THE EPOCH TIMES IN THE EPOCH TIMES

THE CREATIVE EXCHANGE/UNSPLASH





Stoic philosopher Epictetus counseled us toward calm acceptance. PUBLIC DOMAIN

Life's Limitations Can Set You Free

We grow through hardship and find greater freedom in our growth

JAY HARRINGTON

In 1944, a 39-year-old Austrian man named Viktor Frankl and his wife Tilly were processed into the Auschwitz concentration camp. He spent approximately 18 months in the shackles of the Nazis, shuttled from one camp to another, before being liberated by American soldiers. Frankl survived the Holocaust, but his wife, mother, and brother didn't.

Tales of Pandemic Weight Loss and Gain

For many people, fear and stress are fueling unsustainable eating habits

CONAN MILNER

ave you plumped up during the lockdown? You're not alone. The phenomenon is known as the "quarantine 15." It refers to the 15 pounds (more or less) many have put on while they've been stuck at home.

A new study gives a global scope of the issue.

Research Director Nick Rizzo and his team at RunRepeat, an online shoe store

Fear is at the heart of many people's weight gain. known for its ranking system, surveyed nearly 20,000 people from 140 countries. They found that more than one-third (36 percent) gained more than five pounds over the past year.

The United States had the most gainers (40 percent) and the United Kingdom had the least (28 percent).

Globally, the quarantine 15 hit women harder. In comparison to males, females

Continued on Page 4

Despite suffering such great trauma, Frankl went on to become one of the most important and influential neurologists and psychiatrists of the 20th century. In fact, it was the experience of spending time in captivity, experiencing suffering and deprivation, and watching some prisoners transcend their circumstances while others succumbed to them, that set Frankl on a path to explore life's meaning and develop a renowned technique called "logotherapy" to help those in need overcome difficulty. Frankl's big insight, which surfaced at his lowest moment, was gained by observing the resilience of humanity, and teaching others how to find meaning in life even in the harshest of conditions.

Frankl wrote, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way." The search for meaning, Frankl believed, is the primary motivational factor of humans.

Frankl, of course, isn't the first to explore life's big question: Why are we here? For thousands of years, religious and secular scholars have attempted to answer this question. Frankl wrote that "religion is the ultimate search for meaning." The search for meaning in a world full of hardship is a thread that has bound philosophical and spiritual study for thousands of years.

The search for clarity around existential questions is what leads us to keep searching, reading, writing, and thinking about the most ancient and enduring question: What is the purpose of life?

Continued on Page 7

A new clothing brand from the world of Shen Yun.

Classic design and luxurious comfort.



THE EPOCH TIMES

The Book You've Been Waiting for...

HOW THE SPECTER OF COMMUNISM IS RULING OUR WORLD

The specter of communism did not disappear with the disintegration of the **Communist Party in Eastern Europe**

ORDER NOW!

EpochShop.com

More Fruits and Veggies Could Prevent Millions of Cardiovascular Deaths

Mounting research affirms the crucial role proper diet and nutrition play in preventing the most common causes of death

Researchers found

roughly 1 in 7 deaths

from heart disease

and strokes could be

attributed to inadequate

fruit consumption.

Consuming fruits and vegetables every day likely to be overweight or obese, hence can keep your heart beating, quite literally, with mounting research connecting low fruit and vegetable intake with an increased *incidence of cardiovascular deaths. These* study findings can save lives, as heart disease remains the top killer across the globe.

Low fruit and vegetable intake may be a major factor in heart disease deaths. Findings from a 2019 study showed that low fruit intake translated to almost 1.8 million cardiovascular deaths in 2010 while low vegetable consumption resulted in 1 million deaths. The impacts were discovered to be most acute in countries with the lowest average consumption of fruits and vegetables.

Let's have a closer look at the different factors that drive these findingsand how you can optimize your fruit and veggie intake for a healthy, thriving heart.

Increasing Vegetable Intake May Prevent 82,000 US Deaths

Roughly 1 in 7 deaths from heart disease and strokes could be attributed to inadequate fruit consumption, while 1 in 12 deaths from the same diseases may be rooted in not eating enough vegetables, according to findings presented at Nutrition 2019, the American Society for Nutrition annual meeting, in Baltimore.

Using dietary guidelines and existing studies on heart risk factors, the team defined optimal fruit intake as 300 grams (g) a day, which is equivalent to about two small apples. For vegetables, on the other hand, it's 400 g a day, or about three cups of raw carrots.

The researchers then estimated average national fruit and vegetable intakes from diet surveys and food availability data 20,069 adults. Classifying the fruits and from 113 countries, or some 82 percent vegetables into four groups—green, orof the global population. In the United ange-yellow, red-purple, and white—the States, suboptimal veggie consumption researchers saw that stroke incidence risk may account for some 82,000 cardiovascular deaths and poor fruit intake for 57,000 deaths.

Note that cardiovascular disease remains the No. 1 killer globally, taking about 17.9 million lives each year. Poor intake had the worst impact on younger adults when it came to age groups, and on men, as opposed to women, possibly because women may tend to eat more fruits and vegetables.

"Our findings indicate the need for population-based efforts to increase fruit and vegetable consumption throughout the world," said Victoria Miller, lead study author and postdoc researcher at Tufts University, in a news release.

Part of why they are so heart-friendly is that fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of fiber, potassium, magnesium, antioxidants and phenolics, all proven beneficial in reducing blood pressure and maintaining healthy cholesterol levels. They also enhance the diversity of beneficial bacteria in the digestive tract and *LLC. Sign up for the newsletter at* eating more of them may make you less GreenmedInfo.health

reducing the likelihood of heart disease.

Eat More Fruits and Veggies to Protect Your Heart

A 2014 study that was part of the Harvard-based Nurses' Health Study and Health Professionals Follow-up Study confirmed that a diet heavy in fruits and vegetables can slash the risk of heart disease and stroke.

The team, after analyzing the results and combining them with other studies' findings, estimated that heart disease risk was 20 percent lower among subjects who consumed more than five servings of fruits and vegetables a day, versus those who ate fewer than three serv-

ings daily. A 1999 study concluded

that consuming fruits and vegetables, particularly cruciferous and green leafy vegetables along with citrus fruit, reduced the risk for ischemic stroke. In 2003, another team of

researchers found that daily consumption of green-yellow vegetables and fruits translated to a lower risk of total stroke, intracerebral hemorrhage, and cerebral infarction mortality. What's more, the protective effects were similar in men and women.

Plasma vitamin C, a biomarker that reflects fruit and vegetable intake, was inversely associated with heart failure risk in a healthy population in a 2011 study. Interestingly, a 2012 study offered evidence that the color of fruits and vegetables mattered in the anti-stroke benefit of fruits and vegetables.

Over a 10-year period, the researchers examined the link between the color of fruits and vegetables and stroke incidence in a population-based study involving was 52 percent lower for those who consumed white fruits and vegetables such as apples and pears.

One takeaway from these studies is having a rainbow of fruits and vegetables on your plate every day can work wonders in preventing strokes, heart disease, and other illnesses. Read abstracts with vegetable research and abstracts with fruit research on the GreenMedInfo.com database for further potentially life-saving information.

The GMI Research Group is dedicated to investigating the most important health and environmental issues of the day. Special emphasis will be placed on environmental health. Our focused and deep research will explore the many ways in which the present condition of the human body directly reflects the true state of the ambient environment. *This work is reproduced and distributed* with the permission of GreenMedInfo



phenolics-all proven beneficial in reducing blood pressure.

Linking Sleep Apnea and the CCP Virus airway pressure PAP) device helps

Research finds links between common sleep apnea comorbidities and more severe COVID-19 infections

BARRY KRAKOW

leep apnea can take a serious toll on general well-being and contribites to health conditions known to worsen COVID-19 outcomes. Despite these findings, scant research has been conducted linking sleep apnea directly to COVID-19 outcomes. There are, however, notable connections showing greater COVID morbidity and mortality among patients with obesity and hypertension, two conditions extremely common to sleep apnea patients.

What little research has been conducted lends support to sleep apnea as a significant factor in how well one fares when infected with the CCP virus.

Three newer studies use valid retrospective designs to measure available research data. These studies help us understand the impact of this pervasive sleep disorder that goes by the names of obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) or sleep-disordered breathing (SDB).

Harvard researchers examined a group of 443 people with sleep apnea who contracted COVID-19 (the CCP virus) and compared them to a control group of who also contracted the virus but did not have sleep apnea. The OSA group exhibited nearly twice the death rate of the non-OSA control group. These Harvard researchers noted 310 of

the people with sleep apnea used continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) through a positive airway pressure (PAP) device to provide a stream of compressed air through a face mask while they sleep. This is a standard treatment for sleep apnea. The remaining 133 sleep apnea patients were not on CPAP. Although the findings were statistically non-significant, there was a statistical trend (meaning nearly significant) for better "composite" outcomes in the CPAP users. Composite referred to a cluster of bad outcomes, such as hospitalization, ICU admission, need for a ventilator, or death. In other words, each patient may suffer one or more of these events, and the CPAP group appears to have suffered slightly fewer events.

Northwestern University researched ten hospitals in the Chicago area involving 9405 positive CCP virus cases. From this large group, 3185 hospitalized cases (1779 also with respiratory failure) were compared to patients not hospitalized. OSA was roughly five times more common in those hospitalized (15.3 percent versus 3.4 percent) and

More studies are needed to understand how obstructive sleep apnea worsens COVID morbidity and mortality.

disordered breathing can elevate levels of C-reactive protein, a widely-used marker of inflammation.

Sleep

roughly four times greater in those with respiratory failure (19.4 percent versus 4.5 percent). After adjusting for common conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and bodymass index, OSA still showed significantly greater risks for hospitalization and respiratory failure.

A study from France examined diabetics admitted to the hospital with COVID. More than a thousand CCP virus cases were identified of which 144 were also diagnosed with OSA. These OSA cases showed a nearly three times greater death rate compared to those without OSA. The analysis indicated OSA cases were receiving treatment for the condition, most likely a positive airway pressure (PAP) device, but when I contacted the research group they reported some people were regularly using, minimally using, or not using a device at all. If these compliance data were gathered, an analysis might reveal whether one group fared better than another as suggested by the trend in the Harvard study.

Just recently, two additional studies emerged with relevant though somewhat speculative findings.

In Finland a very small sample of 28 virus positive patients were first admitted to the Turku University Hospital near the beginning of the pandemic. Of these cases, 29 percent (8 cases) had pre-existing OSA prior to hospitalization, which is noteworthy as this Finland district of nearly half a million people only shows a 3 percent rate of diagnosed OSA. Moreover, a chief limitation of this research was the lack of sleep testing in the other 20 admitted patients; therefore the actual prevalence of a sleep breathing disorder may have been under diagnosed. OSA's chief comorbidities were prevalent among the cases, with hypertension in 43 percent of the 28 patients and obesity in 37 percent.

Though the Finland study did not directly address morbidity and mortality based on OSA, it examined C-reactive protein (CRP, a widely-used marker of inflammation) and oxygen nadir levels (lowest point of oxygenation), both often used to assess disease severity. And, both higher CRP (statistically significant) and lower oxygenation (statistical trend) were associated with ICU admissions. The relevance here is that OSA is known to demonstrate both CRP elevations and lower oxygen levels.

As you see, the research remains sparse; however, OSA clearly seems more frequent in hospitalized cases. More studies are needed to understand how OSA worsens COVID morbidity and mortality and if treating OSA can improve outcomes. The study below offers a possible direction for future investigation.

As background to this last study, there is growing interest in the use of oxygen therapy for patients in the early stages of CO-VID treatment, but no study has compared the use of positive airway pressure (PAP) therapy to replace or supplement oxygen therapy. PAP therapy used standard room air, compared to oxygen therapy, which uses straight oxygen.

To understand the value of a PAP therapy, it is important to appreciate that the vast majority of OSA patients resolve sleeping oxygenation problems with their PAP machine. In other words, few OSA patients require both PAP and oxygen, and these individuals usually suffer from more severe obesity or chronic lung conditions.

those suffering

leep apnea get a better night's

Now along comes a study from the United Kingdom looking at the early use of CPAP combined with supplemental oxygen in hospitalized COVID cases. Remarkably, none of the patients had been tested or diagnosed with OSA. Instead, they wanted to confirm that early CPAP use would repair lung damage by improving the ability of oxygen to diffuse from the lung tissues into no available data on their actual time spent the bloodstream (aka Aveolar-Arterial or using a PAP device. Thus, we don't know if A-a gradient). Overall, the study only had 18 patients using CPAP and oxygen, but it doesn't explain when treatments were used or for how long. The most important finding was the decrease in the A-a gradient, which is a very encouraging sign suggesting oxygenation into the bloodstream was improved in these COVID patients using the combination of CPAP and oxygen.

In light of the current wave of the pandemic, more attention is being directed at outpatient care, which raises the question on whether PAP therapy could effectively treat patients' oxygenation problems while they are sleeping or perhaps while awake. PAP would not likely preclude or replace oxygen therapy, but providing PAP to the appropriate patients with OSA might yield better outcomes compared to giving OSA patients only oxygen at night. It's conceivable even people without OSA would benefit from CPAP when they are recovering from the CCP virus.

The chief benefits for any of these patients could be a better sleep, which in turn fortifies the immune system and provides the patient with greater daytime energy to fight the illness and work through the recovery phase.

For those who suspect they might have sleep apnea, I encourage you to schedule a sleep test for OSA. Signs of sleep apnea include breathing symptoms like loud snoring, gasping for air during sleep, or periods where you stop breathing during sleep, which you may learn about from a spouse. OSA more frequently presents with other sleep-related symptoms like insomnia, unrefreshing sleep, poor quality of sleep, fatigue, low energy and depression.

If you or someone you know is in the early stages of a CCP virus infection, you may want to ask the treating physicians about getting a portable sleep test done or about using CPAP. In cases of moderate to severe OSA, a PAP device may be of the utmost importance.

Barry Krakow, MD, a board-certified sleep medicine specialist who practiced clinical sleep medicine and conducted pioneering sleep research for 30 years. He provides sleep coaching services and training workshops to patients and health care professionals through his website www.BarryKrakowMD.com. He lives in Savannah, Ga.

Tales of Pandemic Weight Loss and Gain

For many people, fear and stress are fueling unsustainable eating habits

Continued from Page 1

were more than 14 percent more likely to gain weight, and nearly 17 percent less likely to lose weight. Another poll from May found that nearly half of women gained weight during quarantine.

These studies don't explore how or why each person gained weight, but Rizzo believes it comes down to two things: How much did the pandemic personally disrupt your life? And how well did you adapt to new circumstances?

"We've all experienced a massive change in our lives," Rizzo said. "Some have been able to maintain their habits, or improve their habits, and some people have been out of control of what they're doing."

Mike Miller, editor-in-chief for the Wilderness Times, traces his 10-pound weight gain to the pandemic derailing his gym habit. Miller says before quarantine, he worked out about five times a week. But when gyms closed, he became less active. However, he still continued eating his previous workout portions.

"Back when I was going to the gym, I used to eat monster meals. Entree, side, dessert,



When bad news and lost freedoms surround us. distractions and indulgences can be particularly hard to resist.

66

I bought some

weights off

Craigslist.

They were

expensive.

wealth.

Mike Miller,

The pandemic

has pushed

some people

to daily walks

and others to

overeat

editor-in-chief,

Wilderness Times

but health is

seconds, you name it. It didn't really matter because I was burning so many calories, I could eat anything," Miller said.

By May, Miller noticed the change in his body and adapted to his circumstances. He started talking morning walks, eating less, and building a home gym.

"I bought some weights off Craigslist. They were expensive, but health is wealth, and they're well worth the purchase price," he said. "It's not the same as the gym, but it's definitely enough."

But not everyone has been able to turn things around so fast. When change or stress is severe, it can become much harder to bounce back.

Author Christina Stanton says she gained 30 pounds this year. It all started with a "terrible case" of COVID-19 in mid-March. Stanton was hospitalized twice, and at one point given a 50 percent chance of survival.

"I barely moved for two months, my body was so torn up," Stanton said. Before COVID-19, she got plenty of ex-

ercise, she said. "I'm from New York City where I typically walk eight miles a day. I'm normally very physically active, which I'm sure contributed to the incredible weight gain."

When Stanton's muscles finally got back lungs were only about half their previous capacity. So she couldn't do much before she got winded.

Stanton's lung capacity has since improved, but she says now her will is shot. Gaining so much weight in such a short period of time has been an overwhelming ordeal.

"As it creeps up, I feel more and more powerless," she said.

Eating and Exercise Opportunities

While just more than one-third of respondents in Rizzo's study gained weight, another third (globally 32 percent) lost weight.

stopped, the company disclosed the infor-

mation on a conference call with JP Morgan

The United States saw the fewest losers (27 percent), the UK the most (40 percent). "The UK had as much losing as the U.S. had gained," Rizzo said.

DOUCEFLEUR/SHUTTERSTOCK

Pandemic responses varied from country to country, and differing policies may have played a role in public weight fluctuations around the world. When Rizzo talked to a colleague in the UK, he realized that, unlike Americans, the British had exercise built into their day.

"In the UK, everyone had an hour of time to go outside during the lockdown. And one of the main things people would do is go exercise," Rizzo said. "Pretty much everyone my colleague knew started running or hiking. In the United States, people were encouraged to wear masks and take precautions, but there was nothing about how to take care of yourself in this different world that we're living in."

But policy results can vary. Rhiannon Moore is from the UK, but she gained over the past year. She blames it on having more opportunities to eat.

"Working from home meant I was close to the refrigerator. Every time I had a fiveminute break, I'd go to the fridge or cupboard and eat something, just because it was there. I wasn't hungry, but it became the strength to start moving again, her a routine," Moore said. "I felt powerless to stop it.

> Moore says she tried to buy healthier food so that she had access to better choices when she started snacking. But the experiment only lasted a week, because she felt so unsatisfied.

> Moore says she needed more than nutrients. She ate to alleviate boredom and loneliness.

> "Having nowhere to go and very few people to talk to for days and days left me a little bit empty and purposeless, so I think I used food to fill time and to fill a bit of an empty hole in me," she said.

For some, the impetus to get in shape be-

The pharmaceutical industry is opposed to

Companies argue that they are already

taking voluntary actions that make this

move unnecessary. Moderna isn't going to

enforce its COVID-19-related patents against

other companies "while the pandemic con-

demic period.

tual property for COVID-19

vaccines for the post-pan-

A company statement

said, "We feel a special ob-

ligation under the current

circumstances to use our

resources to bring this pan-

demic to an end as quickly

as possible." But as Ron La-

bonte and Mira Johri wrote

in The Conversation, this

is a one-time deal and has

"the aura of charity rather

Others opposed to the

than of obligation.

this proposal.

Can a Pharma Company Change?

Profit, not altruism, motivates COVID-19 vaccine development

JOEL LEXCHIN

Health Canada announced its approval of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine on Dec. 9. Earlier, the news that the same vaccine was approved in the United Kingdom—and that others weren't far behind—was a relief to many people all over the world—or at least those in developed countries that can afford the vaccine.

The arrival of the vaccine also seems to have boosted public approval for the pharmaceutical industry. Globally, the industry's "trust and like score" grew to more than 68 percent of people surveyed in 2020 from 65 percent in 2018.

The bump in the industry's score was probably helped by the September joint pledge from nine companies that they would "stand with science" and not try to get a vaccine approved until it had been thoroughly tested for efficacy and safety. This statement was widely seen as the companies standing up to U.S. President Donald Trump, who was making promises about an "October surprise" in a bid to enhance his re-election chances. Can a drug company change? The evidence isn't clear cut.

The AstraZeneca vaccine is a case in point. The company has promised not to make a profit from the vaccine during the pandemic and is going to sell it at \$3 to \$4 per dose, a price that is one-fifth to one-tenth the cost of the other leading vaccine contenders from Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson.

At the same time, when there was a possible safety problem in September and Astra-Zeneca's clinical trials had to be temporarily clients but didn't make the same information public. The company is also making deals with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and has a licensing agreement with Serum Institute of India to supply low- and middle-income countries. According to the company's CEO tinues," and is willing to license its intellec-Pascal Soriot, "We want to

cover the whole world so everyone can get access to this vaccine." AstraZeneca has also re-

served the right to declare when the pandemic is over, which could be as early as July 2021 according to a document seen by the Financial Times. Presumably, at that time, the price will go up, although Soriot hasn't disclosed what that price will be.

Intellectual Property

South Africa and India are calling on the be much quicker to pressure companies to World Trade Organization to temporarily waive intellectual property rights related to COVID-19 products and treatments. The aim is to be sure that that medicines, vaccines, and other technologies needed to control the pandemic can be made available to all.



has contributed to the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool.

waiver argue that it would allow non-exclusive licenses and technology transfer of their products. But the Astra-Zeneca agreement with India's Serum Institute is only limited success. The deal lacks transparency about costs, while Pfizer hasn't

shown any sign of licensing or transferring



ANDREY POPOV/SHUTTERSTOCK

came a personal mission during COVID-19. Semi-retired 78-year-old Jim Edholm says his inspiration to slim down came a few months before the lockdown did. In October 2019, Edholm said he was "lucky enough" to be diagnosed with borderline diabetes. It encouraged him to reduce sugar intake, and start walking.

The lockdown drove Edholm to walk even more, and eat less. "I found that the combination of reducing

my sugar and walking curbed my appetite, said Edholm, who lost 15 pounds over the past year.

Fear Factor

One habit often blamed for causing the quarantine 15 weight gain is drinking booze. It's easy to see why. Alcohol is empty calories, and a nice drink—or three—is

tempting during life's stressful episodes. While alcohol is often a contributing factor to weight gain, Edholm believes the issue goes much deeper. Although he has drastically reduced his sugar, Edholm proudly proclaims that he never gave up his scotch. But he believes not getting caught up in the fear of COVID-19 has allowed him to focus his energy on his own self-care.

"I believe that the pandemic panic is total BS," he said. So while I drank more, I was successful in improving my mental outlook, increasing my positive attitude and sense of accomplishment. I dodged the pandemic depression that I believe leads to weight gain."

For author and high school English teacher Marci Brockman, the stress of the pandemic has been much more difficult to shake—and it's just been one of multiple stressors that have hit her this past year. The experience has left Brockman rattled. Her frequent anxiety attacks mimicking cardiac episodes prompted her doctor and therapist to put her on the antidepressant Lexapro.

"I was teaching online having been thrust into connecting with new technology and



the technology needed to manufacture its patented products. Pfizer's reply to this criti cism is that "a one-size-fits-all model disregards the specific circumstances of each situation, each product, and each country. So far, no pharmaceutical company has contributed to the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool, an initiative backed by the World Health Organization and endorsed by 40 countries that encourages the voluntary donation of COVID-19 health technologyrelated knowledge, intellectual property and data. The aim of C-TAP is to ensure all populations around the world have access to affordable health products as soon as they need them.

Back in May when C-TAP was announced, Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla said, "At this point in time, I think it's nonsense, and ... it's also dangerous," a remark echoed by AstraZeneca's Soriot, who maintained that intellectual property is "a fundamental part of our industry and if you don't protect IP, then essentially, there is no incentive for anybody to innovate."

Private Profits, Public Partners

Both CEOs have reaped major financial rewards during the pandemic. Between April and August, AstraZeneca stock and options owned by Soriot increased by nearly \$15 million in value. The day after Pfizer an

More time at home means more trips to the fridge.

struggling to provide meaningful instruction, while we were all freaking out over CO-VID numbers, illness, and deaths," Brockman said. "I'm balancing this with writing, marketing, following the election—which is another source of stress—and being anxious about my weight."

Even before the stress of COVID-19, Brockman was burdened with health problems. In June 2019, she was given a complete hysterectomy. The addition of stay-at-home orders made for a perfect storm of weight gain.

"Without estrogen to regulate my body, drastically reduced activity, and incomparable anxiety and stress, I went off my healthy eating plan and spent six months binge eating comfort food," Brockman said. "At last count, I've gained 20 pounds since March and had previously gained 25 pounds. So, that has completely changed how my body looks and feels to me."

Brockman says staying productive has helped her cope (she finished writing two books under lockdown), but she remains frustrated with her body. Despite consulting a dietitian, starting a Pilates routine at home, and using a fitness app, Brockman says the extra pounds refuse to leave. "For now, I've decided to let it all ride,"

she said. Self-proclaimed "weight loss wizard" Alex Tomaszewska helps women lose weight for a living. She's heard from a lot of people over the past year who are dealing with a similar

pattern to Brockman. "They seem to have no control over their body expansion and it's scary, especially seeing that there is no end to lockdown soon. This weight gain makes us doubt ourselves even more than just the whole general pandemic chaos," Tomaszewka said. Tomaszewka believes that fear is at the

heart of many people's weight gain. She believes the best remedy isn't a specific exercise routine or diet plan, but learning how to remain calm and confident in tough times.

"That fear influences not only our weight, but also our immune system," she said.

Tomaszewka admits that overcoming fear is easier said than done. But she says that if we can start to get our fear under control-through meditation, journaling, or just turning off the news—we can turn things around.

"I can guarantee you it's possible. And it will pay off a hundred times in the future, too," Tomaszewka said. Personal trainer and fitness coach Danielle Young echoes Tamaszewka's advice. Young says, instead of fretting about the numbers rising on the scale,

focus on being kind to yourself. "Move your body in a way that brings you joy," Young said. "Focus on the good things in life. Practice gratitude. Take care of yourself in a positive way

Brockman is already working toward this goal. In an article from The Elephant Journal, Brockman shares about the frustration she's had with her body, and the importance of compassion and self-acceptance in overcoming it.

"I regularly judge and cruelly criticize my body, and I have to work hard to see it kindly and generously," Brockman writes. "We need to practice expressing patience, forgiveness, kindness, love, compassion, and uncompromising support to ourselves and, over time, it will become how we think and feel."

nounced promising interim results about its vaccine, Bourla sold more than 130,000 shares of Pfizer stock worth \$5.6 million as part of a regularly scheduled plan to periodically sell some of his Pfizer shares.

Finally, it's important to remember that the drug companies had public partners that provided large amounts of money to accelerate the development of vaccines.

Moderna received \$955 million from the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority and the U.S. government's Operation Warp Speed initiative. In addition, Moderna inked a deal with the U.S. government worth \$1.5 billion for 100 million doses of its vaccine should it be successful.

Even Pfizer, which didn't directly take money from the U.S. government, had a contract worth \$1.95 billion to manufacture 100 million doses of its product if it is effective. In contrast to Moderna's earlier altruistic pronouncement, its CEO Stephane Bancel told investors that "Moderna retains worldwide rights to develop and commercialize [its vaccine] mRNA-1273. Without a corporate partner, Moderna will realize all the profits from our COVID-19 vaccine. ... We should have a unique cash position at the

end of 2021." Despite the injection of money from the U.S. government, the government has no say in Moderna's manufacturing program.

Trouble Concentrating? That Can Be Normal

Mild cognitive decline happens with age, but there are things you can do about it

DEVON ANDRE

Not being able to run as fast or lift as much weight as you used to is an acceptable form of aging. But when memory starts to go? Little can be more frustrating. But it happens. Just like your muscles have slowed down with age, so has your brain. Age can cause your brain to process, store, and recall information more slowly.

Just like your muscles have slowed down with age, so has your brain.

You may also have greater distractions: the pain in your back, for example, or the pills you use to treat it, can influence focus and memory recall.

Age also means you've learned a lot more. All of your experience adds up to more memories. The information you need to remember daily, or habits you've formed, are much easier to recall than old memories or random events that may arise.

Slower learning, processing, storing, and retrieving speeds are likely not related to cognitive diseases like dementia and Alzheimer's. It's probable that these challenges are caused by diminished attention

If you can still make sense of information, argue a point, or display consistent judgment, your brain is still demonstrating strong executive function.

The distraction can come from several areas. Pain or pain treatment can be one. Poor sleep could be another. Perhaps some issues in your life are occupying your attention. Whatever it is, distractions exist that can influence memory.

To get a handle on it, there are different things you can try. One is to slow down and try to take things as they come. You can also begin an exercise regime to help improve blood flow to the brain's areas with an essential role in memory.

Eating more antioxidant-rich foods may also help enhance blood flow and protect memory. And as always, finding ways to improve sleep hygiene may help.

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

moderna

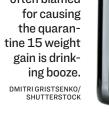
MADDIE MEYER / STAFF / STRINGER/GETTYIMAGES

We should applaud drug companies for developing multiple vaccines in record time, but let's not be under any illusion about whether a drug company can change. In the end, it's profits that are motivating them.

Joel Lexchin is a professor emeritus of health policy and management at York University in Canada, an emergency physician at University Health Network, and associate professor of family and community medicine at the University of Toronto. This article was first published by The Conversation.

Moderna expects strong profits from its COVID-19 vaccine.





Weight gain

excessive self

Moderna

received \$955

million from

Research and

Development

Advanced

Authority

and the U.S.

Operation

initiative.

Warp Speed

government's

the Biomedical

can lead to

criticism



How to Relieve Stress in Your Life

10 ways to relax and feel calm

DEBORAH MITCHELL

Do you know the secret to relieving stress in your life? Take action. Worrying about it only fuels the fire. If you really want to help reduce or eliminate stress and anxiety in your life, then identify several activities or methods that you enjoy and that fit into your lifestyle and make them a part of your stress-reduction routine. Where should you begin? How about right here!

Laugh It Up

Genuine belly-busting laughter not only reduces the physical downfalls of stress such as headache and fatigue; it also lifts your spirits. Forced laughter doesn't have the same impact, so feel it in your soul. Watch your favorite comedians, movies, or YouTube videos. Get together with friends who know how to laugh it up. Laughter is medicine!

Smell the Flowers

Scents have the power to soothe and calm the mind and body. Essential oils are believed to act directly on the brain's emotional centers. Breathe in the aromas of oils shown to help promote calm, such as lavender, rose, rosemary, clary sage, and chamomile. Use an essential oil diffuser, a spritzer, add oils to your bath, or breathe in their aroma from a cotton ball or soft cloth.

Tune In to Music

Music is a universal language that can both stir and calm our heart. Music has the ability to dampen levels of the hormone, cortisol, and ease stress in the process. Tune into your favorite music whenever you can to help ease tension and stress. Don't be afraid to break into a dance as well! Moving to music is another way to rein in stress and anxiety. Work it out.

Visualize Tranquility

A tried-and-

true way to

banish stress

and tension

is exercise.

The mind is a powerful tool, so let's use



A staycation is a great way to de-stress

Stress

exhausts the body and irritates the mind. Fortunately, you can bring down your stress levels with any of a number of stressreducing activities.

it. If you try guided visualization, you may discover it is a great way to reduce stress and anxiety. A great way to start is to listen to a guided imagery recording to help you visualize a sensory experience, such as walking on a beach, exploring a flower-filled meadow, or frolicking with puppies in a field. You pick a scene that appeals to you and then envision the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. This visualization can take you away from your worries.

Breathe It Away

Various breathing techniques can be practiced just about anywhere. One popular breathing process is 4-7-8: breath in deeply through your nose to the count of 4; hold the breath for a count of 7, then release your breath through your mouth to a count of 8. Repeat this routine at least five to seven more times, and do it several times a day. Deep breathing can be combined with other anxiety-reducing techniques, such as guided visualization, meditation, and progressive relaxation.

Take a Staycation

It isn't always possible to hop into a car or plane and take a vacation, but you can take a staycation. Even if it's only for a few hours (but hopefully it can be a bit longer), shut off your phone, put a "do not disturb" sign on your office or home door, tell your family and friends you are "away," and just do something for you alone. Read a book you've been dying to read. Watch a movie. Take a walk in the park. Soak in an herbal bath with a cup of green tea. Get a massage. You deserve a staycation.

Meditate

Here's the skinny on meditation: You don't have to worry about "doing it right." Meditation is a practice. Relax into it. You also don't need to sit cross-legged for hours. Some people meditate while walking (walking meditation), washing dishes, or sitting in their garden. Twenty minutes a day can be helpful and is a

great start. The only "secret" to meditation is practicing it, and daily is highly recommended. There are various techniques, and mindfulness is one of the more popular ones. You can watch many meditation videos and instructions on YouTube, in your library, and in group and individual classes in the community. The key thing is a clear and calm mind.

Pose

Dozens of yoga poses support and promote relaxation, and you don't have to be a gymnast to do them. You can get professional instruction in classes or onine. You may want to check with your doctor before starting a new exercise program. A 15-minute yoga program several times a week (or daily if possible) can relax your body and mind and help you get through the day. Yoga also can help reduce muscle pain, aid digestion, and improve sleep.

Try Progressive Relaxation

If you want to experience a sense of relaxation from the top of your head to the tips of your toes, then progressive relaxation is for you. Get into a comfortable position lying down or sitting. Beginning with your toes, tense each muscle group in your body, hold it for a few seconds, and then release. Work your way up to your body (and don't forget your arms and fingers). Be sure to include your facial muscles, including your forehead. Playing soothing music in the background is a nice touch.

Move It

A tried-and-true way to banish stress and tension is exercise. Jogging, a game of tennis or racketball, swimming, Zumba, a brisk walk, lifting weights, or other physical activity can raise endorphin levels, which helps relieve pain and lifts mood. Research shows that people feel calmer after exercise and that feeling lasts for several hours after a 20- to 30-minute exercise session.

Bottom Line

Stress is a part of life, and a little stress is actually healthy. However, unmanaged stress can cause inflammation throughout the body, muscle aches and pains, anxiety, irritability, loss of sleep, and more. Thankfully there are some wonderful, natural, effective ways to get stress under control and live your life to the fullest. Try one or more of these stress management techniques and feel better soon!

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

TORWAISTUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK



Your attention is bought and sold every single day by people you've never met.

Your Attention is Being Boughtand Sold

You are beset by sounds and images meant to move you for someone else's gain

Advertising

the buying

attention.

of your

is, essentially,

JOSHUA BECKER

Your attention is the most valuable resource in the world.

It determines your destiny, your accomplishments, and the life you live. And companies spend billions and bil lions of dollars every day to capture it.

That's right. Your attention is bought and sold every single day by people you've never met. It is bought by large multinational

conglomerates; it is bought by the local neighborhood pizza joint down the street; and it is bought by businesses of every size in-between.

Your attention is the most valuable resource in the world to both you and anybody, anywhere, trying to sell you anything.

Advertising is, essentially, the buying of your attention.

Marketers will pay buckets of cash for ad space on websites, airwaves, billboards, pages, bus stops, and stadium scoreboards. Almost anywhere your eyes will be focused, marketers will seek to place an ad or a logo.

Why? Simple, they want your attention, even if for a brief second. Their pursuit of our attention is to be

expected I suppose. If someone has



something to sell us, and a dollar to be made from it, they will work hard to get that product in front of us.

Not only will they send emails and junk mail, put up billboards and place radio ads, they'll even inject their products in the shows we watch and the video games we play. They are constantly buying ads anywhere and everywhere they can. If they can collect our attention, they

can sell us something, even if it is an idea, like a political position. But for every buyer, there must be a

seller. And there must be a product to be purchased. The buyer is the marketer.

The product is you.

And the seller? The seller is often times the person or entity you trust the most—selling your attention to the higher bidder.

Scrolling Facebook or Instagram or Twitter or Tik-tok? That sponsored post that just showed up in your feed? That's your favorite social media site selling access to you for a dollar—and not just access, but your personal data as well.

Just run a Google search and the first four items on the Results page say "Ad"? That's not Google returning the four best, most reliable answers to your speaker, and the founder and editor question. That's Google selling you, your attention, and your intention, to whoever sent them the most money to show

up on your screen. That website you like to visit that is filled with ads and pop-up videos that automatically play every time you click on it? You're the one being marketed.

That free app you love to play on your phone with the ads across the top or inbetween levels? Yup, they're selling you. Of course, this extends beyond the

digital world. In fact, the digital world is pretty new to the game. Radio shows, sports leagues, and ce-

lebrities posting pictures of their favorite make-up or blender? They are all selling you.

That newspaper you love, that magazine you like, that harmless television show with singers in masks, even that government-run mass transit system you ride each day. All of them, they sold your attention for a profit.

Every time you see an ad, just remember, you are the commodity being bought and sold. There is a buyer, there is a seller, and there is a product changing hands-you.

The most valuable resource you own, your attention, being sold for pennies.

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

Life's Limitations Can Set You Free

Continued from Page 1

Is it enlightenment? Should we strive for self-actualization? Are we here to serve others? Is there no purpose? Are we just passing through?

66

Every difficulty in life presents us with an opportunity to turn inward and to invoke our own inner resources.

Epictetus

Frankl noted that finding the "ultimate meaning" of life "necessarily exceeds and surpasses the finite intellectual capacities of man." But, as he observed, the struggle to make sense of it all is what makes life meaningful.

Sigmund Freud believed that humans are motivated by their desire for pleasure. Frankl and others disagreed with Freud they believe that life's purpose is derived not from life's bounty, but rather from its limitations.

On the one hand, this seems like a gloomy outlook on life, because limitations lead to the type of pain and suffering that the Buddha described as the most enduring of human conditions. Because of limitations-in terms of health, happiness, relationships, and basic needs-hu-

mans suffer, at times intolerably. On the other hand, limitations make life's purpose worth fighting for. We find meaning because of the struggle, not in spite of it.

As philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said, "To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering." In other words, the darker the darkness we experience, the brighter the light on the other side of it. We are "meant" to struggle, because it's what leads us to learn and grow.

Awareness of our own limitations is what calls us to help others. Because we struggle, we come to appreciate that others do, too. We learn to teach, and more importantly empathize with, others who face tough odds. If our limitations aren't as severe as those of others, or if we've been fortunate enough to overcome them, then we're called to service.

If we define ourselves by what we have, and not by who we are and what we do, then we become trapped by our limitations, not set free by them. Stoic philosopher Epictetus counseled us to "live so that our happiness depends as little as possible on external causes." To the extent that we suffer hardship, Epictetus urged us to look back and find the positive takeaways from what happened.

According to Epictetus: "Every difficulty in life presents us with an opportunity to turn inward and to invoke our own inner resources. The trials we endure can and should introduce us to our strengths." The last nine months has been a period of mighty struggle for many. And more





The lotus is an ancient symbol of elevating spiritually through hardship. KA_ZOO/ SHUTTERSTOCK

hardship awaits. But if there's one silver lining to what we've endured, it's that we will emerge stronger for having had this experience. We will have gained more clarity about what really matters in life, better relationships with those we care about, greater fortitude to overcome adversity, more empathy for others, and greater appreciation for the finite time we have left.

In this sense, the limits of life give us the essential reasons to grow, to exceed our current self and present situation. When we see life's limitations as the ladder that allows us to climb, we can begin to understand how they can set us free.

Jay Harrington is an author, lawyerturned-entrepreneur, and runs a northern Michigan-inspired lifestyle brand called Life and Whim. He lives with his wife and three young girls in a small town and writes about living a purposeful, outdoor-oriented life.

Life's daily limits temper us toward something greater.

You attention is a

commodity that ad platforms are desperate to sell.

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK UNLESS NOTED OTHERWISI



The familiar rituals and traditions of the holiday season offer structure and predictability in our lives and contribute to greater social cohesion.

Why Celebrating Christmas Is Good for Your Mental Health

The Christmas season has been shown to lead to greater altruism, goodwill, and generosity

NILUFAR AHMED



rom birthdays to weddings and graduations, this year has seen many personal celebrations canceled, while communal festivities such as Bonfire Night, Eid, and Diwali either haven't been celebrated or have been more subdued. So it might feel tempting to downplay Christmas, too, especially with concerns that people mixing more freely could lead to a third wave of COVID-19.

However, it will be more important this year than ever before to engage in the celebrations and rituals of Christmas and New Year. There's plenty of evidence to suggest that entering wholeheartedly into the spirit recognizes that rituals are important in of the season—while keeping to 2020's limi- their own right. Routines and rituals oftations—will be very good for our mental fer structure and predictability in our lives health. After a tough year, this might be and perform important psychological funcexactly what we need.

Christmas has important social, cultural, and religious functions. For people of all faiths (and none), the Christmas holidays bring people and families together to reflect on the year gone by and look forward to the next.

The sociologist Émile Durkheim used the term "collective effervescence" to describe the positive mood we feel when we take part in social activities that bring collective joy and make us feel part of a bigger community. Durkheim was writing about large religious gatherings, but researchers have argued more recently that this same feeling can be experienced in smaller units when family or friends get together.

We see this collective effervescence at this spirit of Christmas manifests as a multitude of positive feelings and behaviors

that are experienced collectively, including greater altruism, goodwill, and generosity. This happens to such an extent that some have argued that Christmas cheer could be an emotion in its own right.

Although we can't do everything we normally would this year, restrictions will be easing over Christmas in the United Kingdom and in certain European countries. This means we can, if we choose to, still experience some of this effervescence.

The Positive Power of Ritual

The popular adage that the best part of going out is getting ready—that the journey is more important than the destination tions to manage anxiety. With rates of anxietv soaring in lockdown, anything we can do to manage our mental health is to be welcomed.

Rituals have been described as individual units of action that form a sequence or pattern that is repeated in a particular way, and which are imbued with personal symbolism and meaning. For Christmas, these individual units typically include religious observances, buying presents, parties, pantomimes, carol singing, ice skating, and Christmas markets, not to mention the food and drink that we love so much during this time of the year—mince pies, panettone, stollen, mulled wine.

This year, many people put up Christmas decorations earlier than usual to try to lift Christmas time. Research has shown that the general mood. There's evidence that this will work, as research shows that Christmas rituals specifically can play a role in creat-



Though we're in completely different circumstances now, faced with these stimuli, our brains will make us feel happy by triggering happy memories.

ing a sense of wellbeing and satisfaction. They evoke memories of other times in our lives when we have gone through the same rituals. Every time we put up Christmas decorations, our brain fires up our stored up festive feelings.

This is why it's important to maintain rituals associated with celebrations: Even if we won't be experiencing events in the same way, our brains will still respond positively.

Even Christmas smells can evoke memories of past times. Though we're in completely different circumstances now, faced with these stimuli, our brains will make us feel happy by triggering happy memories.

Rituals also play a key role in social cohesion, as those in the UK saw with the "clap for carers" in the summer. When our traditional rituals are disrupted, this challenges the notion of who we are as a social group. Following a year in which we have had so much disruption in our routines and rituals already, and people have reported feeling increasingly isolated, Christmas rituals can offer us a sense of connection again.

Festivities also often highlight the things we have to be grateful for, and this gratitude can also increase our sense of well-being. And even if we can't be with loved ones. spending time catching up on the phone or online can help to boost our mood. Just reminiscing over past happy memories can make us feel happier in the present.

Celebrating whole heartedly may feel difficult when the celebrations are constrained and many of us have experienced loss, but the rituals associated with Christmas traditions can help us to stay positive. Celebrations can increase our appreciation for the positive elements in our lives, and will draw upon stores of positive emotion that we've built through memory. So go ahead and put up that Christmas tree. Even if there won't be as many people gathering around it this year, it should still make you feel better.

Nilufar Ahmed is a lecturer in social sciences at the University of Bristol in the UK. This article was first published on The Conversation.



Original artworks, canvas wraps, and prints of Award-winning oil paintings now available at

INSPIRED

InspiredOriginal.Org/Store



Humidifiers May Play a Role in Preventing COVID

Researchers have found a solid connection between virus survival and humidity

JOSEPH MERCOLA

ontrolling the humidity level in your home, or even simply in your bedroom while you sleep, may lower your risk of contracting infectious diseases like influenza, colds, or possibly even COVID-19 during the winter months.

Humidity is an often overlooked factor in the spread of viruses, which become more transmissible in cold, dry winter climates. That's why many viral diseases are seasonal in nature, peaking during the colder, less humid winter. Dr. Stephanie Taylor, a graduate of Harvard Medical School who also has a master's in architecture, believes so strongly in the role of humidity in infection control that she's petitioning the World Health Organization to make relative humidity part of standard recommendations for indoor air, along with other air quality measures like pollution and mold.

Taylor, along with researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, collected data from 125 countries regarding pandemic responses, COVID-19 cases, and environmental data, including estimates of indoor relative humidity.

They analyzed the data for a period of three months, revealing that indoor relative humidity had the most significant correlation with daily new coronavirus cases and daily COVID-19 deaths.

In the northern hemisphere, as indoor humidity levels rose in the summer, COVID-19 deaths had a sharp decline. Likewise, in the southern hemisphere, COVID-19 deaths rose as humidity levels declined during the winter months.

"It's so powerful, it's crazy," Taylor told Wired. While the research hasn't been published yet, years of research support the importance of humidity levels when it comes to warding off infectious disease.

Dry Air Impairs

Respiratory Tract Defenses Back in 2011, researchers found that SARS, another type of coronavirus, was more stable in low temperature, low humidity environments compared to those in higher temperatures and relative humidity. It's also been found in animal transmission studies that when relative humidity is kept in the "Goldilocks" zone of 40 percent to 60 percent, viruses become inactivated.

"It is assumed that temperature and humidity modulate the viability of viruses by affecting the properties of viral surface proteins and lipid membrane," researchers wrote in the Annual Review of Virology. "An ideal humidity for preventing aerosol respiratory viral transmission at room temperature appears to be between 40 percent and 60 percent RH (relative humidity)."

Continued on Page 11

Humidifiers can add moisture to indoor air which tends to be dry, even during more humid times of year.





Behind the Subscription

Your subscription will not only provide you with accurate news and features, but also contribute to the revival of American journalism and help safeguard our freedoms for future generations.

We aim to tell you what we see, not how to think; we strive to deliver you a factual picture of reality that lets you form your own opinions.

We believe that we live in truly epochal times, where the faithful representation of our current events won't just be important for the people of today, but also for the generations to come. The records we keep now will directly inform the foundations of the history they'll learn and the values they'll cherishand this knowledge is what drives us.

Learn more at **EpochSubscription.com**

THE EPOCH TIMES



It's a wonderful collection of gifts that everyone will love. Showcasing treasures from the magnificent vault of traditional Chinese culture, our Shen Yuninspired collection lets you find the perfect gift for anyone on your list.

Shop now for our newest arrivals brimming with inspiration straight out of Shen Yun's performances!



Your tea cupboard should be one of the first places you turn to when the sniffles strike and you sense a cold or flu coming on.

Helpful Teas During Cold and Flu Season

These 10 teas can entertain your taste buds and help you deal with the cold and flu

LISA ROTH COLLINS

When cold and flu season comes around, one of the first home treatments many people think of is hot tea. Besides helping with cough and sore throat, some regular and herbal teas have properties that might help with other common cold and flu symptoms, such as aches and pain, high fever, and inflammation.

If you want to prepare yourself and vour family for the possibility of having to deal with colds and other viral infections, including influenza A viruses, then it may be time to stock up on teas. The following list represents some of the many options available and their specific advantages.

You can purchase traditional and herbpotent antioxidant. You also can combine against influenza A virus infection. various dried teas together to create your own cold-and-flu-fighting beverage.

Chamomile

You might think of this tea as one to enjoy to help you sleep, but research published in the European Journal of Pharmacology in 1990 found inhaling chamomile may alleviate cold and flu symptoms. Chamomile also has antiphlogistic properties, according to an article in Molecular Medicine Reports, that can help with fever.

Echinacea

This herb is among the more common ones used for upper respiratory tract infections such as cold and flu. Echinacea can boost immune system function, and it is recommended during the early stages of infection. Some research indicates it may shorten the duration of the common cold and lessen the severity of symptoms.

Elderberry

This flowering plant makes a delicious tea that may help reduce the duration of cold and flu symptoms. One study showed that concentrated elderberry juice was effective against the human influenza virus.

Ginger

A favorite way to enjoy this herbal tea is with lemon and honey, two ingredients that can work with the ginger to soothe cold and flu symptoms. Use freshly grated ginger if possible when making this tea. Also, ginger is a warming spice and is known to help with digestion.

Green and White Teas

Both green and white teas are less processed than black tea, which is oxidized while the others are not. One consequence of this fact is that green and white teas have greater levels of potent antioxidants known as catechins. Green tea is a source of catechins as well as theanine, both of which may help prevent flu. A better source of catechins is white tea, so choose one or the other or both

and have several cups daily. Green tea is one of the few teas that contain a noticeable amount of vitamin C; around 2 to 10 percent RDA per cup. Basically, the less processed the tea, the more vitamin C it contains.

Guava

This is one of the lesser-known teas, but that doesn't mean it doesn't have some great healing powers. Studies indicate guava tea may inhibit the rapid spread of the flu, as well as help, prevent the growth of influenza A.

Hibiscus

The hibiscus flower makes a flavorful reddish tea that is a source of vitamin C and iron, which can help the immune system fight off pathogens. In a al teas as tea bags or loose leaf. Some va- 2020 study, researchers reported that rieties have added vitamin C, which is a hibiscus tea extract showed potential

You can also combine various dried teas together to create your own cold-and-flu fighting beverage.

Licorice Root

Research shows that licorice root may be a formidable challenger for type A flu viruses. It is not as effective against the common cold, however.

Peppermint

The menthol in peppermint tea is the "magic" ingredient that works as a decongestant. Peppermint tea also can help relieve cough and relieve nasal congestion.

Rooibos

You might breathe a great sigh of relief if you drink this caffeine-free, lightly sweet herbal tea, which is made from the leaves of the red bush plant. Rooibos tea has anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and antiviral properties.

A Final Note

Two other natural remedies to help ward off the common cold and flu and its symptoms are probiotics and honey. Numerous studies have touted the ability of probiotic supplements to benefit the immune system in its fight against these common conditions. Honey, especially organic raw honey, is a sweet and nutritious way to help manage cough and sore throat symptoms. It makes a great addition to these healing teas!

Lisa Roth Collins is a registered holistic nutritionist and the marketing manager at NaturallySavvy.com, which first published this article.

Humidifiers May Play a Role in Preventing COVID

Researchers have found a solid connection between virus survival and humidity

Continued from Page 9

The mucosal surface of your respiratory tract is involved in part of a multi-tiered defense system against inhaled pathogens. Your mucus can catch bacteria and viruses, allowing you to expel them via a cough or swallow them before they're able to enter your cells.

However, proper mucus hydration is required for this to work efficiently, and when you breathe dry, low humidity air it dries out the mucus layer and immobilizes cilia, hairlike structures that help move pathogens out of the body with their wave-like motions.

Airway epithelial cells act as the second line of defense after the mucus layer, acting as a physical barrier within your respiratory tract. Inhaling dry air has been found to lead to "epithelial cilia loss, detachment of epithelial cells, and inflammation of the trachea" in animal studies, and may also impair epithelial cell repair in the lung after infection with influenza.

Mucociliary clearance (MCC) is another one of your lungs' defense mechanisms, which helps eliminate inhaled pathogens and irritants from the epithelial surface in your respiratory tract. Inhaling cold, dry air also impairs MCC, leading to impaired viral clearance following infection with influenza, for example. As noted in the Annual Review of Virology:

"Given that the MCC depends on the maintenance of double mucus layers with two different viscosities and a delicate osmotic balance, proper mucus hydration is required for efficient mucus transport.

"A review on the relationship between temperature and humidity of inhaled air and properties of airway mucosa found that 100 percent RH at core temperature is the optimal condition for the efficient mucosal functions and airway defense in humans. Mucus dehydration caused by breathing air of low humidity leads to decreased MCC."

Exposure to low humidity may even affect your antiviral innate immunity, including the expression of interferonstimulated genes that help induce an antiviral state.

Low Humidity in Hospitals, Schools Considering the strong seasonality of influenza, and the fact that flu outbreaks have been associated with reductions in absolute humidity, researchers decided to raise humidity levels in a preschool to see if it would affect influenza infections. Humidifying classrooms from January to March to approximately 45 percent RH led to a significant reduction in influenza A virus, both in the air and on objects.

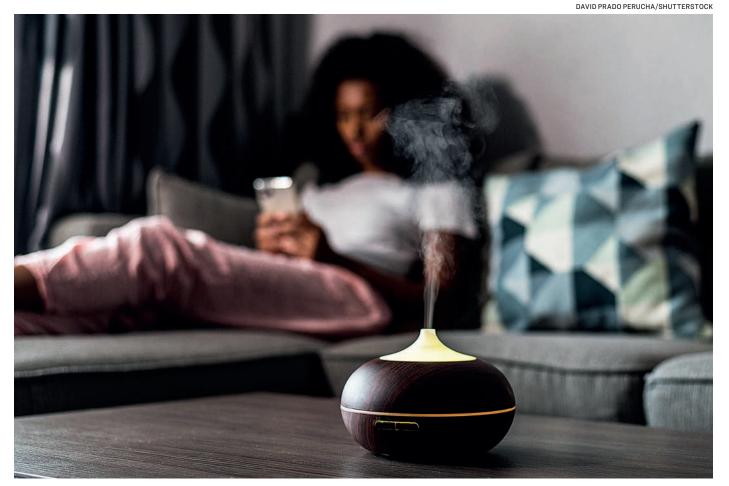
Humidity in residential and commercial spaces in the U.S. is often below 25 percent, which enhances viral transmission.

The control rooms, which were not humidified, had 2.3 times more cases of influenza-like illness than the humidified rooms. Taylor, in an interview with the editor-in-chief of Engineered Systems, also described research showing that changing humidity levels in hospital rooms altered the rate of infections:

"Starting in 2012-2013, I was involved in some research that was initially done in hospitals that clearly pointed to the correlation between low relative humidity in patient rooms and an increase in bacterial and viral infections.

"I was startled by this. Subsequent studies in nursing homes, schools, and in offices have shown that people are much healthier, obtain fewer infections, have increased productivity, and sleep better at night with this range of humidity.

"So, in doing more and more research on the relationship between 40 percent-60 percent indoor relative humidity and human health and decreased infections, it's



Dry indoor air helps viruses survive longer and undermines the respiratory tract's multi-tiered defense system.

AF.RLIN/SHUTTERSTO

Viral diseases are

seasonal in nature.

peaking during the colder,

less humid winter.

absolutely a rapid, holistic, and effective room during the winter months could disease infection control strategy.

"And, now, here comes COVID-19 and it's more important than ever that we decrease transmission of respiratory viruses. Relative humidity in that range is so effective and, in my opinion, it should be mandated."

40 Percent-60 Percent Humidity May Be Ideal

Many studies point to humidity levels between 40 percent and 60 percent as a key range for lowering infection risk. In a study on mice, those housed in a low-humidity environment were more susceptible to influenza and had more severe disease.

Mice exposed to an aerosolized influenza virus and housed at 20 percent relative humidity, for instance, had more rapid weight loss, drop in body temperature and shortened survival compared to mice housed at 50 percent relative humidity.

The dry air compromised the mice's resistance to infection, and those to 13.9 percent. housed at lower humidity levels had impaired mucociliary clearance, infunction, the study found.

The results from another animal study demonstrated that raising relative humidity to 50 percent decreased mortality from flu infections, while yet another study found maintaining indoor relative humidity greater than 40 percent could significantly reduce the infectivity of influenza virus in the air.

Studies on the survival of influenza virus also show a humidity connection, with one suggesting that aerosolized influenza sur- How to Monitor Humidity Levels vived the longest when the relative humidity was below 36 percent.

In an opinion piece published in the Journal of Global Health, it's again highlighted that indoor relative humidity greater than 40 percent will significantly reduce the infectivity of aerosolized influenza virus particles. Unfortunately, humidity in residential and commercial spaces in the U.S. is often below 25 percent, which enhances viral transmission. Even in the summer, when humidity levels are naturally higher outdoors, air conditioning limits humidity indoors.

The article, which was written by a collaboration of Croatian, U.S., and German researchers, also suggested that humidified air could be a solution to protecting hospital patients and fighting COVID-19: "In addition to being a protection against initial infection, functional mucosal barrier is also important in suppression of viral progression in already infected patients. Since many hospitals have very dry air, providing humidified air to patients in early stages of the disease may be beneficial."

"Considering the evident detrimental effect of dry air on our mucosal barrier and its role of the first line of defense against infection, in a situation of rapidly progressing COVID-19 pandemics, it would be essential to aggressively promote active re- Dr. Joseph Mercola is the founder of Merhumidification of dry air in all public and private heated spaces.

"Furthermore, wherever possible patients on ventilators should be ventilated with humidified air."

Put a Humidifier in Your Bedroom

Using a portable humidifier in your bed-

reduce the survival of influenza virus in the air, according to a study published in Environmental Health. A model of a twostory residential residence was used under two ventilation conditions: forced hot air and radiant heating.

Portable humidifiers were used to add moisture content in the air, which was monitored for absolute humidity and concentrations of influenza virus. The addition of a portable humidifier with an output of 0.16 kilograms of water per hour in the bedroom increased absolute humidity by 11 percent and relative humidity percent during sleeping hours compared to having no humidifier present.

Along with the increases in humidity came a decrease in the survival of the influenza virus, from 17.5 percent to 31.6 percent. The distribution of water vapor through the whole home was also beneficial, with increases of 3 percent to 12 percent AH/RH associated with reductions in influenza virus survival of 7.8 percent

The results suggest that not only could adding a humidifier to your bedroom p nate antiviral defense, and tissue repair to be an easy way to protect against the flu and other infections, but increasing humidification in public settings could also be beneficial for public health.

> In fact, when Japanese researchers used the Fugaku supercomputer to model the transmission of virus particles in indoor environments, they found air humidity of lower than 30 percent led to more than double the number of aerosolized particles that occurred at humidity levels of 60 percent or higher.

It should be noted that higher isn't always better in the case of humidity. If your home's humidity is higher than 60 percent, it increases the risk of mold and fungal growth. So, you'll want to keep the level within the 40 percent to 60 percent range for ideal health benefits. The best way to test levels in your home is with a hygrometer. This device looks like a thermometer and measures the amount of moisture in the air.

Some humidifiers come with a built-in hygrometer, or humidistat, to help the humidifier maintain relative humidity in your home at a healthy level. If not, you can purchase a hygrometer at most hardware stores.

In one study, adding a humidifier to the bedroom occasionally resulted in relative humidity levels that exceeded 60 percent, especially when radiant heat was used, so you may need to adjust accordingly to keep levels in the optimal range. A dirty humidifier can also lead to the growth of mold and bacteria, so keeping it clean is important.

A hydrogen peroxide solution and soft bristle brush can be used to clean your humidifier, which should be done every three days. If your humidifier has a filter, be sure to change it at least as often as the manufacturer recommends and more if it's dirty.

cola.com. An osteopathic physician, bestselling 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



Many studies point to humidity levels between 40 percent and 60 percent as a key range for lowering infection risk.

Researchers Discover Why Gum Disease Causes Heart Disease

An important blood cell type can become a major autoimmune issue and it all starts with poor dental hygiene

hink skipping your nightly dental care routine is no big deal? The results of a recent study linking gum health to inflammatory diseases like heart disease may convince you to never skip oral hygiene again. Medical science has now firmly established a link between periodontal (gum) disease and inflammation-linked conditions such as cancer, heart disease, and diabetes. But the mechanism linking these conditions has remained a medical mysterv-until now

Researchers at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Dentistry have identified what they believe is the correlation between these conditions-blood cells called neutrophils. The new findings present the first evidence pointing to the body's own immune system response.

The controlled clinical experiment, conducted in collaboration with top dentists from Sinai Health Systems and Princess Margaret Cancer Centre in Toronto, indicates that neutrophil immune cell activity is the "missing link" connecting periodontal disease with other inflammatory diseases. Their findings were published in the October 2020 Journal of Dental Research.

Excessive Immune Response

Neutrophils are a type of white blood cell that is activated to respond to areas of acute inflammation. When neutrophils, which play a critical role in immune system response, were activated to fight infections from active cases of gum disease, researchers observed a hyperactive, systemic response that they believe makes the body susceptible to damage from secondary inflammatory conditions.

The study's senior author, professor Michael Glogauer, put it this way: "It's almost as if these white blood cells are in second gear when they should be in first."

Produced initially in in vivo models, the findings were confirmed through a controlled clinical experiment involving mice with induced periodontal disease (PD). A to negative health outcomes for patients. human gingivitis study was conducted in tandem, with volunteers being instructed to cease all oral hygiene practices for three weeks to induce gingivitis, followed by a two-week recovery period.

Blood and tissue samples were taken from the mice; blood and saliva samples were also collected from human gingivitis study volunteers. Multiplex cytokine analysis was performed on immune system cells for both human and mouse subjects to indicate the presence of neutrophils.



Good dental hygiene can prevent bacteria in our mouth from triggering an immune response that has dangerous potential consequences.

PD and Pre-Existing Conditions

After analyzing immune system cells harvested from the oral cavities of both healthy and PD-infected tissues, researchers observed that the numbers of neutrophils in diseased tissues were greatly increased over the neutrophils present in healthy tissues. They further found that PD in mice mimics human PD when it comes to the number of neutrophils recruited to sites of oral bacterial infection.

This aggressive neutrophil response to PD primes the immune system to attack, and much like what is seen in autoimmune diseases, the target of the attack is the body's own tissues and organs. If secondary infection sites are present in the body, as is often the case with cardiac and diabetic patients, the abundance of neutrophils can respond to these areas with excessive force, leading

The study's lead author, Noah Fine, states: "We believe this is the mechanism by which oral hygiene can impact vulnerability to unrelated secondary health challenges. Neutrophil (immune) priming ... can connect these seemingly distinct conditions."

Healthy Mouth, Healthy Body

Studies like this underscore the importance of oral health as a window into the overall health of the body. Periodontitis is a serious yet common gum infection that can

destroy the soft tissues and bone structure supporting teeth. Over time, this damage can result in permanent tooth loss and lead to worsening comorbid conditions. Symptoms of periodontitis include:

- Swollen, sore gums • Chronic halitosis (bad breath)
- Red or purple spots on the gums • Bleeding of the gums when you brush
- or floss • Pain when chewing
- Loosening or lost teeth

Tooth decay in the form of dental caries (cavities), is often a precursor to periodontitis and serves as a warning sign that oral hygiene, and possibly diet, need to be improved. Outside of poor oral care, dental caries are a common side effect of a highsugar diet, especially in children.

The addition of probiotics has been shown to significantly reduce caries in young children, and both green tea and black tea have been effectively used in clinical studies as a mouth rinse to reduce the presence of harmful bacteria in the mouth.

While most synthetic, non-nutritive sugar alternatives are toxic to the body, xylitol, made from birch bark, discourages bacterial growth that can lead to dental caries. And stevia, a safe plant-based sweetener, can satisfy your sweet tooth without causing it to fall out.

Drugs used to treat sleep troubles are adding a new risk for many dementia patients.

Practice Healthy Eating

and Oral Hygiene Fortunately, dental caries and periodontitis can be reversed and are largely preventable by reducing sugar consumption and paying attention to good oral hygiene. Start by brushing your teeth at least twice daily for around two minutes per session to remove dental plaque. Floss a minimum of once per day and use a water pic to remove bacteria around the gumline (where teeth meet the gums).

See your mercury-free dentist every six months and follow his or her recommendations for achieving and maintaining healthy teeth and gums. To learn more about natural remedies for dental caries, consult the GreenMedInfo.com research database, the world's most widely referenced, evidencebased natural medical resource.

The GMI Research Group is dedicated to and environmental issues of the day. Special emphasis will be placed on environmental health. Our focused and deep research will explore the many ways in which the present condition of the human body directly reflects the true state of the ambient environment. This work is reproduced and distributed with the permission of GreenMedInfo LLC. Sign up for the newsletter at GreenmedInfo.health

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

Sleeping Pills Can Increase Risk for Falls and Fractures

Dementia patients should seek alternative treatments for sleep troubles, study suggests

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

Sleep is at a premium these days. The stress and anxiety of the holidays can make it tough to get a good night's rest. Toss a pandemic into the mix, and quality sleep becomes even more elusive.

Sleeping pills, also called "z-drugs," can be an attractive option for those struggling with sleep. But they aren't without risk. New research suggests high dose z-pills may increase the risk of falls or fractures in people with dementia.

The study appeared in BMC Medicine and looked at data on more than 27,000 patients in England diagnosed with dementia between 2000 and 2016. More than 3,500 were prescribed z-drugs.

Researcher Chris Fox from the University of East Anglia's Norwich Medical School said up to 90 percent of people with dementia suffer sleep disturbances that can substantially



pills are still required, talk to the doctor about a lower

dose.

impact physical and mental health. Using high-dose sleeping pills, however, might not be the safest way to treat it. Of the patients who took z-drugs, 17 percent were given high doses (a high dose is

7.5 mg of zopiclone or an excess of 5 mg of Ativan). After comparing the z-drug group to dementia patients with sleep disturbances not taking these drugs, researchers found a significant increase in risk, up to 70 percent for some fractures.

Instead, finding other ways to address sleeping trouble might be in order. If you're helping to care for someone with dementia, there are some other measures you could employ.

Improving sleep hygiene might be one way to help. Setting the mood for bed about an hour or two before the head goes down can help. This can include darkening the lights, turning off screens, or encouraging a low-stimulus activity.

Paying attention to caffeine and alcohol intake is also essential.

Getting some exercise during the day can also help, as can spending some time to ease nerves through relaxing conversation or mindfulness meditation.

If sleeping pills are still required, talk to the doctor about a lower dose. The study didn't find an increased risk for falls and fractures in patients who weren't taking high-dose sleeping pills.

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

MADE TO MOVE

ANDREY POPOV/SHUTTERSTOCI

Walking Away the Pain of Peripheral Artery Disease

Research reveals a specific walking regimen to help relieve leg pain for those with peripheral artery disease

AMY ELIZABETH HARWOOD, **CHRIS SEENAN & GARRY TEW**

Exercise has been used in the treatment of many medical conditions, including heart and lung diseases. But it can also play an important role in treating peripheral artery disease. Our latest review shows that for people with peripheral artery disease, exercise programs may help improve walking ability and quality of life by relieving symptoms of leg pain, cramps, and fatigue that some people experience.

Peripheral artery disease is a common type of cardiovascular disease, which affects 236 million people across the world. It happens when the arteries in the legs and feet become clogged with fatty plaques through a process known as atherosclerosis.

While some people with this disease experience no symptoms, the most classic symptoms are pain, cramps, numbness, weakness, or tingling that occurs in the legs during walking—known as intermittent claudication. These problems affect around 30 percent of people with peripheral artery disease. Intermittent claudication is more common in adults over 50, men, and people who smoke. Currently, peripheral artery disease treatments focus on managing symptoms and preventing the arteries from becoming more clogged, which will reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. Medications may also be prescribed to reduce cholesterol or treat high blood pressure, which are both risk factors for developing peripheral artery disease.

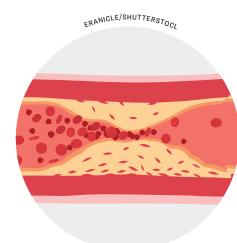
Managing intermittent claudication is especially important as people who have it are at a higher risk of other cardiovascular diseases, such as heart disease and stroke. On top of this, the leg pain they experience means people often can't walk very far. This could lead to lower fitness levels and reduced quality of life. It may even cause depression, as people are no longer as independent as they'd like to be in their daily life.

But exercise programs may offer another treatment approach for people with intermittent claudication. Evidence from our latest review shows exercise can help increase the distance patients can walk pain-free, and may reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. We also uncovered what it takes for an exercise program to be successful.

We found that for people with intermittent claudication, a supervised, walking-based exercise program is most likely to improve their symptoms. This program should ideally be done at least three times per week for a minimum of three months. Patients should try to walk at a challenging pace (meaning it causes them to experience strong leg pain) for 3 to 5 minutes before resting until the pain goes away. The walk-rest pattern should be repeated for about 30 to 60 minutes.

This type of exercise program was shown to significantly improve claudication symptoms, as indicated by an increase in the distance a person can walk without pain. It also increases the quality of life and overall fitness levels.

For those who can't access a supervised walking program, this type of exercise can still be done independently, and should also be carried out at least three times a week for 30 to 60 minutes each time. We recommend people start walking regularly for exercise at their own pace, building up their walking speed and time gradually. Monitoring how far you walk with an app or smartwatch may be helpful. If you don't have those, street markers (such as lampposts) can help you check if you're walking a little further each day and make sure you are pro-



Fatty plaques can clog arteries in the legs and cause peripheral artery disease.

gressing the exercise.

For those exercising independently, we also recommend they plan their route as much as possible to identify places where they can rest safely in between their walking bouts and try to keep it as fun as possible, perhaps by walking with friends. Other activities that people with intermittent claudication can take part in safely include going to the gym, cycling, dancing, or bowls. There is less evidence for these how beneficial types of activities are, but they may help to improve symptoms and keep people engaged with the things they enjoy.

Our review also found that resistance exercise (such as lifting weights) can help to improve muscle strength in patients with intermittent claudication. Resistance exercises can be used alongside a walking program and can be done 2 to 3 times per week with each session including exercises for the main muscles of the upper and lower body.

It's worth noting that people with intermittent claudication shouldn't worry about walking with leg pain because this pain doesn't equate to harm being caused. Claudication pain is thought to be a result of insufficient blood flow to the exercising muscle. Walking while experiencing claudication pain could, over time, stimulate the growth of new blood vessels in the legs and improve symptoms.

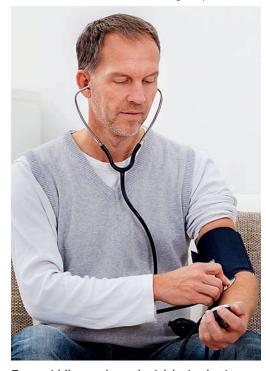
However, people are advised not to exercise if they feel unwell and should seek medical advice if they experience any concerning symptoms when they do exercise—such as chest pain, dizziness, or sickness.

We usually think of cardiovascular disease in terms of heart attacks. but similar artery clogging can affect the legs-and walking can help treat it.

Our review shows exercise can help manage claudication pain and may limit the progression of atherosclerotic disease throughout the body. Regular exercise may improve claudication pain in several ways, including improving the way blood vessels work and helping the leg muscles use oxygen more efficiently.

Not only can this exercise be done alone or as part of a supervised program, but it may also have other benefits, including improving cardiovascular health, mood, and sleep.

Amy Elizabeth Harwood is a research fellow of clinical and exercise sciences at Coventry University in the UK, Chris Seenan is a senior *lecturer of physiotherapy at Glasgow* Caledonian University in the UK, and Garry Tew is an associate professor of exercise and health sciences at Northumbria University, Newcastle. This article was originally published on The Conversation.



Even middle-aged people risk losing brain function due to high blood pressure.

New Study Suggests High Blood Pressure Damages the Brain

DEVON ANDRE

A new study has come to a clear conclusion about blood pressure and brain function. Regardless of age, high blood pressure takes a toll on memory and thinking skills.

The findings, published in Hypertension, the journal of the American Heart Association, suggested that even hypertensive middle-aged folks experienced cognitive decline. And even if high blood pressure was kept in check until advanced age, cognition took a steep decline once it set it.

The long and short of the study is that if you've got high blood pressure at any age, you can almost bet that it will take a toll on your ability to think and remember. But much like blood pressure, the effects on your brain may be correctible. The study found that getting blood pressure under control can preserve brain health and slow cognitive decline.

Getting blood pressure under control can preserve brain health and slow cognitive decline.

Therefore, controlling blood pressure may be an imperative component of preventing memory loss and preserving thinking skills.

There is still no proven cause-andeffect link between high blood pressure and mental decline. There are a few indi-

cations as to why the association exists. High blood pressure can limit the flow of oxygen- and nutrient-rich blood to the

brain, which can cause damage to brain cells. Chronic inflammation is also linked to high blood pressure and damaged white

matter in the brain. White matter damage can result in cognitive decline and increase dementia risk.

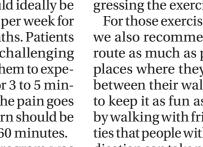
Thankfully, the study found that reducing blood pressure with medication and/ or lifestyle measures was able to show benefits to brain health.

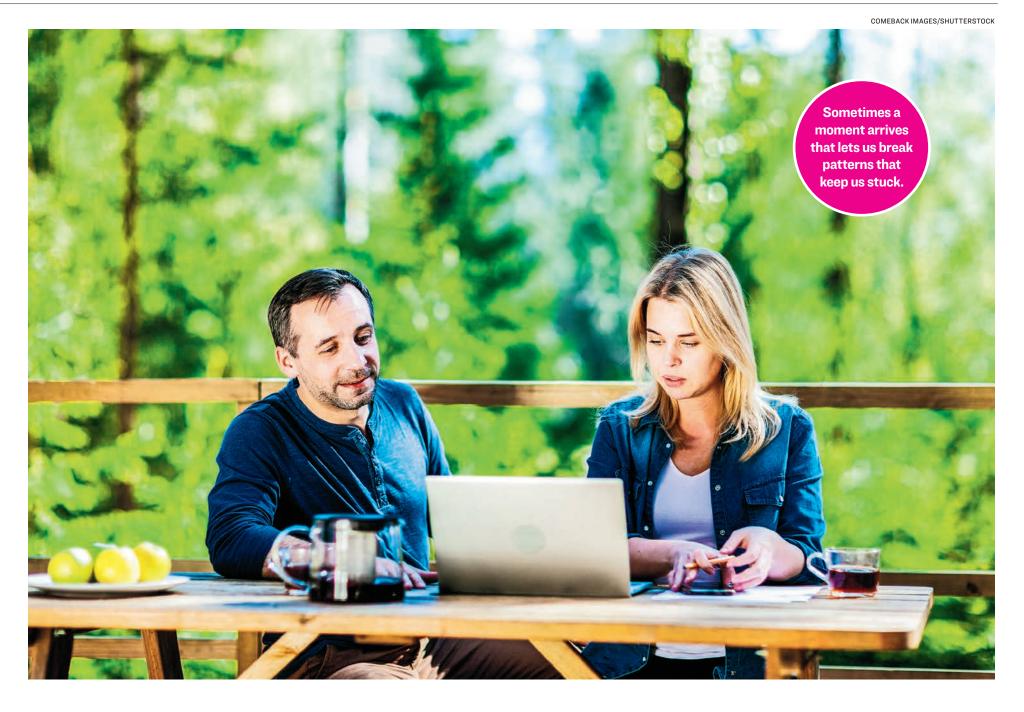
You can work on lowering blood pressure by:

- · Continuing with any existing treatment or medications
- · Slowly increasing the amount of daily physical activity
- Including more colorful fruits and vegetables into your diet • Eating more fiber-rich whole grains
- Staying hydrated • Limiting intake of processed foods,
- refined grains, and high-sugar items

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







MINDSET MATTERS

How to Overcome 3 Common Obstacles to Positive Change

Amid the crisis of COVID comes an opportunity to break through and pick up dreams left by the wayside

JAY HARRINGTON

o much of life is spent on autopilot. Years pass by, then decades. The more time passes, the more who we've become, despite the gap b tween our hopes and our reality.

We recognize the dissonance, but explain it away because the dreams of our youth are, we believe, impractical. It's not realistic or responsible—and may even be selfish—to harbor, let alone act upon, deeply held desires for something more out of life, right?

Time passes. Nothing changes. And we tell ourselves stories about why that's okay. "I'm 30. I'm advancing in my career,

planning a wedding, and trying to pay off student loans. I'm too busy." "I'm 40. I have kids, a mortgage, and

college tuition to save for. I have too many responsibilities."

"I'm 50. My knee hurts, I'm tired, I need to save for retirement. I'm too old."

Unlike in most books and movies, our stories don't always have happy endings.

Life goes by fast, and then faster and faster. If we're not careful, our bucket lists will get filled with excuses rather than accomplishments and experiences. It's easy to allow routine to take hold, and once it does, progress often grinds to a halt. We lose ourselves in other people's expectations about how we're supposed to think, what we should say, and what we ought to do or not do. Those deferred dreams of becoming an artist, of writing that book, of pursuing a new career, of traveling, of living somewhere new, all begin to fade.

But not entirely. Any dream worth dreaming keeps flickering, no matter how faintly. It begins to burn brighter at times of turmoil, when the routine becomes unbearable. It is during trying times, such as the onset of an illness or the disintegration of a relationship, that we conjure the courage to revisit what we really desire from our lives. These are the inciting incidents of life.

How Will You Rise to the Challenge? In screenplay and novel writing, the inciting incident is the event that gets the story we lose sight of who we wanted rolling. It's the action or decision that to be, and the more we accept introduces the problem that the story's main character must overcome

> In movies and books, the inciting incident is unmistakable. It's the moment that calls the protagonist to action and changes his or her life irrevocably. That's the thing about fiction—almost every story follows the same arc. There's incitement, struggle, and ultimately triumph, with twists and turns along the way. But the story almost always gets resolved, wrapped up in a pretty bow.

> Art may imitate life, but real life is, of course, far different. And messier (at least the ending). We're all characters in a narrative, but unlike in most books and movies, our stories don't always result in happy endings. Inciting incidents occur all around us, but rarely do they lead to real change.

> Over the past nine months, we have all been called to action. Even if you haven't personally been afflicted with illness, COVID-19's second-order consequences have almost certainly affected you in some ways. The question is: Will you use this moment as a catalyst for change, or merely accept more of the same?

> If you've pondered this question, in some form or another, you're not alone. I've struggled with it mightily. For me, it's led to a host of other questions: What legacy will I leave? How will I look back at my time spent during the pandemic? What are my priorities? What lessons will I pass on to my kids that will help them confront the inevitable struggles they will face? Have I stepped up for others? Am I showing up with an abundance or scarcity mindset? Am I living a life true to myself? What changes should I make? If not now, when?

> The problem with an inciting incident in the form of a global pandemic is that the severity of such a crisis tends to inhibit and not spur positive change. It's during times like this that we tend to withdraw and avoid risk-taking. We hunker down. We settle for the status quo, no matter how dissatisfying. We get stuck.

Five years ago, facing other challenges, my wife and I finally summoned the courage to act and change our circumstances for the better. We picked up and moved

Any dream worth dreaming keeps flickering, no matter how faintly.

Life can deliver hard-

out of old patterns.

ships that lets us break

hundreds of miles away to a place we loved but previously lacked the will to embrace as our home. We started a new business. We fashioned a new life. We took action.

It worked, and the experience has been revelatory in many ways. We're still not sure exactly where this journey will end up, but we got ourselves moving. And that's important, because almost everything positive that has happened in our lives has come as a result of stepping outside of our comfort zones.

One of the most important lessons we learned is that to move forward, you first need to understand what's holding you back. Only after you've diagnosed the problem can you determine the right course of treatment.

Here are three common challenges that impede progress—they certainly impeded ours—and some ideas for moving forward.

The Sunk Cost Fallacy

Have you ever stayed in a job or situation for too long because you felt like you



had so much time and effort invested in it? Have you feared that walking away, despite the fact that you were in a bad situation, was not worth the cost? Most of us have, which means we've fallen victim to the "sunk cost fallacy."

A sunk cost is one that has already been incurred and cannot be recouped. It's gone, and there's nothing we can do about it. The fallacy is that we believe we can recover sunk costs by putting more energy into the situation, so we make bad decisions—or no decision at all—because we don't want to accept the fact that the past is in the past. So instead of making progress on a new path, we compound our mistakes based on the irrational desire to justify our prior decisions.

Not only do people overvalue sunk costs, but they undervalue future investments. They stay in situations for too long even though they're not happy because they doubt their potential to pivot and make positive change

Sunk costs are, by definition, gone. You can't get them back. So there's no reason to regret past mistakes. And there's certainly no reason to compound them by not changing behavior. Learn from your past and remember that every stumble is a step toward your future.

Living for Others

Far too many people live their lives based on perceptions of what others may think of their actions and decisions rather than focusing on their own dreams and desires. Instead of working to be happy, they worry about pleasing others.

"If I quit my job, what will my parents think?" "If I join this group, what will my friends

say?" "How will my co-workers react if I speak

up at the meeting?" "Will people 'like' my social media

post?" This is no way to live, and it's a recipe for staying stuck. That's not to say that we shouldn't consider what other people think of us, it's just that it can't be your guiding principle.

So what if someone does judge you? You'll never please everyone—that's out of your control. What is in your control is how you react. You can either let it get you down, or you can ignore it and move forward. There's no way that everyone is going to like you, but depending on how you conduct yourself, you can earn everyone's respect. And that should be the objective.

This is not a call to narcissism. It's a wake-up call to start living life on your own terms. The path to progress starts with having a well-developed value system and the courage to unabashedly express it. Again, not everyone will like it, but if you're true to yourself and your values, then you'll be respected no matter where your path takes you.

Thinking 'Why Me?'

Instead of 'Why Not Me?' We hear a lot about "overnight success" stories—people who emerge from obscurity and skyrocket to fame and fortune, and businesses that start in a garage or dorm room and quickly command billion-dollar valuations. These stories make for great sound bites in the age of the internet and social media, and they leave people thinking that success is more the result of a stroke of luck than it is hard work and determination

With few exceptions, the overnight success phenomenon is a myth. We see the end result—the fame and fortune-but we don't see the blood, sweat, tears, toil, failure, sacrifice, and rejection that enabled the achievement to happen. Almost no one achieves anything worthwhile the first time they try, or even the second or third. Indeed, the road to success for most is littered with failures.

If you're willing to work hard and persevere through hardship, you can become "successful"—no matter how you define it. It just won't happen overnight. Those who grasp this don't look for lightning in a bottle. They don't fatalistically and self-defeatingly ask, "Why me?" Instead, with calm confidence they dig deep, roll up their sleeves, and proclaim, "Why not me?" And they shift into action.

Success begins and ends with an enduring belief in self.

In almost all ways, the COVID-19 crisis is a curse. But in crisis lies opportunity. What will you do in the face of this clear and present inciting incident to make changes for the better?

Jay Harrington is an author, lawyerturned-entrepreneur, and runs a northern Michigan-inspired lifestyle brand called Life and Whim. He lives with his wife and three young girls in a small town and writes about living a purposeful, outdoor-oriented life.

Refueling the Feminine Soul

Recharge your batteries with these 6 mini vacations for the spirit

JONI RAVENNA SUSSMAN

Jim Clancy, a licensed family therapist in Orange County, California, for over 35 years, has seen rising anxiety levels among mothers of young children. And it's never been worse than during recent months, when many kids are unable to return to school due to COVID-19.

"I practically have to beg mothers to take time for themselves," Clancy said. "Most women come to me because they

feel out of balance." Quick to align the tires so they can chauffeur safely, they've forgotten about the driver's own equilibrium. During a difficult year, when summer travel has been restricted and holiday travel may be difficult, we can still take some mini-vacations for the soul.

Muscle De-stressor

Want to relax? Whip up just a dash of adrenaline (the fight-or-flight hormone) with a dose of endorphins (the natural opiates we get from pleasurable activities) and a sprinkle of the neurotransmitter serotonin (low levels of which are associated with depression) for the perfect biochemical balance. To achieve this, exercise. Exercise can release adrenaline, which burns off, but the endorphins and serotonin it spurs continue to be released into your system.

When in Aroma

A hot bath is the perfect mini-vacay anytime but especially during the holiday months when expectations are high. Just fill the tub, add an essence (magnolia is relaxing), and revel in the sense of scent. Scent, the most underrated of the five senses, has the ability to affect our mood, memory, appetite, and libido, among other things.

Researchers are finding that certain fragrances can both calm us down and perk us up. Lavender, long known for its relaxing effect, also helps people complete tasks faster and more accurately while remaining calm. If the warm bath is sedating enough, try a touch of peppermint. Both subjective reports and brainwave readings of a recent study indicate that the scent of peppermint reduces fatigue.

Keep in mind that certain smells also have the power to elicit memories. Make sure the scent has positive associations, or better yet, imprint a new fragrance so that in the future it will evoke memories of, say, a family gathering that everyone enjoyed—even if it was different this year. "Holiday gatherings are great bonding opportunities," Clancy said. "But if mom's burned out, she can't be totally present." Use your favorite essence, and you'll emerge from that tub feeling scentsational!

No Place Like 'Ohm'

Although aware of the physiological benefits of meditation, many people complain that it's too hard to sit there and "just do nothing." Meditation is anything but nothing. It lowers levels of stress hormones lactate and cortisol (elevated levels of the latter can cause everything from widening girths to Cushing syndrome); heart, breathing, and metabolic rates; and elevated blood pressure.

But like all skills, quieting the mind takes practice.

For this meditation, begin by sitting comfortably, eyes closed. Take deep breaths and count to 10 as you exhale. When the mind wanders, gently bring it back by focusing on your breath and start from one. Try five minutes a day, then slowly work your way up to longer periods.

Need further motivation? A study using electroencephalograms showed that the brains of Buddhist monks had greater activity in areas associated with positive emotions, such as happiness, and the highest levels of gamma wave activity (involved in memory and learning) ever recorded.

Amazing Labyrinths

For those who find meditation difficult, it may be because recent studies show what we've all suspected: men's and women's brains are different. The corpus callosumthe bridge of nerve tissue connecting the two hemispheres—is thicker in female fetuses. Brain imaging of adults indicates that while only the left hemisphere of male brains shows activity during language-oriented tasks, such as reading, both sides of women's brains are working.

"Women think tangentially; they are multi-taskers," said Jolanta Lukawski, medical director for Women's Wellness Center at Hoag Hospital. "Emptying the mind goes against



Scent, the most underrated of the five senses, has the ability to affect our mood, memory, appetite, and libido, among other things.

Emptying the mind goes against the grain of how women's minds work. They relax more easily when using their hands; knitting, painting, kneading dough.

Jolanta Lukawski, medical director for Women's Wellness Center at Hoag Hospital



the grain of how women's minds work. They relax more easily when using their hands; knitting, painting, kneading dough."

This may explain the popularity of finger labyrinths. They work much the same way as walking meditation labyrinths except that you let your finger do the walking. You trace the meandering but purposeful path of a circular design either drawn on paper or etched into wood to and from the labyrinth's center. It's thought to be a spiritual journey to one's core and back again into the world. Unlike a maze, a labyrinth has lots of turns but no dead-ends—a nice metaphor for life during stressful times.

Aural Gratification

Think of your favorite singer or one whose music you find soothing. "Music is ether," Tori Amos once said in a television interview. Long famous for her songwriting, Tori creates ballads (like "Mother Revolution," one she wrote years ago) that can soothe the souls of both young and old. So why not put on Tori, or another singer you enjoy, and turn your living room into a spiritual ballroom.

There's been much research on sound therapy since it was discovered that listening to Mozart improved test scores. "Certain frequencies can stimulate alpha waves that are relaxing," Lukawski said. Whether you like your tunes sweet and low or loud and fast, the physical exertion in tandem with the right vibrations equal a happier, more refreshed you.

Hydrotherapy

Crashing bodies of water, such as ocean waves and waterfalls, create large numbers of negatively charged ions, which are thought to be associated with good health. Research by the U.S. Air Force in the 1940s and '50s showed that pilots passed out at high altitudes where the air was found to have high concentrations of positively charged ions. When negativeion generators were placed in the planes, pilots stayed awake. Consider that at Niagara Falls, there are 100,000 negative ions per cubic centimeter as opposed to 100 positive ions per cubic centimeter on any given freeway during rush hour. Breaking waves also provide sound therapy. "Even if you can't see the ocean, just the rhythmic sound instills peace," Lukawski said.

During one of the most stressful years in recent memory, when opportunities to get away from it all are most needed yet hardest to come by, taking these minivacays for the soul might just be all the travel you need.

Joni Ravenna Sussman is a freelance writer specializing in health and wellness. Her articles have appeared in dozens of national and regional publications

over the years. She is also a playwright and TV writer.

16 | MIND & BODY

WISE HABITS

Reminder: 8 Practices to Get Still and Calm

We can deepen our connection to each moment, gaining more from even routine experiences of life

LEO BABAUTA

hese days, it's always nice to have reminders to become present, to pause into stillness, and to calm ourselves down.

Chaos rules most of our lives, and every reminder we get can be helpful. Here are some simple reminders to bring calmness into your day.

I highly encourage you to write these on cards, sticky notes, phone lock screens, and other places you'll see them during the day.

Pause and breathe. Simply take a moment a handful of times during the day to pause, and check in with your breath. Notice how you feel. Get present to your surroundings.

Go slowly, and savor. With a meal, eat each bite slowly. Pause and breathe between bites and really savor each bite. How often do we give ourselves this gift? And we can do this with any activity—do it slowly, and savor the activity. Washing a dish. Taking a shower. Brushing your teeth. Cleaning the counter. Go slowly, and savor fully.

Find moments of stillness. At almost any moment of the day, we can find some stillness. Curl up on the couch with a book. Sit on a park bench while out on a walk. Go outside and look up at the sky or out at the trees. Instead of constantly being in motion, we can pause in stillness and savor that stillness.

Get curious. No matter what you're doing, it's an opportunity to bring curiosity. What can you get curious about as someone is talking to you? Notice when you've shut your curiosity down into opinions, views, judgment, righteousness. It's usually when we're frustrated or rigid in our views and rightness. Instead, can we bring curiosity and see what there is to learn from this person, this situation? Really try to know more, and bring the joyful curiosity that we had



Instead of constantly being in motion, we can pause in stillness.

RTIMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK

as children about everything in our world.

No matter what you're doing, it's an opportunity to bring curiosity. Let yourself stay in the not knowing. We want to know the answer. Not knowing is a state that most people want to get out of immediately, so we'll make a plan, search the internet for something, try to find the certainty. Nothing wrong with that, but what would it be like to stay in the not knowing? To get curious, and savor the groundless feeling of not having a fixed path or view? We can bring this to any activity, any conversation.

Create rituals of mindfulness. Little things, like brushing our teeth, can become a ritual to bring mindfulness and curiosity. Eating your morning meal can be a time to just slow down and savor. Starting up your computer in the morning can be an opportunity for a ritual to get present to what's important to you today. Shutting the computer down in the evening can be an opportunity to reflect on what you learned

STOCKFOUR/SHUTTERSTOCK

today. There are lots of little opportunties like this to create rituals to get present.

Ask yourself what would make you happy today. Every day, you can start by asking what would make you happy. Is there an accomplishment that would make this a great day? A self-care ritual? A phone call to your mom or best friend? Make this a top priority for the day!

It's easy to cruise through life half distracted but savoring our experience, whether it be a meal or washing the dishes, can transform the moment.

Find wonder and awe right now. In every single moment, if we open ourselves to it, we can find awe for this incredible universe. For the interconnectedness we might see we have with all beings. We can find wonder for things we take for granted. Right now, where can you find wonder and awe?

As I said, these are probably not new to you—but can you use this reminder as an opportunity to bring one or more of these into your life today?

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



A new clothing brand from the world of Shen Yun.

Classic design and luxurious comfort.



Wear it With Honor

ShenYunDancer.com

B

OMEGA-3

100mg

00mg x 60 softgels (42g

Buy 4

Get 1

Free

Made from Purslane NATURE'S OMEGA-3 GOLD

Purslane is nature's gold mine of omega-3, containing the highest level of any green plant. Besides 0% trans fat and 0% hormones, this

product is 100% organic and 100% natural. It has no fishy aftertaste or risk of ocean-borne contaminants. It is also non-GMO. Made in Korea.

Puritang Green Vegetable Omega 3, 6, 7, 9 Inspired by Nature. Made from the Heart.

www.Puritang.com

Natural Purity for All