

# MIND & BODY



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## Science of Mask Risks

Masks have become mandatory in many places, despite conflicting research

"Masks can block oxygen intake significantly. That's been demonstrated in experiments all over the world. It's been studied in surgeons in an optimal environment where there is a higher level of oxygen in an operating suite." Dr. James Meehan

CONAN MILNER

If 2020 could be summed up in a single garment, it would be a mask.

Whether it's one of those blue pleated surgical models, a snug-fitting N95, or a homemade version with a cheery seasonal print, the mask has become the face of the pandemic. There are several ways doctors say we can protect ourselves from COVID-19, but the loudest and most persistent prescription by far is a mask.

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**Oxygen deficiency is even more of an emergency for younger people than it is for adults.**



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Waiting feels frustrating when we don't accept some things are beyond our control.  
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## The Dividends of Practicing Patience

Learning to wait can ease your mind, improve your options, and uplift your outlook

CONAN MILNER

Patience is the ability to wait. If that sounds easy, then you're fortunate.

When you're in a hurry, waiting can be especially frustrating. Unexpected wait time can feel as if the universe refuses to cooperate with your schedule, wasting resources you don't have on hassles you don't need.

But patience teaches a valuable lesson: When circumstances are beyond your control, it's time to shift your focus to what you can control. A patient mindset can give you the power to address obstacles and setbacks in the calmest, kindest, and most effective way possible.

If you lack patience, the wait seems even longer and more annoying. You may even

say or do things you'll later regret.

What makes practicing patience such a pain is that we must put our agenda on hold to do so. And when we're focused on a goal, that's the last thing we want to do.

**Impatient Achievements**

According to Dr. Rob Bell, a sports psychology coach and author of several books on cultivating mental toughness, to understand patience you have to put your goals in proper perspective.

A goal is just a motivator, Bell says; it gives you something to aim for, but obsessing over it won't lead you to success.

"A focus on winning doesn't lead to

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## Science of Mask Risks

Masks have become mandatory in many places, despite conflicting research

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Wearing a mask is supposed to contain a potentially deadly disease. And with no end in sight for the COVID-19 pandemic, health officials want to see more masks on more faces.

Of course, not everyone embraces the idea. Masks are uncomfortable, inconvenient, and some evidence suggests they might be unnecessary. However, in many indoor places, masks are a requirement. And as case numbers continue to climb, many call for a mandate in which everyone must mask up anywhere they go.

The rationale for mask mandates is that responsibility trumps rights. If health officials say masks save lives, then we owe it to everyone to make this sacrifice. In an Aug. 25 blog post titled "Masks Save Lives," National Institutes of Health (NIH) Director Francis Collins says he masks up whenever he's outside his home. He points to a "sophisticated mathematical model" funded by NIH and published in Nature Communications to justify the recommendation for everyone.

"Under different outbreak scenarios and mask usages, the researchers calculated the total numbers of expected SARS-CoV-2 infections and deaths from COVID-19," Collins said. "Not surprisingly, they found that the total number of deaths and infections declined as the availability and effectiveness of face masks increased."

But what if masks actually create more problems than they solve? That's a question pondered in four peer-reviewed research papers published in the journal Primary Doctor.

In their last installment, researchers concluded that due to the extensive risk to mask wearers documented in these papers, "we urgently recommend that no adult or child be coerced to wear a mask under any circumstances."

In a world in which people consider a mask a life-or-death issue, such a statement seems dangerous, blasphemous, and anti-science.

But according to co-author of the papers on the problems associated with masks, Dr. Colleen Huber, forcing everyone to mask up doesn't make sense.

"Respiratory droplets have been really exaggerated recently by those who advocate masks. As if we were spitting all over everything all the time," Huber said. "It suggests we've been lethal to human success of the species. However, for 99,999 percent of our existence on earth, we've been a relatively successful species from an evolutionary perspective."

While Huber's statement may sound radical in a discussion of mask mandates, many doctors and scientists back her claim.

In October, Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, a medical professor at Stanford University, told *The Epoch Times* that mask mandates are "not supported by the scientific data."

"For instance, there is no randomized evidence to show that mask mandates would work to slow the spread of the disease. In fact, for influenza, the randomized studies that have been done suggest that they don't work to slow the spread of the disease."

Even the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which is now a staunch supporter of masks as a public health measure, previously saw little use for them. In a CDC policy review on "non-pharmaceutical measures for pandemic influenza in non-healthcare settings," researchers stated that after examining 10 randomized controlled trials, they "found no significant reduction in influenza transmission with the use of face masks."

Huber and her team observed a similar theme in regard to COVID-19. They looked at data from a survey on masks done by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) this summer, and compared it to their own survey with the same 25 countries three months later.

Both surveys asked subjects if they had always worn a mask when they left their

homes. In the CFR survey, Singapore had the highest yes responses: 93 percent. The fewest were Finland and Denmark, where only 1 percent answered yes.

"When we looked at the same countries in October, there were actually fewer positive COVID tests in the countries that were the least masked," Huber said.

The largest and most recent scientific evaluation on the effectiveness of masks also shows no support for the practice.

Danish researchers published their findings in a November issue of the *Annals of Internal Medicine*. They conducted a randomized controlled study with about 4,800 participants completing the trial. Half the subjects were assigned to wear masks, and the other half went without. Both groups were instructed to maintain other public health measures—social distancing and clean hands.

COVID-19 infections occurred in 42 participants who wore masks (1.8 percent) and in 53 of the maskless control participants (2.1 percent), resulting in a "statistically insignificant" difference of 0.3 of a percentage point.

The study didn't assess whether masks could decrease disease transmission from mask wearers to others.

**There are several ways doctors say we can protect ourselves from COVID-19, but the loudest and most persistent prescription by far is a mask.**

### Stopping the Spread?

It seems hard to believe now, but when the COVID-19 pandemic first hit, health officials actually discouraged people from wearing masks. On March 30, a United Nations tweet, citing experts from the World Health Organization (WHO), stated that "there is no evidence that wearing a mask by healthy people has any medical benefit."

Today, masks must now be worn everywhere, whether you feel sick or not.

The policy changed when health officials discovered that asymptomatic carriers, people actively infected with COVID-19 but showing no symptoms, were inadvertently spreading the disease through the process of normal respiration.

How much this asymptomatic influence has on the spread of COVID-19 is unclear. Statements from the WHO say this type of transmission is "rare," but the degree to which it occurs is unknown. One study from September estimates the proportion of asymptomatic infections from 18 to 81 percent. Researchers could provide no guidance for how the data should influence public health measures.

However, health officials remain firm that masks are a must for perhaps years to come. Even with a vaccine, health experts say we must remain diligent in containing our droplets.

In October, Dr. Anthony Fauci, infectious disease expert and head of the U.S. COVID-19 task force, forecast that mask-wearing and social distancing may remain in our world well into 2022.

"It's not going to be the way it was with polio and measles, where you get a vaccine, case closed, it's done," Fauci told the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. "It's going to be public health measures that linger for months and months."

The mathematical model used to support mask mandates primarily focuses on medical-grade, surgical masks. But anything that covers your mouth and nose will get you in a store without a hassle.

However, a study from Duke University suggests that some masks may spread droplets more than no mask at all. The study explored how different



masks filtered droplets during speech. Researchers noticed that "speaking through some masks (particularly the neck gaiter) seemed to disperse the largest droplets into a multitude of smaller droplets, which explains the apparent increase in droplet count relative to no mask in that case. Considering that smaller particles are airborne longer than large droplets (larger droplets sink faster), the use of such a mask might be counterproductive."

Another issue was noted with N95 masks that feature an exhalation valve. Researchers said the valve doesn't compromise the protection of the wearer, but it "can decrease the protection of persons surrounding the wearer."

The Duke University study also found that bandanas and knitted masks also performed poorly, but none of these findings have done anything to change health policy.

Huber says there's a concerted effort to censor any negative information about masks, even if the details might be important to public health.

"Those blue masks available at the grocery store, they're sterilized with ethylene oxide, which is a known carcinogen. And they are made with PFOA in their fibers which is a known lung cancer risk," Huber said. "I retweeted this on Twitter and I was kicked off for seven days."

Before this report went to print, Huber was removed from Twitter permanently.

**The rationale for mask mandates is that responsibility trumps rights.**

### Weighing the Risks

Throughout the pandemic, YouTube and social media have routinely silenced voices that stray from official statements and policy pertaining to COVID-19, or attached warning labels to give context to rogue commentary.

The goal is to protect public health. In a statement about "immunizing the public against misinformation," the WHO stated that bad information can have "social and lethal health ramifications in the context of a global pandemic."

"We're not just battling the virus," said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "We're also battling the trolls and conspiracy theorists that push misinformation and undermine the outbreak response."

For example, if masks truly save lives, then any information that might discourage the public from wearing one

could prove deadly.

However, if there are health problems associated with masks, shouldn't this also inform policy?

In Huber's studies, and in several she cited, masks compromise oxygen intake. They may be made of thin cloth, but a physical barrier is still covering your airways, and breathing is clearly better without one.

"There is no successful species that has any obstruction to their breathing," Huber said. "No species has evolved a mask, chosen to wear one, or sought out a mask in nature. It's only humans and this has been very rare throughout our history, for free people anyway. Masks have been used historically in slavery, and in torture at Guantanamo."

Of course, surgeons regularly wear masks for hours on end, so we should theoretically have little problem with one when we go about our business. However, there is evidence that even medical personnel can have issues.

"We found a study where surgeons also suffered from deoxygenation," Huber said.

That 2008 study "revealed a decrease in the oxygen saturation of arterial pulsations (SpO2) and a slight increase in pulse rates compared to preoperative values in all surgeon groups. The decrease was more prominent in the surgeons aged over 35."

Since 1979, the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has determined that the optimal range of oxygen in the air for humans is 19.5 percent or more. Anything less has been labeled as "not safe for workers."

When Huber and her team measured the air-space inside a mask with an OSHA-approved oxygen meter, it measured 17.4 percent within 10 seconds, and stayed below that threshold.

Children under 2 years of age are exempt from mask regulations, but Huber and her colleagues believe older children should also be exempt. They note that oxygen deficiency is even more of an emergency for younger people than it is for adults. They point to anatomical differences in children's bodies that make them more vulnerable to "injury from hypoxic assault."

Another issue with mask-wearing is particulates. Huber and her team looked at brand-new masks of the models most frequently worn, and at 40 times magnification found lots of debris and loose fibers all over the face-side surface. The most debris was found on cloth masks that had been laundered once.

Inhaling a few particulates may seem fairly harmless. But Huber found nu-

Wearing a mask is supposed to contain a potentially deadly disease and health officials want to see more masks on more faces. Researchers disagree.

merous air-quality issues that exist inside a mask compared to barrier-free breathing. And over time, these issues could lead to serious illness.

**When the COVID-19 pandemic first hit, health officials actually discouraged people from wearing masks.**

"If you inhale particulates, then you put yourself at risk for lung diseases," Huber said. "One of the worst diseases that we mention that is a risk is pulmonary fibrosis. It's a very threatening disease because there is no cure for it in conventional or natural medicine. Pulmonary fibrosis is slow suffocation of a patient. The survival rate at five years is only 20 percent."

Because a mask deprives you of oxygen, you have to breathe more forcefully to get the air you need, which results in more suction, drawing in debris.

Our bodies are designed to cough out most particulates we might happen to inhale, thanks to little hair-like structures in our upper airways called cilia that help us expectorate. However, because a mask makes it harder to expel carbon dioxide, Huber says it can make cilia immobile, and keep particles stuck deep in our airways.

It's clear that good breathing is essential to good health. We inhale life-giving oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide waste with every breath. But Huber says that for all types of masks, the carbon dioxide in the masked airspace exceeded the OSHA requirement for room air in about 30 seconds, and continued to increase the longer it is worn.

"People might say, 'Carbon dioxide molecules are so tiny, even tinier than a virus that it can easily escape through the mesh of a mask,'" Huber said. "This isn't true. While it only takes a microscopic amount of viral particles to infect, we breathe in about a half-liter to a liter of carbon dioxide with every single breath. ... That's a lot of carbon dioxide."

Wearing a mask can also create a buildup of bacteria, and many doctors are now seeing health problems related to it. At an August press conference for a lawsuit to stop Oklahoma City's mask mandate on the grounds that it's "harmful to healthy people," Dr. James Meehan reported seeing patients with facial rashes, fungal infections, and bacterial infections due to their masks.

"Reports from my colleagues coming from all over the world are suggesting that bacterial pneumonia is on the rise," Meehan said. "Why might that be? Because untrained members of the public are wearing medical masks repeatedly in an unsterile fashion."

Meehan estimates having worn a medical mask in surgical procedures more than 10,000 times, but he says even those who wear masks properly in an operating room, an environment designed for people to wear masks for prolonged periods of time, suffer health problems from wearing them.

"I'll start to develop a tremor after 30 minutes of mask wear in that high air-exchange, higher oxygen level, cool environment [of the operating room]. Imagine what untrained members of our community are doing when they are wearing them in the Oklahoma summer," he said. "Masks can block oxygen intake significantly. That's been demonstrated in experiments all over the world. It's been studied in surgeons in an optimal environment where there is a higher level of oxygen in an operating suite."

As case levels rise, and officials struggle to get a pandemic under control, many look to mask mandates as part of the solution. But should a cost-benefit analysis of a mass medical intervention also be included in the conversation? Huber believes so. She says that understanding the harms is especially urgent for children, employees, and others compelled to wear a mask for extended periods of time.

"People think, 'Well, it's just a piece of cloth. I'm just going to wear it for a few minutes while I go to the grocery store. What's the big deal if it protects Grandma?'" Huber said. "But at what point does the illness that results from this going to be regrettable?"

**There is no randomized evidence to show that mask mandates would work to slow the spread of the disease. In fact, the randomized studies that have been done suggest that they don't work to slow the spread of the disease.**

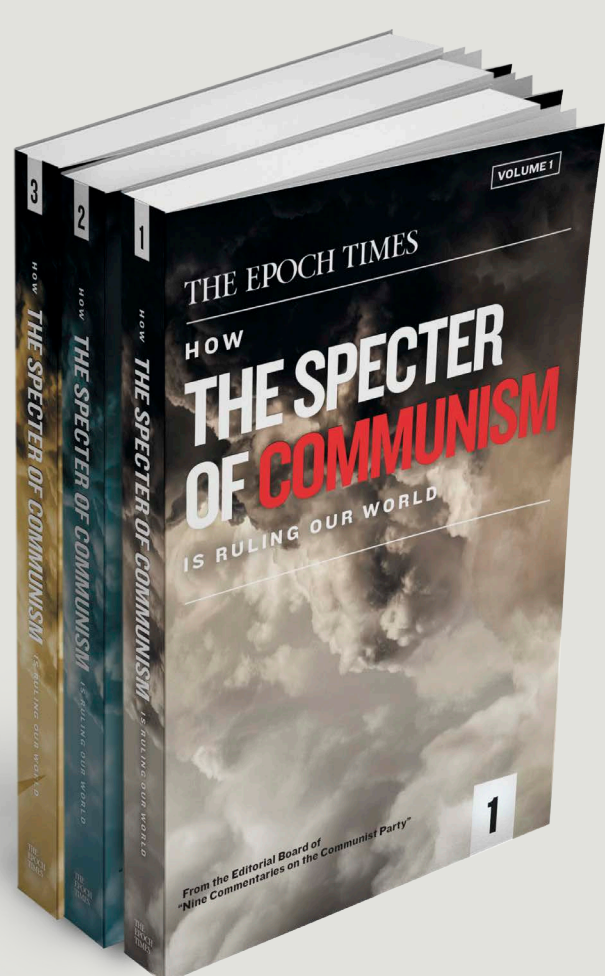
Dr. Jay Bhattacharya, professor, Stanford University



Masks are uncomfortable, inconvenient, and some evidence suggests they might be unnecessary.

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## HOW THE SPECTER OF COMMUNISM IS RULING OUR WORLD

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# Vitamin D Reduces Cancer Deaths

Studies reveal vitamin D levels have a major impact on cancer risk

JOSEPH MERCOLA

There's good news for those of you who have taken the proactive step to make sure you're getting enough vitamin D. Several recent studies demonstrate it can significantly lower your cancer risk, in terms of preventing and also treating cancer.

## Vitamin D Reduces Cancer Mortality

In the first of these studies, which included 25,871 patients, vitamin D supplementation was found to reduce the risk for metastatic cancer and death by 17 percent. The risk was reduced by as much as 38 percent among those who also maintained a healthy weight.

This was a really poorly done study as they only gave participants 2,000 IUs a day and never measured their blood levels. Had there been no improvement, I wouldn't have been surprised, but it still reduced metastatic cancer and death by 17 percent, and they found significant benefit among those who were not obese.

This is pretty extraordinary but not as good as epidemiological studies that show a 50 percent to even 78 percent reduction in people who are vitamin D-sufficient, as suggested in a study further below.

That said, UPI reported that vitamin D3's ability to limit cancer severity and metastases, or the spread of cancer to other organs, was seen across all cancers and was more prominent among study participants who maintained healthy weight.



Vitamin D is best obtained through exposing the skin to sunlight but in the short and cold winter days, supplements may be needed.

diluted." As explained in the paper "Vitamin D in Obesity," published in 2017:

"Serum vitamin D is lower in obese people; it is important to understand the mechanism of this effect and whether it indicates clinically significant deficiency. ... Vitamin D is fat soluble, and distributed into fat, muscle, liver, and serum.

All of these compartments are increased in volume in obesity, so the lower vitamin D likely reflects a volumetric dilution effect and whole body stores of vitamin D may be adequate. ... Obese people need higher loading doses of vitamin D to achieve the same serum 25-hydroxyvitamin D as normal weight."

While that particular paper stresses that lower vitamin D in obese individuals might not mean that they're deficient, others disagree. For example, one study found that for every 10 percent increase in body-mass index, there's a 4.2 percent reduction in blood levels of vitamin D. According to the authors of that particular study, obesity may in fact be a causal factor in the development of vitamin D deficiency.

## Vitamin D Improves Colorectal Cancer Outcomes

A scientific review published in the September 2020 issue of the British Journal of Cancer noted that having low vitamin D is associated with poor colorectal cancer survival.

To assess whether vitamin D supplementation might improve survival in these patients, they reviewed the findings of seven trials, three of which included patients diagnosed with colorectal cancer from the outset and four population trials that reported survival in incident cases.

Overall, the meta-analysis found supplementation resulted in a 30 percent reduction in adverse colorectal cancer outcomes. Vitamin D also improved outcomes among patients already diagnosed with colorectal cancer.

According to the authors: "Meta-analysis demonstrates a clinically meaningful benefit of vitamin D supplementation on [colorectal cancer] survival outcomes. Further well-designed, adequately powered RCTs are needed to ... [determine] optimal dosing."

## Low Vitamin D Linked to Higher Cancer Incidence

Another review and meta-analysis, this one published in November 2019 in Bioscience Reports, looked at vitamin D supplementation on cancer incidence and mortality in general. Ten randomized controlled trials with a pool of 81,362 participants were included in the analysis.

While the incidence rate of cancer was very similar between the vitamin D intervention group and the placebo control group (9.16 percent versus 9.29 percent), the risk reduction in mortality was deemed "significant." As reported by the authors: "The mortality rate of cancer was 2.11 percent (821 cases) and 2.43 percent (942 cases) in vitamin D intervention group and placebo group, respectively, resulting in a significant reduction in risk (RR = 0.87)."

"There was no observable heterogeneity or publication bias. ... Our findings support a beneficial effect of vitamin D supplement on lowering cancer mortality, especially in sub-populations with no history of cancer, extra use of vitamin D, or calcium supplement."

## Vitamin D Protects Against Breast Cancer

Several studies have highlighted the benefit of vitamin D for breast cancer. For example, an analysis by GrassrootsHealth published June 2018 in PLOS ONE showed women with a vitamin D level at or above 60 ng/mL (150 nmol/L) had an 82 percent lower risk of breast cancer compared to those with levels below 20 ng/mL (50 nmol/L).

An earlier study, which looked at women in the UK, found having a vitamin D level above 60 ng/mL resulted in an 83 percent lower breast cancer risk, which is nearly identical to GrassrootsHealth's 2018 analysis.

One of the most recent meta-analyses looking at breast cancer was published December 28, 2019, in the journal Aging. Here, they reviewed 70 observational studies, finding that for each 2 ng/mL (5 nmol/L) increase in vitamin D level there was a corresponding 6 percent decrease in breast cancer incidence.

Overall, this translates into a 71 percent reduced risk when you increase your vitamin D level from 20 ng/mL to 60 ng/mL. The following graph, created by GrassrootsHealth, illustrates the dose response between vitamin D levels and breast cancer risk found in this study.

GrassrootsHealth's 2018 analysis in PLOS ONE also analyzed this dose relationship. To do that, they looked at the percentage of breast cancer-free participants in various vitamin D groups, from deficient (below 20 ng/mL) to optimal (at or above 60 ng/mL), over time (four years).

As you might expect, the higher the blood level of vitamin D, the lower the incidence of breast cancer. The graph below illustrates this dose-related protection. At four years, the percentage of women who had been diagnosed with breast cancer in the 60 ng/mL group was 78 percent lower than among those with blood levels below 20 ng/mL.

## How to Optimize Your Vitamin D Level

If you live in the northern hemisphere, which is currently heading toward winter, now is the time to check your vitamin D level and start taking action to raise it if you're below 40 ng/mL (100 nmol/L). As you can see from the studies above, a vitamin D level of 60 ng/mL (150 nmol/L) or higher is recommended if you want to protect against cancer.

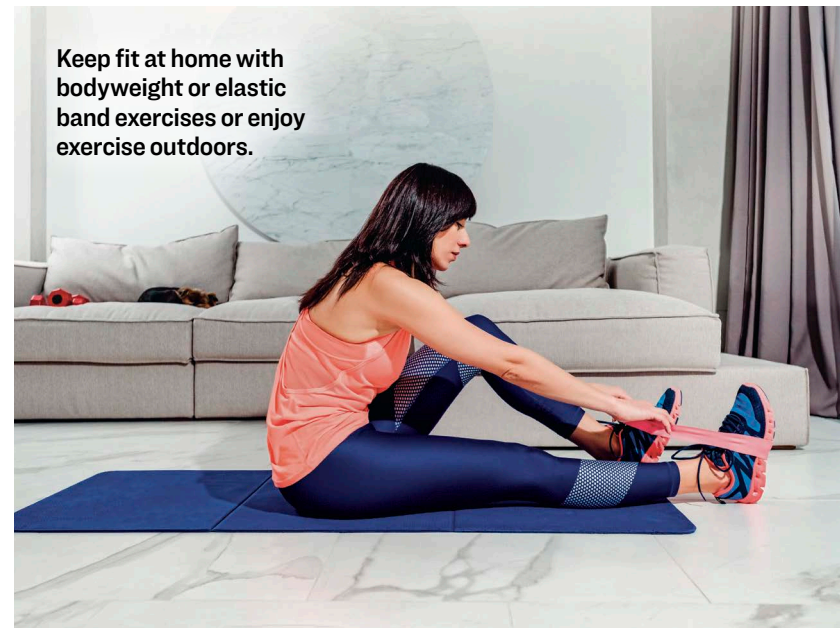
An easy and cost-effective way of measuring your vitamin D level is to order GrassrootsHealth's vitamin D testing kit. Once you know your current vitamin D level, use the GrassrootsHealth vitamin D calculator to determine how much vitamin D you might need to reach your target level. To optimize vitamin D absorption and utilization, be sure to take your vitamin D with vitamin K2 and magnesium.

Lastly, remember to retest in three to four months to make sure you've reached your target level. If you have, then you know you're taking the correct dosage. If you're still low (or have reached a level above 80 ng/mL), you'll need to adjust your dosage accordingly and retest again in another three to four months.

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

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Keep fit at home with bodyweight or elastic band exercises or enjoy exercise outdoors.



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# Dangers of a Sedentary COVID-19 Lockdown

Inactivity can steal muscle mass from older people in just 2 weeks

JAMES MCKENDRY

As the world digs in for the second wave of COVID-19, flu season, and winter, people also face a serious risk from reduced physical activity—especially older adults. Developing a plan to be physically active now will help you to stay strong and healthy through the long winter ahead.

While most people are aware of the benefits of physical activity—increased muscle and strength, reduced risk of disease, better quality of life, and a lower risk of death—we tend to be less aware of how damaging and expensive reduced physical activity can be.

We are all familiar with the loss of muscle and strength as you get older (known as sarcopenia). We have all heard older family members say, "I'm just not as strong as I used to be," or "I just can't do that anymore." But did you know that inactivity can make muscle loss a whole lot worse?

## Health Effects of Inactivity

Physical inactivity can be forced on a person by an acute event such as a broken arm or leg or becoming bed-bound due to illness. However, reduced physical activity, such as step reduction, is a long-term choice that brings about multiple negative health consequences.

Insulin resistance (a warning sign for the development of Type 2 diabetes), as well as reduced muscle mass, increased body fat, and poor sleep quality are just some of the health concerns caused by physical inactivity. Physical inactivity is also a major contributor to poor mental health and social isolation, which can be particularly problematic for older adults.

The health effects of inactivity start piling up within days.

McMaster University researchers have shown that reducing daily steps to fewer than 1,500—similar to the activity level of

Once an older individual loses muscle, it is much more difficult to restore.

people who are housebound during this pandemic—for just two weeks can reduce an older person's insulin sensitivity by as much as one-third. The same period of inactivity also led to individuals over age 65 losing as much as 4 percent of their leg muscle.

To make matters worse, once an older individual loses muscle, it is much more difficult to restore. Even when the research subjects returned to their normal daily routines, they didn't regain their lost muscle. Effectively, older individuals simply don't possess the same ability to bounce back that younger people do.

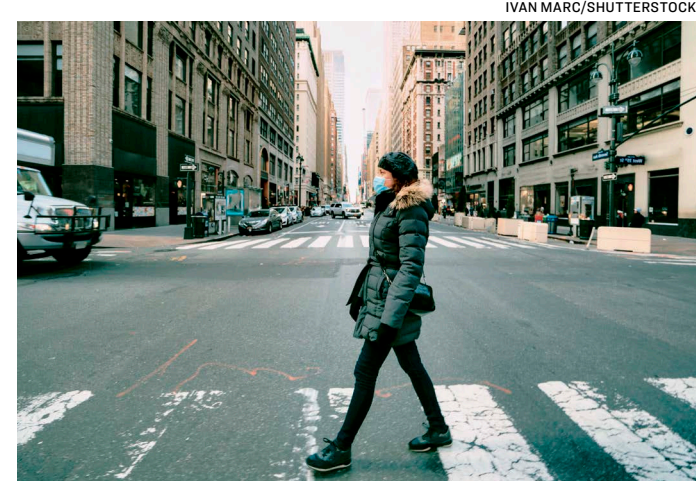
Regaining muscle requires deliberate effort. So, it truly is a case of use it or lose it.

## Resistance Is Not Futile

As a muscle physiologist with a keen interest in healthy aging, I'm pleased to report it's not all doom and gloom. There are some things you can do—resistance exercise and eating your protein—to keep and even build muscle, get stronger, and maintain your health for this winter and beyond.

The most effective way to maintain the muscle you have is strength training, or resistance exercise, which, put simply, means performing work against an additional load. And it doesn't have to be complicated. If you have access to a gym to use free-weights and guided-motion machines, that's great. However, there are many valuable alternatives you can easily do at home. Body-weight exercises such as push-ups, squats, and lunges, elastic-band exercises, and stair-climbing are just a few options that will help you to meet the World Health Organization's latest physical activity guidelines.

The good news for those who may be put off by the sound of resistance exercise is that doing any exercise with a high degree of effort will help you to get stronger and prevent (at least some) muscle loss. If, for any reason, performing resistance exercise isn't possible, simply adding a walk, a bike ride, or some lower-intensity



IVAN MARC/SHUTTERSTOCK

strength exercises such as yoga or Pilates to your daily routine can have significant physical and mental health benefits.

## Protein and Muscle

Of course, a healthy diet and avoiding overeating are also critical to staying healthy. Protein-rich foods are particularly important since they make you feel fuller for longer and provide building blocks for your muscles.

It is generally agreed that older adults need more protein than current guidelines suggest.

A good, easily achievable, target would be to eat 25 to 40 grams of protein with each meal (about one or two palm-sized portions). This equates to approximately 1.2 to 1.6 grams of protein per kilogram of body mass each day. Also, getting your protein from both animal (dairy, meat, fish, and eggs) and plant-based (beans, nuts, seeds, and lentils) sources may be beneficial.

Given how quickly inactivity and poor nutrition can sap your strength and your health, doing something now is the best way to power through the cold, dark winter and beyond.

James McKendry is a postdoctoral research fellow in exercise physiology, muscle protein metabolism and aging at McMaster University in Canada. This article was first published on The Conversation.

If it is difficult to fit in exercise, try to build more walking time into your day.

Low levels of vitamin D are associated with poor colorectal cancer survival.



PHOTOGRAPHEE.EU/SHUTTERSTOCK

Study co-author Dr. Paulette Chandler told UPI, "The primary message [of our study] is that vitamin D may reduce the chance of developing metastatic or fatal cancer among adults without a diagnosis of cancer."

The study, published in JAMA Network Open, is a secondary analysis of the VITAL Study which, in part, sought to determine whether taking 2,000 IUs of vitamin D per day would reduce the risk of cancer, heart disease, or stroke in people who did not have a prior history of these diseases.

The VITAL study itself, which followed patients for an average of 5.3 years, found no statistical difference in overall cancer rates among those who took vitamin D3, but there was a reduction in cancer-related deaths, which is what prompted this secondary analysis.

## Obesity May Inhibit Vitamin D's Benefits

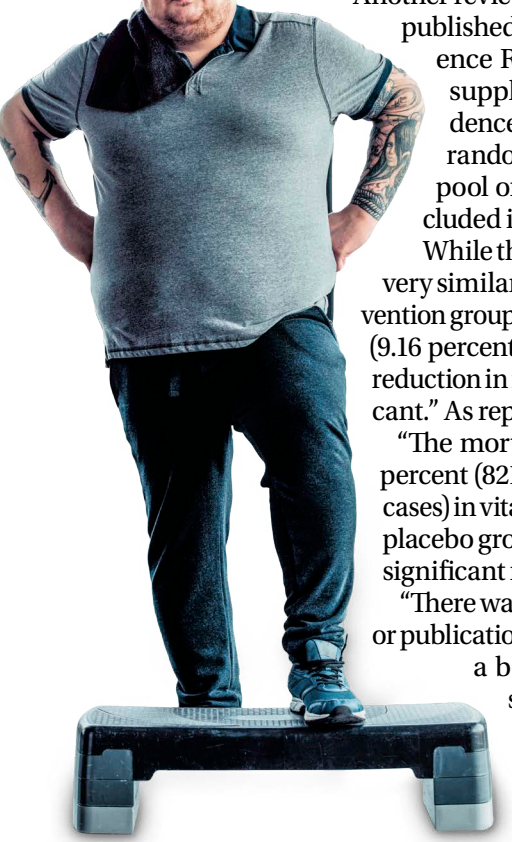
The fact that patients with a healthy weight derived a much greater benefit—a 38 percent reduced risk for metastatic cancer and death compared to 17 percent overall—suggests your body weight may play a significant role in whether vitamin D supplementation will provide you with the anticancer benefits you seek.

According to study co-author Dr. Paulette Chandler, assistant professor of medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, "Our study highlights that obesity may confer resistance to vitamin D effects."

There may be something to that. Research published in 2010 found that dietary fructose inhibits intestinal calcium absorption, thereby inducing vitamin D insufficiency in people with chronic kidney disease.

That said, vitamin D tends to be lower in obese people in general, for the fact that it's a fat-soluble nutrient and when you're obese, the vitamin D ends up being "volumetrically

Obesity appears to undermine vitamin D's effects in the body.



LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS/SHUTTERSTOCK

The higher the blood level of vitamin D, the lower the incidence of breast cancer.

# Take a Little Time to Think about Your Prostate This Winter

DEVON ANDRE

Winter is not good for your prostate.

It seems strange to think that seasons may play a role in prostate health, but according to a 2010 study, they do. The work noted that cold and dry weather is closely correlated with incidences of poor prostate health.

Not only does the cold winter keep many confined to the couch, but it makes it very difficult to get enough vitamin D.

The researchers of the study, which was published in the International Journal of Health Geographics, suggest it may have something to do with "meteorological effects on persistent organic pollutants," namely pesticides and other industrial byproducts.

But it might be more than that. One of the top recommendations for a healthy prostate is physical activity. Most people aren't moving as much in the winter; they are inside where it's warm, and they

can be a little more sure-footed.

Not only does the cold winter keep many confined to the couch, but it makes it very difficult to get enough vitamin D.

Spending more time indoors, limited sunlight, and covering up mightily to brave the elements can all lead to significant drops in blood levels of vitamin D.

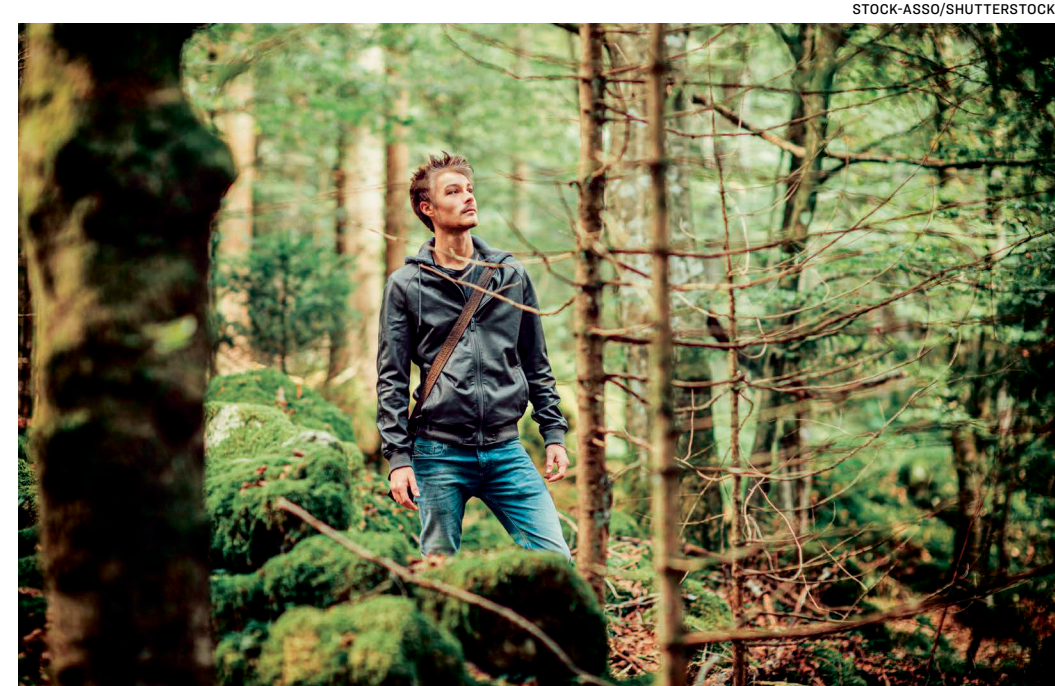
There are associations between low vitamin D and increased risk for genetic mutations in the prostate.

Your diet may also change during the winter, especially during the holidays. Eating more fatty comfort foods is common, which can all contribute to inflammation and poor prostate health. Seasonal candies and sugary beverages like eggnog don't help either.

All of these factors can make the winter an essential season for your prostate health. To take a little extra care this winter, consider the following:

**Don't spend too much time on the sofa.** Stand up and walk around your home for at least five minutes every hour. Just a few trips back and forth down the hall might make a difference.

**Plan for exercise.** Work daily activity into your routine. It might mean investing in a treadmill, or some warm clothes or ice picks



STOCK-ASSO/SHUTTERSTOCK

Sometimes it takes the allure of an adventure in nature to get us up and moving.

for your boots, but getting in some walking or another form of physical exercise for at least 30-minutes per day is recommended.

**Try to include as many whole fresh fruits and vegetables in your diet as possible.** Limit fatty and high-sugar foods to special occasions.

## Supplement with vitamin D.

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

# The Dividends of Practicing Patience

Learning to wait can ease your mind, improve your options, and uplift your outlook

Continued from Page 1

winning," he said. "You have to focus on the process, not the results."

Often, we have it flipped. We're so driven by getting what we want when we want it that we become intolerant of anything that gets in our way.

But Bell says that while we may not be able to control the situation for a particular outcome, we can control the process we take to get there.

For athletes, that means focusing on training, practice, and each moment of the game, not the final score or the championship. The same principle applies in life. If we focus on what we need to do to get the job done and keep patience with the progress, it will naturally lead to better performance.

"I take the standpoint that everybody is an athlete, our office is just different," said Bell. "We are all just trying to be a better version of ourselves than what we were yesterday."

In the end, the process is all we have. That's because achieving the goal we've been striving for doesn't give us lasting satisfaction, it's the journey we take to get there.

"Even though what we want is the results, it's not fulfilling. How we go about it, the passion we have for it, that's what's fulfilling, because that's what lasts," Bell said. "Even with sports, it's really about the relationships we build

**Our base instinct is to get our needs met; the ability to wait is a learned behavior.**

Our phones can seem to ease the discomfort of waiting, but they chain us to a need for constant stimulation.



DOOMU/SHUTTERSTOCK



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along the way. That's what matters."

**Gaining Patience Through Practice**  
Some people seem to have boundless patience, while others lose their cool at the slightest inconvenience. Luckily, practice can make patience.

According to Nickia Lowery, a licensed professional counselor and certified anger management specialist, nobody is born with patience. Our base instinct is to get our needs met; the ability to wait is a learned behavior.

"You have to be taught to be considerate of others and delay gratification," Lowery said. "If you are raised to always get everything you want, you likely will not be as patient as someone who has had to wait on getting their needs and wants met."

But patience doesn't just come from going without. You also need to embrace setbacks with the right attitude—calm, relaxed (or at least restrained), and kind. Responding to loss with jealousy and spite won't lead to patience, but manipulative and coercive means to even the score.

"If you never received what you want, this may lead to feelings of resentment and rebellion, where you learn to take what you want or lash out in order to get what you want," Lowery said.

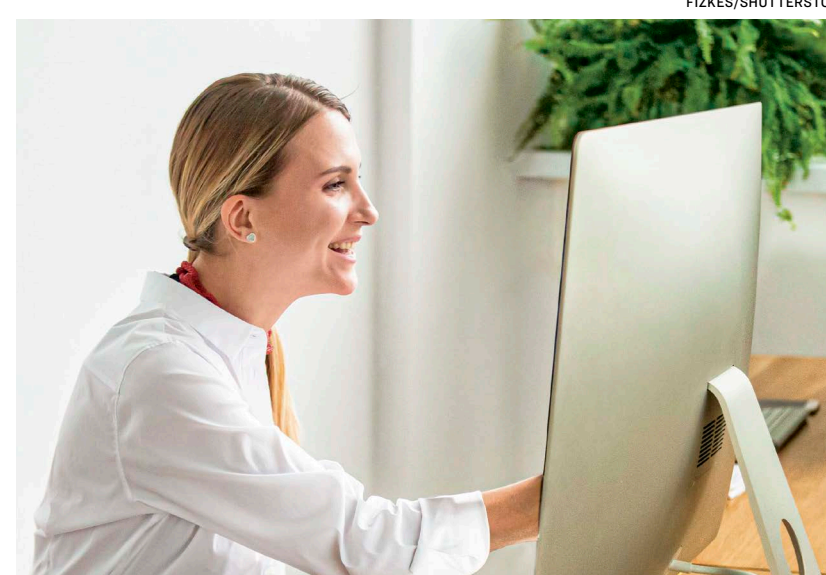
Lowery believes it's best to teach patience to children when they're young, but she says practicing patience at any age is bound to play a positive role.

**Giving yourself a little moment to consider your actions when you feel irritated can help you make better, more patient decisions.**

"Imagine if you were able to just walk away with no negative feelings when someone does something to slight you," she said. "Imagine going through life just being happy and accepting of others."

**Age of Instant Gratification**  
Unfortunately, the opportunities for daily patience practice are getting harder to come by. According to Dr. Russell Thackeray, a licensed clinical psychologist specializing in patience, people become "hard-wired for immediate gratification" as a result of our convenience culture.

Thackeray describes how the modern world caters to our needs like never before. In the past, before we could order virtually anything we wanted over the internet on a credit card, every aspect of life took more time. People were used to waiting because they had to. Today, a webpage that takes longer than five seconds to load seems like



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a small eternity. Even getting up to grab your credit card for an online order can seem like a hassle.

"I think we find it so hard to delay gratification because of the societal norms that are created," Thackeray said. "It reinforces this idea that we do not need to wait for anything."

Nobody wants to wait, but there can be value in being forced to do so. Obstacles may impede our plans for the moment, but they can also give us a chance to pause, reconsider, and reassess, leading us down roads we otherwise wouldn't have taken, and granting us ideas we never would have considered.

Patience can transform frustrations and difficulties in challenges and opportunities to learn.

"We gain perspective and insight with patience," Thackeray said. "Building a product line, growing a company, building relationships—all require time to work and mature."

With enough patience, you can see every unpleasant moment as an opportunity to calmly observe, and consider your next move. In some cases, the best response may be no move at all.

"Sometimes things just need time to play out," Thackeray said. "However, patience should never be confused with procrastination or idleness—all of which have a lack of action within them but the intention and execution is different."

Meditation is a tried and true method of developing patience, but any opportunity we take to slow down and focus on the moment can contribute to this strength.

However, if we fail to practice, our patience won't grow. Whipping out your phone during tedious moments means you never have to wait—you always have a distraction to pass the time. But Bell believes our devices can rob of the lessons we need to cope with life.

"The way we improve our mental health is by learning how to handle adversity," Bell said. "If I never have to deal with it because I can distract myself all the time, then I'm not getting mentally healthy. I'm actually getting sicker."

## Patience Is Confidence

Patience is often compared to mindfulness. Both concepts ask you to focus on life in the moment rather than the agenda in your head.

But patience shares similarities with another concept: confidence.

According to Bell, people become impatient because they fear things won't work out. "They believe that in order to be successful they need everything to go their way," he said. "But you show me any competent athlete and I'll show you someone who is patient. Because they are confident that success is still going to be there, they just don't know when it's going to happen."

But for many of us, it's hard to have confidence and trust the process when we don't see results right away. Trainer and fitness expert Kyle Hoffman says his clients often get upset when his diet and workout programs don't create changes fast enough.

"When this happens, they're quick to point fingers at me or give up altogether," Hoffman said.

If we lack patience, we may even be blind to the progress we've made, because it's not the dramatic change we envision. But according to Hoffman, the quickest way to help a frustrated client develop patience is to show them some evidence, no matter how small, that they are indeed on the right track.

"By giving them a small win that they can experience or see, it reminds them that every step of the process is necessary and better times are just around the corner," he said.

When you realize that a little outside encouragement can help with your own confidence, be sure to share this gift with others as they learn new skills.

## Growth Time

According to Donna Cameron, author of



**Having a high sense of control is related to proactive behavior and positive psychological outcomes.**

Health researchers

"A Year of Living Kindly: Choices That Will Change Your Life and the World Around You," we often get impatient when someone does something slowly or awkwardly. It's especially frustrating when they're doing something that seems ridiculously easy to us. Think of trying to teach your grandmother how to use the internet.

"It's human nature that once we learn something, we often forget how hard it was to learn," Cameron said. "Once something becomes routine (driving a stick-shift or using new technology), we forget that it wasn't always ingrained in our brains or muscle memory, and we lose patience for those who are struggling to learn."

Sometimes, we reason that it's easier to do things ourselves than to wait for a newbie to get it right. While that may be true, Cameron says the kind and helpful reaction is to stand by patiently, offer help if asked, and encourage the learning process.

She says that instead of getting impatient with a beginner, we should hold a space for them to grow. A few moments of our patience could soon reward us with more free time.

"If our work colleague, spouse, or child masters a new skill, they may be able to lighten our own load at some time in the future," Cameron said. "There are gifts in patience if we take the time to look for them."

Patience is the ability to wait, but it doesn't take much waiting to harness this power. Cameron's tip to bolster our patience is to learn to pause. Giving yourself a little moment to consider your actions when you feel irritated can help you make better, more patient decisions.

"Think about what expressing impatience will gain you," she said. "Think about whether you are likely to regret uttering sharp words, and think about who you want to be and how you'd like this interaction to advance."

## Poll Reveals Americans' Mental Health Hits 20-Year Low

Weighing the value of lockdown policies must measure the loss of life and human suffering they caused

BRAD POLUMBO

In California and other parts of the country, Americans are headed back to lockdown or otherwise facing renewed restrictions on their day-to-day lives amid another spike of COVID-19. Yet a new Gallup poll shows these lockdowns come as people are already struggling with their mental health.

"Americans' latest assessment of their mental health is worse than it has been

at any point in the last two decades," Gallup reports.

The new polling found that 34 percent of respondents said their mental health was "excellent," which is 9 points down from 2019. Similarly, 85 percent of Americans had rated their mental health as "good or excellent" in 2019. Just 76 percent did this year. This poll only further documents an ongoing trend.

As Jon Miltmore previously explained for FEE.org, the Centers for Disease Control found that 1 in 4 young Americans considered suicide this past summer amid life under lockdown and unprecedented levels of social isolation. In one anecdote that painfully demonstrates this broader trend, a California hospital doctor told local news in May that during lockdown he witnessed "a year's worth of suicide attempts in the last four weeks."

Much of the decline in mental health over



Staying home to stay safe comes with consequences.

FIZKES/SHUTTERSTOCK

the past nine months can reasonably be attributed to pandemic lockdowns rather than COVID-19 itself.

Why? Well, consider that for the aforementioned suicidal young adults, the actual mortality risk of COVID-19 is close to zero. It's the shuttering of their schools, closures of their offices, and isolation from family, friends, and community that has affected them so drastically.

And the negative health effects, both physical and mental, of social isolation are well-documented. Consider this report from The New York Times:

"A wave of new research suggests social separation is bad for us. Individuals with less social connection have disrupted sleep patterns, altered immune systems, more inflammation and higher levels of stress hormones. One recent study found that isolation increases the risk of heart disease by 29 percent and stroke by 32 percent."

"Another analysis that pooled data from 70 studies and 3.4 million people found that socially isolated individuals had a 30 percent higher risk of dying in the next seven years, and that this effect was largest in middle age."

Loneliness can accelerate cognitive decline in older adults, and isolated individuals are twice as likely to die prematurely as

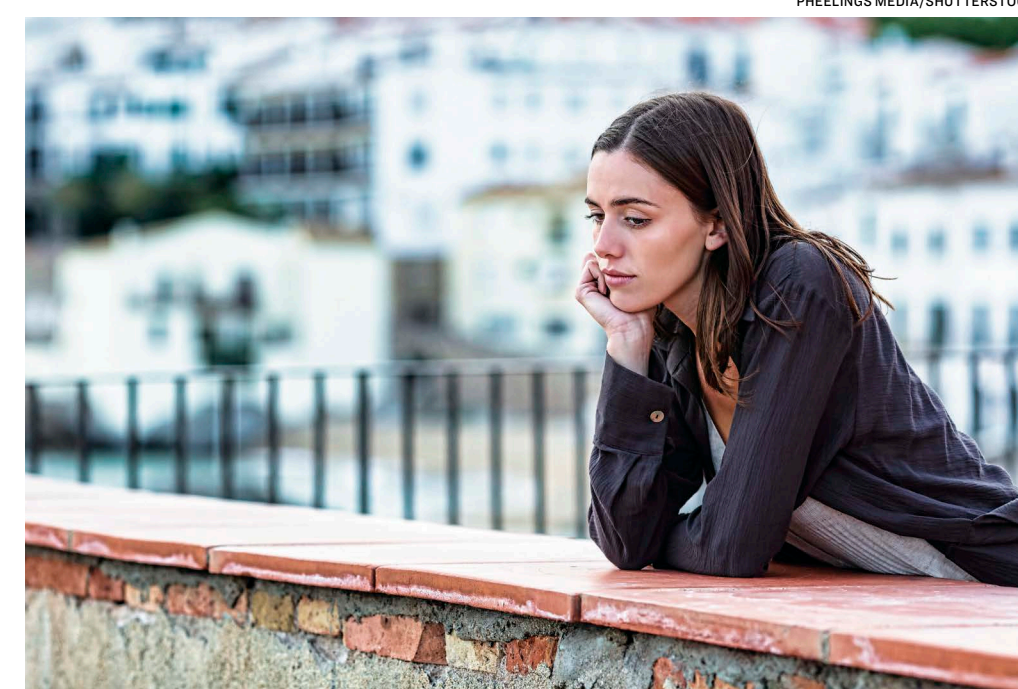
**The CDC found that 1 in 4 young Americans considered suicide this past summer.**

those with more robust social interactions. These effects start early: Socially isolated children have significantly poorer health 20 years later, even after controlling for other factors. All told, loneliness is as important a risk factor for early death as obesity and smoking."

It's certainly true that we can't solely attribute the burgeoning mental health crisis to the lockdowns. But there's no denying the intuitive and demonstrable fact that confining people to their homes and stripping away their livelihoods has driven the spikes in suicide and depression.

How could it not? Ample research shows how stripping people of their agency and leaving them feeling powerless contributes to mental health decline.

"Having a high sense of control is related



PHEELINGS MEDIA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Ample research shows how stripping people of their agency and leaving them feeling powerless contributes to mental health decline.

to proactive behavior and positive psychological outcomes," health researchers point out. "Control is linked to an ability to take preventative action and is associated with depression, stress, and anxiety-related disorders."

So, such drastic government lockdowns seizing control of the minutiae of American life were always going to have severe mental health consequences. Unintended consequences plague all top-down government efforts to control or manage society.

"Every human action has both intended and unintended consequences," Antony Davies and James Harrigan explain for FEE. "Human beings react to every rule, regulation, and order governments impose, and their reactions result in outcomes that can be quite different than the outcomes lawmakers intended."

Replacing individual decision-making of hundreds of millions of peoples' everyday lives with centralized government mandates intended to slow the spread of COVID-19 inevitably causes enormous ripple effects. Our retrospective analysis of lockdown policies—the effectiveness which is seriously disputed—must be weighed against the loss of life and human suffering they caused in their own right.

Brad Polumbo is a libertarian-conservative journalist and opinion editor at the Foundation for Economic Education. This article was originally published on FEE.org

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CONNECT TO LEAD

# An American Mindset

Finding trust and connection with those we disagree with is critical to our nation's well-being

SCOTT MANN

In America, we are in some very turbulent times right now as the nation goes through the aftermath of this election. I can tell you in my time as a Green Beret working in trust-depleted places all over the world, I've seen these situations before, as have many of my brothers and sisters who serve in the military.

I'm speaking to you as a veteran, citizen, and the founder of Rooftop Leadership. I am asking you to take a look at what's happening around you in your operational environment and really take stock of it and ask yourself, "How can I create connection and trust through this?"

One of the first things we need to look at is the churn of political polarization itself. That's that social tension we're all feeling and it is just getting more and more turbulent as the days go by. That churn can take on many different forms—it can present as distraction, disengagement, a lack of purpose, distrust, or—of late—as Sebastian Junger, author of "Tribe," says, "contempt among citizens that one normally reserves for one's enemies."

That's a powerful word. Contempt. When that happens, the outcome is predictable and it isn't good.

It isn't good for our nation, it isn't good for our communities, and it isn't good for our kids.

In his groundbreaking book "The Upswing," award-winning social scientist, Robert Putnam says, "The most important reason to worry about polarization is that in the long run extreme polarization can



A land of diverse beliefs requires trust and connection.

MARIA SBYTOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK

**We don't need top-down leadership to show us what responsible leadership looks like.**

produce democratic breakdown."

Our political leaders know this, as do their respective parties, and yet they still govern from the extremes. And we get caught right up in that churn. What we have to realize as leaders as the next few months unfold is that nobody else is coming.

How we conduct ourselves at an individual level, and at a community level, will set the tone for how we come out on the other side of this thing, regardless of who holds power, regardless of who sits in the Oval Office or Congress.

We don't need top-down leadership to show us what responsible leadership looks like. It's about how we lead ourselves, our communities, our families, our businesses, that will decide how we fare on the other side of this thing, regardless of our political party.

It's about how we show up for each other as Americans. A bridging trust mindset is the absolute key to that. Bridging trust means to bridge beyond your own in-group, your own ethnicity, your own religion, your own socioeconomic status, and your own political party.

It's how we find the common ground that we can all rally around in this country, instead of dividing ourselves by our differences.

We must fight for a sense of "we" in times of unprecedented "I" mindsets. In fact, how we show up as leaders—whether we are on the losing or winning side—goes far beyond the results of this election.

And I think the greatest test for us as a nation is how we lead when nobody's looking. Again, if you're waiting for someone in

In spite of all the disagreement, let's find what we have in common and connect there first.

Washington to model that, it isn't going to happen, at least I'm not seeing it. And as an American, I'm not good with that.

I'm not good with handing this churn of polarization over to my kids. I'm asking you right now to stand up for what's right and good and best for the country we love so dearly and adopt a bridging trust mindset.

Start by regulating your own emotional temperature. If you find yourself starting to get worked up, get off social media, turn off the news, and go for a workout, run, or do whatever helps you lower your emotional temperature down to a parasympathetic state rather than this highly aroused fight, flight, or freeze state. That state is for dealing with threats to our survival. It limits long-term thinking and narrows our focus. It makes us reactionary and isn't a healthy norm for a democracy.

Then, and this one is so overlooked, connect around common ground. In spite of all the disagreement, let's find what we have in common and connect there first. Stuart Diamond in his book "Getting More" says, "Even in the most high-stakes negotiations, make a connection first." There's plenty for us to connect around as we come through this election.

We need to think about our younger generation. Are we going to hand them a society where in-groups and out-groups compete for resources and scarcity in a primal, tribal kind of way, or are we going to hand our children a bridging trust society where people go beyond their in-group and rally around a common vision that's bigger than themselves?

In this time of political polarization, there's no mindset more American than one of bridging trust.

*Scott Mann is a former Green Beret who specialized in unconventional, high-impact missions and relationship building. He is the founder of Rooftop Leadership and appears frequently on TV and many syndicated radio programs. For more information, visit RooftopLeadership.com*

LYNNE SHALLCROSS/KHN



"I'm volunteering more," was writer Bruce Horovitz's reply when his doctor asked what he'd been doing to cause a dramatic improvement in his health. Before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, Horovitz had increased his volunteering from one day a week to three days a week, including doing food distribution at the Arlington Food Assistance Center in Arlington, Va. But he stopped that in March and says he misses it.

# Volunteering Was My Secret to Feeling Younger and Stronger

The pandemic has stolen a life-changing experience that provides people a sense of meaning and uplift

BRUCE HOROVITZ

Back in early January, before COVID-19 was as familiar as the furniture, I went in for my annual physical. My doctor looked at my test results and shook his head. Virtually everything was perfect. My cholesterol was down. So was my weight. My blood pressure was that of a swimmer. A barrage of blood tests turned up zero red flags.

"What are you doing differently?" he asked, almost dumbfounded.

After all, I'm a 67-year-old balding guy who had spent much of his life as a desk-bound journalist dealing with nasty

ailments like hernias (in my 30s), kidney stones (40s) and shingles (50s).

I ruminated over what had changed since my last physical. Sure, I exercise more than 90 minutes daily, but I've been doing that for five years. And yes, I watch what I eat, but that's not new. Like most families with college-age kids, mine has its share of emotional and financial stresses—and there'd been no let-up there.

Only one thing in my life had registered any real change. "I'm volunteering more," I told him.

I'd been spending less time in my basement office and more time out doing

**Volunteers share a dirty little secret. We may start it to help others, but we stick with it for our own good, emotionally and physically.**

some good with like-minded people. Was this the magic elixir that seemed to steadily improve my health?

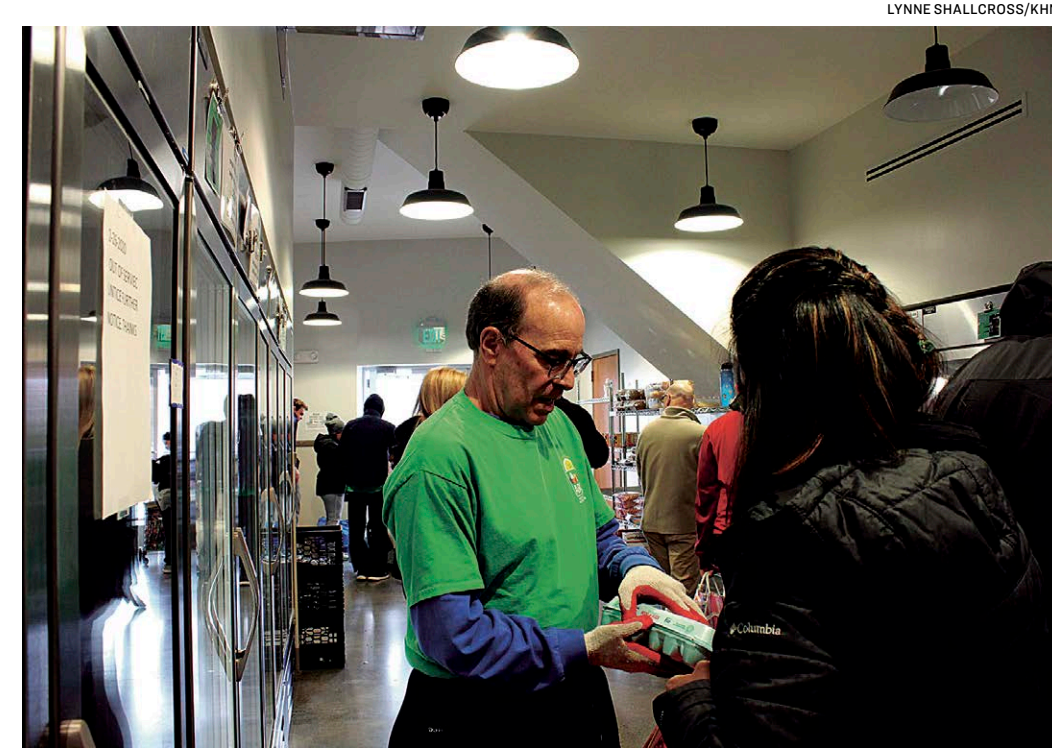
Several signs pointed to a big "yes." As I considered it, I realized how important volunteering had become to my health and well-being before COVID-19 appeared. As cases climbed, society shut down. One by one, my beloved volunteer gigs in Virginia disappeared. No more Mondays at Riverbend Park in Great Falls helping folks decide which trails to walk. Or Wednesdays serving lunch to the homeless at a community shelter in Falls Church. Or Fridays at the Arlington Food Assistance Center, which I gave up out of an abundance of caution. My modest asthma is just the sort of underlying condition that seems to make COVID-19 all the more brutal.

It used to be that missing even one day of volunteering made me feel like a sour-puss. After almost eight months without it, I'm downright dour.

Science helps explain why. "The health benefits for older volunteers are mind-blowing," said Paul Irving, chairman of the Center for the Future of Aging at the Milken Institute, and distinguished scholar in residence at the USC Leonard Davis School of Gerontology, whose lectures, books and podcasts on aging are turning heads.

When older folks go in for physicals, he said, "in addition to taking blood and doing all the other things that the doctor does when he or she pushes and prods and pokes, the doctor should say to you, 'So, tell me about your volunteering.'"

Writer Bruce Horovitz gives a carton of eggs to a client at the Arlington Food Assistance Center in Arlington, Va., on Feb. 28, 2020.



LYNNE SHALLCROSS/KHN

Continued on Page 12

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**THE EPOCH TIMES**  
TRUTH AND TRADITION

# Link Between Alzheimer's and Gut Confirmed

JOSEPH MERCOLA

Alzheimer's disease continues to be a leading cause of death in the United States, with 1 in 3 seniors dying with Alzheimer's or dementia—more than the number killed by breast and prostate cancers combined.

While a cure has remained elusive, the connection between brain health and gut microbiota has grown clearer, and research suggests that the bacteria in your intestines may influence brain functioning and can even promote neurodegeneration.

A team of Swiss and Italian researchers has taken the correlation a step further, with research showing a connection between imbalanced gut microbiota and the development of amyloid plaques in the brain; Alzheimer's is characterized by an accumulation of beta-amyloid plaques and neurofibrillary tangles in the brain.

### Proteins Produced by Gut Bacteria May Trigger Alzheimer's

The study involved a cohort of 89 people between 65 and 85 years of age. Some of them suffered from Alzheimer's disease or other neurodegenerative diseases while others were healthy with no memory problems.

The researchers used PET imaging to measure amyloid deposition in their brains, then measured markers of inflammation and proteins produced by intestinal bacteria, such as lipopolysaccharides and short-chain fatty acids, in their blood.

Lipopolysaccharides (LPSs) are dead bacteria or, more specifically, the cell walls of dead bacteria. The problem is that your immune system treats them as living bacteria and mounts immune defenses against the perceived invaders. LPSs are pro-inflammatory and have been found in amyloid plaques in the brains of Alzheimer's patients.

The study revealed that high blood levels of LPSs and the short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs) acetate and valerate were associated with large amyloid deposits in the brain. Other SCFAs, namely butyrate, appeared to have a protective effect; high levels of butyrate were associated with less amyloid. Butyrate—an SCFA produced when gut bacteria ferment fiber—activates the secretion of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF). Alzheimer's disease has been linked to reduced levels of BDNF.

"Our results are indisputable: Certain bacterial products of the intestinal microbiota are correlated with the quantity of amyloid plaques in the brain," explains Moira Marizzoni, a study author with the Fatebenefratelli Center in Brescia, Italy.

### Probiotic 'Cocktail' May Act as an Early Preventative

The study represents a continuation of prior research by the team, which found that the gut microbiota in people with Alzheimer's disease differs from those without the condition. In those with Alzheimer's, microbial diversity is reduced, with certain bacteria being overrepresented and other

microbes decreased.

"Furthermore," said neurologist Giovanni Frisoni, study author and director of the University Hospitals of Geneva Memory Center in Switzerland, "we have also discovered an association between an inflammatory phenomenon detected in the blood, certain intestinal bacteria and Alzheimer's disease; hence the hypothesis that we wanted to test here: Could inflammation in the blood be a mediator between the microbiota and the brain?"

With the connection growing stronger, the team is planning further research to reveal which specific bacteria or groups of bacteria may be responsible for the effect, which could ultimately lead to a preventive treatment "cocktail."

"Indeed, we must first identify the strains of the cocktail. Then, a neuroprotective effect could only be effective at a very early stage of the disease, with a view to prevention rather than therapy," Frisoni said in a news release.

“We have an amazing repair system that goes to work when you're fasting. Not the least of which is [letting] your gut rest.”

Dr. Steven Gundry

"However, early diagnosis is still one of the main challenges in the management of neurodegenerative diseases, as protocols must be developed to identify high-risk individuals and treat them well before the appearance of detectable symptoms."

### The Fasting Connection

One reason why fasting is so beneficial for neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's is because it helps your body to cycle through autophagy and the rebuilding phase.

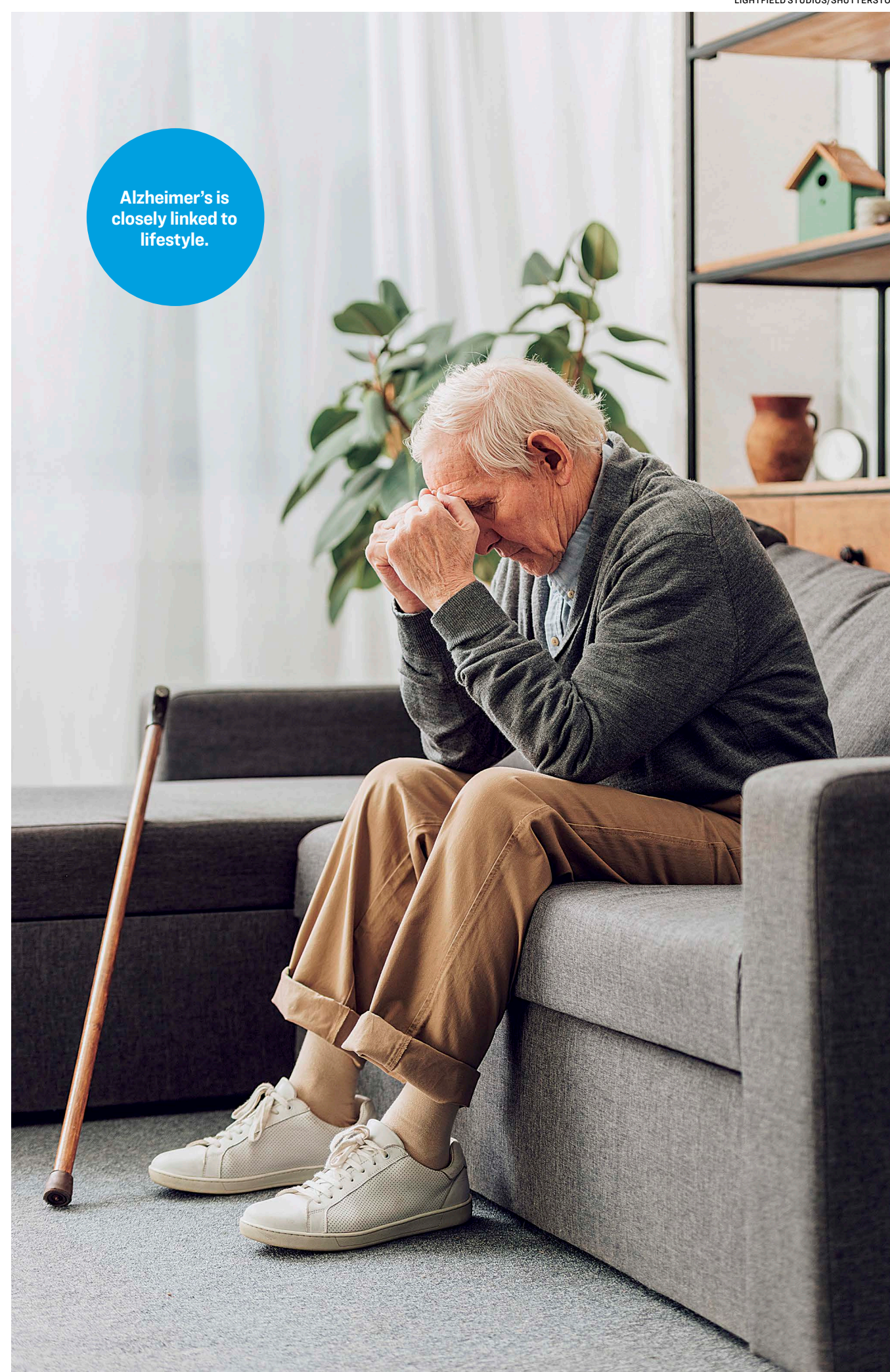
Autophagy is the process by which your body cleans out damaged organelles, encouraging proliferation of new, healthy cells, which relates to Alzheimer's because the refolding process is one of several factors that need to work in order for your brain to function.

Importantly, fasting activates autophagy, which is your body's way of taking out the trash, and will also trigger the regeneration of stem cells. In our 2017 interview, Dr. Steven Gundry explained that this also may have a direct connection with LPSs, and giving your gut a rest from these pro-inflammatory proteins via fasting may be healing:

"We have an amazing repair system that goes to work when you're fasting. Not the least of which is [letting] your gut rest. It's probably one of the smartest things that any of us can do—putting the wall of your gut at rest, not having to absorb nutrients, not having



Alzheimer's is less likely when healthy gut bacteria ferment dietary fiber and make brain-derived neurotrophic factor.



Alzheimer's is closely linked to lifestyle.

to deal with the constant inflow of lectins or toxins. But I think more importantly, it gives [your body] a chance to finally do some serious cleaning of your brain," said Dr. Gundry. "Alzheimer's and Parkinson's have a unifying cause, and that is the brain is defending itself against perceived threat, a lot of which are LPSs. If you put your gut at rest and don't have LPSs coming into your system, and the longer you can maintain that, realistically, the better off you are," he added.

### Probiotics Show Promise for Alzheimer's

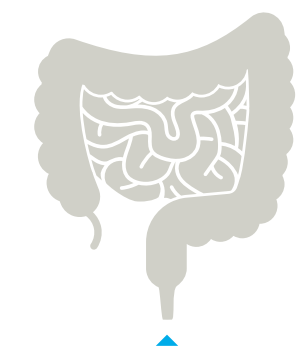
The effect of beneficial bacteria on brain health is well-established, including in people with Alzheimer's disease. A 2016 study of 60 Alzheimer's patients looked into the effect of probiotic supplements on cognitive function, with promising results. Those who drank milk containing probiotics experienced significant improvements in cognitive function.

While average Mini-Mental State Examination (MMSE) scores increased among the probiotics group and the control group, which drank plain milk, had a decrease in scores.

The probiotics group also had beneficial metabolic changes, including lowered triglycerides, very low-density lipoprotein and C-reactive protein, a measure of inflammation, as well as reduced markers for insulin resistance.

The researchers suggested the beneficial metabolic changes may be responsible for the cognitive improvements. Walter Lukiw, a professor at Louisiana State University who wasn't involved in the study, further explained to Medical News Today that your gut and brain are intricately connected:

"This is in line with some of our recent studies which indicate that the GI [gastrointestinal] tract microbiome in Alzheimer's is significantly altered in composition when compared to age-matched controls," he said. Lukiw noted that "both the GI tract



Rebalancing a patient's gut microbiota may slow Alzheimer's progression.

and blood-brain barriers become significantly more leaky with aging, thus allowing GI tract microbial exudates (e.g. amyloids, lipopolysaccharides, endotoxins and small non-coding RNAs) to access central nervous system compartments."

### Probiotics May Inhibit Neurodegeneration

Probiotics are thought to influence the central nervous system and behavior via the microbiota-gut-brain-axis, and researchers have suggested they may have both preventive and therapeutic potential for Alzheimer's disease (AD) by modulating the inflammatory process and counteracting oxidative stress, among other mechanisms. Writing in the open-access Impact Journal on Aging, researchers explained:

"It has been found that dysfunction in behavior and cognition is associated with GM [gut microbiota] dysbiosis. Activation of gut inflammation has been regarded as a possible pathogenic cofactor in cognitive deterioration and dementia."

The researchers noted that the gut microbiota of Alzheimer patients had a distinctive decrease in anti-inflammatory bacterial species (e.g. Bifidobacterium breve strain A1) and increased abundance of pro-inflammatory flora phyla (e.g. Firmicutes and Bacteroidetes).

In other words, their gut microbiota had shifted toward a more inflammatory balance.

The researchers said restoring homeostasis or balance to the gut microbiota of Alzheimer's patients may slow the progression of the disease, offering a new way to treat and prevent the disease.

They conducted a meta-analysis involving five studies and 297 subjects, which revealed a significant improvement in cognition and a significant reduction in malondialdehyde and high-sensitivity C-reactive protein, inflammatory and oxidative biomarkers—in

probiotic groups compared to controls.

Research is still uncovering which bacteria are most beneficial, but the Bifidobacterium breve strain A1 may be of particular use in Alzheimer's treatment. Using Alzheimer's disease model mice, researchers were able to confirm that daily oral administration of B. breve A1 reduced the cognitive dysfunction normally induced by amyloid beta plaques.

One of the mechanisms behind these protective effects was found to be suppression of amyloid-beta-induced changes in gene expression in the hippocampus. In short, the bacterium had an ameliorating effect on amyloid-beta toxicity.

Still other research suggests gut microbiota may contribute to Alzheimer's risk via multiple avenues, including by influencing aging, diabetes, sleep, and circadian rhythm.

It's also possible, researchers hypothesize, that decades of factors such as diet, stress, aging, and genetics combine to disrupt gut permeability and the integrity of the blood-brain barrier, allowing the entry of inflammatory agents and pathogens and inducing an inflammatory response that triggers a neuroinflammatory response in the brain.

The researchers noted mounting evidence that gut microbiota affect how Alzheimers develops by disrupting inflammation in the brain and metabolic balance.

"The gut microbiota has gone from being the forgotten organ to a potential key player in the AD pathology," they wrote.

## Nourishing your brain health is best done with a comprehensively healthy lifestyle.

### Alzheimer's Prevention Strategies

Optimizing your gut flora is a key strategy to preventing Alzheimer's and a host of other chronic diseases. To do this, avoid processed foods, antibiotics, and antibacterial products, fluoridated and chlorinated water, and be sure to eat traditionally fermented and cultured foods, along with taking a high-quality probiotic if needed.

Maintaining a healthy gut is one of the healthy lifestyle parameters outlined by Dr. Dale Bredezen, professor of molecular and medical pharmacology at the University of California—Los Angeles School of Medicine, and author of "The End of Alzheimer's: The First Program to Prevent and Reverse Cognitive Decline."

Bredezen's ReCODE protocol evaluates 150 factors, including biochemistry, genetics, and historical imaging, known to contribute to Alzheimer's disease. This identifies your disease subtype or combination of subtypes so an effective treatment protocol can be devised.

Time-restricted eating, or fasting, is another important strategy, as is reducing your intake of polyunsaturated fatty acids, also called PUFAs, found in vegetable oils, edible oils, seed oils, trans fat, and plant oils. A high-fat, moderate-protein, low net-carb ketogenic diet is ideal for preventing degeneration that can lead to Alzheimer's, and this will also help to nourish a healthy gut.

Overall, nourishing your brain health is best done with a comprehensively healthy lifestyle. By leveraging 36 healthy lifestyle parameters, Bredezen was able to reverse Alzheimer's in 9 out of 10 patients who participated in a study.

This included the use of exercise, ketogenic diet, optimizing vitamin D and other hormones, increasing sleep, meditation, detoxification, and eliminating gluten and processed food. For more details, you can download Bredezen's full-text case paper online, which details the full program.

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 article sources.

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# Volunteering Was My Secret to Feeling Younger and Stronger

The pandemic has stolen a life-changing experience that provides people a sense of meaning and uplift

Continued from Page 9

A 2016 study in Psychosomatic Medicine: Journal of Behavioral Medicine that pooled data from 10 studies found that people with a higher sense of purpose in their lives—such as that received from volunteering—were less likely to die in the near term. Another study, published in Daedalus, an academic journal by MIT Press for the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, concluded that older volunteers had reduced risk of hypertension, delayed physical disability, enhanced cognition and lower mortality.

“People who are happy and engaged show better physiological functioning,” said Dr. Alan Rozanski, a cardiologist at Mount Sinai St. Luke’s Hospital, a senior author of the Psychosomatic Medicine study. People who engage in social activities such as volunteering, he said, often showed better blood pressure results and better heart rates.

That makes sense, of course, because volunteers are typically more active than, say, someone home on the couch streaming “Gilligan’s Island.”

Volunteers share a dirty little secret. We may start it to help others, but we stick with it for our own good, emotionally and physically.

At the homeless shelter, I could hit my target heart rate packing 50 sack lunches in an hour to the beat of Motown music. And at the food bank, I could feel the physical and emotional uplift of human contact while distributing hundreds of gallons of milk and dozens of cartons of eggs during my three-hour shifts. When I’m volunteering, I dare say I feel more like 37 than 67.

None of this surprises Rozanski, who looked at 10 studies over the past 15 years that included more than 130,000 participants. All of them, he said, showed that partaking in activities with purpose—such as volunteering—reduced the risk of cardiovascular events and often resulted in a longer life for older people.

Dr. David DeHart knows something about this, too. He’s a doctor of family medicine at the Mayo Clinic in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. He figures he has worked with thousands of patients—many of them elderly—over his career. Instead of just writing prescriptions, he recommends volunteering to his older patients, primarily as a stress reducer.

“Compassionate actions that relieve someone else’s pain can help to reduce your own pain and discomfort,” he said.

At age 50, he listens to his own advice. DeHart volunteers with international

**Instead of just writing prescriptions, Dr. David DeHart recommends volunteering to his older patients, primarily as a stress reducer.**



Writer Bruce Horovitz at the Arlington Food Assistance Center in Arlington, Va., on Feb. 28, 2020, where he was giving out eggs and milk as part of the food distribution. Horovitz credited volunteering with improving his overall physical and mental health, but stopped when the pandemic hit in March.

medical teams in Vietnam, typically two trips a year. He often brings his wife and children to help, too. “When I come back, I feel recharged and ready to jump back into my work here,” he said. “The energy it gives me reminds me why I wanted to be a doctor in the first place.”

I think of my personal rewards from volunteering as cosmic electricity—with no “off” button. The good feeling sticks with me throughout the week—if not the month.

When will it be safe to resume my volunteering activities?

I’m considering my options. The park is offering some outdoor opportunities involving cleanup, but that lacks the interaction that lifts me. I’m tempted to go back to the food bank because even Charles Dinkens, an 85-year-old who has volunteered next to me for years, has returned after eight months away. “What else am I supposed to do?” he posed. The homeless shelter isn’t allowing volunteers in just yet. Instead, it’s asking folks to bag lunches at home and drop them off. Oh, they’re also looking for people to “call” virtual games of bingo for residents.

Virtual bingo just doesn’t float my boat. Truth be told, there’s no one-size-fits-all way to safely volunteer during the pandemic, said Dr. Kristin Englund, staff physician and infectious disease expert at the Cleveland Clinic. She suggests that volunteers—particularly those over 65—stick with outdoor options. It’s better in a protected

space where the general public isn’t moving through, she said, because “every time you interact with a person, it increases your risk of contracting the disease.”

Englund said she’d consider walking dogs outside for a local animal shelter as one safe option with some companionship. “While we do know that people can give COVID to animals,” she said, “it’s unlikely they can give it back to you.”

Meanwhile, my next annual physical is coming right up in January. It’s got me wondering if my labs will be quite as pristine as they were the last go-round. I’ve got my doubts. Unless, of course, I’ve resumed some sort of in-person volunteering by then.

Last year, an elderly woman staying at the homeless shelter pulled me aside to thank me after I handed her a lunch of tomato soup and a turkey sandwich. She set down her tray, took my hand, looked me smack in the eye and asked, “Why do you do this?”

She was probably expecting me to say I do it to help others because I care about those less fortunate than me. But that’s not what came out.

“I do it for myself,” I said. “Being here makes me whole.”

*Bruce Horovitz is a freelance journalist and regularly writes for Kaiser Health News, which first published this article. KHN’s coverage of end-of-life and serious illness issues is supported by The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation.*



Writer Bruce Horovitz gives a carton of eggs to a client at the Arlington Food Assistance Center in Arlington, Va., on Feb. 28, 2020.

## Natural Ways to Boost One of the Body’s Most Powerful Antioxidants

DEVON ANDRE

- Eating glutathione-rich foods such as avocado, spinach, and asparagus
- Supplementing with whey protein

One of your body’s most significant defenses against aging is antioxidants. These valuable compounds help protect your cells from oxidative stress so they can maintain health and efficiency.

Most antioxidants come from the food you eat. Some powerful ones, however, are made naturally in the body. But with age, like many other functions, this antioxidant production can slow down and leave cells more susceptible to harmful free radicals.

Glutathione is a natural antioxidant that decreases with age. It is made up of three amino acids: glutamine, glycine, and cysteine. Finding ways to get more glutathione as you age may help combat the effects of diminishing levels.

Ways to boost levels of age-fighting antioxidants include:

- Eating sulfur-rich foods such as beef, poultry, fish, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kale, garlic, shallots, and onion
- Getting more vitamin C. Some research has shown supplemental doses of 500 to 1,000 mg per day may boost glutathione levels.

It’s important to remember that glutathione is constructed from three amino acids. Therefore, eating amino-acid rich foods, such as “complete” proteins, could be the best strategy.

“Complete” proteins feature all essential amino acids and are generally found in animal-based foods such as meat and dairy. Some plant-based foods such as quinoa offer complete proteins, but it is uncommon.

Eating certain meat products, however, can boost inflammation and lead to increased free radical production. It’s advised to limit intake of fried and fatty processed meats such as deli meat, bacon, cold cuts, hot dogs, and other processed varieties to strike the right balance.

Sticking to leaner, unprocessed cuts is a healthier approach to help limit inflammation. Have servings similar to your palm size while opting for fatty fish such as salmon twice per week.

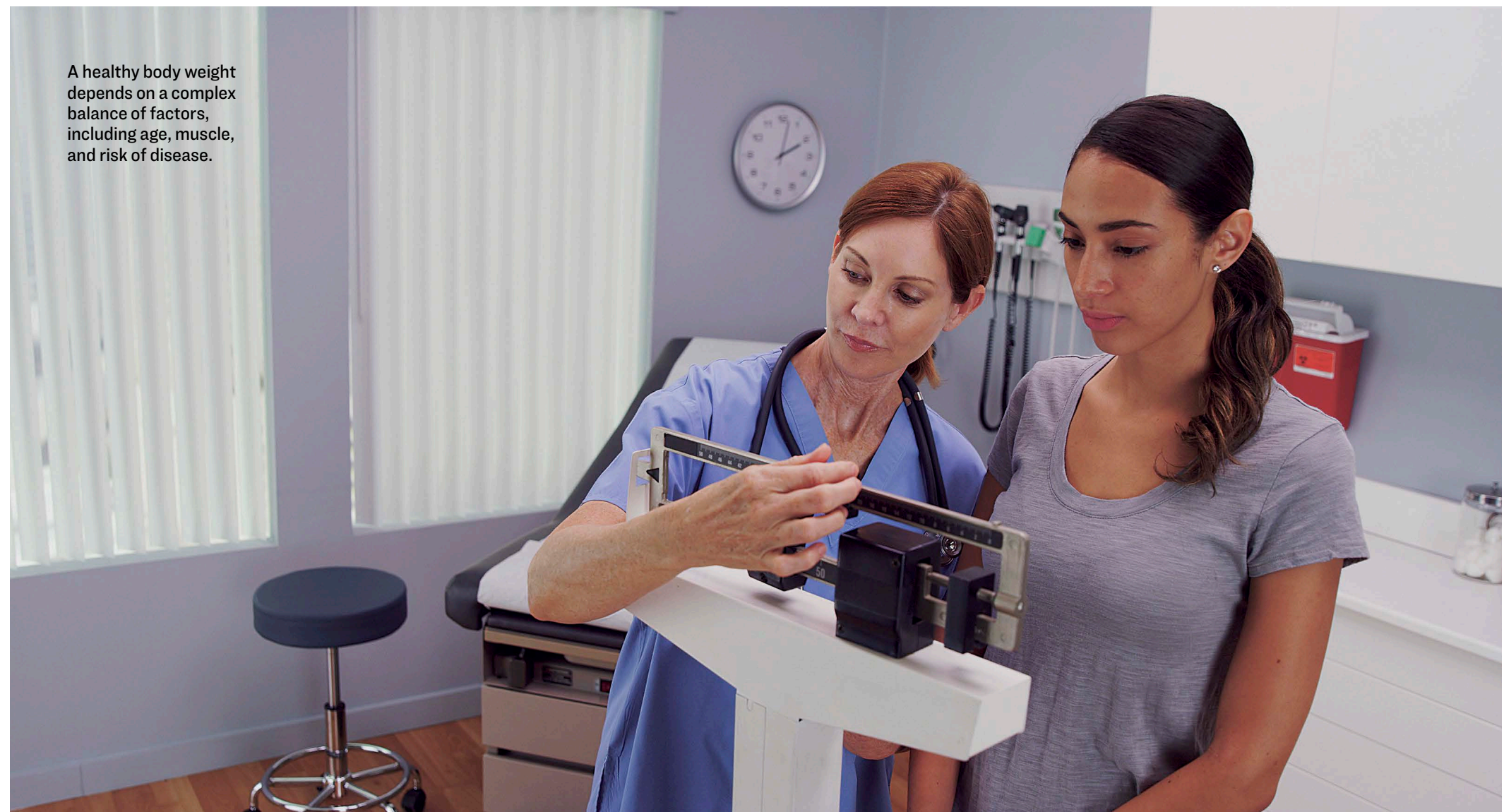
Antioxidants can help keep your cells young and slow aging to promote better health.



Glutathione is an important antioxidant produced in the body but at reduced amounts as we age.

Lean protein, especially complete proteins found in quinoa and animal products, are important sources of antioxidants.

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



## Beyond the Bathroom Scale: Healthy Body Weight

Figuring out a person’s perfect body weight is surprisingly difficult

NANCY BERKOFF

Discussing weight and figuring out what healthy body weight is has been a popular topic for centuries. For much of history, extra weight was considered an indication of good health, wealth, and success, although that has changed over time.

As the years have passed, people have developed complex ways of understanding and measuring healthy body weight.

**Body Weight Statistics**

Statistical breakthroughs had a major impact on our understanding of healthy weight. In 1846, Sir Jonathan Hutchinson, a British surgeon, published a table of “average” weights for each inch of height from 61 through 72 inches, using information gathered from 2,650 30-year-old men. This table was utilized by life insurance companies as a guide to evaluate applicants.

The introduction of a penny scale, around 1885, in Germany and the United States, then permitted the public to measure body weight to the nearest pound. These scales were a public draw, costing those that wished to know their weight a penny.

Body weight statistics evolved further in the beginning of the 20th century, as the purchase of insurance policies grew in popularity.

Healthy weight became an important factor for insurance companies, as medical professionals had established a relationship between being underweight and death from tuberculosis and pneumonia and, conversely, being overweight and death from heart-related conditions.

The Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. was able to develop standard weight or “height to weight” charts. Those tables, using information gathered from middle-aged males, are the basis for the current definition for underweight, normal, overweight, and obese individuals.

Many people, when thinking of body weight, may point to body mass index or BMI. Nutrition and dietetics students and professionals will likely recognize the name of Belgian astronomer and mathematician Adolphe Quetelet (1796-1874), the inventor of the concept.

Quetelet applied probability calculus to the human body, looking for “norms.” In 1835, he published “A Treatise on Man and the Development of His Aptitudes,” with the conclusion that healthy weight could be mathematically calculated. Known then as the Quetelet Index, and now as BMI, this was the first table, still in use, that indicated “average weight” at ages 20 through 60.

**The Current Standard**

Body mass index (BMI) is a person’s weight in kilograms divided by the square of height in meters. A higher BMI can indicate elevated body fatness, and a lower BMI can indicate decreased body fatness. To calculate your BMI, you can use an online BMI calculator or a height and weight chart.

In general, health care professionals use the following guide: if your BMI is 18.5 to 24.9, it falls within the normal or healthy weight range. If your BMI is 25.0 to 29.9, it

falls within the overweight range. If your BMI is 30.0 or higher, it falls within the obese range.

But there are shortfalls to the system.

BMI calculations don’t take age or gender into consideration, or provide information on the location or amount of body fat, important factors for predicting certain health conditions. It’s possible to be “overweight” according to BMI, but have healthful levels of fat. For extremely muscular people, such as athletes and bodybuilders, height and weight measurements alone may not accurately indicate health, because muscle weighs more than fat.

**BMI calculations don’t take age, gender, or the location or amount of body fat into consideration.**

A healthy, muscular person may have a BMI in a very high range. Meanwhile, a frail, inactive person with a low BMI may have a dangerously low level of muscle. BMI alone can’t show whether a person’s weight is healthful, but using it in combination with other indicators can provide a more complete picture. One of those indicators is waist circumference.

**Waist Circumference**

Waist circumference can tell us if our weight is being gathered in muscle or fat. And where we wear our fat is important also. Generally, abdominal fat is considered more dangerous than hip fat. People with abdominal fat are at greater risk of insulin resistance, diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

To correctly measure waist circumference, stand and place a tape measure around your middle, just above your hip bones. Make sure the tape is horizontal around and keep it snug around the waist but don’t compress the skin. Measure your

waist just after you breathe out. A man whose waist circumference is more than 40 inches or a non-pregnant woman whose waist circumference is more than 35 inches is considered to be “elevated” in weight.

**Other Measurement Systems**

There are many technologies that have developed around estimating and tracking a healthy body weight, from smart phone apps to total immersion pods. Figuring out the perfect body weight turns out to be surprisingly personal. It depends on many factors and can be difficult to ascertain. That hasn’t stopped people from trying though.

**Skinfold Thickness**

One more familiar and longstanding method is to measure skinfold thickness. People who have quickly fluctuating weight may do this themselves, pinching an area of fat accumulation and noting how much bigger or smaller it is.

But there are more scientific ways to do this using a special caliper to measure the thickness to “pinch an inch” of skin and the fat beneath it. This is done in specific areas of the body: the trunk, the thighs, front and back of the upper arm, and under the shoulder blade. Equations are used to predict body fat percentage based on these measurements. This is a convenient, portable, and inexpensive method used in schools and the military, but is not unerringly accurate.

**Bioelectric Impedance (BIA)**

BIA equipment sends a small, safe electric current through the body, similar to an EKG, measuring the resistance. The current gets more resistance passing through body fat than it does passing through lean body mass and water. Equations are used to estimate body fat percentage and fat-free mass. The ratio of body water to fat may change during illness, dehydration or weight loss, which can decrease the accuracy of this method.

**Underwater Weighing (Densitometry)**

This method involves putting on a swimsuit and being completely submerged in water. Individuals are weighed in air and

then while submerged in a tank. Formulas to estimate body volume, body density, and body fat percentage are then used. Fat is more buoyant (less dense) than water, so someone with high body fat will have a lower body density than someone with low body fat. This method is time-consuming and generally not a good option for children or older adults.

**The BodPod or**

**Air-Displacement Plethysmography**

This method uses a similar principle to underwater weighing but can be done in the air instead of in water. Individuals sit in a small chamber such as in the “Bod Pod.” The machine estimates body volume based on air pressure differences between the empty chamber and the occupied chamber. This expensive method is relatively quick and comfortable and a good choice for children and older adults, and other individuals who would not want to be submerged in water.

**Dual Energy X-ray**

**Absorptiometry (DEXA)**

X-ray beams pass through different body tissues at different rates. DEXA uses two low-level X-ray beams to develop estimates of fat-free mass, fat mass, and bone mineral density. DEXA is becoming more popular for estimating healthy body weight, with the added benefit of estimating bone density. Of course, X-rays aren’t a risk free way of evaluating the body given the radiation risk.

**Feeling Good About the Skin You’re In**

Cultural values and norms affect how we think about a healthy body weight. Over the years, many cultures have valued “chubbiness” or “curves” rather than thinness. Social ideals change with time. In the United States and Europe, “thin” continues to be “in.”

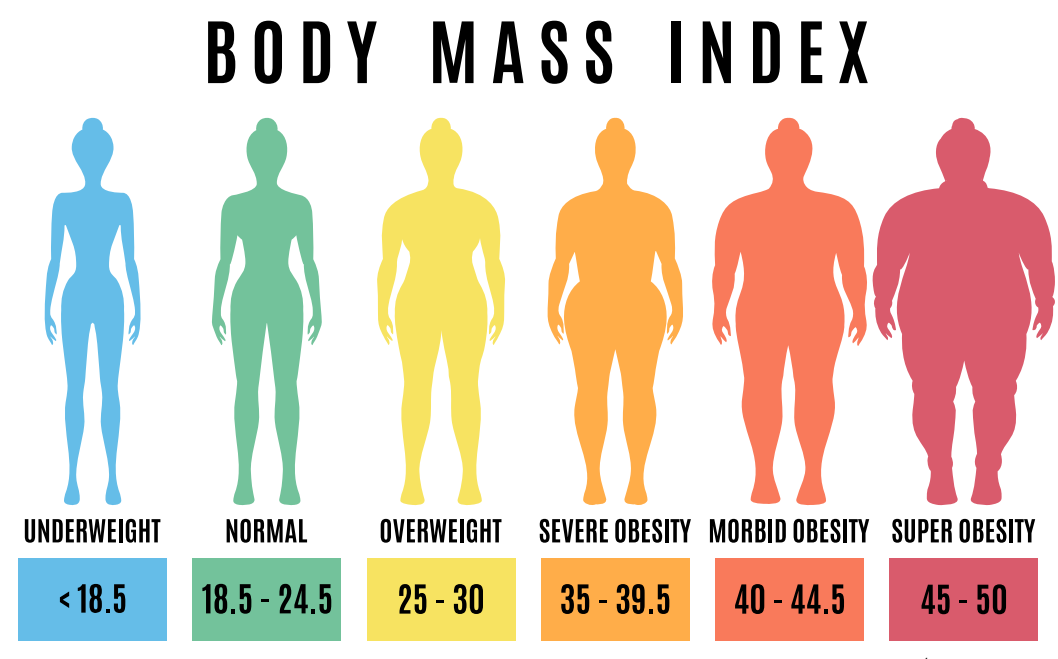
But what is a healthy body weight? A healthy weight is a weight that lowers your risk for health problems. With the immense variety of different body types out there, it is impossible to have a one-size-fits-all method of saying a certain weight is healthy.

Being very thin can sometimes have little to do with good health, just as having a “few extra pounds” may not be an indication of poor health status.

And while it can be fashionable to be “on a diet,” what you really need to do is find a healthy way of eating you will stick to indefinitely. If you want to lose weight, rather than go on a diet, change your food philosophy. Become mindful about eating and focus on vegetables, fruit, and whole grains.

Plan to make changes slowly. Try to make physical activity a regular part of your day, and plan to do something nice for yourself on a regular basis. A healthy lifestyle, which includes a healthy weight, isn’t just about the numbers on the bathroom scale.

*Dr. Nancy Berkoff is a registered dietitian, food technologist, and culinary professional. She divides her time between health care and culinary consulting, food writing, and healthy living.*



BODNAR.PHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK

Addiction practices are used in the creating and marketing of junk food, gambling, and video games.



## How to Reduce Addiction-Like Behaviors Over the Holidays

Strategies to keep yourself from addictive behaviors and find healthier alternatives

TANYA MUDRY

With the pressures of the holiday season, rising COVID-19 rates, and the resulting social isolation from friends and family, people can easily fall into addictive or excessive behaviors. These are behaviors that are sometimes done to excess, taking on an addiction-like quality.

In your life, this might look like eating too many cookies or too much ice cream, a lot of online shopping (Amazon packages keep showing up), too much screen time (binge-watching Netflix) or playing Minecraft or League of Legends all night long.

If you are wondering how to keep these habits in check, here are five strategies to help reduce excessive behaviors.

### 1. Investigate the Behavior

Investigate the behaviors you deem to be excessive. The more details you have about the behavior, the more opportunities you have to interrupt it.

Examples of useful questions to ask include: When are you most likely to eat or drink more than you planned? Is it perhaps after a long day of work? Where does it happen—in the living room on the couch? Who else is involved? What do you typically eat or drink? How does it make you feel?

If you have someone in your life who loves gaming (playing video games) and may be spending too much time doing it, become curious about what it means to them. Ask what they love about gaming. They may enjoy it because it's skills-based, or they achieve success in gaming, or because it's team-oriented and social.

Ask how gaming makes them feel. For example, does it make them feel proud, energetic, or disengaged from school? When are they most likely to do these behaviors for longer than planned (for example, at night)? Where do they do these behaviors (for example, in the bedroom)?

### 2. Recruit Others for Their Good Ideas!

Family members often have great ideas and insights when it comes to issues with excessive behaviors. For example, when it comes to gaming, young people often come up with great ideas around making a schedule and playing video games at certain times, or earning screen time.

We know from the research that most people recover from addiction and excessive behaviors with the help of a social network and from people close to them.

### 3. Experiment With Place, Time, and Objects

We know from research that context and

place of casinos and drug use spaces invites excessive use. Context is important for other habits, too.

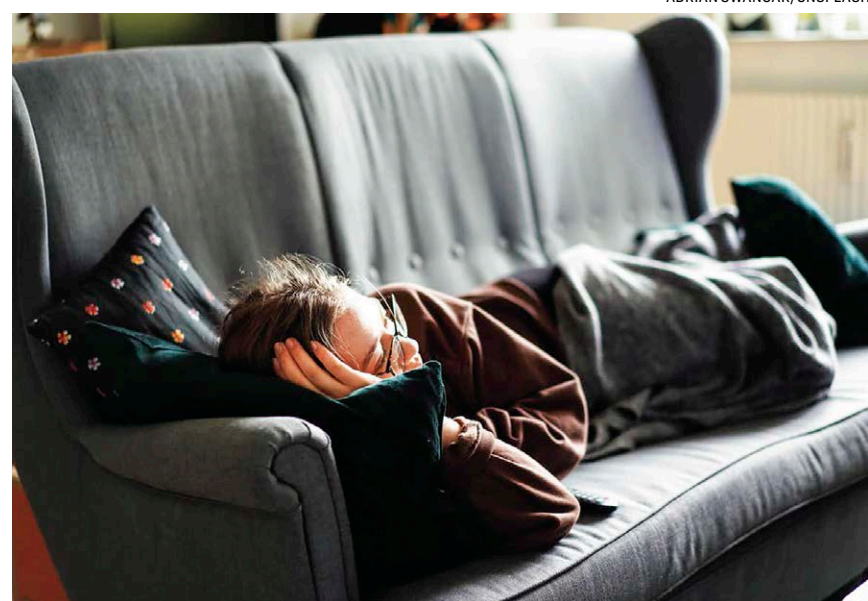
If out-of-control snacking happens on the couch during Netflix in the evening, restrict eating to only the kitchen. If someone is gaming until all hours of the night in the bedroom, limit gaming to the living room before 10 p.m. By changing the place and timing of behaviors, the practice itself ultimately changes—even just a little bit.

Marketing and consumerism have been implicated in the maintaining of addiction practices in junk food, gambling, and video games. The developers of these products want people to continue to use them, and design them to keep people hooked. Video games are designed to require many hours to pass to the next challenge. Apps have bells and whistles (likes, messages, and comments) that reward and entice users for more engagement.

In the world of gambling, this looks like games designed for near-miss features, speed of play, and the illusion of control. These features increase gaming productivity to accelerate play, extend the duration, and increase the amount of money spent.

In fact, former technologists from Silicon Valley who created the “addictive” technologies used in social media are now warning of potential tech addiction and corresponding negative effects.

Investigate the objects that are important to the behavior you want to reduce. Some folks find removing apps on their phones is helpful, taking gaming holidays, designing a cellphone hotel in the kitchen (a place where the cellphones stay), limiting video game and social media use to common areas or turning off internet by 10 p.m. each night.



Time and place matter. If you binge-watch shows at night, switching up your behavior, such as timing the TV to turn off at 10 p.m., may help.

ADRIAN SWANGAR/UNSPLASH

How we talk about excessive behaviors to ourselves and others matters.

### 4. Pay Attention to What You Think and Say

How we talk about excessive behaviors and what we say about them to ourselves and others matters. If we talk about ourselves or other people (such as our partners or kids) as “addicted” to something, like video games, it's easy for them to live up to that reputation, almost defining who they are. Addiction and the words we use are tied to our identities and the ways we see ourselves and others.

Telling your teen they are addicted to gaming and making them stop cold turkey won't likely be helpful, and may elicit unwanted responses. To avoid anger, protest and sneaky behaviour, invite your teens into the decision-making.

Consider the things you say to yourself when you engage in excessive behaviours. Do you catch yourself thinking, “I need this drink to relax” or doing X “provides me with me time”? Any “should” or “shouldn't” type language might be setting yourself up for failure.

Instead, avoid “shoulds,” extremes or black-and-white thinking. Live in the grey area, have kindness and compassion for yourself and others. Experiment with new ways of talking to yourself (and others) during your daily life.

### 5. Experiment With Other Activities

Are there other activities that help you relax, beyond mulled wine and cookies?

What happens if you make tea and go for an evening walk instead of snacking and turning on Netflix? Other ideas to try could be a game of cards, games night, puzzles, dance parties in the kitchen, scavenger hunts in the neighborhood (counting reindeer or inflatable figures), family karaoke night or themed evenings.

Perhaps you want to imagine visiting Mexico for the night, complete with nachos, mocktails, dancing to mariachi music on YouTube, and wearing shorts and a T-shirt. You might consider someone's favorite video game or character and create a party around that theme.

Ask all household members to contribute ideas for activities, and take turns trying them out. By adding new activities, you end up crowding out the behavior you want to reduce. The more we do a behavior, the more the brain starts to wire to that activity—inviting continuation and repetition. By adding more preferred activities and behaviors and repeating those, we help our brain re-wire towards the preferred ways of thinking, being, and responding.

Tanya Mudry is an assistant professor of educational studies in psychology at the University of Calgary in Canada. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.

WISE HABITS

## A Guide to Habit Resilience

Coming back from setbacks is your best guarantee that sooner or later that change will stick

LEO BABAUTA

I've coached thousands of people who want to change habits, in my Sea Change Program, and I've found there's a key difference between those who actually make changes and those who don't.

That key difference is what I like to call “habit resilience.”

Habit resilience is the ability to bounce back when things don't go as you planned, to stay positive, to encourage yourself, to forgive yourself, to be loving and compassionate with yourself, to shake it off and start again afresh. To learn and grow from struggles.

The opposite of habit resilience is getting discouraged when things don't go as planned, beating yourself up, trying not to think about it when you mess up, ignoring problems, complaining, blaming others, deciding you can't change, hardening your low or harsh opinion of yourself.

Let's look at one example:

I want to change my eating habits, which is pretty tough to do, so I set myself a plan to eat oats for breakfast, a salad for lunch, and scrambled tofu with veggies for dinner. Great! But then during the week, I have to go to a work get-together, a family party, a three-day trip to New York, and then my daughter's birthday party. All the plans went out the window on those days.

So at this point, I can give up, beat myself up, ignore the problem, or, if I've developed habit resilience, I can shake myself off, make some adjustments to the plan, give myself some love, encourage myself, and start again, keeping a positive attitude the whole time. The second way of doing it will result in long-term change. If you can stick with it, there's no change you can't create.

That's just one version of habit resilience, but you can see that the difference between the first option and the second one is huge.

So how do we develop habit resilience? Let's take a look.

### Developing Habit Resilience

The good news is that you can develop this marvelous quality or skill of habit resilience. Actually, it's a set of skills, but they can be developed with some practice.

Here's how to develop habit resilience:

### Loosen your hold on expectations.

When we start to make changes in our lives, we often have unrealistic expectations. (Six-pack abs in four weeks!) But when we actually try to hit those expectations, we usually fall short. At least, at first. Over the long run, we can often make greater changes than we think we can. But over the short term, the changes are small, and not very orderly, either. Change is messy. So just expect things to go less than ideally. Don't be too attached to how you expect things to go, so that when your expectations aren't met, you can just take it in stride.

### Learn the skill of adjusting.

If your diet plan doesn't go as planned,

The opposite of habit resilience is getting discouraged when things don't go as planned.



Taking on a new habit usually means we'll fall back to old habits at some point. Returning to a new habit after a fall takes self-compassion and forgiveness.

NIYAS KHAN/UNSPLASH

it's not necessarily a fault

of yours—it may be the fault of the method or plan. How can you make it better to accommodate your life? Maybe you can get some accountability, set up some reminders, get rid of junk food from your house, and so on. There are a thousand ways to adjust a plan or method. When things go wrong, look for a way to adjust, don't just give up.

### Practice self-compassion and forgiveness.

This is so important, but most people have the opposite habit. When things go wrong, we often beat ourselves up and are critical and harsh. Those kinds of reactions are unhelpful and can keep us stuck in old habits for years. Instead, we need to learn to be kinder to ourselves when we don't measure up to what we hope we'll be. When we let ourselves down, it's important to forgive ourselves and be compassionate, seeing our own suffering, and wishing for relief from that suffering. Wishing for peace for ourselves, and being loving to ourselves, no matter what we do, is critical to our future success.

Don't be too attached to how you expect things to go. Then, when your expectations aren't met, you can just take it in stride.

### Don't ignore problems, face them with kindness.

That said, being forgiving is very different than just pretending it didn't happen. If you've gone off your exercise plan or stopped meditating, don't just ignore the problem, not wanting to face it. Instead, turn toward the problem and look at it with kindness. It's like if you have a crying child—is it better to ignore the child and just hope that they'll be quiet? That will just lead to more pain for both of you. Instead, give them a hug. Acknowledge their pain. Give them love. Be there for them. And do the same for yourself when you're having difficulties.

Learn to encourage yourself.

I wrote recently about the importance of encouragement versus discouragement and how we need to practice this regularly. When you falter, can you be encouraging to yourself? Can you stay positive in the face of failure? Can you look at it as another step in your growth, instead of failure?

### Find encouragement from others.

In the same way, we can get encouragement from other people. Being in a program with other people who are there to encourage you is a good way to find that support. Ask for help from friends and family. Find a good friend who will help you get back on track, with love. We aren't alone—lots of others know what it's like to struggle, and are willing to support us when we're struggling.

### Learn perseverance and keep coming back.

Stay positive when things go astray, and just keep coming back to the habit you want to change. Want to quit smoking but you backtracked when your father died? Get back on it as soon as you're able. Come back with even more resolve. Commit yourself even deeper.

Can you feel that if you practice these skills, you'll handle any difficulty that comes your way? That your path to change might be bumpy, filled with obstacles, but nothing will stop you if you keep a positive attitude, keep coming back, keep being loving and compassionate to yourself?

This is habit resilience. And it will change your entire life if you practice.

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](http://ZenHabits.net)

## Smart Tips for Managing Stress During Covid-19 Pandemic

MAT LECOMPTE

With the COVID-19 pandemic across the world, many people are experiencing more stress than ever. This stress can cause health problems such as headaches, trouble sleeping, muscle pain, upset stomach, and fatigue.

According to Dr. Craig Sawchuk, a Mayo Clinic psychologist, everyone has a “stressometer.” This is a warning from your body that stress may be affecting your overall health.

Sawchuk explains: “So, one way that we think people experience stress is physically. So, we may experience it in our stomachs. Our sleep gets disrupted. We feel a lot more tense. We can also see it emotionally, sometimes more of that irritability or sometimes even flattening of emotions. Sometimes we see it in terms of how we think, whether it's difficult

to concentrate, we're worrying or ruminating more, or sometimes how we behave.”

Sometimes we tend to withdraw, or maybe our eating or drinking starts to pick up. So, it's really important that we pay attention to our own stressometer.

Dr. Craig Sawchuk, psychologist

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MIMAGEPHOTOGRAPHY/SHUTTERSTOCK



Stress takes a toll on the body and mind, but we can reduce stress levels with good habits.

tion to our own stressometer.”

### Many Ways to Reduce Stress

There are many ways to help reduce stress. Some people find help from practicing relaxation techniques, such as meditation, focused breathing, or massage. Some simple lifestyle changes have also been shown to have an effect on stress levels. Sticking to a healthy diet full of fruits and vegetables and getting plenty of exercise can make a big difference in stress levels.

Maintaining a good sleep routine can also be beneficial for stress reduction. Try to go to sleep and wake up at the same time each day. Also, reduce screen time before bed and try to avoid caffeine a couple of hours before bedtime. This can make a big difference in the quality of sleep you get.

Many people find it comforting to write a journal if they are

struggling with their thinking. By writing down your stressful thoughts, you may be able to look at things in a different way, which may be helpful. Also, be sure to pay attention to your social habits. It is easy to withdraw when feeling stressed, so be sure to set goals of reaching out to others to stay connected to those around you.

It is important to remember that we are all in this together. By being mindful and holding yourself accountable, you can reduce the risk of stress and its related symptoms. By staying healthy yourself, you may be able to reach out to a loved one who may be struggling and give them hope to reduce their stress levels as well.

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



## BECOMING MINIMALIST

# Signs You Shouldn't Buy Another Christmas Gift This Year

Here are 7 ways to tell you are going beyond your limit or wasting money with holiday gift buying

JOSHUA BECKER

Christmas is a time for giving. But is there a chance we're going a bit overboard with the gifting these days?

The average American will spend \$805 this holiday season. And let's face it, for the most part, we're spending that \$800 buying stuff we don't really need—including gifts the receiver doesn't need either.

I mean, look around your home, you already have everything. If you did need something, you already went to Amazon and bought it. You weren't going to wait for someone else to wrap it and put it under a tree.

**We're buying stuff for each other that isn't necessary. At some point, enough is enough.**

In other words, the stuff we're buying for each other isn't necessary. It's fun, sure. But at some point, enough is enough.

To help you decide if you've reached that point, here are seven signs you shouldn't buy another Christmas gift:

**1. You are still paying off last year's gifts.**

According to a recent study by Credit Insider, 22 percent of respondents who bought Christmas gifts with credit last year, are still paying it off. If that's you, don't continue the trend by purchasing more. It's no fun if your interest payments last longer than the gift you gave.

**2. The person you are shopping for already has 'everything.'**

I can't believe how many times I've heard someone say, "I just don't know what to get so-and-so, he's already 'got everything.'" Crazy idea here, folks. If somebody already has so much stuff that you need to wander the aisles of a department store just to find something to buy them, your money can probably be spent in better ways.

**3. The person you are shopping for has requested no gifts.**

You'd be surprised how many times I've been asked, "How do I tell people to stop buying me gifts?" There is a growing number of people who honestly mean it when they say, "I don't want anything for Christmas this year." Respect their wishes. Before buying a whole bunch of new stuff this Christmas for people in your life, you might want to ask if they even want a whole bunch of new stuff.

**4. The person you are buying a gift for already has a clutter-problem.**

The average American home now contains 300,000 items. Possessions are a burden on our lives. They drain money, time, and energy. And they add stress. If the person you are shopping for has a clutter problem in their home (you know who they are), maybe the best gift you can give them this year is not a physical gift.

**5. You've already bought gifts for everyone on your list ... except for one.**

One of the most significant holiday trends over recent years is the increase in "self-gifting"—people treating themselves to presents when they are out shopping for others. In fact, according to the National Retail Federation, nearly 60 percent of us will give ourselves gifts this holiday season. If everyone

on your list is crossed off, resist the urge to add one more name at the bottom—yours.

**6. You are digging into savings.**

Before entering the holiday season, it's wise to set a budget to keep from overspending. Additionally, it's wise to keep your savings in savings—and not blow it all during the last month of the year. Unfortunately, 38.5 percent of us will take money from our savings/emergency fund for holiday shopping. If that's you, don't do it. Don't buy another gift. Instead, explain to your family and friends the decision you made this year. They'll understand—and just might change their budgeting for next year as a result of your example.

**7. You think one more gift will make the perfect holiday.**

Marketers work hard to convince us that consumer products will create that perfect holiday season. If we buy the right lights, the biggest tree, the perfect gifts, and the ideal stocking stuffers, Christmas will be perfect! This is their claim. But it's not true. You don't need any of those things for the perfect holiday. If you think your next purchase will bring about the perfect holiday, you are looking in all the wrong places and it's time to stop.

Just to be clear, I'm not against giving gifts at Christmas. But I am against the way our society has begun to make gifts the centerpiece of Christmas and the shopping never ends.

There are numerous signs that it's time to be done shopping—if we'd only begin to notice them.

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



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