed a 60 percent greater chance of anxiety.

Lead author Aaron Kandola said, "Here we have provided further evidence of a relationship between physical and mental health, and that structured exercise aimed at improving different types of fitness is not only good for your physical health, but may also have mental health benefits."

mechanism involved in learning and memory. Regular physical activity may protect memory in the long term by inducing neurogenesis via BDNF.

While this link between exercise, BDNF, neurogenesis, and memory is very well described in animal models, experimental and ethical constraints mean that its importance to human brain function is not quite so clear. Nevertheless, exercise-induced neurogenesis is being actively researched as a potential therapy for neurological and psychiatric disorders, such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and depression.

Blood Vessels

The brain is highly dependent on blood flow, receiving approximately 15 percent of the body's entire supply—despite being only 2 to 3 percent of our body's total mass. This is because our nervous tissues need a constant supply of oxygen to function and survive. When neurons become more active, blood flow in the region where these neurons are located increases to meet demand. As such, maintaining a healthy brain depends on maintaining a healthy network of blood vessels.

Regular exercise increases the growth of new blood vessels in the brain regions where neurogenesis occurs, providing the increased blood supply that supports the development of these new neurons. Exercise also improves the health and function of existing blood vessels, ensuring that brain tissue consistently receives adequate blood supply to meet its needs and preserve its function.

Finally, regular exercise can prevent, and even treat, hypertension (high blood pressure), which is a risk factor for the development of dementia. Exercise works in multiple ways to enhance the health and function of blood vessels in the brain.

Inflammation

Recently, a growing body of research has centered on microglia, which are the resident immune cells of the brain. Their main function is to constantly check the brain for potential threats from microbes or dying or damaged cells, and

to clear any damage they find.

With age, normal immune function declines, and chronic, low-level inflammation occurs in body organs, including the brain, where it increases the risk of neurodegenerative diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease. As we age, microglia become less efficient at clearing damage and less able to prevent disease and inflammation. This means neuroinflammation can progress, impairing brain functions—including memory.

But recently, we've shown that exercise can reprogram these microglia in the aged brain. Exercise was shown to make the microglia more energy-efficient and capable of counteracting neuroinflammatory changes that impair brain function. Exercise can also modulate neuroinflammation in degenerative conditions such as Alzheimer's disease and multiple sclerosis. This shows us the effects of physical activity on immune function may be an important target for therapy and disease prevention.

So how can we ensure that we're doing the right kind of exercise—or getting enough of it—to protect the brain? As yet, we don't have robust enough evidence to develop specific guidelines for brain health though findings to date suggest that the greatest benefits are to be gained by aerobic exercises such as walking, running, or cycling. It's recommended adults get a minimum of 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity aerobic exercise, combined with activities that maintain strength and flexibility, to maintain good general health.

It must also be noted that researchers don't always find exercise has a beneficial effect on the brain in their studies—likely because different studies use different exercise training programs and measures of cognitive function, making it difficult to directly compare studies and results. But regardless, plenty of research shows us that exercise is beneficial for many aspects of our health, so it's important to make sure you're getting enough. We need to be conscious of making time in our day to be active—our brains will thank us for it in years to come.

Aine Kelly is a professor in physiology at Trinity College Dublin in Ireland. This article was first published on The Conversation.

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to perform weight-bearing exercises, or follow online exercise classes to get yourself moving.

Mental health can turn into a chronic illness if steps are not taken to help minimize the risk. Help yourself and others by encouraging physical activity and healthy eating. Lifestyle changes are significant for reducing the risk of mental illness, and this study helps to outline the relationship between the two.

Mat Lecompté is a freelance health and wellness journalist. This article was first published by Bel Marra Health.

During this stressful time with lockdowns, it is more important than ever to focus on your mental well-being.

OSTILL/ISTOCK/SHUTTERSTOCK

MINDSET MATTERS

It's Not a Rejection, Just a Redirection

Sometimes life gives you a hard 'no' that may actually be a helpful guide to something better

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A few months ago, I was chatting with one of my Break Diving staff members, Ileana from Hawaii, and I was telling her about some new "rejection" in my life. I don't recall anymore what I was sharing with her, but I do remember distinctly what she replied to me. I was telling her about this "horrible" rejection I had just experienced, and she had the wisdom to matter-of-factly set me straight: "Hey Monroe, it's not a rejection, it's a redirection." And my life was changed forever.

For some reason, whenever I encountered some heart-wrenching rejection, I would always get angry at myself, and at the other people involved, i.e. those who caused that terrible rejection. It was always hard to look at it as a blessing.

I think what made it click for me was the alliteration. You see, the differences between the letters in the word "redirection" and the word "rejection" are not many. The only differences are "dir" and "j." The words are so close, and yet, their meanings completely opposite. "Rejection" sends me into an aimless rebound with no map or goal; "redirection" turns me around gently, gives me a focus, and sends me happily on my way toward what I was truly meant to pursue. It makes sense, doesn't it?

Even if you're not someone who believes in God, many studies have proven that prayer does indeed have a positive effect on those who partake. Similarly, here, just by forcing yourself to refocus how you interpret what has happened, you can improve how you feel about what happened. You can even turn it into a genuinely positive event. As Ileana also once said to me (she's a wise one), "You can't change your history, but you can definitely change the story."

This idea of reframing life's "interruptions" as redirections instead of rejections assists our psyche in so many ways. Consider this. Too often we think we are certain that we know what is best for our lives, when in real-

ity, we often make poor decisions and pursue things and people who are completely wrong for us. We all make imperfect decisions based on imperfect data and change our minds constantly based on constantly changing (and imperfect) data and emotions. This is true for each of us, regardless of our self-control. The bottom line is that, often, what made sense yesterday just doesn't make sense today.

Acknowledging that, are we not better off by reframing it all? What if we just accepted that "interruptions" are going to happen in our lives for our best purpose? Is it not wise to expect that the decisions we make are not always going to be correct, but that ultimately, everything happened that way in order to lead us to something greater?

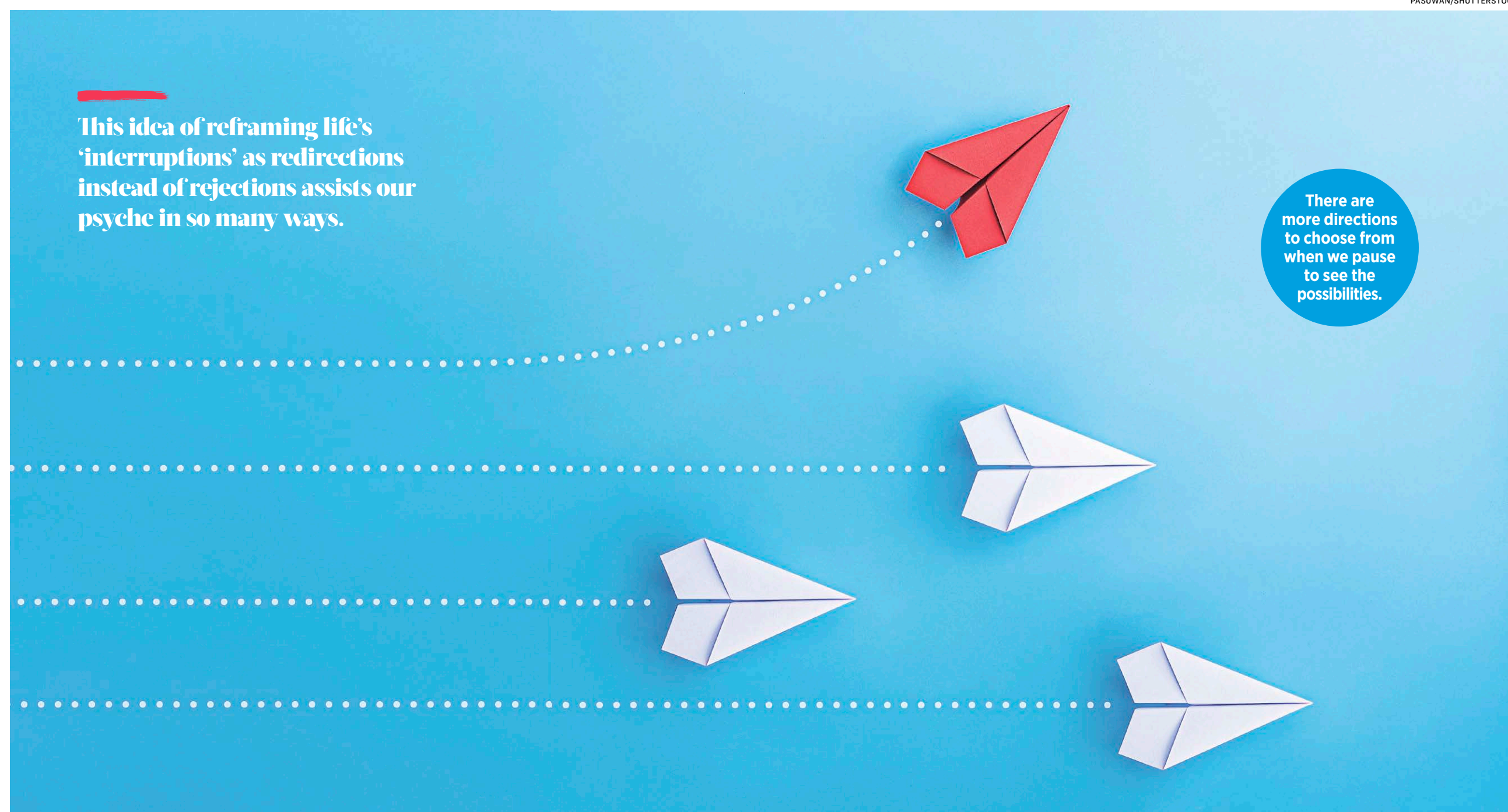
This shift in mindset prepares you to look at the world before you for the opportunity it offers, with gratitude and acceptance in your heart. What better way to face the day ahead?

Maybe rejection doesn't then even exist. With enough time, if you look back, you don't see rejection, but instead, a redirection. A redirection to something bigger, better, or simply more right for you.

Some may scoff, "What's the point of trying to lie to myself that negative things that happened to me are good for me and my life?" Because otherwise, you will harbor bitterness, anger, and regret day in and day out. You have to be pragmatic. If you don't change your thinking, that negativity robs you of your future. As I wrote in a prior article, even just a 5 percent improvement on your present situation can have exponential positive effects on your self-esteem and emotional state. If you're constantly looking backward, though, you'll never even give yourself a chance to find that 5 percent improvement.

Even if you think you know what is precisely perfect for you and your life, more often than you'd like to admit, you are mistaken. The older I become, the more I recognize that what I was certain was a terrible rejection was in fact the perfect redirection. Why was it so painful then? My ego was hurt, and that's what bothered me most. As we all should know, our egos are poor decision makers for our lives.

So, moving forward, when you receive a



This idea of reframing life's 'interruptions' as redirections instead of rejections assists our psyche in so many ways.

There are more directions to choose from when we pause to see the possibilities.

What if every single time you have been rejected, it was actually a redirection.

redirection, it may be God redirecting you, or maybe the other person sees you more objectively. Maybe your own subconscious is working diligently to keep you from going down that path.

You have two choices: You can choose to live your life classifying all of the "terrible" things that happen to you as rejections, or you can choose to look at them for what they truly are: hope-filled redirections. The bitter, angry soul will find heartless and unfair rejections around every corner; the optimistic, positive soul will instead find gentle and wise redirections instead. The choice is up to you.

As you go through the rest of this week, look at everything that happens to you as a wise redirection that is setting you on the perfect course of action that you are destined to travel for the realization of your best self. You could even look at your past and apply this perspective to so-called rejections you suffered long ago.

I am reminded of a quotation by Winston Churchill. He helps to sum up why we shouldn't feel destroyed when some setback comes our way:

"To every man, there comes in his lifetime that special moment when he is figuratively

tapped on the shoulder and offered a chance to do a very special thing, unique to him and fitted to his talents. What a tragedy if that moment finds him unprepared or unqualified for that which would be his finest hour."

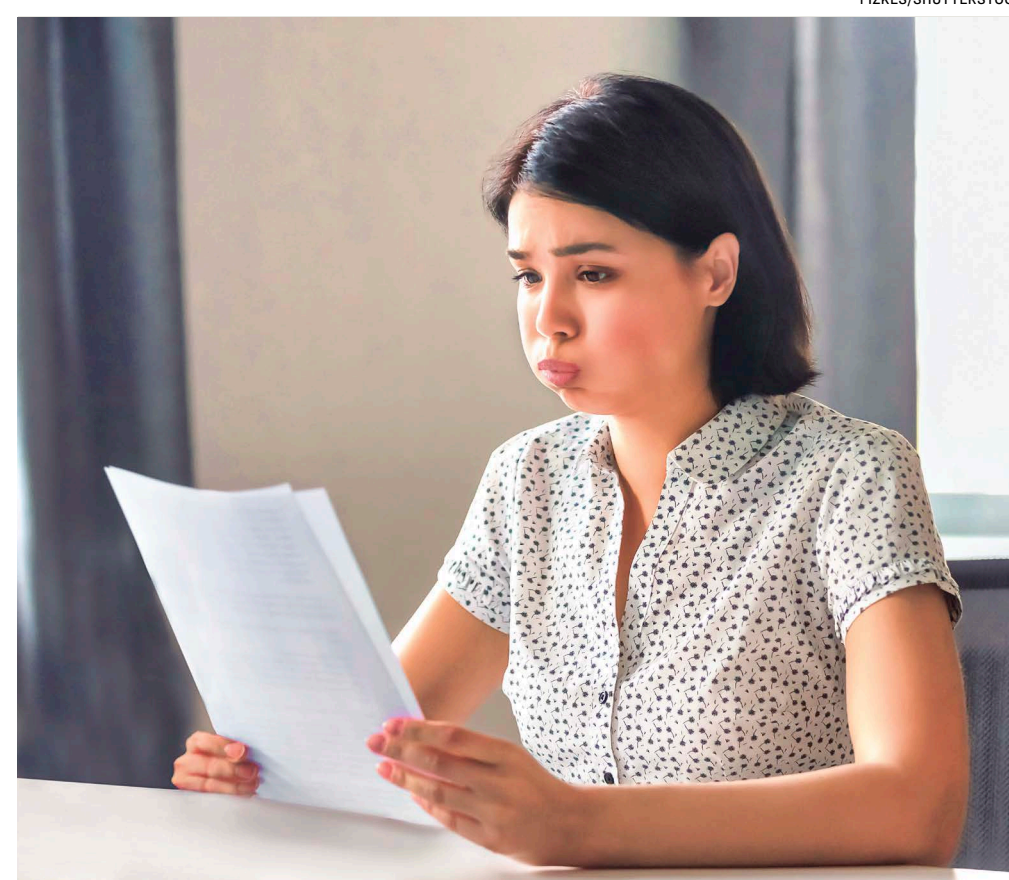
What a tragedy if you end up not being redirected from a wrong path, and thus never find that special moment.

Before we go, I just want to point out that if we take the 'dir' and the 'j' from the two words themselves, we can come up with a reminder: dirj.

What does dirj mean? It means that from this point forward, whatever you are upset about, reframe it: it's a redirection, not a rejection. So in closing, no matter what is bothering you, I just have three words for you: Dirj.

Can you dirj it?

Dr. Monroe Mann (Psych Ph.D., MBA) is an attorney, author, actor, bronze-star nominated Iraq vet, motivational speaker, and founder of socialmedia2.0 at BreakDiving.io. No Rules. No Excuses. No Regrets. Remember: It's not a rejection, just a redirection. Follow on Twitter: @monroemann and: youtube.com/monroemann More: monroemannlaw.com



If you don't change your thinking, that negativity robs you of possibilities.

The Simple Habits of Nonprocrastinators

These people are rare, so it's a good idea to learn from them

LEO BABAUTA

It's pretty rare to find people who (almost) never procrastinate. In my experience, 95 to 99 percent of people procrastinate for at least part, if not most, of each day.

That's not a judgment. I procrastinate, too. It's about understanding our habitual reactions to stress, uncertainty, difficult tasks, distractions, and the feeling of being overwhelmed. Most of us procrastinate based on habits we formed as kids and teenagers.

But some people rarely procrastinate. Like unicorns, they are beautiful and a little unbelievable. So, when I find one, I interview them. I have found they have two notable qualities.

Having Compassion for One's Future Self

This is the main one I've found to be true in nonprocrastinators, and most of them do it without really thinking about it. They think about what would make their future selves happiest, or have the least amount of pain. Then, they do that

action. So simple, right? Ha!

Making the Steps Small and Doable

This is a fairly common tip, but combined with the above habit, it's a powerful one-two punch. Take any difficult task and make it smaller, easier, and more doable.

As a bonus, here's another habit that I've found to be useful: Be fully open to the task.

This is something I've added, though not every nonprocrastinator does this, and it works wonders. Instead of closing ourselves to the task, instead of wanting it to be over, we can open up to it fully.

Let's look at each of these in a little more detail.

Compassion for Future Self

You've heard this one before, but it's worth thinking about again.

I think nonprocrastinators form this habit in elementary school and don't even realize they're doing it most of the time. Something happened when they were young—maybe they turned something in late because they procrastinated, or they had to do something at the last minute and really hated that. In any case, they learned that putting things off led to future pain.

So they have a mental habit of thinking, "I should just get it over with and do it



Think of the smallest step to start moving in order to overcome procrastination.

How can you be compassionate toward your future self so that you don't have to suffer?

now because if I put this off, it will just be more trouble for me in the future," or, "If I do this now, I will be happier in the future."

So simple, and yet this must be ingrained as a habit. Most people, on the other hand, have a habit of thinking, "I can do this later, it's not a problem. I would rather do something else right now," or, "I want to get away from this pain right now, put it off, and relieve my stress with comfort food, distraction, etc."

"Therefore, internet!"

It's such a strongly ingrained habit that we don't even think about it.

To change the habit, you should pause

and act more deliberately. Think about your future self, tomorrow or a year from now. What action(s) taken today, and repeatedly, would make your future self happier? How can you be compassionate toward your future self so that you don't have to suffer?

Make the Steps Easy and Doable

The above habit may seem a bit obvious and so too may this next habit. But most people don't realize how powerful it is to combine these two into one method. In fact, I believe most nonprocrastinators combine these two habits without even realizing they're doing it.

The habit is really this: Make the task seem so doable that starting it will be easy. The key is to get moving, and you do that by making it seem really easy to start. Once you've started, you just keep moving.

You kind of trick your present self into starting so that your future self will be happier.

Often, we build a task up in our minds into something so hard and so painful that we put it off. If we just start, we'll see that it's not so bad.

So, when you're contemplating a task or project, make a habit of thinking about how easy it will be to start.

Want to write a book chapter? Don't think about how hard it will be to spend three to four hours writing, or how many things you need to figure out before you can start. Instead, just think about opening a word processor, playing some nice music, and writing the first thing that comes to mind. Easy, doable, small.

The truth is, you can't do the whole

thing at once. All you can do is the next simple step. Focus on that.

Combine the two aforementioned habits and see what happens. Empathize with your future self, think about the smallest way to start, and you will be just like a nonprocrastinator!

Bonus: Be Fully Open to the Task

The last habit is something I've found



Take any difficult task and make it smaller, easier, and more doable.

adds a lot to this method, even if not all nonprocrastinators practice it. It takes a little more awareness and mindfulness than most habits.

It's about how we normally want to either get away from a task because it's hard or filled with uncertainty, or get the task over with like it's a chore and move on to the next one because we have a lot to do.

The problem with this approach is that every task becomes something we don't like doing, and this means our days are filled with things we don't really like. After a while, this gets tiring, stressful, and boring. This, in turn, leads to procrastination, because who wants to do tasks they don't really want to do?

Instead, what if you fully opened up to the task and found joy in the middle of it?

It's about allowing yourself to be fully present. Say, for example, you're about to start writing, so you decide to get into the headspace, allowing yourself to arrive fully. You look at the task full on and notice if you're resisting, wanting to run, or not liking it. You allow yourself to stay with the task, being compassionate for not only your future self, but also your present.

You find gratitude for being able to do the task, and connect it with the larger mission you're trying to serve and the people you care about. In the middle of that gratitude and devotion to what and who you care about, you do the task and find joy in the simple act of doing.

Notice the difference between this kind of openness and the closedness in the way we usually try to just get things done. It's completely different.

Open up to the task, have compassion for your future self, and just focus on the smallest, most doable way to get started. See what that might change.

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

Minimalism Is Maximalism

Owing less is about living more

JOSHUA BECKER

An interesting turn of phrase has recently emerged: Maximalism.

The first time I heard the word was many years ago in a conversation with someone I had just met. When I mentioned the word "minimalism," he responded by saying, "Oh, I'd describe myself as more of a maximalist. I want as much stuff as I can get."

I filed away the word. "Clever wordplay," I thought to myself.

Since then, I've seen it used off and on. But there appears to be a growing increase in its usage. Recently, in a number of articles, it has become used to designate a particular design with a loud style composed of mixed patterns, excessive, but curated collections, and saturated colors.

Minimalism, coincidentally, was also first used as a reference to an art movement and a design style.

I will never forget my introduction to the word, maximalism. It was used to describe a life chasing material possessions. As if, somehow, that was something to be proud of.

Minimalism is less about the things you remove and more about the things you add.

I'll tell you now what I told that gentleman. I responded to his statement by saying, "But minimalism is maximalism. By minimizing my possessions, I maximize my life."

Minimalism is less about the things you remove and more about the things you add.

The payout of minimalism lies in what you choose to pursue with your life rather than material possessions. It is maximalism.

It's about maximizing the right things!

For example, I choose to own fewer possessions because:

I want to maximize time with my family.

I want to maximize adventure and freedom.

I want to maximize my deepest passions, not the passions hijacked by marketers and advertisers.

I want to maximize opportunity to make a difference in the world.

I want to maximize happiness, joy, meaning, and significance.

No doubt, you may complete any of those sentences differently. I don't know what it is that you most want to maximize in your life—faith, or travel, or early retirement, or calm and peace in your home.

Whatever it is for you, be assured that minimalism provides that opportunity. Owing less frees up money and time and energy and focus.

Through minimalism, you can maximize all the things that matter most.

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



Dropping into our actual experience, whether it's anxiety, fear, anger, sadness, whatever it is, can in fact be a fascinating and beneficial exercise.

MINDSET MATTERS

Surviving 2020, One Panic Attack at a Time

Learning to be present, even when we don't like the present

NANCY COLIER

Wow, 2020! Our year of anxiety. Many of us are walking around with a sense of trepidation, if not abject fear. It sits in our bellies and brains. Sometimes it feels like there's so much on the line right now that there's literally no way to be OK.

So, what are we to do with all this anxiety? When the new normal is anxious, can we also feel peaceful?

While it may not be what we want to hear, the only way through our anxiety is through it. In order to ease our anxiety, we have to stop running from it and actually experience it.

Amped up on caffeine, I had spent the morning busying myself with one task after another. With a hyperzealous, Virgo-style efficiency, I was getting an inordinate amount done, which was good, but I could also sense a kind of franticness in myself. As productive as I felt, I also knew that it wouldn't have been possible to stop moving, stop getting stuff done, stop accomplishing, stop checking the boxes, just plain stop. I was running, internally and externally. Then it occurred to me to stop and ask myself what I was running from.

When I asked myself this question, however, I was careful not to frame it as an intellectual quandary. Such an inquiry can easily become an invitation to describe (to ourselves) all the things we're anxious about, to mentally regurgitate the list of

When we become aware of the fact that we're running from something inside ourselves, that's our cue to stop.

scary things and remind ourselves why we have a right to be afraid. But this isn't helpful. We already know what we're afraid of and why.

When we become aware of the fact that we're running from something inside ourselves, that's our cue to stop. We have to (compassionately) override the instinctive part of our brain that's desperately trying to keep us away from what scares us.

I spent years, even decades, running, literally and figuratively. I got accolades for my running, but my real work was in learning to stop. That is, to get inside here and feel its edges, no matter what here contains.

When we feel the anxiety of what's happening in our world, we can invite ourselves directly into the experience of that anxiety. Not our story or narrative on it, but the experience itself, what it feels like in our senses. We can literally say to ourselves, "feel its edges, feel its uncomfortableness." Simultaneously, we can give ourselves permission to not have to understand it, or make it feel better. Just step into it like a wet suit for scuba diving.

Maybe it's all my years of being a serious athlete, but there's something challenging and even exciting about experiencing something difficult. There's a real payoff when we stretch outside our comfort zone. Dropping into our actual experience, whether it's anxiety, fear, anger, sadness, whatever it is, can in fact be a fascinating and beneficial exercise.

And here's the thing: When we stop running and drop into whatever is under all the running, we feel better. It's the paradox of all paradoxes: When we allow ourselves to experience our anxiety, we feel less anxious. It's as if the anxiety benefits or is soothed by our own presence.

Experiencing it is not collapsing into our emotional storylines about it. It is inhabiting the experience itself, the physical and emotional experience of it.

So, give it a whirl. The next time you feel anxious or any other unwanted emotion, try thinking of it as a challenge. If you're like me, you can make it a kind of athletic or spiritual challenge, like climbing Mount Everest.

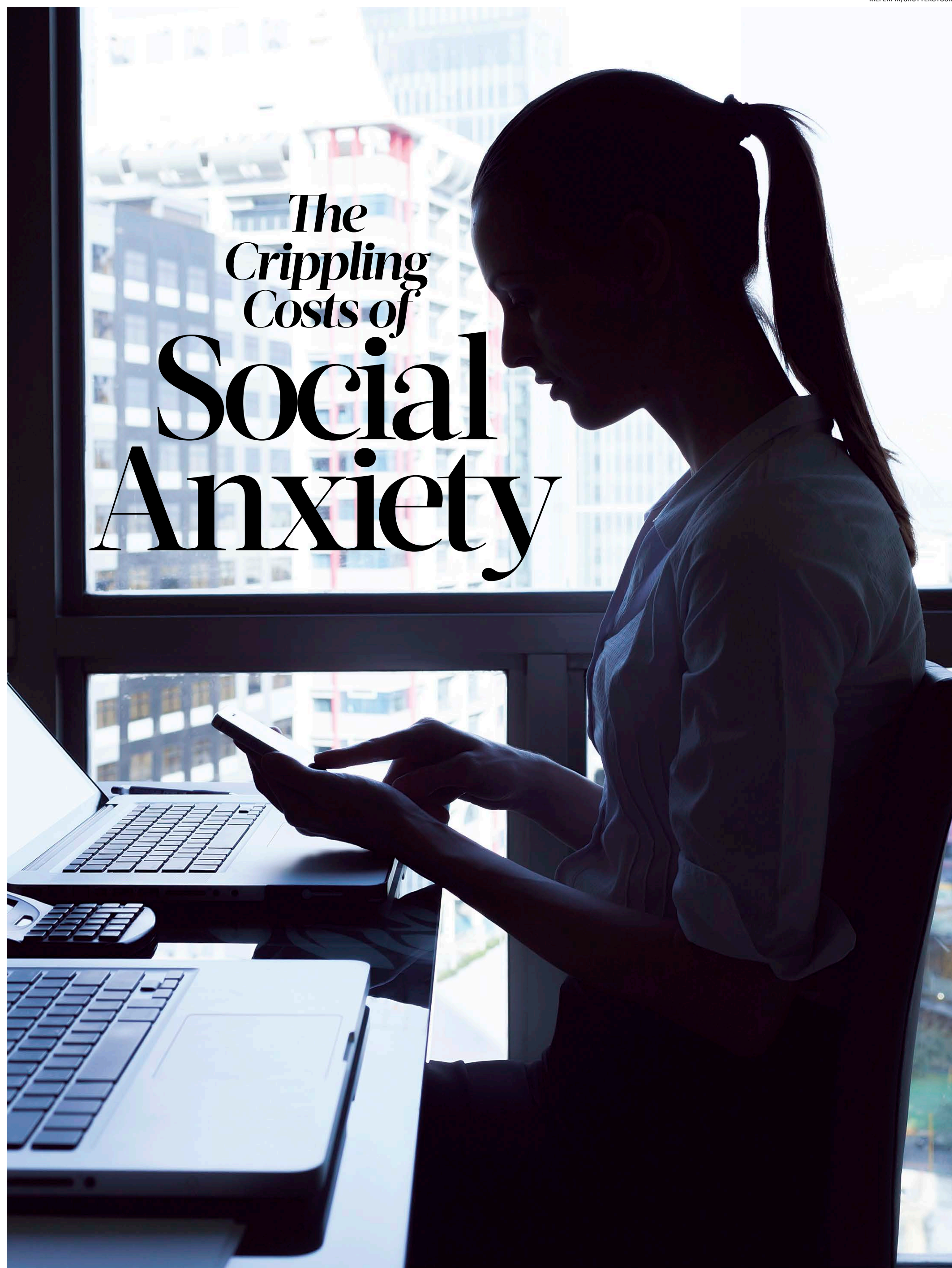
Instead of distracting yourself from the emotion, do the least intuitive thing possible: Lean into the feeling you're running from. Wear it.

Hey, if the experiment is a disaster and experiencing it proves worse than running from it, you can always peel off the wet suit and put your sneakers back on.

Nancy Colier is a psychotherapist, interfaith minister, public speaker, and author of the upcoming "Can't Stop Thinking" (2021) and "The Power of Off: The Mindful Way to Stay Sane in a Virtual World." For more information, visit NancyColier.com



We have to (compassionately) override the instinctive part of our brain that's desperately trying to keep us away from what scares us.



Modern technology and a perfectionist culture feed an affliction of isolation

CONAN MILNER

We all need moments of solitude, but people are primarily social creatures. Connecting with others gives us a sense of meaning and purpose, and helps us make our way in the world.

That is why social anxiety can be so devastating—it injures our ability to connect.

Sometimes known as "social phobia," this affliction can turn an otherwise ordinary social interaction into a humiliating experience. It starts as a worry and a loss for words. Then it builds to a panic. Over time, it develops into a deep sense of inferiority.

Writer and editor Jazmin Cybulski has struggled with social anxiety for most of her life. She describes feeling distant in social situations for reasons

beyond her control. During bouts of social anxiety, her usual facility for language escapes her. Sometimes it strikes when she's one-on-one with a person she admires. Other times, it hits when she's in a room full of people.

"It's like there's a disconnect between my brain's ability to cope with whatever situation is happening and my desire to be fully engaged in the situation," Cybulski said. "I want to be there, but my brain won't let me fully be there."

Shaun Walker, creative director and co-founder of a marketing and PR agency, has suffered from social anxiety since he was a teen. An introverted individual from a family of extroverts, Walker says he feels like there's something wrong with him, but he's not sure how to fix it.

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Everyone has social needs, and people with social anxiety naturally gravitate toward social media to meet those needs. That's where new problems arise.



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Grandparents are enjoying a golden age as they live longer and have more time and money to enjoy their role in the family.

POSITIVE AGING

Are You a Grandparent?

Statistics reveal interesting aspects of America's grandparents

MARILYN MURRAY WILLISON

If you are a baby boomer, chances are you are also a grandparent. And the reason I'm so sure about that statement is because I learned from a Pew Research Center study that 83 percent of Americans over the age of 65 have grandchildren.

What this means is that 37 percent of households nationwide are headed by grandparents, and the number of homes that include grandparents and grandchildren is increasing at twice the average rate of U.S. households overall. In fact, in 2015, that number exceeded 50 million. Plus, 67 percent of those baby boomers with grandchildren have at least four of them. But when we factor in people between 50 and 64 years old, those two statistics drop to 52 percent and 47 percent.

Grandparents in Germany and Italy, however, are actually more likely than we are to provide regular child care for grandchildren. Why? Seniors in the United States are more likely to still be in the labor force than older Germans or Italians, and we also receive less financial support from the government than our European counterparts.

Today's grandparents—as opposed to the ones populating Norman Rockwell paintings—are younger than ever before. According to Grandparents.com, the website of the American Grandparents Association, 43 percent of today's grandparents earned that title while in their 50s, and 37 percent while in their 40s. The average age people become grandparents in the United States is 48, though that age is rising as people delay having children.

This segment of the population is surprisingly up to speed. In fact, 75 percent of us are online, and 45 percent of us are on social networks such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. And here's a statistic our own grandparents would have never believed: Thirty-three percent of us have been married more than once; 15 percent of us have demonstrated for a cause, and 10 percent of us have a tattoo.

The number of homes that include grandparents and grandchildren is increasing at twice the rate of the average U.S. household.

A significant number of grandparents who live with a grandchild (this group would include more than 7 million) actually serve as that child's primary caregiver. But the fact that more than 5 percent of all U.S. households are now multigenerational doesn't reflect the economic impact that seniors

have on the American economy. We have the highest average net worth (\$254,000) of any other age group, and we earn the highest average income. Essentially, baby boomer grandparents control 75 percent of this country's wealth.

And much of our discretionary income spending goes to help support our adult children and our grandchildren. Experts have estimated that \$52 billion is spent every year on grandchild-related expenses that range from daycare to education to health care to housing.

Helping to raise a grandchild isn't considered to be as stressful or onerous as it once was.

Helping to raise a grandchild isn't considered to be as stressful or onerous as it once was. In fact, according to grandparents:

- Sixty-three percent say they can do a better job of caring for their grandchildren than they did with their own offspring.
- Sixty-eight percent think that being a grandparent has brought them closer to their own adult children.
- Seventy-two percent feel that being a grandparent is the single most important and satisfying thing in their life.
- Ninety percent enjoy talking about their grandkids to anyone who will listen.

If you happen to be a grandparent who doesn't live with a grandchild, like me, the statistics below will be of interest.

When it comes to these grandparents:

- Eighty-one percent have their grandkids for part or all of their summer vacation.
- Seventy percent see the kids at least once a week.
- Sixty-six percent travel with their grandkids.
- Sixty percent live close to their grandchildren.
- Forty-six percent wish they could live even closer.

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

Modern technology and a perfectionist culture feed an affliction of isolation

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"I've seen a psychologist for this and now take prescriptions, which helps with the anxiety, but I still feel at times disappointed in myself in social scenes," he said. "I want to talk more; I do. But I just don't. I don't know what to say or am held back from previous experiences."

These are common themes according to Jonathan Berent, a clinical social worker and therapist from Great Neck, New York, who has devoted the past 40 years to understanding and treating social anxiety. Berent has written three books on the subject, and has had consistent clinical success with helping clients deal with social anxiety.

"It's very rewarding when you can help people like this because there are profoundly positive things that can happen," he said.

Low self-esteem and a sense of missing out can haunt those with social anxiety, but freeing oneself from this mindset can seem like an impossible task. The impulse to avoid social situations is strengthened by a feeling of defectiveness, resulting from uncontrollably weird or stilted behavior in the presence of others, feeding a vicious cycle.

To cope with the pain of being around people, social anxiety sufferers often develop a knack for numbing themselves to the outside world. That's why Berent calls it "the disease of resistance."

"As a defense mechanism, sufferers learn to disconnect from thoughts and feelings associated with anxiety. This detachment leads to avoidance and repressed emotion, which recycles negatively," Berent said.

Social anxiety is estimated to impact as much as 7 percent of the population, but the actual number may be much larger. Experts believe that many cases go undiagnosed because sufferers are too embarrassed to seek help.

One form of social anxiety that most people can relate to is the fear of public speaking. We become more self-conscious when a crowd is focused on our speech and appearance. Now imagine if you always felt under the spotlight—your every word and action subject to intense public scrutiny.

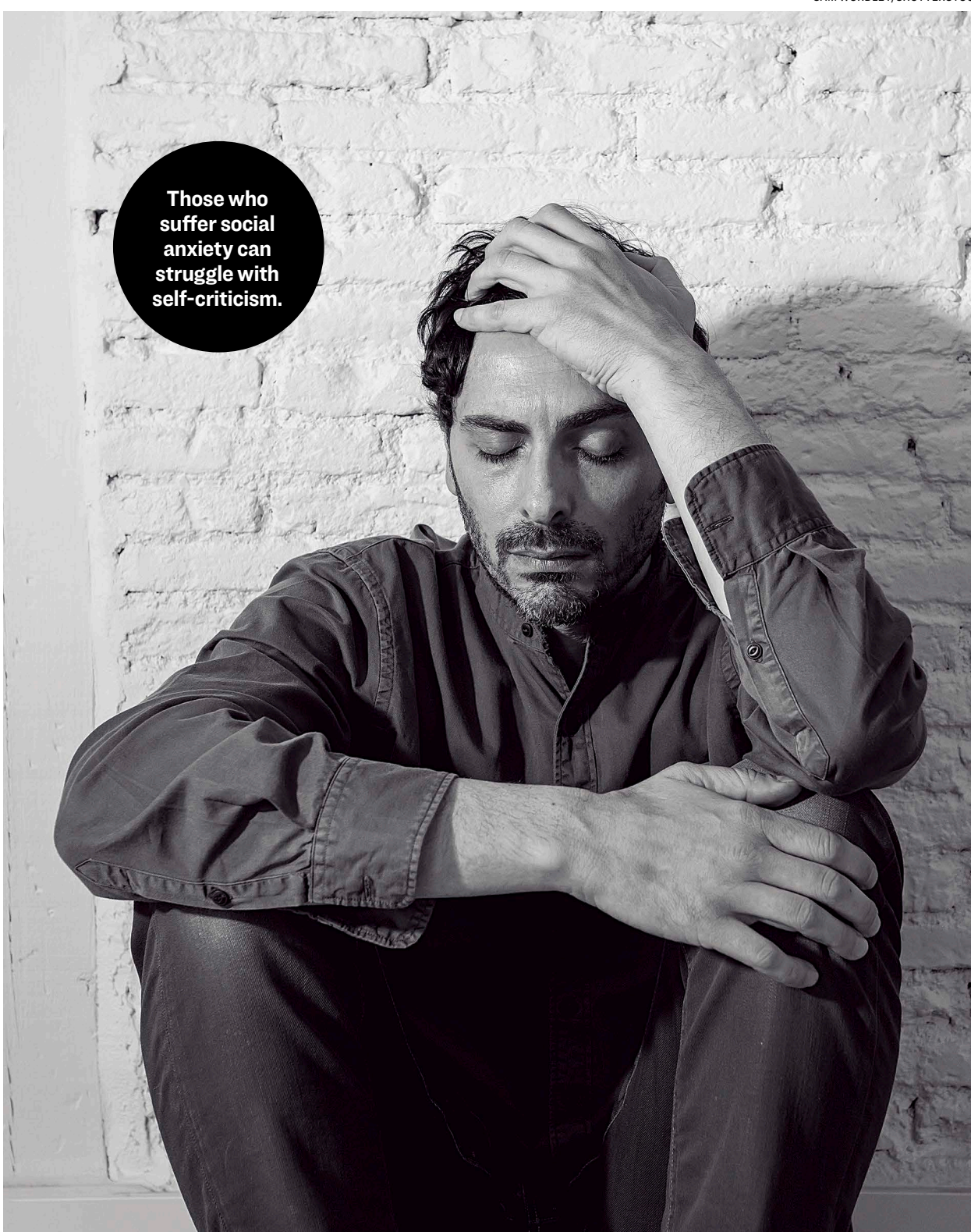
Often confused with shyness, social anxiety isn't about having a quiet or timid disposition, but rather a constant fear of ridicule and rejection. It's thinking too much about what to say to avoid looking foolish, and looking more foolish in the process.

For some, classic symptoms of embarrassment—such as blushing, stammering, and sweating—flare up. Quirks and flaws seem to magnify in the presence of people, the mind goes blank, and self-esteem shrivels.

There are no data available to show a rise in social anxiety, but therapists report seeing more people who struggle with it in recent years. Cybulski believes the cultural pressure to be perfect plays a big role.

"We all are told to be the best in everything, but no one is perfect, and that expectation is crippling to a lot of people," she said. "This extends to social situations. We don't want to be seen as failing at being perfect at sociability, but that fear of failure causes us to fail anyway."

The Crippling Costs of Social Anxiety



Our dependence on technology may weaken the neural pathways required for basic social skills, such as verbal communication.

In a society that emphasizes competition, increased productivity, and perfect performance, social anxiety follows along.

"People who are afflicted are dying of embarrassment," Berent said. "For example, a woman who almost died of ovarian cancer said to me, 'Jonathan, I'd rather be back in chemotherapy than speak in front of a group.' Why? Because with cancer there is no judgment."

Technology perpetuates this affliction as our convenient gadgets keep unwanted human contact at a comfortable distance.

Everyone has social needs, and people with social anxiety naturally gravitate toward social media to meet those needs. This format allows anxious individuals the time to craft exactly what they want to say without the pressure, awkward silences, or embarrassing behaviors that might arise with an actual person in real-time.

In an article exploring the rise in social anxiety and why people are reluctant to seek help, psychologist Dr. Laura Chackes says social media is sometimes the only way socially nervous people will interact with others. But this strategy can backfire, inflicting some of the ugliest features of online culture on extremely sensitive individuals.

"They are at an even higher risk of the negative effects related to comparisons to others, being left out, and cyberbullying," Chackes said.

Too much reliance on technology may also erode our people skills. Author and travel blogger Lauren Juliff has suffered from social anxiety for most of her life. She works online, so it's easy for her to avoid other people. But her social anxiety got much worse while working on a time-sensitive project a few years ago.

In 2015, Juliff landed a book deal that demanded a finished manuscript in just a few months. She agreed to the tight deadline

and hunkered down—working 18-hour days and rarely leaving the house.

When she finally emerged, Juliff hadn't seen friends or even felt the sunlight on her skin for four months. Just being outside made her jumpy and nervous, and talking to people felt too far out of her comfort zone.

"I overanalyzed everything I said in a conversation for months afterwards, beating myself up if a joke didn't land or if I couldn't find anything to say when forced with an awkward silence," Juliff said.

There were physical symptoms, too. Talking to friends would result in dizziness and heart palpitations. Simply walking to a friend's house would trigger severe stomach cramps. Juliff would have to turn around and go home, reporting through text that she was too sick to meet up.

"On the rare occasions when I was able to push through the pain, I'd arrive and be so nervous I was going to say something weird that I'd opt for saying nothing at all, and stand on my own in an awkward silence," Juliff said. "It got pretty bad."

Juliff's is an extreme case, but in a world in which texting has replaced talking as the dominant form of nonpersonal communication for people under 50, it may be a sign of a growing trend.

Berent believes that with our increased dependence on technology, the neural pathways required for basic social skills, such as verbal communication, have started to atrophy.

"This is really becoming an epidemic," he said.

Confronting Social Fears

Social anxiety doesn't just go away on its own. Therapists and sufferers agree that challenging social fears is essential to recovery.

For Juliff, this meant learning to let go of what other people thought, and forcing herself to do things that made her uncomfortable, such as asking a stranger a question, accepting invitations, or inviting friends to her house. To keep calm,

Juliff turned to meditation. "I found that if I meditated before going outside, I would leave the house feeling relaxed, which then helped me feel better equipped to deal with talking to friends," she said. "I realized I stopped overanalyzing every word that came out of my mouth, too."

The conventional strategy for addressing social anxiety is cognitive behavioral therapy with the option of medication if anxious feelings prove too difficult to get under control. But Berent doesn't think these strategies alone get to the heart of the problem.

"Cognition is very important; everything starts with a thought. Behavior speaks for itself. But this doesn't work with the core issue, which is anger and how it's related to physiology," he said.

This insight is inspired by the work of the late Dr. John Sarno, a professor of rehabilitation medicine at New York University School of Medicine known for his surprisingly effective yet controversial idea. Sarno discovered that most chronic back pain could be traced to repressed rage. Berent sees the same pattern in social anxiety.

"This is the quintessential disease of resistance because people don't want to feel it," Berent said. "Once they start processing the anger, the goal is to channel that into productive energy."

These people have a lot to be angry at. Living in constant fear of what others think is an enormous burden to carry and makes life extremely limiting. It also prevents a lot of the good experiences spending time with others has to offer, such as building healthy relationships.

People who don't suffer from social anxiety often believe you can simply snap out of it given enough willpower. But some say recovery is the hardest thing they've ever done.

There is a big reward for coming out the other side. Berent teaches his patients to learn how to harness the adrenaline surges that once tripped them up, and use it as a means to focus, stay present, and zero in on what they truly want to communicate. The result is engaged, sincere, and more meaningful interaction.

Getting to this place requires introspection. Someone who spends most of their time alone may believe they already excel at this skill, but Berent insists that being in your head isn't the same as going inside.

"They can be more worrying; more ruminating. But introspection is a different process. It's looking at and identifying what is. Then it's emotional agility—the process of identifying the specificity and intensity of feelings, as well as how the thinking is gluing it all together," he said.

Because of the work and courage required for recovery, a key quality to pursuing this process is initiative. For some, the motivation is the promise of dating, or better employment opportunities. For Juliff, it was a realization that all her close friends had moved on because she was unable to maintain a relationship.

"I knew I had to make a change or I'd end up miserable and alone for the rest of my life," she said.

For those who lack initiative, they may never be able to break free.

When parents contact Berent for help because their adult, unemployed, live-in son or daughter spend their lives playing video games, they are often surprised when he wants to talk to them first. But the parents may not realize that they are standing in the way of their child's initiative.

"This is an addiction to avoidance," Berent said. "So if you do not teach the enablers what to do, this problem will sustain itself."

Jordan Peterson's Most Important Rule for Life

Jordan Peterson is back, and the primary lesson from his book remains as important as ever

JONATHAN MILTIMORE

Nearly two years ago, friends purchased me a copy of Jordan Peterson's best-selling book "12 Rules for Life."

I started the book shortly after receiving it, but somewhere along the way I got sidetracked and didn't finish. (This never used to happen to me, but raising three kids has altered my reading habits.)

With Peterson's recent return to the public scene, I decided to return to the work. I'm currently reading Rule No. 12 ("Pet a Cat When You Encounter One on the Street"), and plan to review the work eventually.

But before tackling the entire book, it seemed appropriate to share the most important rule in Peterson's seminal work, which has sold more than 3 million copies worldwide.

"Take responsibility for your life."

That's it. It sounds simple, trite even. It's something you'd expect your father or grandmother to tell you after you screwed up or got fired.

Nevertheless, it's a message sorely needed right now. Norman Doidge, who wrote the foreword to "12 Rules," agreed that is the primary lesson from Peterson's book.

"The foremost rule is that you must take responsibility for your own life. Period," writes Doidge, a psychiatrist, author, and friend of Peterson.

To be clear, "take responsibility" isn't actually one of Peterson's 12 rules. Still, Doidge's assessment is correct and should come as little surprise.

Personal responsibility over one's life is an idea embedded throughout the rules Peterson offers throughout his book as an antidote to the chaos many of us feel today. (It's also a theme of his lectures and interviews.) When Peterson says stand up straight, make good friends, set your own house in order first, tell

the truth, make your bed, be precise in speech, etc., he's not really concerned about how clean your room is. He is instructing readers on how they can take control of their own lives. He's reminding them of their power. Their agency.

The question is, why does this lesson suddenly feel so important? After all, Peterson's message is not exactly new. In many ways, his teachings channel some of the ancient Stoics, who millennia ago taught that the path to a peaceful and happy life was to master the one thing humans can truly control: themselves.

"Where is the good? In our choices," the Stoic philosopher Epictetus once observed. "Where is the evil? In our choices."

The message of the Stoics was to not subject your own feelings, your own happiness, to external factors. After all, we often have little control over events and circumstances and people. The path to harmony and happiness is learning to control how we, as individuals, respond to these things.

The ideas of self-empowerment, self-control, and individual initiative are hardly unique to the Stoics, of course. Other ancient philosophies explored these concepts to varying degrees, and the themes are interwoven in the American idea, and found in classic works, such as Benjamin Franklin's "Poor Richard's Almanack" and Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance."

The problem, as Peterson sees it, is Americans are no longer receiving these lessons. In a 2018 interview with British GQ, Peterson was asked why people were so "hungry" for his message.

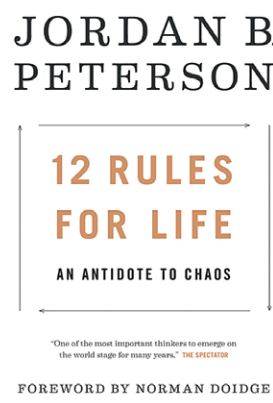
"They are hungry for a discussion of the relationship of responsibility and meaning," Peterson responded. "We haven't had that discussion in our culture for 50 years."

This is an incredible statement. For most of human history, thinkers have explored this issue—how our individual choices intersected with living a life of meaning—perhaps above all others. It was central to the philosophies of thinkers from Plato and Aristotle to Immanuel Kant and Nietzsche.

But Peterson says we no longer grapple with these questions. Postmodern philosophy has taken us in new directions.

"We've concentrated on rights

Personal responsibility is an antidote to the chaos many of us feel today.



"The 12 Rules For Life" has sold millions of copies around the world.

It's not just that we don't teach people how to take responsibility for their own life; it's that in many ways we actively discourage them from doing so.



Jordan Peterson, author of "12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos."

and privileges and freedom and impulsive pleasure," Peterson says. "Those are all useful in their place, but they're shallow, and that's not good. Because if people are moored shallowly, then storms wreck them. And storms come along."

Leaning into responsibility is how humans learn to bear storms, which are inevitable. As many know, Peterson encountered his own storm when his wife Tammy was diagnosed with terminal cancer in April 2019, and he struggled with a dependency on the drug benzodiazepine.

Peterson survived his storm because his life was moored in responsibility, which offered meaning and strength.

Sadly, many people today are unmoored.

When Peterson says we haven't had a discussion on responsibility and meaning in our culture "for 50 years," he's alluding to a cultural shift that has taken place.

It's not just that we don't teach people how to take responsibility for their own life; it's that in many ways we actively discourage them from doing so. Woke culture, safe spaces, and victimhood—each is a manifestation of a culture that has replaced individual responsibility with collectivist notions of injustice. People are openly hostile to Peterson's message of owning your life.

This is not to say that injustice is

not real. It is, and it always will be. The problem is that in our quest of ridding the world of injustice, we've forgotten that we must first own and fix ourselves.

Moreover, Peterson's message is not to ignore injustice. His message is to take responsibility for your life despite the presence of injustice, which will always exist. (Peterson has pointed out, for example, that studies show a parolee's fate hinges to a troubling degree on whether the hearing judge ruled before or after her lunch. Apparently, hungry judges are much less likely to be forgiving.)

This is how one becomes a ship that can weather storms—not by placing your power in things beyond your control, but by taking responsibility over the things you can.

The very fact that people can treat Peterson's message as foreign, strange, and worthy of their hostility is evidence of how necessary it is.

We should be thankful Jordan Peterson is back to deliver it.

Jonathan Miltimore is the managing editor of FEE.org. His writing/reporting has been the subject of articles in TIME magazine, The Wall Street Journal, CNN, Forbes, Fox News, and the Star Tribune. This article was originally published on Foundation for Economic Education.

Hoarding, Stockpiling, Panic Buying

What is rational or normal behavior in an abnormal time?

CAROL MATHEWS

Symptoms of depression, anxiety, and obsessive compulsive disorders have emerged or worsened for many during the pandemic. This is no surprise to clinicians and scientists around the world working to improve access to mental health information and resources.

But what effect has the pandemic had on another common but often misunderstood problem—hoarding? The issue first received attention when people piled up paper towels, toilet tissue, and hand sanitizer in their shopping carts at the start of the pandemic, leading some people to wonder whether they or a loved one were showing signs of hoarding disorder.

The short answer is: Probably not. Hoarding disorder goes beyond stockpiling in an emergency. I am a psychiatrist at the University of Florida and the director of the Center for OCD, Anxiety and Related Disorders. I also recently authored a book on hoarding disorder. My work focuses on identifying the causes of hoarding and its impact on individuals and on society.

Stockpiling items in the face of a perceived shortage is normal behavior.

Millions Have Hoarding Disorder

Although often sensationalized in the popular press as a behavioral oddity, hoarding disorder is a serious psychiatric illness affecting more than 13 million American adults. The cause is a complex interaction of biological and environmental factors. Doctors have known about hoarding for centuries, although the disorder was only formally recognized by the psychiatric community as a distinct psychiatric illness in 2013. Perhaps the most famous person who had a hoarding disorder was Howard Hughes.

The disorder is chronic and often lifelong. Although symptoms typically begin in adolescence, they usually do not become problematic until mid- to late adulthood. No one knows exactly why the disorder takes so long to manifest; perhaps as those with hoarding symptoms get older, their ability to decide what to discard becomes increasingly impaired. Or they might have fewer people around, such as parents or spouses, to encourage them to get rid of unneeded items.

What is clear is that the increase in hoarding behaviors across the lifespan is not just a result of a lifetime's accumulation of clutter. About 7 percent of adults over age 60 have problematic hoarding; that's one in every 14 people.

And contrary to popular belief, the defining feature of hoarding disorder is not clutter. Instead, it is the difficulty in discarding what's no longer needed. The most commonly hoarded items are everyday belongings: clothes, shoes, containers, tools, and mechanical objects like nails and screws, household supplies, newspapers, mail, and magazines.



EPIC_IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK

Those with the disorder report feeling indecision about what to discard, or fear the item will be needed in the future.

This trouble in disposing of items, even common items like junk mail, plastic bags and plastic containers, leads to the accumulation of clutter. Over time, living and work spaces become unusable. In addition to affecting living spaces, hoarding also causes problems between spouses, between parents and their children, and between friends. At its worst, hoarding can also impact one's ability to work.

Hoarding disorder has a substantial impact on public health, including not only lost workdays but also increased rates of medical illness, depression, anxiety, risk of suicide, and cognitive impairment. As many as half of those suffering from hoarding disorder will also suffer from depression, and 30 percent or more will have an anxiety disorder.

Hoarding-related clutter in homes increases the risk of falls, pest or vermin infestation, unstable or unsafe living conditions,

and difficulty with self-care. It may stun you to know that up to 25 percent of deaths by house fire are due to hoarding.

Stockpiling and Panic Buying

What is the difference between stockpiling, panic buying, and hoarding? Will someone who stockpiled toilet paper and hand sanitizer in the early days of the pandemic develop hoarding disorder? Or are they instead rational and thoughtful planners?

While stockpiling is planned, panic buying is an impulsive and temporary reaction to anxiety caused by an impending crisis. Items, even if unneeded, may be purchased simply because they are available on store shelves. Panic buying may also include purchasing enormous quantities of a particular item, in volumes that will never be needed, or emptying a store shelf of that item. Panic acquiring, which involves getting free things through giveaways, food pantries, or scavenging, also occurs during a crisis.

For example, people who live in cold climates may stock up on wood for fireplaces and salt

for driveways before the winter. Similarly, those who live in the southeast U.S. may stock up on gasoline and water before hurricane season.

That said, stockpiling can be excessive. During a crisis, it can lead to national shortages of essential items. This occurred early in the pandemic when people bought toilet paper in large quantities and emptied store shelves for everyone else.

Ironically, the more media attention on stockpiling, the more it triggers additional stockpiling. People reading about a potential shortage of hand sanitizer will be driven to buy as much as possible until it's no longer available for weeks or months.

While stockpiling is planned, panic buying is an impulsive and temporary reaction to anxiety caused by an impending crisis. Items, even if unneeded, may be purchased simply because they are available on store shelves. Panic buying may also include purchasing enormous quantities of a particular item, in volumes that will never be needed, or emptying a store shelf of that item. Panic acquiring, which involves getting free things through giveaways, food pantries or scavenging, also occurs during a crisis.

Unlike those with hoarding disorder, panic buyers and stockpilers are able to discard something no longer needed. Usually, after the crisis has passed, they can easily throw or give these items away.

How to Get Help

For some with hoarding disorder, the pandemic has made it even harder to dispose of unneeded items. Others find their material belongings provide comfort and safety in the face of increased uncertainty. Yet others have used the lockdowns as a reset—time to finally declutter their home.

If you or someone you know has problems with hoarding, help is available. Resources are on the American Psychiatric Association website and at the International Obsessive Compulsive Foundation.

Carol Mathews is a professor of psychiatry at the University of Florida. This article was first published on The Conversation.

WISE HABITS

The Magic of a Fresh Start

Falling off the wagon of a new habit is a great opportunity

LEO BABAUTA

One of the biggest obstacles to sticking with a habit change, a new system, a goal, or long-term project is that we get disrupted.

Something interrupts our progress. We skip a workout day or two and then some programming in our brains turns that into a message of how we're not good enough, we can't do it, we should just give up.

This stops so many people from making long-term progress.

It stops us from simply starting again.

This is because most of us don't realize the power and magic of a fresh start.

A fresh start is when we get to start anew, with a blank slate. It's waking up to a brand new morning, with a day we get to use however we want.

When we miss a few days of meditation, or eat junk for a week because of various celebrations, or fall off from writing our book, instead of thinking that means that this whole thing is a waste of time or that we somehow

suck, we can look at it as a fresh start.

I'm not simply reframing things to "be positive." There's a lot of power available to us in a fresh start that we miss out on.

A fresh start is magical:

We can see the habit or project with fresh eyes, as if we'd never seen it before, and bring a sense of wonder and curiosity to what we're doing.

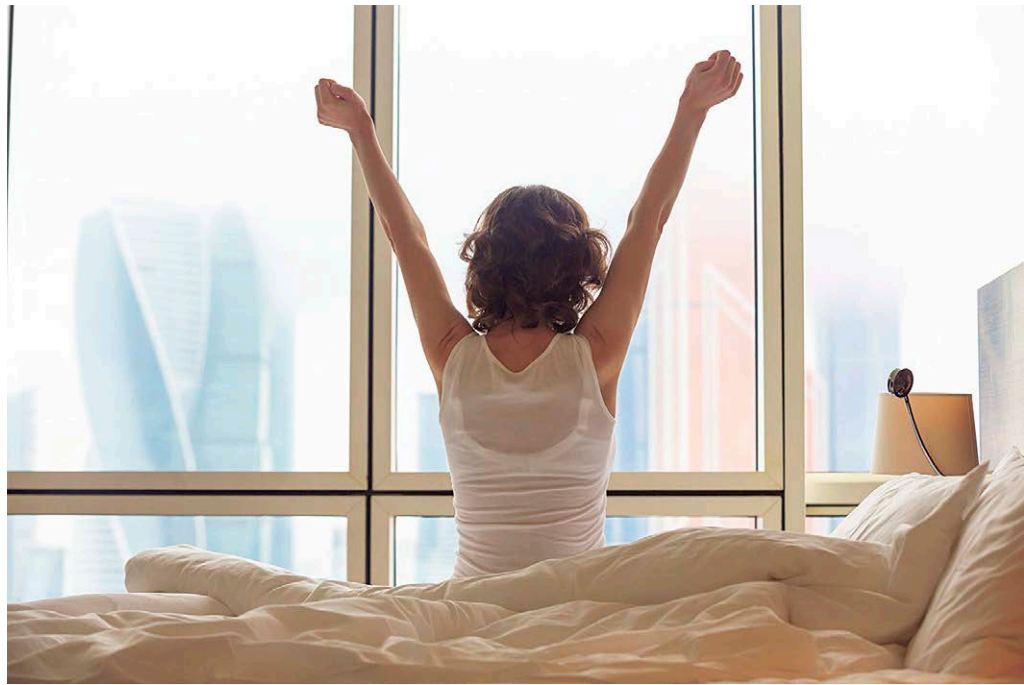
There's a sacredness to letting everything go from the past and just showing up in a new moment.

We can learn something from the past failure or disruption, and use this new start as a way to get better at that difficulty, armed with this new information, so that every fresh start becomes a new opportunity to learn, grow, and get better at something.

We get to reinvent ourselves, reinvent what we're taking on, and reinvent what we want to make our lives to be.

We can recommit, and remind ourselves of why we're committed to this.

This is all missed when we ignore the



FIZKES/SHUTTERSTOCK

When we are working on changing ourselves, disruptions will take us off course. That's where a fresh start becomes a precious chance to improve.

magic and power of a fresh start!

The beautiful thing is that a fresh start is available to us not only when we get disrupted or stumble but in every moment. Every day, every new meditation or workout or work session, every new meeting with someone, every new conversation, every

new breath is a chance for a fresh start.

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

BECOMING MINIMALIST

Why Do I Have This?

Questioning ourselves opens us to insight about our unacknowledged motivations

JOSHUA BECKER

Ask yourself, with everything you own, Why do I own this?

When you do, you will be surprised by the answers.

In my own life, it was the question of "Why?" that forced me to uncover and evaluate many of the unhealthy motivations that were contributing to my over-accumulation in the first place. Once I knew them, I was better equipped to overcome them.

For example, one of the first areas of my home that I chose to minimize was my closet. When I did, I noticed all sorts of different styles and colors and fits of clothing, many of which I no longer wore.

Of course, I am not alone in this—many of our closets are filled with items we no longer wear. Our over-filled closets have nothing to do with functionality.

Why do we own closets full of clothing and so much more than we need? Is it because we love them all or because we need that many shirts or shoes? No, of course not.

We buy them because we are trying to keep up with changing fashions—the same changing styles that the fashion industry tells us we need to remain in style.

Similarly, when we look in our living rooms, we notice all kinds of decorations and knick-knacks cluttering our shelves. Why do we have them? Because we love them and they tell the story of our lives? Doubtful.

Instead, we bought them because they were on sale, they matched the couch, or those built-in shelves needed something on them.

In each case, we buy things and keep them, not because they benefit our lives, but for some other intention.

This question (Why do I have this?) makes the process of decluttering easier and holds benefit for almost every item we own: Why do I own these CDs, that piece of furniture, these toys, these old electronics, those books? Once we determine the Why? we are better equipped to answer the What now?

Asking Why? forces us to stand face to face with questions of motivation and impulse. It requires us to confront the reason behind the actions.

In fact, the question offers opportunity wherever it is asked:

- What is the first thing you do in the morning? Why?
- What are the unhealthy habits in your life? Why are they there?

- What worries do you carry? Why is that so?
- What fears do you have? Why do you have them?
- What struggle points do you have in your marriage? Why?
- Do you enjoy your work? Why or why not?
- Are you getting ahead financially? Why not?
- Are you content with your life? Why or why not?
- Are you happy? Why or why not?

With each question, you journey deeper and deeper into your heart.

That's why the question "Why do I have

this?" forms the basis for your best decluttering efforts going forward.

This question—along with Do I need it?—will open up new ideas about what items and habits to keep and what to remove.

And ultimately, isn't that goal? To remove things entirely from your life that you no longer need ... so you can begin living the life that you want.

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



KOSTIKOVA NATALIA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Asking 'Why?' forces us to stand face to face with questions of motivation and impulse.

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A diet rich in niacin could protect your skin against ultraviolet radiation.



The Benefits of Niacin (Vitamin B3)

This vitamin can protect your skin and heart and may reduce the risk of COVID-19

JOSEPH MERCOLA

Niacin, also called vitamin B3, is a water-soluble vitamin that is found naturally in foods, is added to processed foods, and can be bought as a supplement. Niacin plays a vital role in over 400 enzymes which catalyze biochemical reactions in your body. One study suggests that a diet rich in niacin could protect your skin against ultraviolet (UV) radiation.

A severe niacin deficiency called pellagra is ultimately a lethal disease. While it was common in the early 20th century, pellagra is uncommon in industrialized populations where most processed foods are fortified with niacin. Currently, pellagra is limited to people living in poverty whose diets are low in niacin and protein.

The disease is marked by the four D's: diarrhea, dermatitis, dementia, and death. Symptoms of the condition include a brown discoloration on skin exposed to sunlight, a bright red tongue, and vomiting, constipation, and/or diarrhea. Neurological symptoms include headache, fatigue, loss of memory, and depression.

Without treatment, the disease progresses until a person exhibits paranoid and suicidal behaviors with visual and auditory hallucinations and dies. Although this deficiency is rare in industrialized nations, insufficiency contributes to several disease entities.

"Benefits of niacin supplementation have been observed in experimental models of cancer, cardiovascular disease, skin health, mental health, and oxidant lung injury," notes a study published in *Advances in Nutrition* in 2016.

Approximately 20 percent of people living in the U.S. will have skin cancer by age 70.

Niacin Protects Your Skin From UV Radiation

There are three main forms of niacin, which are dietary precursors to nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide (NAD). These are nicotinamide riboside, nicotinic acid, and nicotinamide. Researchers in Italy studied skin cells from nonmelanoma skin cancers and treated them with different doses of nicotinamide for 48, 24, and 18 hours, after which they were exposed to UV light.

The lab studies showed the cells that were pretreated with nicotinamide were protected from oxidative stress, including damage to DNA from ultraviolet rays. In addition, the data showed niacin reduced local inflammation and the production of

reactive oxygen species. Laura Camillo participated in the study and commented in a press release: "Our study indicates that increasing the consumption of vitamin B3, which is readily available in the daily diet, will protect the skin from some of the effects of UV exposure, potentially reducing the incidence of non-melanoma skin cancers. However, the protective effect of vitamin B3 is short-acting, so it should be consumed no later than 24 to 48 hours before sun exposure."

The current lab study supported data from past studies demonstrating similar results. In an animal model, nicotinamide helps prevent photocarcinogenesis and protected the skin against UVA and UVB light. Researchers also tested nicotinamide supplements twice-daily in a human trial with people who had actinic keratosis, a precursor to skin cancer. The nicotinamide supplements reduced the actinic keratosis by 35 percent relative to the placebo used in the study when it was measured at two and four months. The results were presented at the 41st European Society for Dermatological Research Annual Meeting 2011.

In a paper published in *American Health & Drug Benefits*, the author reported on one study investigating the use of oral nicotinamide in people who were at high risk for skin cancer. The data showed the supplement reduced the rate of new diagnosis of basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma after one year by 23 percent when the results were compared against a placebo.

Niacin also lowered the risk the participant would develop actinic keratosis. It was estimated the use of this inexpensive supplement could reduce health care costs by approximately \$4.8 million each year. The investigators stressed the results were in individuals who had been diagnosed with skin cancer in the past and may not apply to other populations.

In addition, the researchers believe vitamin B3 could be used as a preventive strategy and not treatment. The lead investigator from the University of Sydney also warned the prevention did not take the place of routine care and skin examinations, commenting:

"This form of prevention is safe and inexpensive, costing around \$10 per month, and it is widely available. It is ready to go straight to the clinic for high-risk patients with a track record of skin cancer. This is a new opportunity for skin cancer prevention."

Prevalence of Skin Cancer Is Rising Approximately 20 percent of people living in the U.S. will have skin cancer by age 70. Experts estimate nearly 9,500 people receive a diagnosis of skin cancer every day in the U.S. There are four main types of skin cancer, including basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, Merkel cell carcinoma and melanoma.

"This form of prevention is safe and inexpensive, costing around \$10 per month, and it is widely available."

Lead investigator from The University of Sydney

Rich sources of niacin include brown rice, beef, pork, and sockeye salmon.



Of the nonmelanoma types of skin cancer, nearly 80 percent are basal cell, which develop more often on the head and neck. These types of cancer grow slowly and rarely spread. Nearly 20 percent are squamous cell carcinomas that can be found in areas of the skin that had been burned, exposed to X-rays, or damaged by chemicals. Merkel cell is a rare and highly aggressive form of cancer.

Experts estimate over 100,000 adults in the U.S. are diagnosed with invasive melanoma each year and it is the fifth most common cancer that can develop in any age person. From 1982 until 2011, the rate of melanoma in the U.S. doubled. Since then, the number of people diagnosed has continued to rise.

Long-Term Heart Benefits of Niacin

Nicotinic acid has been used for more than 40 years to help control dyslipidemia. Supplementation with nicotinic acid from 1,000 milligrams (mg) to 2,000 mg have been used daily to increase HDL and lower LDL cholesterol in carefully monitored studies. However, doses this high can produce side effects.

Some clinical trials have demonstrated patients on niacin therapy have a lower number of cardiovascular events and deaths. Other trials were not as positive. After a review of the literature, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration concluded:

"... scientific evidence no longer supports the conclusion that a drug-induced reduction in triglyceride levels and/or increase in HDL cholesterol levels in statin-treated patients results in a reduction in the risk of cardiovascular events."

As I've written before, it is the relationship between HDL, LDL and triglycerides that is a greater predictor of heart health and not the absolute numbers of each. This means the FDA statement supports lowering LDL cholesterol with dangerous statin medications but suggests altering HDL and triglyceride levels with an inexpensive and safe supplement would have no effect on heart health.

In one study published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, researchers evaluated data from 1966 to 1975, looking at the effectiveness and safety of five drugs in a population of 8,341 men.

Two medications were discontinued early

in the study because of adverse events. The niacin treatment showed modest benefit in reducing the number of heart attacks, but did not reduce all-cause mortality. However, researchers followed up with the group 15 years later, nearly nine years after the participants stopped using the interventions.

"They found all-cause mortality was similar to the placebo group in all drugs except niacin. Nine years after the participants stopped taking niacin, it continued to have a positive effect on their health, lowering all-cause mortality by 11 percent over the placebo group."

B Vitamins May Lower Risk of Worst COVID Outcomes

In the past, I have reviewed how nutrients such as vitamins C and D play a role in the treatment of COVID-19. A recently published paper has also highlighted the potential value of B vitamins. The paper was an international collaborative effort among researchers from the University of Oxford, United Arab Emirates University, and the University of Melbourne Australia.

Although there are no studies evaluating the efficacy of B vitamins on patients with COVID-19, the scientists advocate for research into the group of vitamins, stressing their importance to the immune system and immune competence. The paper does not suggest that B vitamins could prevent or treat COVID-19 alone.

However, as scientists have discovered many times, a single vitamin or nutritional supplement does not work alone, but in concert with others. COVID-19 has been dangerous for those with underlying medical conditions or older adults as it triggers an overactivation of your immune system and a cytokine or bradykinin storm.

Niacin and nicotinamide are important to your immune health as they are precursors to NAD+. This is a crucial signaling molecule that naturally declines with age. According to David Sinclair with Harvard Medical School, higher levels of NLRP3 inflammasomes are culprits in cytokine storms and are influenced by NAD+ levels.

Niacin is a building block of NAD and NADP. This component is vital when combating inflammation, such as what happens during a viral infection like COVID-19. The scientists advocating for research into B vitamins explain:

"NAD+ is released during the early stages of inflammation and has immunomodulatory properties, known to decrease the pro-inflammatory cytokines, IL-1 β , IL-6 and TNF- α ."

"Recent evidence indicates that targeting IL-6 could help control the inflammatory storm in patients with COVID-19. Moreover, niacin reduces neutrophil infiltration and exhibits an anti-inflammatory effect in patients with ventilator-induced lung injury..."

"In addition, nicotinamide reduces viral replication (vaccinia virus, human immunodeficiency virus, enteroviruses, hepatitis B virus) and strengthens the body's defense mechanisms. Taking into account the lung protective and immune strengthening roles of niacin, it could be used as an adjunct treatment for COVID-19 patients."

Be Aware of a Niacin Flush

Niacin can be found in a wide variety of foods, including animal-based foods such as poultry, beef and fish, and nuts and grains. Many processed foods such as breads, cereals and infant formulas are fortified with niacin.

One of the highest sources of B3 is grass-fed beef liver, and even half a cup of chopped onions has 0.1 mg of niacin per serving. Other rich sources include brown rice, beef, pork, and sockeye salmon.

If you are considering using a niacin supplement, be aware that one of the common side effects is a niacin flush. This most often happens when the vitamin is taken in large doses and usually only when using nicotinic acid. Niacinamide does not commonly produce the flushing side effect, but also does not have the same effect on cholesterol levels.

A niacin flush doesn't happen when you eat foods high in niacin. The condition is marked by symptoms of a burning or tingling sensation in the chest, neck, and face. Your skin can feel warm to the touch and take on a flushed, red appearance. For some, as little as a 50 mg supplement can trigger the reaction.

Although it is irritating and sometimes alarming, it is nonetheless harmless. Some find using a timed-release supplement, taking it with meals or drinking plenty of fluid, can reduce the flushing effect. Taking smaller doses spread throughout the day may also reduce the potential of a reaction.

Dr. Joseph Mercola is the founder of Mercola.com. An osteopathic physician, best-selling author, and recipient of multiple awards in the field of natural health, his primary vision is to change the modern health paradigm by providing people with a valuable resource to help them take control of their health. This article was originally published on Mercola.com, visit for sources.

Study: Acupressure Eases Chronic Lower Back Pain

Data reveals positive effects of self-administered acupressure on fatigue and pain

Did you know that chronic lower back pain is the leading cause of disability, worldwide? Back pain can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, or activity level, and is responsible for more than 264 million sick days from work in a given year—that's two lost workdays for every full-time worker in the United States.

Experts estimate that around 80 percent of the population will experience back pain at some time in their lives, and the cost to Americans in annual health care costs, lost wages, and diminished productivity exceeds \$100 billion. The costs to individuals are equally grievous, measured in fatigue, pain, poor sleep, and diminished quality of life.

Opioids, a common prescription for lower back pain, have contributed to a dangerous epidemic of pain pill addiction, a crisis with astronomical costs, both in dollars, and devastating effects on lives.

In an effort to contribute useful, nonpharmacological interventions for chronic low back pain (CLBP), researchers at Michigan Medicine, University of Michigan conducted a randomized pilot trial on the effects of acupressure to treat CLBP.

Study Evaluates Acupressure for Back Pain

Participants in the six-week trial were randomized into three groups of around 20 individuals each, receiving either relaxing acupressure, stimulating acupressure, or their usual care routines. Eligibility was determined based on geographic proximity to the study facility, as well as self-reported or previously documented medical records of low back pain persisting for at least three months prior to commencement of the study.

Eligible participants were over 18 years of age and reported a minimum 4 out of 10 score on the Pain Bothersome Scale, and minimum 3 out of 10 fatigue severity score. Each was able to move without an assistive device and operate a smartwatch used to collect study data, among other criteria. None of the eligible participants received acupuncture or acupressure in the preceding 12 months.

Participants met at the Michigan facility and were instructed on how to collect personal biological data relevant to the study, as well as how to self-administer either a relaxing acupressure session or a stimulating acupressure session, based on group assignment. Control group participants carried on with their normal self-care and pain management practices.

Once trained, participants returned home to perform a seven-day baseline analysis of their back-pain levels and usual pain management practices. Data was collected via smartwatch and self-assessment, measuring physical activity and any pain and fatigue experienced. Study monitors followed up with weekly phone calls. After the six-week study period, all participants attended a post-test clinic visit and the seven-day home self-analysis was repeated.

Acupressure Stimulates Healing

Energy and Relaxes the Body Study participants in the two test groups self-administered acupressure for around 30 minutes per day to specifically chosen acupoints based on group assignment. Acupoints are sites on the body used in acupuncture manipulation that may stimulate or soothe the specific organs and systems within the body.

Relaxing acupressure was applied to five acupoints thought to be effective in reducing fatigue by alleviating insomnia. Stimulating acupressure was applied to six acupoints associated with energizing effects. Acupoints in both relaxing and stimulating acupressure were chosen by consensus of four acupressure practitioners and were based on previous studies by the team.

During the trial, participants rated their levels of fatigue, pain, sleep quality, and overall disability using standardized indexes for each criterion. The predominant profile in the sample group was middle-aged (42), female, white, and overweight, with normal to mild depression.

Pain and fatigue were listed as moderate, with opioids being used to manage chronic pain. Sleep was generally poor,



Acupressure is a safe, noninvasive therapy that can be self-applied anywhere, anytime, without need for equipment or extensive training.



Self-administered acupressure relieved fatigue and pain to a statistically significant degree, with an average 35.5 percent pain reduction.

with 85 percent of participants reporting "significant sleep disturbance" in the prior year. Overall disability was 8.7 out of 24 points on the Roland Morris Scale.

Self-Administered Acupressure

Data analysis identified positive effects of self-administered acupressure, both relaxing and stimulating techniques, on fatigue and pain reported by CLBP patients. The positive improvements in pain were statistically significant with an average 35.5 percent pain reduction experienced by both acupressure groups when compared to the control group.

Fatigue levels improved significantly from stimulating acupressure, but not relaxing acupressure, as compared to usual care. There were no significant differences among the groups in terms of sleep quality or disability level, nor any significant adverse effects.

Lead author of the study, Susan Murphy, an associate professor of physical medicine and rehabilitation at Michigan Medicine, explained in a news release: "Compared to the usual care group, we found that people who performed stimulating acupressure experienced pain and fatigue improvement. Those that performed relaxing acupressure felt their pain had improved after six weeks."

Murphy emphasized the usefulness of self-administered acupressure, performed with fingertips in a safe, non-penetrative manner, versus acupuncture, which uses needles to stimulate acupoints and requires a skilled practitioner. "Although larger studies are needed, acupressure may be a useful pain management strategy given that it is low risk, low cost, and easy to administer," Murphy said.

While results are preliminary, study authors encouraged further study across a broader array of health concerns, particularly when chronic pain is a factor. "Better treatments are needed for chronic pain," Murphy said. "Most treatments offered are medications, which have side effects, and in some cases, may increase the risk of abuse and addiction." The study is published in its entirety in December 2019, Volume 20, Issue 12 of the journal *Pain Medicine*.

Acupressure: A Safe Way to Treat Pain and Energize Your Body

Acupressure is a safe, noninvasive therapy that can be self-applied anywhere, anytime, without need for equipment or extensive training.

Useful for a boost of energy any time fatigue sets in, acupressure has been useful as a therapeutic intervention for chemotherapy-induced nausea, as an aid in treating the psychological and physical symptoms of premenstrual syndrome, and to reduce blood pressure and improve sleep in patients with high blood pressure and insomnia.

To learn more about nonpharmaceutical interventions for chronic pain, consult the GreenMedInfo.com research database, the world's most widely referenced, evidence-based natural medical resource.

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Experts estimate that around 80 percent of people will experience back pain at some time in their lives.

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Exercise Nutrition Depends on Fitness Goals

There are different reasons to eat either before or after a workout—but eating for recovery is universal

JUSTIN ROBERTS

There's plenty of evidence showing how important nutrition is for exercise, from aiding performance to enhancing recovery. But it's often confusing to know whether it's best to eat before or after you exercise.

To answer this, you should first consider what you're training for, as your goal could influence whether to eat before or not. Second, you need to consider the level that you're at. An elite athlete's needs are different from a beginner and probably influences how much energy from food is needed—and even the number of meals eaten. Third, you need to think about what works for you. Some people thrive when training in a fasted state, while for others, it's the opposite.

Eating Before

When we exercise, our bodies need energy. This energy is supplied by fuel, either stored in our bodies (as carbohydrate in our liver and muscles, or from fat stores), or from the food we eat. If the exercise is demanding or if we exercise for a long time, we use more stored carbohydrates (known as glycogen).

Studies show that carbohydrates in our diet are important in topping up our glycogen stores between bouts of exercise and also when eaten before exercise sessions.

So if your energy is somewhat low, or you're doing a longer or more demanding session, consuming carbohydrate-rich foods—such as pasta, rice, cereals, or fruit—around 3 to 4 hours before exercise can help provide the energy you need to keep moving.

There's also evidence that carbohydrate type can help improve

metabolic responses to exercise. While this may not necessarily affect performance, eating lower glycemic index foods (foods that produce a slower-releasing carbohydrate effect, such as porridge, oats or whole grain bread) can better sustain energy and provide benefits (such as lower use of glycogen stores) during exercise for some.

First consider what you're training for, as your goal could influence when you eat.

But eating right before exercising could cause indigestion, cramps, or nausea. Consuming an easily digestible, carbohydrate-rich meal (for example, porridge with blueberries) around three hours before a training session may help sustain energy and improve training quality without necessarily leading to gut issues. Pre-fuelling also helps sustain blood sugar levels during exercise, which can positively affect performance.

If your goal is building strength or muscle, evidence also suggests that eating protein before exercise may improve overall recovery responses. By providing essential amino acids before they're needed, could support early recovery and may be relevant for those undertaking intensive workouts.

Eating After

On the flip side, however, recent research has demonstrated that training in a fasted state—for example, first thing in the morning before breakfast—can actually lead to

positive adaptations linked with efficient fuel use and fat burning.

This doesn't necessarily mean greater weight loss, but it could optimize fuel efficiency, which may be important for those training for a marathon, for example, to help delay fatigue. Fasted training could also have other health benefits such as improved blood sugar and hormone regulation.

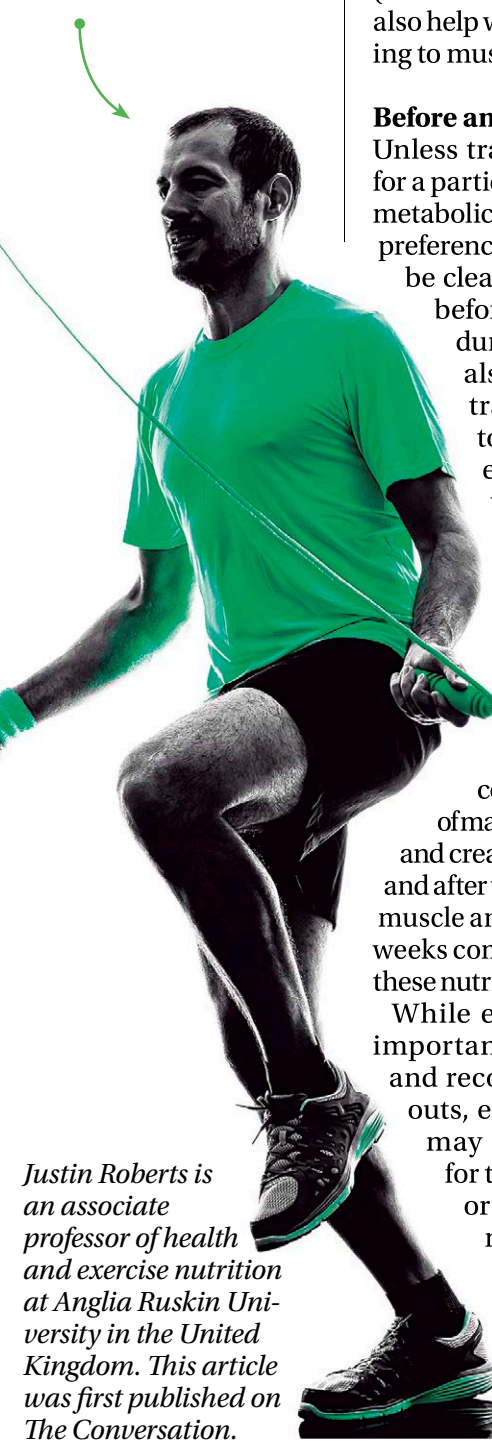
But if we think about the point of training, it's all down to how we recover and adapt from it. This is where nutrition has a significant role to play. Early research has shown the benefits of eating carbohydrates after exercise to restore muscle glycogen. Not only does this affect our ability to train many times a week by helping muscles recover faster, it's also shown to affect how well we perform.

Studies have also demonstrated that eating soon after finishing exercise (as opposed to waiting for a few hours) can help maximize recovery, particularly if a carbohydrate intake of about 1.3 grams per kilogram of body weight per hour is consumed during the 2-to-6 hour short-term recovery phase. This could be useful to know if you are doing another session that day or within eight hours.

If your exercise sessions are more spread out, then early refueling of carbohydrates is less important, so long as you aim to meet suggested guidelines, which, for moderate activity, is around 5 to 7 grams of carbohydrates per kilogram of body weight a day.

But there's also an overwhelming amount of evidence pointing toward the importance of protein feeding during recovery from exercise, both for maximizing muscle growth, and supporting gly-

Eating soon after exercise can help maximize recovery.



Justin Roberts is an associate professor of health and exercise nutrition at Anglia Ruskin University in the United Kingdom. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.

cogen replenishment (if protein is consumed with carbohydrates). Research also shows that if training is done later in the day, then consuming a small protein meal (such as a shake) before bed can also help with acute recovery leading to muscle growth.

Before and After

Unless training in a fasted state for a particular reason (such as for metabolic adaptations or personal preference), there does appear to be clear advantages for eating before (and during) longer duration exercise. This may also be the case for more trained athletes looking to gain a performance edge. But using nutrition to strategically recover should be a must for those who are serious about maximizing their workouts.

But what about both? In the case of resistance training, such as weight lifting, research shows consuming a combination of mainly carbohydrate, protein, and creatine immediately before and after training provided better muscle and strength gains over 10 weeks compared with consuming these nutrients away from training.

While eating after exercise is important for building muscle and recovering between workouts, eating before a workout may be equally important for those doing demanding or long workouts. But no matter the type of exercise, it's important to make sure you're eating enough carbohydrates, protein, and other key nutrients to fuel yourself.

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