

THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND &

BODY

THE CREATIVE EXCHANGE/UNSPLASH

Many of us use food to alleviate boredom, depression, or anxiety caused by the pandemic.



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.

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?

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Tales of Pandemic Weight Loss and Gain

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

CONAN MILNER

Have 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

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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

Consuming fruits and vegetables every day 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 findings—and 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 from 113 countries, or some 82 percent of the global population. In the United States, suboptimal veggie consumption 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 eating more of them may make you less

likely to be overweight or obese, hence 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 servings 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 bio-chemical marker 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 20,069 adults. Classifying the fruits and vegetables into four groups—green, orange-yellow, red-purple, and white—the researchers saw that stroke incidence risk 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.

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Researchers found roughly 1 in 7 deaths from heart disease and strokes could be attributed to inadequate fruit consumption.



Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of fiber, potassium, magnesium, antioxidants, and phenolics—all proven beneficial in reducing blood pressure.

Linking Sleep Apnea and the CCP Virus

A positive airway pressure (PAP) device helps those suffering sleep apnea get a better night's rest.



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

BARRY KRAKOW

Sleep apnea can take a serious toll on general well-being and contributes 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.

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

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 body-mass 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 no available data on their actual time spent using a PAP device. Thus, we don't know if 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 COVID 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.

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 the bloodstream (aka Arterial-Arterial or 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.



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



JULIANA MALTA/UNSPLASH



Why Celebrating Christmas Is Good for Your Mental Health

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



LES ANDERSON/UNSPLASH

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 wholeheartedly 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.

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

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—recognizes that rituals are important in their own right. Routines and rituals offer structure and predictability in our lives and perform important psychological functions to manage anxiety. With rates of anxiety 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 the general mood. There's evidence that this will work, as research shows that Christmas rituals specifically can play a role in creat-

NILUFAR AHMED

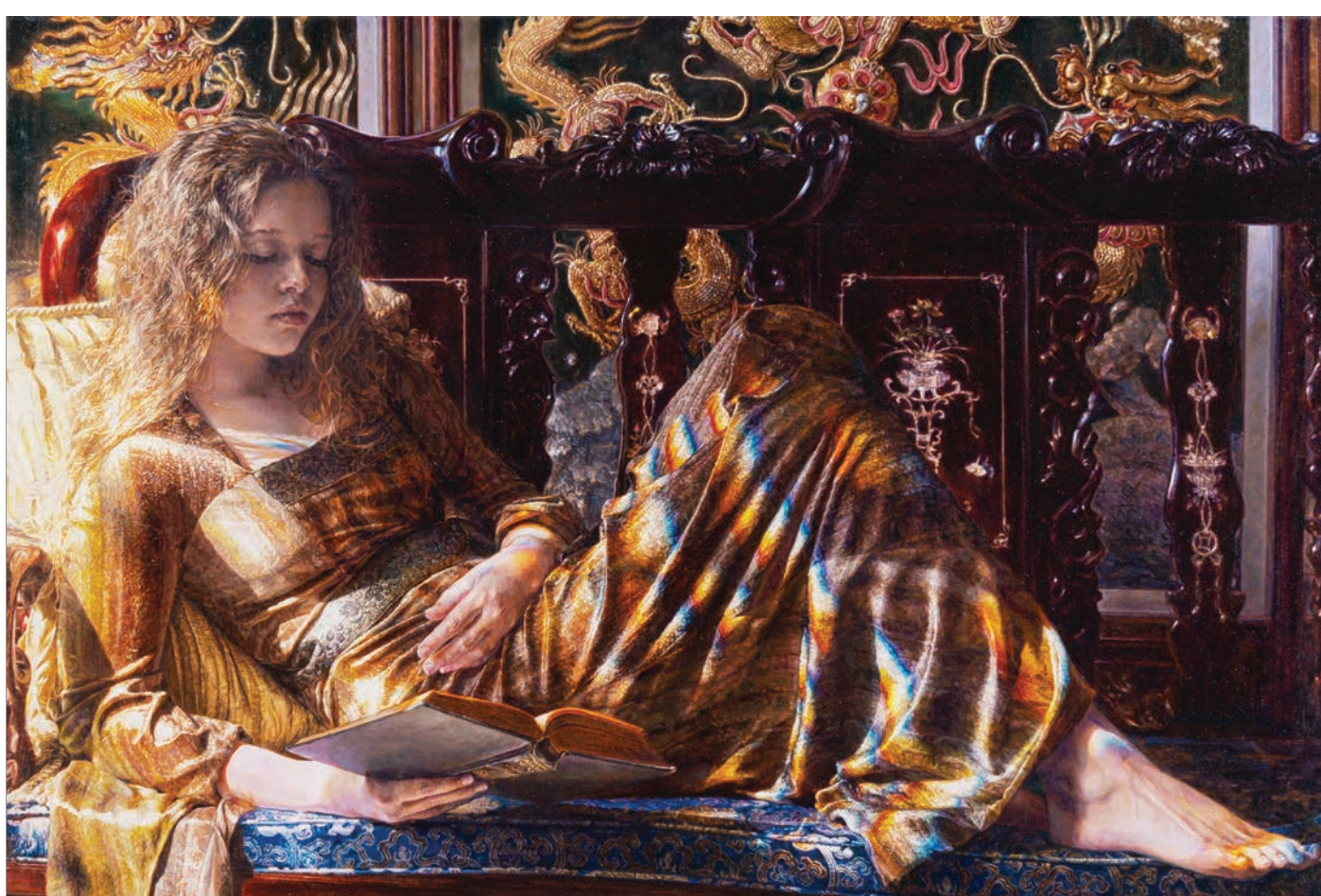
From birthdays to weddings and graduations, this year has seen many personal celebrations canceled, while communal festivities such as Bonfire Night, Eid, and Diwali either haven't been celebrated or have been more subdued. So it might feel tempting to downplay Christmas, too, especially with concerns 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 of the season—while keeping to 2020's limitations—will be very good for our mental health. After a tough year, this might be exactly 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 Christmas time. Research has shown that this spirit of Christmas manifests as a multitude of positive feelings and behaviors



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Humid air helps maintain the protective mucosal surface of your respiratory tract.

Humidifiers May Play a Role in Preventing COVID

Researchers have found a solid connection between virus survival and humidity

JOSEPH MERCOLA

Controlling 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.



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

These 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.

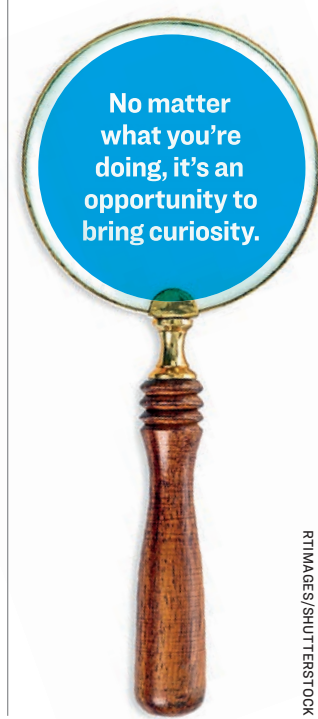
Find moments of stillness. At almost any moment of the day, we can find some stillness. Curl up on the couch with a book. Sit on a park bench while out on a walk. Go outside and look up at the sky or out at the trees. Instead of constantly being in motion, we can pause in stillness and savor that stillness.

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



STOCKFOUR/SHUTTERSTOCK

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



RTIMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK

as children about everything in our world.

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

today. There are lots of little opportunities 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

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