

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# MIND & BODY

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Cravings for comfort food can be hard to resist, but each time we do, a change occurs.



Your daily patterns will decide your future well-being.

## Conquering Cravings

How our brain, gut, and hormones derail our good intentions

**CONAN MILNER**

Hunger is a signal that reminds us to eat. This built-in, biological cue ensures our survival. A food craving, however, is a cry for comfort. It comes in the form of cookie dough ice cream, cheese fries, a cola, or some other intensely flavored concoction. Hunger is subtle and can be satisfied by a wide range of foods. But a craving nags at us until we feed it something specific. Cravings can become so powerful that they can cloud your judgment and override your willpower. Worst of all, the foods we typically crave aren't in our best interest. Overwhelming evidence shows that the sweets, sodas, and snacks so many of us have grown to love are a major contributor to the chronic health problems that plague the modern world: obesity, sleep apnea, diabetes, heart disease, cancer and more. But if we're built to survive, why don't we only seek well-balanced meals? Why are we compelled to eat things we know rationally are not good for us?

**Eating for Dopamine**  
According to Elena Zinkov, a naturopathic doctor based in Bellevue, Washington, it's because we often use foods to chase a desired emotional state rather than to satisfy an empty stomach. "This habit gives you about 10 seconds of pleasure, but it really starts to be destructive in the long-term," she said.

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FOOD AS MEDICINE

## Can an Onion a Day Keep the Doctor Away?

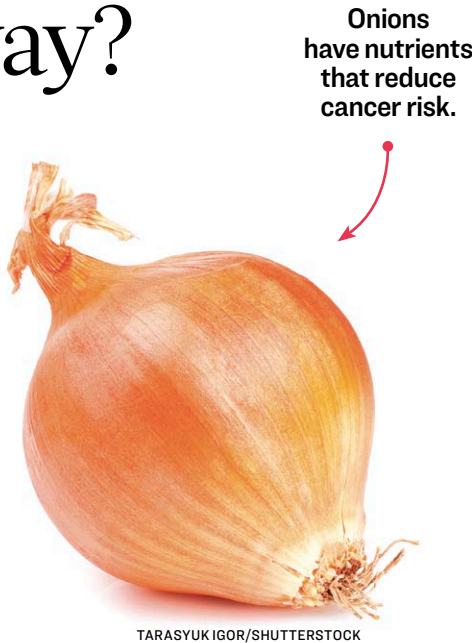
The healing potential of this nutrient rich, low calorie vegetable has been valued for millennia

**JOSEPH MERCOLA**

Onions have a long history of medicinal use. Many experts believe that the first onions appeared in Central Asia. Most agree the vegetable has been cultivated for nearly 5,000 years and might be one of the first cultivated crops since they are easy to grow and transport, and have a long shelf life. Gaius Plinius Secundus (A.D. 23/24-79), called Pliny the Elder, cataloged how Romans used onions in Pompeii before being killed by the volcano. His documents showed that onions were used to induce sleep, heal toothaches and mouth sores, and address vision problems. Others have

documented their use in the treatment of headaches and heart disease. In the Middle Ages, onions were used to help relieve headaches, hair loss, and help to pay the rent. The first pilgrims brought them on the Mayflower to America to cultivate, where they became one of the first products brought to market in New England. It's likely the many health benefits derived from eating onions come from the nutrient value of the vegetable. One small onion has just 28 calories, 6.5 grams (g) of carbohydrate, and 1.1 g of total fiber. It also contains:

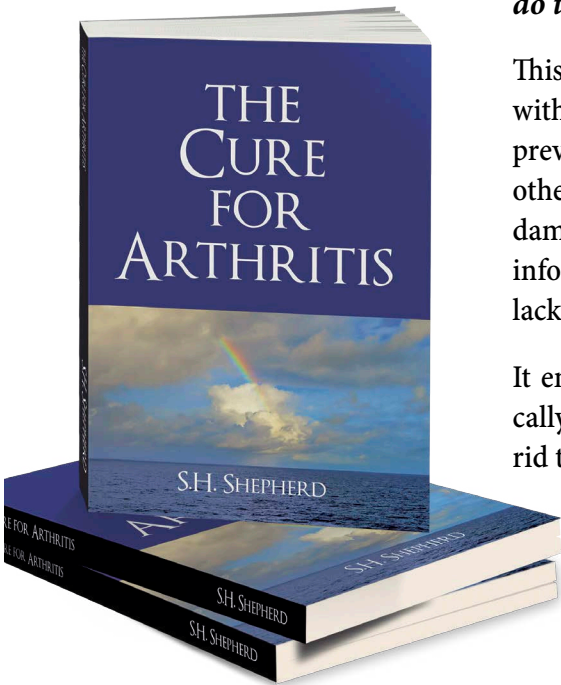
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TARASYUK IGOR/SHUTTERSTOCK



The only way to cure arthritis is by attacking its underlying causes



Copyright 2020, 240 pages  
Available on Amazon.com

There is a sure cure for arthritis. But many people are not aware of it, nor do they practice it.

This book explains how to effectively deal with the underlying causes of arthritis to prevent the disease from spreading to other parts of the body and to reverse the damage already done by the disease, information that is needed, but sorely lacking, in this age of information.

It enables those who suffer from practically any type of arthritis to do more than rid themselves of its symptoms.

When the knowledge of how to effectively deal with arthritis is put into practice, arthritic patients lose their pains and inflammation and recover from the disease.

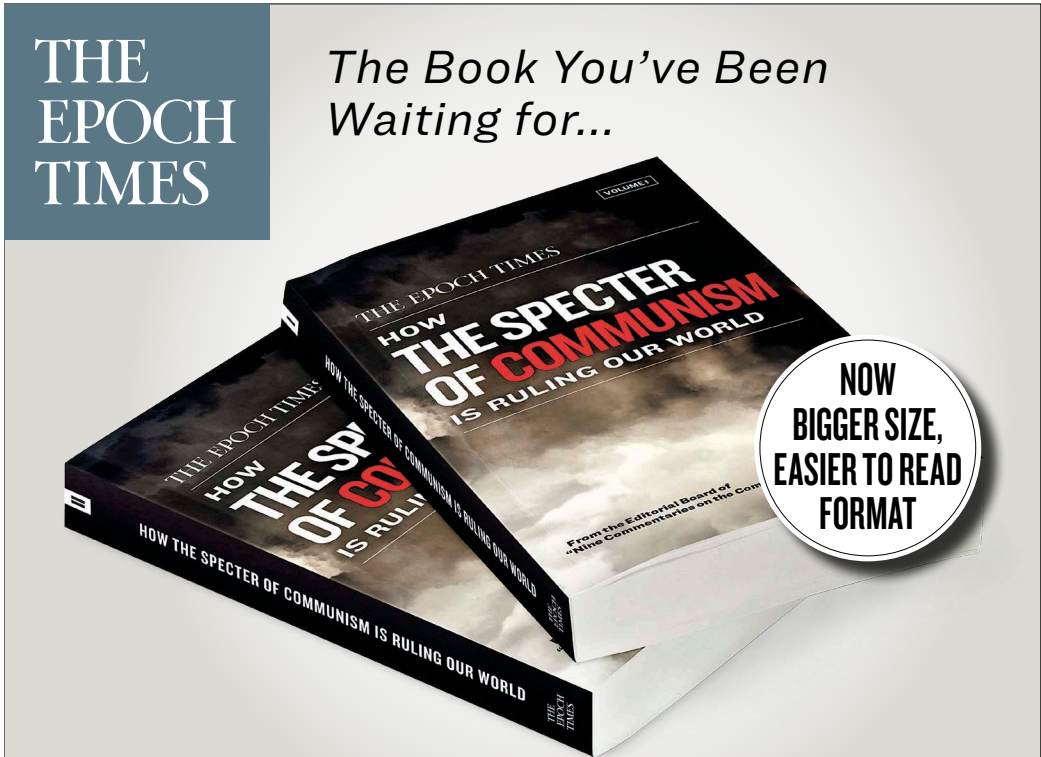
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## HOW THE SPECTER OF COMMUNISM IS RULING OUR WORLD

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## Kids Crave Experiences Over Things

Despite the satisfaction of new experiences, sometimes kids need a helpful push

JAY HARRINGTON

Every January, in the winter wonderland of northern Michigan that we call home, ski season kicks into high gear for our family. Four to five days a week, we are at the ski hill getting exercise and fresh air.

Our girls love skiing. Our twins, now 7, and our eldest daughter, now 10, have been on skis for the past five years. They're adventurous and love speeding down the hills.

One of the questions we were asked most often before moving to northern Michigan was "What about the winters?"

What about them? It's one of our favorite times of the year, because we can play in the snow.

We have the opportunity to engage in new and exciting experiences all year long, for which we're grateful. New experiences are integral to our happiness.

You've probably heard about the research that shows that adults derive more happiness from spending their money on experiences than they do on things. Unlike material possessions that are satisfying at first, but quickly lose their luster, experiences get better over time.

Thomas Gilovich, a psychology professor at Cornell University, conducted a study in which he asked people to report their happiness with major material or experiential purchases. Initially, people rated them about the same. Over time, however, their satisfaction with material objects decreased while their satisfaction with experiences increased.

Gilovich explains that our experiences become a much bigger part of our identity than our possessions.

"You can really like your material stuff. You can even think that part of your identity is connected to those things, but nonetheless, they remain separate from you. In contrast, your experiences really are part of you. We are the sum total of our experiences," he said.

The conclusions of this research ring true for my wife Heather and I.

**Kids Value Experiences ...**

It turns out that the same inclination toward experiences over things holds true for kids. According to a recent study conducted by professor Cindy Chan from the University of Toronto, kids get much more out of an experience than they do from all of the stuff (toys, electronics, etc.) they clamor for, but quickly lose interest in.

Research shows that memories born out of experiences form emotional "anchors" that give kids comfort during tough times, they promote brain development, and they help forge close bonds between family members.

... But They Often Need a Push  
Despite the obvious and scientifically proven benefits of experiences over things, they're not always appreciated by kids. They often need a push—which is obvious to any parents, ourselves included, who struggle to get their kids away from television and tablet screens.

**Our experiences become a much bigger part of our identity than our possessions.**

Which brings us back to skiing. Our local ski hill hosts a racing program, in which kids from the ages of 5 to 12 compete in slalom and giant slalom racing. While our kids love to ski, and are good at it, in past winters they have been hesitant to race. Their hesitance can best be summarized as anxiety about not being able to keep up with some of the more skilled and experienced racers.

We knew they would enjoy the experience, and would quickly improve their skills by competing with kids better than them, so we not-so-gently nudged them to try it.

There was some pushback, and we would have relented had they expressed a really strong desire not to race, but they begrudgingly agreed. We told them to give it a try for one race and they could back out if it wasn't for them.

They all competed and can't wait for more. They were buzzing from the experience.

It's never easy to push kids out of their comfort zones, but the payoff is worth it. It's the only way that most kids will stretch themselves and build resilience.

Jay Harrington is an author, lawyer-turned-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.

# 'Peer Respites' Provide Alternative to Psychiatric Wards During Pandemic

SARAH KWON

Mia McDermott is no stranger to isolation. Abandoned as an infant in China, she lived in an orphanage until a family in California adopted her as a toddler. She spent her adolescence in boarding schools and early adult years in and out of psychiatric hospitals, where she underwent treatment for bipolar disorder, anxiety, and anorexia.

The pandemic left McDermott feeling especially lonely. She restricted social interactions because her fatty liver disease put her at greater risk of complications should she contract COVID-19. The 26-year-old Santa Cruz resident stopped regularly eating and taking her psychiatric medications, and contemplated suicide.

When McDermott's thoughts grew increasingly dark in June, she checked into Second Story, a mental health program based in a home not far from her own, where she finds nonclinical support in a peaceful environment from people who have faced similar challenges.

**Peer respite offers a low-key wellness approach, coupled with empathy from people who have 'been there' themselves. This unorthodox strategy has gained popularity in recent years.**

Second Story is what is known as a "peer respite," a welcoming place where people can stay when they're experiencing or nearing a mental health crisis. Betting that a low-key wellness approach, coupled with empathy from people who have "been there," can help people in distress recover, this unorthodox strategy has gained popularity in recent years as the nation grapples with a severe shortage of psychiatric beds that has been exacerbated by the pandemic.

Peer respites allow guests to avoid psychiatric hospitalization and emergency department visits. They now operate in at least 14 states. California has five in the San Francisco Bay Area and Los Angeles County.

"When things are really tough and you need extra support but you don't need hospitalization, where's that middle ground?" asked Keris Myrick, founder of Hacienda of Hope, a peer respite in Long Beach, California.

People with serious mental illness are more likely to experience emotional distress in the pandemic than the general population, said Dr. Benjamin Druss, a psychiatrist and professor at Emory University's public health school, elaborating that they tend to have smaller social networks and more medical problems.

That was the case with McDermott.

"I don't have a full-on relationship with my family. My friends are my family," she said. She yearned to "give them a hug, see their smile or stand close and take a selfie."

The next best thing was Second Story, located in a pewter-gray split-level, five-bedroom house in Aptos, a quaint beach community near McDermott's Santa Cruz home.

Peer respites offer people in distress short-term (usually up to two weeks), round-the-clock emotional support from peers—people who have experienced mental health conditions and are trained and often certified by states to support others with similar issues—and activities such as arts, meditation, and support groups.

"You can't tell who's the guest and who's the staff. We don't wear uniforms or badges," said Angelica Garcia-Guerrero, associate director of Hacienda of Hope's parent organization.

Peer respites are free for guests but rarely covered by insurance. States and counties typically pick up the tab. Hacienda of Hope's \$900,000 annual operating costs are



In peer respite, peers share personal stories with guests but avoid labeling them with diagnoses.

covered by Los Angeles County through the Mental Health Services Act, a policy that directs proceeds from a statewide tax on people who earn more than \$1 million annually to behavioral health programs.

In September, California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a bill that would establish a statewide certification process for mental health peer providers by July 2022.

For now, however, peer respite staff members in California are not licensed or certified. Peer respites typically don't offer clinical care or dispense psychiatric drugs, though guests can bring theirs. Peers share personal stories with guests but avoid labeling them with diagnoses. Guests must come—and can leave—voluntarily. Some respites have few restrictions on who can stay; others don't allow guests who express suicidal thoughts or are homeless.

Peer respite is one of several types of programs that divert people facing behavioral health crises from the hospital, but is the only one without clinical involvement, said Travis Atkinson, a consultant at TBD Solutions, a behavioral health care company.

The first peer respites arose around 2000, said Laysha Ostrow, CEO of Live & Learn, which conducts behavioral health research.

The approach seems to be expanding. Live & Learn counts 33 peer respites today in the U.S., up from 19 six years ago. All are overseen and staffed by people with histories of psychiatric disorders. About a dozen other programs employ a mix of peers and laypersons who don't have psychiatric diagnoses, or aren't peer-led, Atkinson said.

Though she had stayed at Second Story several times over the past five years, McDermott hesitated to return during the pandemic. However, she felt reassured after learning that guests were required to wear a mask in common areas and get a covid test before their stay. To ensure physical distancing, the respite reduced capacity from six to five guests at a time.

During her two-week stay, McDermott played with the respite's two cats and piano—activities she found therapeutic. But most helpful was talking to peers in a way she couldn't with her mental health providers, she said. In the past, McDermott said, she had been involuntarily admitted to a psychiatric hospital after she expressed suicidal thoughts. When she shared similar sentiments with Second Story peers, they offered to talk, or call the hospital if she wanted.

"They were willing to listen," she said. "But they're not forceful about helping."

By the end of the visit, McDermott said that she felt understood and her loneliness and suicidal feelings had waned. She started eating and taking her medications more

consistently, she said.

The small number of studies on respites have found that guests had fewer hospitalizations and accounted for lower Medicaid spending for nearly a year after a respite stay than people with similar conditions who didn't stay in a respite. Respite visitors spent less time in the hospital and emergency room the longer they had stayed in the respite.

**Peer respites allow guests to avoid psychiatric hospitalization and emergency department visits.**

Financial struggles and opposition from neighbors have hindered the growth of respites, however. Live & Learn said that although five peer respites have been created since 2018, at least two others closed because of budget cuts.

Neighbors have challenged nearby respite placements in a few instances. Santa Cruz-area media outlets reported in 2019 that Second Story neighbors had voiced safety concerns with the respite. Neighbor Tony Crane told California Healthline that guests have used drugs and consumed alcohol in the neighborhood, and he worried that peers are not licensed or certified to support people in crisis. He felt it was too risky to let his children ride their bikes near the respite when they were younger.

In a written response, Monica Martinez, whose organization runs Second Story, said neighbors often target community mental health programs because of concerns that "come from misconceptions and stigma surrounding those seeking mental health support."

Many respites are struggling with increased demand and decreased availability during the pandemic. Sherry Jenkins Tucker, executive director of Georgia Mental Health Consumer Network, said its four respites have had to reduce capacity to enable physical distancing, despite increased demand for services. Other respites have temporarily suspended stays because of the pandemic.

McDermott said her mental health had improved since staying at Second Story in June, but she still struggles with isolation amid the pandemic. "Holidays are hard for me," said McDermott, who returned to Second Story in November. "I really wanted to be able to have Thanksgiving with people."

Sarah Kwon is an independent journalist. Kaiser Health News is a national health policy news service. It is an editorially independent program of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, which isn't affiliated with Kaiser Permanente.



# Conquering Cravings

How our brain, gut, and hormones derail our good intentions

Continued from Page 1

Zinkov's book "Crave Reset" unravels the psychology and physiology behind cravings and offers strategies to help us kick our junk food obsession for good.

When we're suddenly struck by a food craving, it can feel beyond our control to ignore. Yet, we are also responsible for cultivating our cravings over time. This is why stopping a craving is so difficult. It's because our brain and body become dependent on these foods, and begin to feel off without them.

Consider the brain chemicals that control our sensation of pleasure: serotonin and dopamine. Serotonin surges when we taste something good, and dopamine solidifies the behavior, ensuring that we'll seek that food again when we're looking for something to eat in the future.

These chemical signatures have guided our ancestors' food preferences and meal satisfaction since forever. But this system backfires in the modern food environment, where calories are plentiful, sugar is cheap, and products are meticulously engineered to be irresistible.

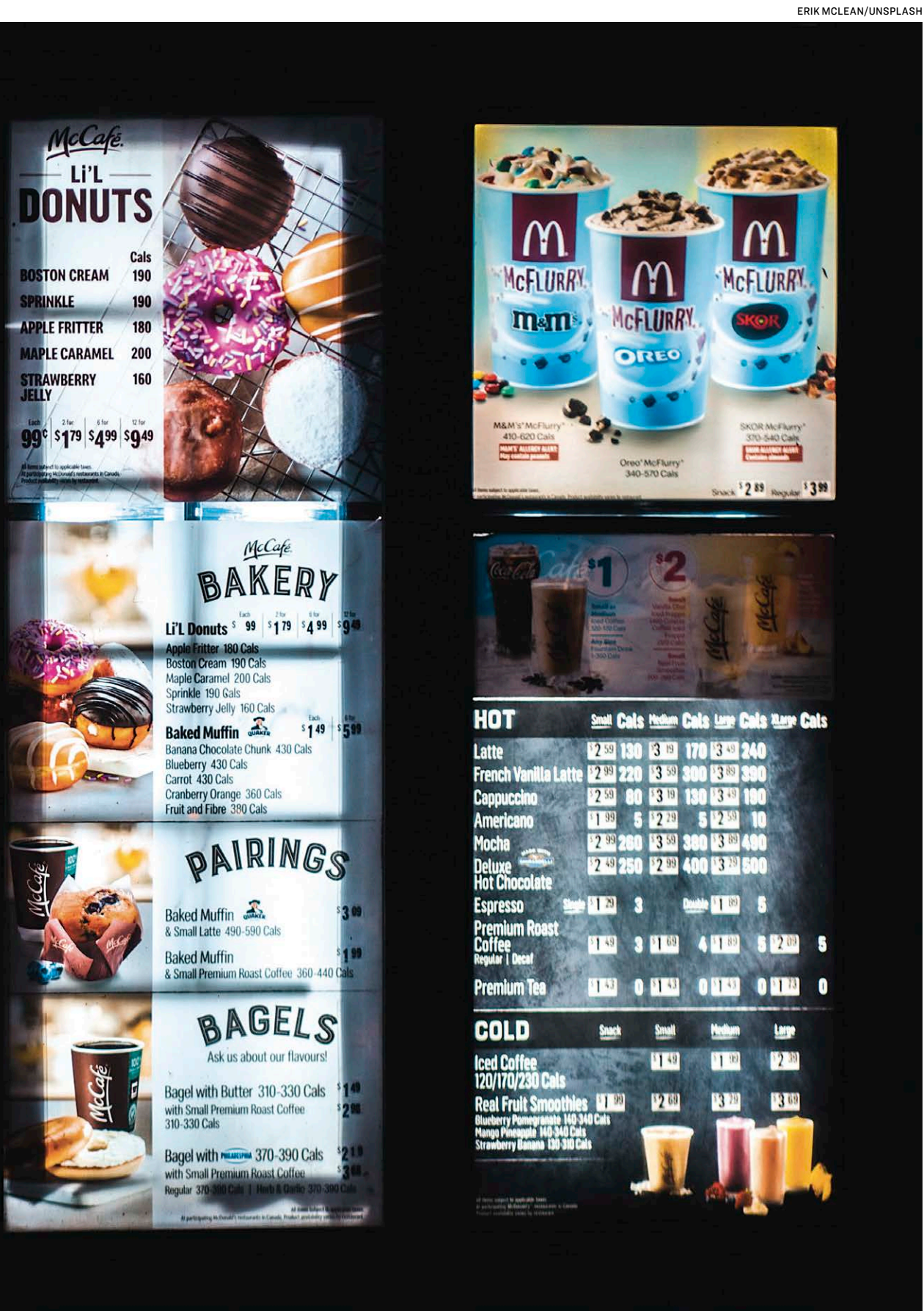
"For our ancestors, food wasn't readily available. It would either be a time of feast or famine," Zinkov said. "Nowadays, you drive around the corner and there's a 7-Eleven, and there are so many options. In this environment, we've grown out of sync with our hunger cues."

**Diminishing Returns of Emotional Eating**  
Constant consumption of intensely craveable foods—those high in fat, sugar, and salt—have been linked to a reduction in D2 dopamine receptors. Scientists have discovered that people who experience food addiction and weight gain due to compulsive eating have fewer D2 receptors. As a result, they need extra stimulation to experience a sufficient level of satisfaction.

In optimal amounts, dopamine is stimulating, energizing, and motivating. With sufficient dopamine, you feel focused, motivated, and happy. Low levels result in low energy, depression, and a lack of interest. This means that as we rely more on our cravings to fuel our sense of satisfaction, it begins to distort our sense of well-being. "This is why I say cravings relate to some-

**We often use foods to chase a desired emotional state rather than to satisfy an empty stomach.**

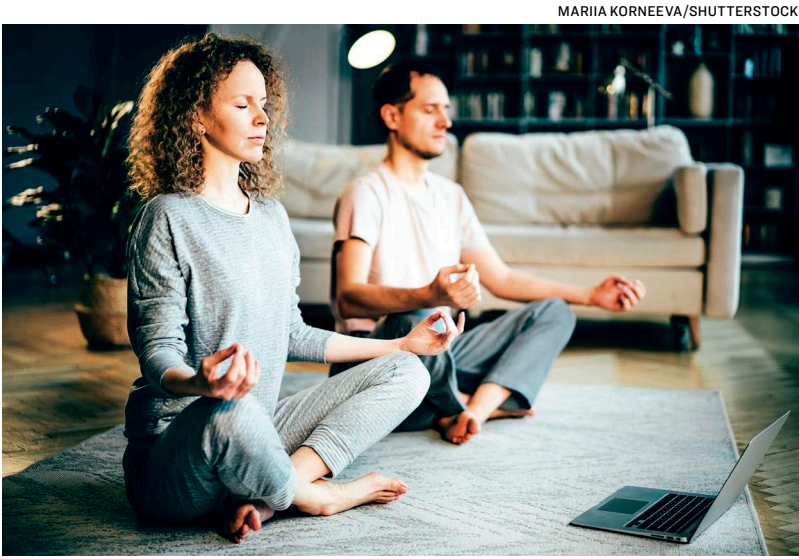
Food cravings aren't just in your head—they're in your gut.



When we are hungry or down, fast food seems to offer a quick pick-me-up.



Leave cravings behind with some exercise in the beautiful outdoors.



Cravings can be driven by stress, so taking steps to relax can ease urges.

Comfort foods offer a jolt of fat, sugar, and salt and are often the most convenient and cheapest foods available.

thing bigger," Zinkov said. "When we have a craving, we're usually trying to distract ourselves from something. People usually have the most cravings during times of stress, painful experiences, or they're bored—they'll eat because they have nothing else to do."

When cravings become our go-to method of dopamine secretion, we condition ourselves to need a regular hit of our favorite flavors just to make it through the day. Do you feel sad and tired when you restrict your sweets? It's not due to your body's needs for sugar. You're just chasing the rush it delivers.

Caffeine influences our neural chemistry in a similar way, binding to proteins in the brain called adenosine receptors. Used in moderation, this can help us stay focused. But if we rely on this trick too heavily, we create a vicious cycle. With our second cup of coffee, our body begins to build a toler-

ance to caffeine, and our brain creates more adenosine receptors. Over time, we need more caffeine to maintain the same level of energy.

**Feeding a Malicious Microbiome**  
Food cravings are not just in your head. A lot of it lies in your gut.

Inside each of us is an enormous colony of beneficial bacteria collectively known as our microbiome. The bulk of our microbiome—about 3 to 5 pounds worth—inhabits our large intestine. The composition of this colon colony has been linked to our mental health, mood, digestion, hormonal balance, weight, gene expression, and general well-being, as well as the food we crave.

Our microbiome consists of hundreds of different strains of bacteria, and what we eat plays a huge role in which strains proliferate. Some thrive on fiber. Others prefer specific fats.

There are general similarities in the human microbiome, but diet contributes many of the differences. For example, bacteria that digest seaweed have been identified in people from Japan, while African children raised on sorghum have been found to have a unique microbiome that helps digest the cellulose from this grain.

As bacterial strains vie for dominance in our gut, the best-fed strains always come out on top. According to Zinkov, we dictate the dominant bacterial strains by voting with our forks. However, the candidates we choose may have an agenda directly at odds with our well-being. They strengthen our craving for more sweets, despite the detrimental impact this has on our own health.

"We have billions of cells in our body, but we have even more gut bacteria, and we are hosting a party for them," Zinkov said. "They are predominantly concerned about themselves, not necessarily us."

As the number of junk-food loving bacteria grow in your gut, they churn out hormones and neurotransmitters that further fuel the fire, resulting in more health problems, and more biological conditions that strengthen your cravings even more. This is what our willpower is up against—not just our own desires, but the desires of the bacterial colony we've cultivated. Research published in a 2014 edition of BioEssays explains that our struggle to resist cravings high in sugar and fat may be hard, because we face an enemy within created as a result of our past poor choices.

"The resistance to change is frequently framed as a matter of 'self-control,' and it has been suggested that multiple 'selves' or cognitive modules exist, each vying for control over our eating behavior," the article states. "Here, we suggest another possibility: that evolutionary conflict between host and microbes in the gut leads microbes to divergent interests over host eating behavior."

**Influence of Hormones**  
Insufficient hormonal levels can also contribute to strong cravings. Low thyroid function, for example, decreases the rate of glucose (sugar) our cells are able to absorb. This slows the insulin response to glucose in the bloodstream following a meal, as well as the clearance of insulin from the blood after it's done its job.

When metabolism slows down to such an

extent, you're bound to crave sweets just to feel a sense of equilibrium.

When cells don't get enough glucose, this puts pressure on the adrenal glands. In response, the adrenals release the stress hormone cortisol in order to increase the amount of glucose available to cells.

This means that unless you improve thyroid function, your body will be in a vicious cycle of low blood sugar, high cortisol secretion, and higher stress levels that further suppress thyroid function.

As this cycle pushes your thyroid and adrenals to exhaustion, it sets off an array of physical, mental, and emotional symptoms, including even more severe food cravings.

**Honor Hunger**  
Zinkov offers many recommendations for taming our desire for bad food, but they all boil down to two things: awareness and mindfulness.

Hunger can sneak up on you, sometimes pushing you to make a poor food choice. "For me, it's about getting in that gap between the stimuli and your reaction," said Zinkov. "When somebody has a craving that is overwhelming, it is so important to recognize it and get in that gap. That's where growth and change happens."

The first step is becoming aware of your hunger. If you skip meals or try to make it all day on a small salad or a single muffin, it lowers your blood sugar and weakens your will, making you even more vulnerable to a craving later in the day.

Instead, honor your body's nutrient needs. Zinkov urges cravers to make sure they get enough protein, fiber, and healthy fat with every meal. These essential macronutrients support the systems that have been turned against us as a result of years of giving in to chronic cravings. Protein and healthy fats support brain health, and fiber helps cultivate a healthy mix of gut bacteria. Fiber also binds and removes toxins from our body, and helps keep you feeling full and satisfied, so you don't reach for a cookie after a meal.

**De-Stress**  
Nothing stokes our cravings like stress, and many of us turn to sweet treats and salty snacks for comfort. Since cravings have such a strong emotional component, it's important to find other ways to manage our stress so that we don't always turn junk

food to soothe our nerves.

One of the most effective and accessible strategies for managing emotions is movement. Multiple studies have shown that exercise, when combined with other therapies such as meditation and cognitive behavior therapies, can help decrease symptoms of depression, anxiety, and addiction.

To lower your stress hormones, at least 20 to 30 minutes of exercise per day is ideal. But if you're just starting out, don't set the bar too high. When you find yourself under stress, just going for a short walk can change how you feel.

**Snack Right**  
Another important eating tip: Learn to make your own healthy snacks. Using nutritious ingredients to satisfy our cravings for something sweet, salty, or crunchy makes it easier to avoid the intensely flavored, nutrient-poor junk we obsess over.

"When we make our own snacks that are rich in flavor but also rich in nutrients, not only are we changing the neurochemistry and hormone balance in our body, but we're also changing our behavior and habits," Zinkov said.

For Anastasia Sharova, founder of the online health-conscious cooking school, Happy Bellyfish, her most intense craving since childhood was gummy bears. Her solution to breaking the gummy bear habit was to create a healthier version at home that resembled the chewy texture and the fruity flavor of her favorite treat.

"I started eating them to satisfy my craving in a healthier way," Sharova said. "With time, my taste perception changed and the craving slowly went away."

**Keep Going**  
Finally, be patient. If you've struggled with cravings for years, don't expect to kick them in a week. Addictive behaviors can take time to unwind.

Zinkov recalls her own struggle with cravings, from realizing that her love of sugar was triggering her acne and irritability, to recognizing that she was impulsively drawn to starchy snacks during stressful moments in her life. But even as she gained more understanding, sometimes she could say "no" to cheesecake, and other times she couldn't.

"Then I went a decade without it. I had done so much work to unwind those pathways and rebuild myself from within," she said. "It was so liberating to feel like I was in control."



**Movement is one of the most effective ways to manage the emotions that drive food cravings.**



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FOOD AS MEDICINE

# Can an Onion a Day Keep the Doctor Away?

## What Onions Can Be Good For

The healing potential of this nutrient rich, low calorie vegetable has been valued for millennia

Continued from Page 1

- Calcium, 16.1 milligrams (mg)
- Magnesium, 7 mg
- Potassium, 102 mg
- Vitamin C, 5.18 mg
- Choline, 4.27 mg

Onions are also surprisingly high in beneficial polyphenols. This group of plant compounds plays an important role in the prevention and reduction of diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular diseases. In a comparison of the polyphenol and antioxidant capacity between red and yellow onions, researchers found the outer layers of the onions had the highest number of total polyphenols and flavonoids.

The outer layers of both types of onions also had the highest antioxidant activity. However, overall, the red onion had better antioxidant activity, with a higher number of total polyphenols and flavonoids that were associated with antioxidant activity. Onions have more than 25 varieties of flavonoids that help prevent cellular damage contributing to chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

In addition to the calcium content promoting strong bones, onions may also relieve oxidative stress, which in turn decreases bone loss and can help prevent osteoporosis. Onions are also good sources of vitamins A and K, which in addition to vitamin C help protect your skin from ultraviolet rays. Vitamin C also helps your body produce collagen, a structural support for your skin and hair.

### Prebiotic Compound Has Multiple Benefits

Prebiotics are the indigestible fiber that helps nourish the beneficial bacteria in your body. In turn, these bacteria help with food digestion and absorption of nutrients, as well as play a significant role in the function of your immune system. One of these prebiotics is inulin, a water-soluble form of dietary fiber that's found in onions.

Inulin is found in thousands of species of plants, but most experts agree that chicory root is the richest source with up to 20 g of inulin per 100 g in weight. Jerusalem artichokes, garlic, asparagus, and raw onion are also significant sources, with Jerusalem artichokes measuring up to 19 g and raw onion measuring from 5 to 9 g.

Your gut thrives on adequate amounts of fiber as it helps improve digestive health and relieves constipation. In one study, researchers found those who took inulin had bowel movements with improved stool consistency. Another study showed older adults experienced better digestion with less constipation.

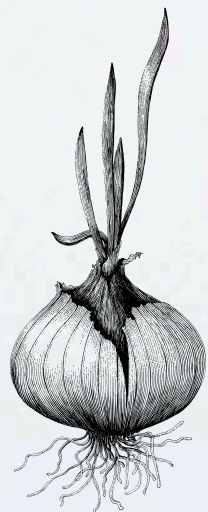
In addition to feeding the beneficial bacteria in your gut microbiome, inulin also demonstrates the ability to promote weight loss and reduce liver fat cells in people who are pre-diabetic.

Since inulin is colorless, has a neutral taste, and is highly soluble, manufacturers are adding it to food products to help increase the fiber content of processed foods. In a review of inulin studies pub-

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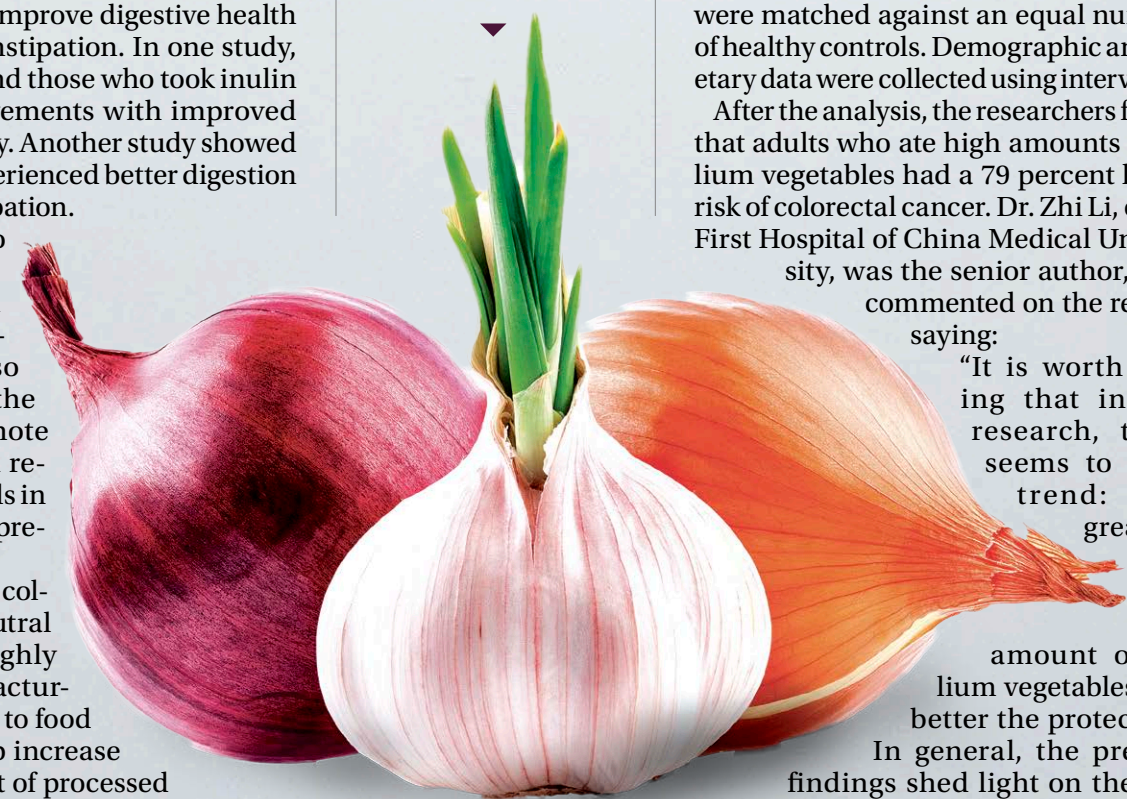


Gaius Plinius Secundus (A.D. 23/24–79), aka Pliny the Elder.



Onions might've been one of the first cultivated crops since they are easy to grow and transport, and have a long shelf life.

Onions are surprisingly high in beneficial polyphenols.



lished in U.S. Pharmacist, the data showed inulin also has an effect on mineral absorption and a potential effect on lipid levels. Lipids are the key building blocks of cells but having too many can contribute to heart disease.

Several studies showed inulin helps improve calcium absorption, which is highly beneficial in the onion since it is also a rich source of calcium. Overall, the data on the effect on lipids were mixed as most studies had a small number of participants. However, past research has shown that soluble fiber does lower lipid levels.

In one study of women who had Type 2 diabetes, the researchers found those who used inulin had better glycemic control. It also appears that flavonoid-rich foods such as onions may help inhibit the growth of *H. pylori*, a type of bacteria responsible for most ulcers.

### Allium Vegetables Linked to Cancer Prevention

Onions are a member of the allium family, which also includes garlic, leeks, shallots, and chives.

Allium vegetables are popular in different dishes worldwide and some epidemiological studies have found an association between people eating large amounts of allium vegetables and a reduced risk of cancer, particularly in the gastrointestinal tract.

The majority of these studies have come from mechanistic research or studies that are "designed to understand a biological or behavioral process, the pathophysiology of a disease, or the mechanism of action of an intervention."

Some of these have been clinical trials evaluating the mechanism sulfur compounds in allium vegetables have on bioactivation of carcinogens and antimicrobial activities. In a review of the literature published in Cancer Prevention Research, researchers found: "Allium vegetables and their components have effects at each stage of carcinogenesis and affect many biological processes that modify cancer risk."

In early 2019, a study published in the Asia-Pacific Journal of Clinical Oncology revealed the results of an analysis of 833 patients with colorectal cancer who were matched against an equal number of healthy controls. Demographic and dietary data were collected using interviews.

After the analysis, the researchers found that adults who ate high amounts of allium vegetables had a 79 percent lower risk of colorectal cancer. Dr. Zhi Li, of the First Hospital of China Medical University, was the senior author, who commented on the results saying:

"It is worth noting that in our research, there seems to be a trend: the greater the

amount of allium vegetables, the better the protection.

In general, the present findings shed light on the primary prevention of colorectal cancer



Red onion has better antioxidant activity than yellow onion.



The outer layers of an onion have the highest antioxidant activity.

through lifestyle intervention, which deserves further in-depth explorations."

Angela Lemond, spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, agrees that onions are one of the richest sources of dietary flavonoids and these compounds have antioxidant effects.

"Foods that are high in antioxidants and amino acids allow your body to function optimally. Antioxidants help prevent damage and cancer. Amino acids are the basic building block for protein, and protein is used in virtually every vital function in the body."

### Onions feed the beneficial bacteria in your gut microbiome.

#### Quercetin Linked to Blood Pressure and Immune Function

Quercetin is another antioxidant flavonoid found in high concentrations in onions and linked to several health benefits. Researchers in Korea have found some onions store quercetin in the outer layers and others have a higher concentration in the inner layers.

Red onions and chartreuse onions have the highest levels in the outer layers, whereas yellow onion has the highest levels of quercetin in the inner layer. In the Korean study, data showed the yellow onions had more total quercetin than red on-

ions, and chartreuse onions had the highest level overall.

The most common onions are red, yellow, and white, whereas chartreuse is a relatively rare genetic genotype. There are two main classes of flavonoids in onions; anthocyanins that are responsible for the color of red onions and quercetin that is responsible for the yellow and brown skins of other varieties.

In one review of the literature, researchers in Italy evaluated the anti-obesity activity of onions and their effect on related comorbidities. Analysis revealed studies that demonstrated "quercetin-rich onion peel extract" could inhibit fat cell generation in the lab and an animal model.

Additionally, they found raw extract could reduce blood sugar in an animal model after 24 hours and had the potential for pancreatic beta cell regeneration. The benefits extended to overweight and obese patients with high blood pressure who used concentrations of quercetin extracted from onion skin.

In this study, a group of participants took three capsules each day, and while there was no difference in blood pressure measurements in the total group, blood pressure was significantly reduced in the subgroup of participants who had high blood pressure.

As I've written in the past, quercetin in combination with vitamin C has a powerful effect on your immune system and specifically to help prevent COVID-19. Since 1 cup of chopped onions provides 13.11 percent of your recommended daily

amount of vitamin C, onions are a healthy addition to your daily nutritional intake. The benefits to your immune system are extensive according to a review of available research that was published in 2016 in Molecules.

"Quercetin is known for its antioxidant activity in radical scavenging and anti-allergic properties characterized by stimulation of immune system, antiviral activity, inhibition of histamine release, decrease in pro-inflammatory cytokines, leukotrienes creation, and suppresses interleukin IL-4 production.

"It can improve the Th1/Th2 balance, and restrain antigen-specific IgE antibody formation. It is also effective in the inhibition of enzymes such as lipoxygenase, eosinophil, and peroxidase and the suppression of inflammatory mediators," noted the review.

#### How to Pick, Peel, and Store Your Onions

Whether you're harvesting from your own garden or selecting onions at the grocery store, use those that are dry and firm. Once they reach the end of their long shelf life, the flesh begins to get soft and moist. The onion should have little or no scent before you begin cutting.

As you peel the onion, take off the least amount of skin from the outer layer. As with many other vegetables, the outer layers are packed with antioxidants, which are best used in your meal and not in the garbage or compost pile.

The chemical properties of onions that make them savory are the same that trigger your tears as you're peeling and chopping. These are sulfur compounds the plant uses in chemical warfare against predators. As you slice an onion, it produces a sulfur-based gas. This reacts with your tears and forms the familiar irritation triggered by a sulfenic acid substrate.

To reduce the effect, try standing farther away so as the gas is released it disperses before reaching your face. You can also try cutting onions in front of a fan that blows the gas away from you. Try refrigerating the onions for 30 minutes and leaving the roots intact as you're cutting and peeling. According to the National Onion Association, the roots have the highest concentration of sulfur.

Onions should be stored in a cool, dry, and well-ventilated area. Instead of a plastic bag, consider wrapping each in a paper towel before placing in the refrigerator. The sweeter the onion, the higher the water content, which means sweet onions have a shorter shelf life than other types of onions.

If learning about the health benefits of eating onions has inspired you to include them in your meal planning, then you'll want to check out the National Onion Association Guide to help choose the different types of onions, their flavors, and how they are best prepared. You'll also find this and more health information about onions on Mercola.com.

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

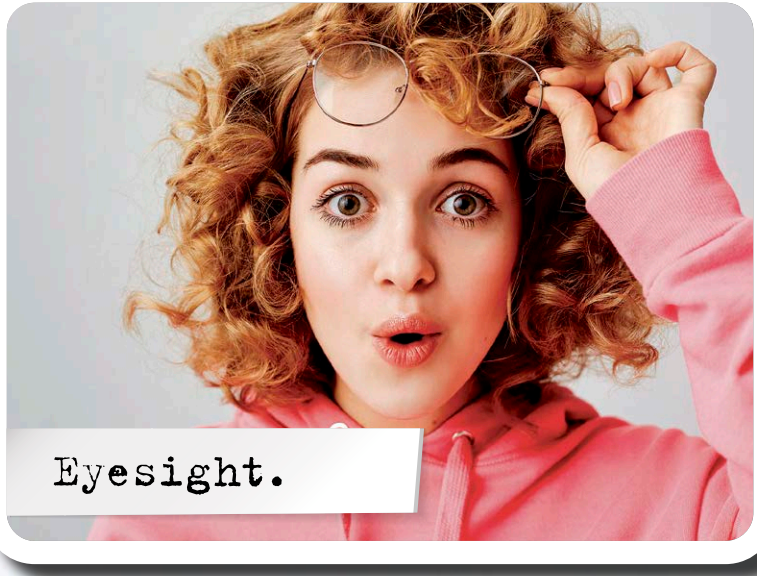
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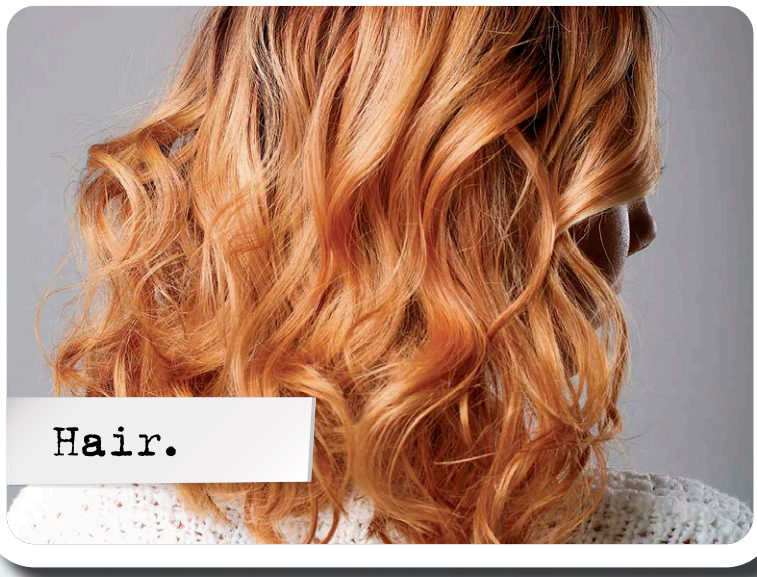
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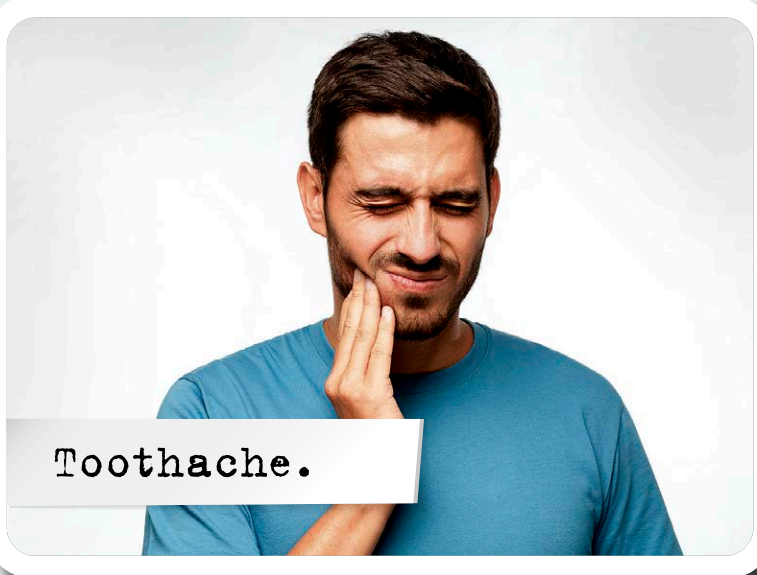
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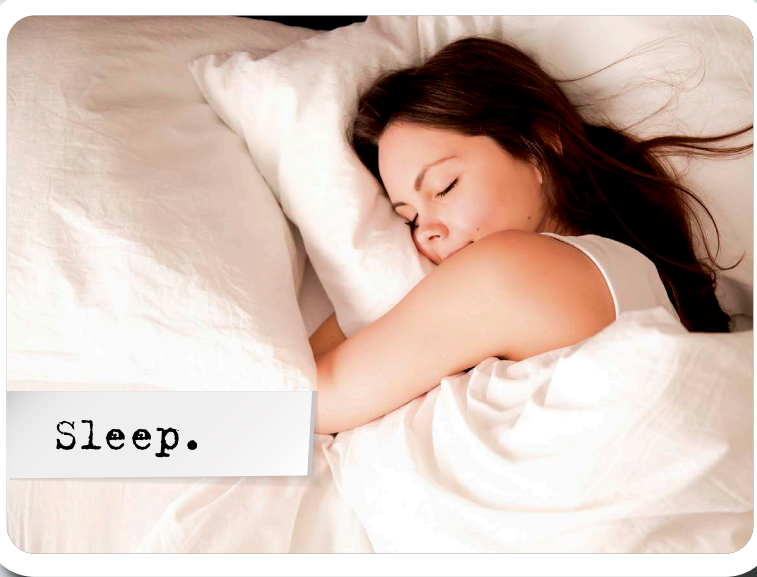
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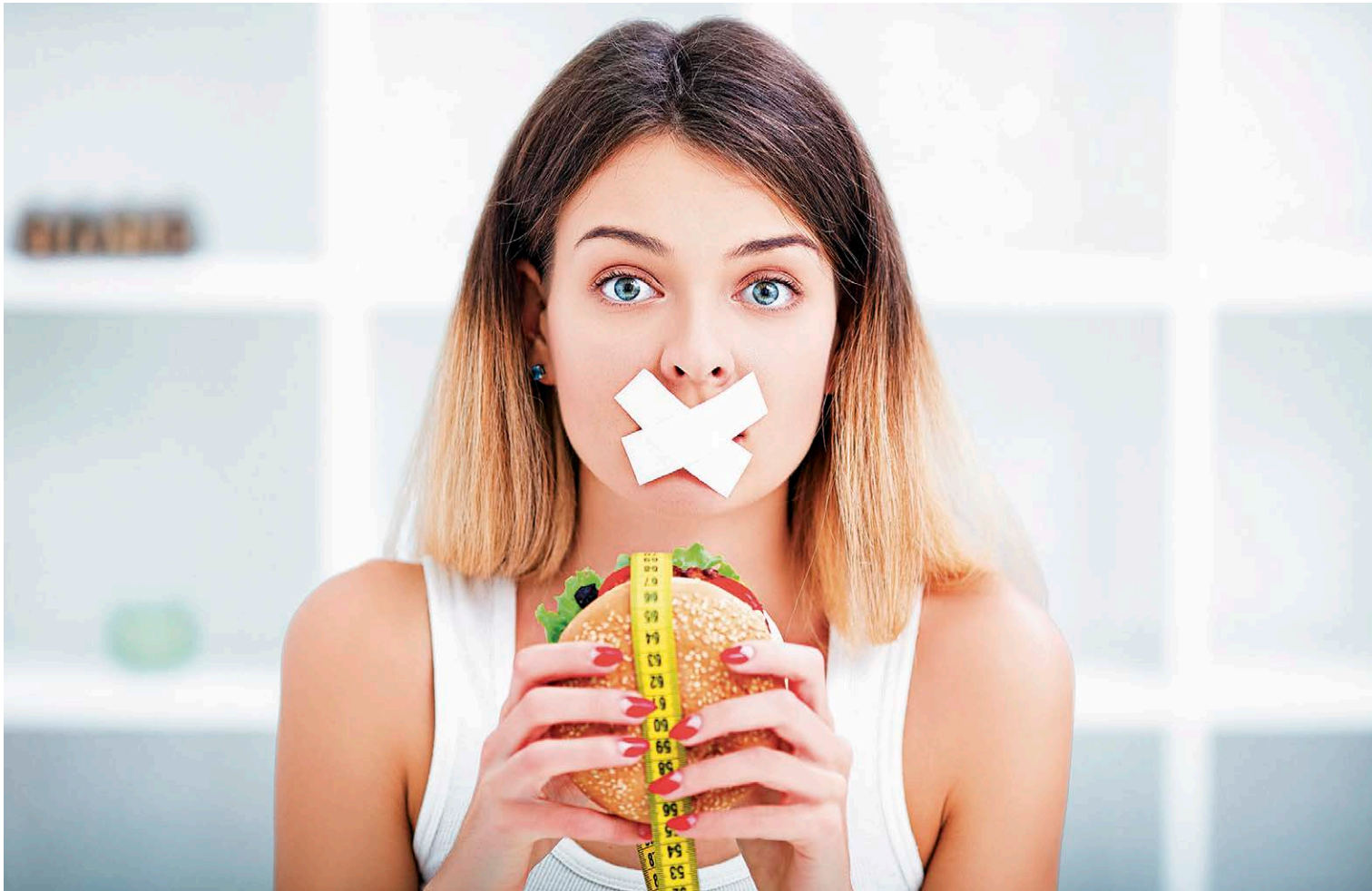


Sleep.



Eating large amounts of onions is linked to reduced risk of certain types of cancer.





Diets that aim to slim us down through radical food restrictions are nothing new.

# The Fad Diets Popular in the 20th Century

MYRIAM WILKS-HEEG

Fad diets certainly aren't a 21st-century obsession. In fact, they were also a popular way for people throughout the 20th century to slim down and improve their health. Though much has changed since then—including what we know about dieting and weight loss—many of the popular fad diets we follow today share similarities with those followed in the 20th century.

**The Early 1900s**  
Regulating body weight became a significant concern in the 1900s, thanks to emerging evidence about the links between obesity and mortality. Like many diets today, early 20th-century diets emphasized low carb and no sugar.

One of the most popular diets in the early 1900s was the Banting diet, invented by English undertaker William Banting in 1863, who had used the diet to help him lose weight when he was obese. The diet appeared in many health manuals and women's magazines, recommending people follow a high protein, low carbohydrate plan that avoided pork, beer, potatoes, and bread.

The Banting diet's focus on avoiding carbohydrates set the trend for other popular diets at the time. For example, the dry diet instructed users to consume only one pint of fluid per day, no soups, sauces, or alcohol, and to avoid pastry, puddings, white bread, potatoes, and sugar. Another diet plan published in Home Science Magazine in 1905 told readers to avoid carbs, excess fluids, desserts, and to walk four miles a day.

Until the 1920s, weight loss wasn't an exclusively female domain. But by the interwar period (the 1920s and '30s), medical concerns over body weight were equaled by popular notions of beauty that called



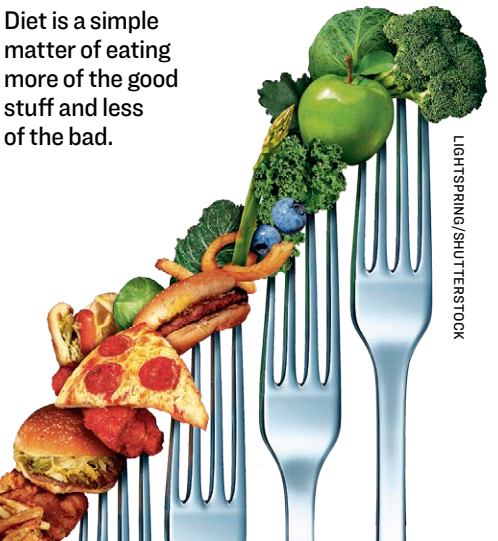
Losing weight through quick diets are often a recipe for later weight gain.

Despite the knowledge we now have about losing weight through dieting, fad diets continue to be popular.

for slimmness, which saw many diets being marketed exclusively at women.

The emergence of the 1920s feminine ideal of the "New Woman," with her slim outline, coupled with women having increased spending power, may have also driven the popularity of diets during this era. As detailed by the magazine Woman's Outlook, the "anti-fat reducing craze" was widespread in Britain by 1926. Home weighing scales had also become common, allowing people to easily monitor their weight. All this resulted in an abundance of diet plans and books, such as the Hay diet (invented by physician William Hay), which advocated avoiding certain food combinations to maintain the body's balance, and "Slimming for the Million" by Eustace Chesser, which eliminated carbohydrates.

Avoiding carbs remained at the center of most popular diets in interwar Britain. But some diets—such as the salad days or fast days diets—placed focus on limiting calories. For example, the 18-day diet, published in 1929 by the Daily Mail, suggested people avoid carbs and follow a strict diet. Readers were told to only eat half a grape-



Diet is a simple matter of eating more of the good stuff and less of the bad.

fruit, one egg, one slice of Melba toast, six slices of cucumber, and tea or coffee for lunch. For dinner, they were limited to two eggs, one tomato, half a head of lettuce, and half a grapefruit.

**The 1950s and '60s**

While slimming diets unsurprisingly played next to no role during wartime and rationing, the years that followed witnessed an explosion of commercial weight loss solutions, all in the name of cultivating a slim, beautiful body.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, body cultivation through dieting had firmly become a woman's domain and dieters could choose from a plethora of regimens to reduce body weight—which had increased on average as a result of the postwar consumer boom. As before, low-carbohydrate approaches dominated, including the crash diet, the third-day diet, and the daffodil diet, which claimed would "give you the slim trim figure of a Spring Daffodil."

Toward the end of the 1960s, weight loss regimens began focusing on limiting portion sizes and consuming as few calories as possible. The three-day-liquid diet from 1968, published in Woman's Own, suggested readers only consume two eggs, two pints of fresh milk, the juice from two big oranges, and one dessert spoonful of olive oil, as well as as much lemon tea or coffee as they wanted (no sugar). This was to help followers "forget sweetness."

The emergence of slimming clubs, commercialized weight loss solutions, and fad diets during this period was partly driven by a recognition of the links between obesity and ill-health. But it's also partly the result of culturally constructed beauty ideals for women that were linked to lower body weight.

**The '70s and '80s**

Popular weight loss regimes became more than just slimming diets, and, in women's magazines such as Woman's Own, were increasingly touted as self-help tools for the emancipated woman. Achieving success and inner balance required control of the body through dieting and, increasingly, exercise.

The links between fitness and health resulted in the widespread emergence of fitness studios with popular exercise classes such as aerobics—a term first coined by Kenneth Cooper in the 1960s, recommending gym workouts and high-energy movement. Regimes in the 1980s emphasized low-fat foods, which resulted from the introduction of dietary guidelines aimed at reducing fat intake in the late '70s and '80s.

The F plan diet was one of the most popular in this era, emphasizing eating high fiber and low calories—and advised that people eat foods such as muesli for breakfast, salad with pulses for lunch, and lean meats for dinner. At the end of the 20th century, diets such as Atkins or the south beach diet returned to Banting's emphasis on cutting carbs for weight loss.

Despite the knowledge we now have about losing weight through dieting, fad diets continue to be popular. Modern diets such as keto or paleo even share many similarities with the low-carb, calorie-restrictive diets popular throughout the 20th century. Yet research shows fad diets may actually lead to weight gain and disordered eating.

So while the appeal of fad diets is understandable, evidence shows a balanced diet with lots of vegetables and fruit and exercising more are the best ways to lose weight.

Myriam Wilks-Heeg is a lecturer in 20th-century history at the University of Liverpool in the UK. This article was first published on The Conversation.



New rules make it easier to price shop for health care.

# Hospital Prices Just Got a Lot More Transparent

New rules require hospitals reveal costs and pricing, but will consumers take advantage?

JULIE APPLEBY

Hospitals face the new year with new requirements to post price information they have long sought to obscure: the actual prices negotiated with insurers and the discounts they offer their cash-paying customers.

The move is part of a larger push by the Trump administration to use price transparency to curtail prices and create better-informed consumers. Yet there is disagreement on whether it will do so.

**Each hospital must make available the specific costs for 300 common and 'shoppable' services.**

As of Jan. 1, facilities must publicly post on their websites prices for every service, drug, and item they provide. Next year, under a separate rule, health insurers must take similar steps. A related effort to force drugmakers to list their prices in advertisements was struck down by the courts.

With the new hospital rule, consumers should be able to see the tremendous variation in prices for the exact same care among hospitals and get an estimate of what they will be charged

for care—before they seek it.

The new data requirements go well beyond the previous rule of requiring hospitals to post their "chargemasters," hospital-generated list prices that bear little relation to what it costs a hospital to provide care and that few consumers or insurers actually pay. Instead, under the new rule put forward by the Trump administration, "these are the real prices in health care," said Cynthia Fisher, founder and chairman of Patient Rights Advocate, a group that promotes price transparency.

**What's the Scope of the Intel?**

Here's what consumers should know:

Each hospital must post publicly online—and in a machine-readable format easy to process by computers—several prices for every item and service they provide: gross charges; the actual, and most likely far lower, prices they've negotiated with insurers, including de-identified minimum and maximum negotiated charges; and the cash price they offer patients who are uninsured or not using their insurance.

Continued on Page 12

Consumers should be able to see the tremendous variation in prices for the exact same care among hospitals and get an estimate of what they will be charged for care—before they seek it.



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# WHO Changes Definition of Herd Immunity

Public health policies, public perception potentially affected as terminology changes

JOSEPH MERCOLA

In a shocking reversal that's akin to redefining reality, the World Health Organization has changed its definition of herd immunity. Herd immunity occurs when enough people acquire immunity to an infectious disease such that it can no longer spread widely in the community. When the number susceptible is low enough to prevent epidemic growth, herd immunity is said to have been reached. Prior to the introduction of vaccines, all herd immunity was achieved via exposure to and recovery from an infectious disease. Eventually, as vaccination became widespread, the concept of herd immunity evolved to include not only the naturally acquired immunity that comes from prior illness, but also the temporary acquired immunity that can occur after vaccination. The WHO, however, quietly revised this concept in an Orwellian move that totally removes natural infection from the equation.

## Redefining Herd Immunity

In June 2020, WHO's definition of herd immunity, posted on one of its COVID-19 Q&A pages, was in line with the widely accepted concept that has been the standard for infectious diseases for decades. Here's what it originally said, courtesy of the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine:

"Herd immunity is the indirect protection from an infectious disease that happens when a population is immune either through vaccination or immunity developed through previous infection." It should be noted that "immunity developed through previous infection" is the way it has worked since humans have been alive. Your immune system isn't designed to get vaccines. It's designed to work in response to exposure to an infectious agent. Apparently, according to WHO, that's no longer the case. As of October 2020, here's their updated definition of herd immunity, which is now "a concept used for vaccination":

"Herd immunity,' also known as 'population immunity,' is a concept used for vaccination, in which a population can be protected from a certain virus if a threshold of vaccination is reached. Herd immunity is achieved by protecting people from a virus, not by exposing them to it. "Vaccines train our immune systems to create proteins that fight disease, known as 'antibodies,' just as would happen when we are exposed to a disease but—crucially—vaccines work without making us sick. Vaccinated people are protected from getting the disease in question and passing it on, breaking any chains of transmission."

This perversion of science implies that the only way to achieve herd immunity is via vaccination, which is blatantly untrue. The startling implications for society, however, are that by putting out this false information, they're attempting to change our perception of what's true and not true, leaving people believing that they must artificially manipulate their immune systems as the only way to stay safe from infectious disease.

**CDC, Others Haven't Adopted WHO's Skewed Definition**  
As of this writing, other high-profile

medical organizations haven't signed on to WHO's skewed definition of herd immunity. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, for instance, in their Vaccine Glossary of Terms, defines community immunity, also known as herd immunity, as follows: "A situation in which a sufficient proportion of a population is immune to an infectious disease (through vaccination and/or prior illness) to make its spread from person to person unlikely. Even individuals not vaccinated (such as newborns and those with chronic illnesses) are offered some protection because the disease has little opportunity to spread within the community." The Mayo Clinic, as of Jan. 6, 2020, also stated, "There are two paths to herd immunity for COVID-19—vaccines and infection," noting:

"Herd immunity can also be reached when a sufficient number of people in the population have recovered from a disease and have developed antibodies against future infection. For example, those who survived the 1918 flu (influenza) pandemic were later immune to infection with the H1N1 flu, a subtype of influenza A."

In a 2020 JAMA Patient Page on herd immunity, Dr. Angel Desai, associated editor of JAMA Network Open, and Dr. Maimuna Majumder with Boston Children's Hospital, Harvard Medical School, also explain that herd immunity may be achieved via natural infection and recovery:

"Herd immunity may be achieved either through infection and recovery or by vaccination ... Achieving herd immunity through infection relies on enough people being infected with the disease and recovering from it, during which they develop antibodies against future infection."

## Naturally Acquired Immunity Is Longer Lasting

Public health officials often state that vaccination offers you a chance to acquire immunity to an illness without having to get sick from it. What they don't typically mention, aside from the risks inherent in all vaccines, is that the resulting immunity from vaccination is not the same as that achieved via natural infection. Many vaccines do not provide long-lasting or lifelong immunity. Vaccines only confer temporary artificial immunity and sometimes they fail to do that. This is why booster shots are needed. Barbara Loe Fisher, co-founder and president of the National Vaccine Information Center (NVIC), explains why this is so problematic using the example of measles:

"What the medical literature shows is that baby boomers and the generation before us acquired natural immunity, which is qualitatively superior. It's longer-lasting than vaccine-acquired immunity." "Vaccine-acquired immunity is not the same as naturally acquired immunity. That has been the problem from the very beginning with the creation



**Data suggests some areas may have already reached the herd immunity threshold.**

"An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus appears against which the human population has no immunity, resulting in several, simultaneous epidemics worldwide with enormous numbers of deaths and illness."

This definition was changed in the month leading up to the 2009 swine flu pandemic, removing the severity and high mortality criteria and leaving the definition of a pandemic as "a worldwide epidemic of a disease."

This switch in definition allowed WHO to declare swine flu a pandemic after a mere 144 people had died from the infection, worldwide, and it's why COVID-19 is still promoted as a pandemic even though there is enough data to suggest the lethality of COVID-19 is on par with the seasonal flu.

Another example of WHO conveniently changing former truths occurred in June 2020. During a press briefing, Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead for the COVID-19 pandemic, made it very clear that people who have COVID-19 without any symptoms "rarely" transmit the disease to others. In a dramatic about-face, WHO then backtracked on the statement just one day later.

On June 9, 2020, Dr. Mike Ryan, executive director of WHO's emergencies program, quickly backpedaled Van Kerkhove's statement, saying the remarks were "misinterpreted or maybe we didn't use the most elegant words to explain that."

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, for those who aren't aware, is the biggest funder of WHO, and Bill Gates, along with Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute for Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), are among those who have stated that life can't return to normal until there is a vaccine against COVID-19.

"Humankind has never had a more urgent task than creating broad immunity for coronavirus," Gates wrote on his blog in April 2020. "Realistically, if we're going to return to normal, we need to develop a safe, effective vaccine. We need to make billions of doses, we need to get them out to every part of the world, and we need all of this to happen as quickly as possible."

Gates has even stated he "suspect[s] the COVID-19 vaccine will become part of the routine newborn immunization schedule" and has gone on record saying the U.S. needs disease surveillance and a national tracking system that could involve vaccine records embedded on our bodies (such as invisible ink quantum dot tattoos described in a Science Translational Medicine paper).

Vaccine passports, which will be attached to cellphone apps that track and trace your COVID-19 test results and vaccination status, are already here and expected to become "widely available" during the first half of 2021. The rollout of widespread COVID-19 vaccination, coupled with tracking and tracing of COVID-19 test results and vaccination status, raises concern that in the future, government authorities will have the tools for biometric surveillance and additional tracking and tracing.

What if COVID-19, which causes only minor symptoms in the majority of people—and causes no symptoms in others—has already spread throughout communities such that natural herd immunity exists? WHO quickly dismisses this possibility, stating:

"Attempts to reach 'herd immunity' through exposing people to a virus are scientifically problematic and unethical. Letting COVID-19 spread through populations, of any age or health status will lead to unnecessary infections, suffering, and death. The vast majority of people in most countries remain susceptible to this virus. Seroprevalence surveys suggest that in most countries, less than 10 percent of the population have been infected with COVID-19."

This contradicts data suggesting that some areas may already have reached the herd immunity threshold (HIT). According to The New York Times, more than a dozen scientists said in interviews that the HIT for COVID-19 is likely 50 percent or lower. "If that's true, then it may be possible to turn back the coronavirus more quickly than once thought," the Times reported, and perhaps without the need for a vaccine.

Herd immunity is calculated using reproductive number, or R-naught (R0), which is the estimated number of new infections that may occur from one infected person. R0 of below 1 (with R1 meaning that one person who's infected is expected to infect one other person) indicates that cases are declining while R0 above 1 suggests cases are on the rise.

It's far from an exact science, however, as a person's susceptibility to infection varies depending on many factors, including their health, age, and contacts within a community. The initial R0 calculations for COVID-19's HIT were based on assumptions that everyone has the same susceptibility and would be mixing randomly with others in the community.

"That doesn't happen in real life," Dr. Saad Omer, director of the Yale Institute for Global Health, told The Times. "Herd immunity could vary from group to group, and subpopulation to subpopulation," or even ZIP code.

When real-world scenarios are factored into the equation, the HIT drops significantly, with some experts saying it could be as low as 10 percent to 20 percent. In fact, as the Times suggested, it's possible that herd immunity for the pandemic is "ahead of schedule."

Researchers from Oxford, Virginia Tech, and the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine are among those that found when individual variations in susceptibility and exposure are taken into account, the HIT declines to less than 10 percent. By that number, and using WHO's estimate that less than 10 percent of the population has already been infected, the HIT could already be met or quickly approaching—all via naturally acquired immunity.

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

of these vaccines. They have never understood how to make vaccines mimic naturally acquired immunity exactly."

"I think the most shocking part, whenever I go into the medical literature, is understanding how much they do not know about the functioning of the immune system, about how infections confer immunity and how vaccines stimulate artificial immunity."

## WHO Also Changed the Definition of 'Pandemic'

The WHO had previously changed the definition of "pandemic," in a way that could have affected how we classify COVID-19. The WHO's original definition of a pandemic from May 1, 2009, specified simultaneous epidemics worldwide "with enormous numbers of deaths and illnesses:"

**Your immune system is designed to work in response to exposure to an infectious agent.**



**The value of a vaccine should be weighed against the cost of natural immunity.**



# Hospital Prices Just Got a Lot More Transparent

New rules require hospitals reveal costs and pricing, but will consumers take advantage?

Continued from Page 9

In addition, each hospital must make available, in a “consumer-friendly format,” the specific costs for 300 common and “shoppable” services, such as having a baby, getting a joint replacement, having a hernia repair, or undergoing a diagnostic brain scan.

Those 300 bundles of procedures and services must total all costs involved—from the hardware used to the operating room time, to drugs given and the fees of hospital-employed physicians—so patients won’t have to attempt the nearly impossible job of figuring it out themselves.

Hospitals can mostly select which services fall into this category, although the federal government has dictated 70 that must be listed—including certain surgeries, diagnostic tests, imaging scans, new patient visits, and psychotherapy sessions.

### Will Prices Be Exact?

No. At best, these are ballpark figures. Other factors influence consumers’ costs, like the type of insurance plan a patient has, the size and remaining amount of the annual deductible, and the complexity of the medical problem.

An estimate on a surgery, for example, might prove inexact. If all goes as expected, the price quoted likely will be close. But unexpected complications could add to the cost.

“You’ll get the average price, but you are not average,” said Gerard Anderson, a professor of health policy and management at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health who studies hospital pricing.

Tools to help consumers determine in advance the amount of deductible they’ll owe are already available from many insurers. And experts expect the additional information being made available this month will prompt entrepreneurs to create their own apps or services to help consumers analyze the price data.

For now, though, the hospital requirements are a worthy start, say experts.

“It’s very good news for consumers,” said George Naton, a professor of law and business at Lehigh University who studies hospital pricing. “Individuals will be able to get price information, although how much they are going to use it will remain to be seen.”



New rules put in place by the Trump administration to help consumers price shop for health care services could shake up the hospital business.

### Who Will Use This Info?

Zack Cooper, an associate professor of public health and economics at Yale, doubts that the data alone will make much of a difference for most consumers.

“It’s not likely that my neighbor—or me, for that matter—will go on and look at prices and, therefore, dramatically change decisions about where to get care,” he said.

Some cost information is already made available by insurers to their enrollees, particularly out-of-pocket costs for elective services, “but most people don’t consult it,” he added.

That could be because many consumers carry types of insurance in which they pay flat-dollar copayments for such things as doctor visits, drugs, or hospital stays that have no correlation to the underlying charges.

Still, the information may be of great interest to the uninsured and to the increasing number of Americans with high-deductible plans, in which they are responsible for hundreds or even thousands of dollars in costs annually before the insurer begins picking up the bulk of the cost.

For them, the negotiated rate and cash discount information may prove more useful, said Naton at Lehigh.

“If I have a \$10,000 deductible plan and it’s December and I’m not close to meeting that, I may go to a hospital and try to get the cash price,” said Naton.

Employers, however, may have a keen

interest in the new data, said James Gelfand, senior vice president at the ERISA Industry Committee, which lobbies on behalf of large employers that offer health insurance to their workers. They’ll want to know how much they are paying each hospital compared with others in the area and how well their insurers stack up in negotiating rates, he said.

For some employers, he said, it could be eye-opening to see how hospitals cross-subsidize by charging exorbitant amounts for some things and minimal amounts for others.

“The rule puts that all into the light,” said Gelfand. “When an employer sees these ridiculous prices, for the first time, they will have the ability to say ‘no.’” That could mean rejecting specific prices or the hospital entirely, cutting it out of the employer plan’s insurance network. But, typically, employers can’t or won’t limit workers’ choices by outright cutting a hospital from an insurance network.

More likely, they may use the information to create financial incentives to use the lowest-cost facilities, said Anderson at Johns Hopkins.

“If I’m an employer, I’ll look at three hospitals in my area and say, ‘I’ll pay the price for the lowest one. If you want to go to one of the other two, you can pay the difference,’” said Anderson.

**Will Transparency Reduce Spending?** Revealing actual negotiated prices, as

this rule requires, may push the more expensive hospitals in an area to reduce prices in future bargaining talks with insurers or employers, potentially lowering health spending in those regions.

It could also go the other way, with lower-cost hospitals demanding a raise, driving up spending.

Bottom line: Price transparency can help, but the market power of the various players might matter more.

In some places, where there may be one dominant hospital, even employers “who know they are getting ripped off” may not feel they can cut out a big, brand-name facility from their networks, no matter the price, said Anderson.

### Is the Rule Change a Done Deal?

The hospital industry went to court, arguing that parts of the rule go too far, violating their First Amendment rights and also unfairly forcing hospitals to disclose trade secrets. That information, the industry said, can then be used against them in negotiations with insurers and employers.

But the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia disagreed with the hospitals and upheld the rule, prompting an appeal by the industry. On Dec. 29, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia affirmed that lower-court decision and did not block the rule.

In a written statement last week, the American Hospital Association’s general counsel cited “disappointment” with the ruling and said the organization is “reviewing the decision carefully to determine next steps.”

“Hospitals are fighting this because they want to keep their negotiated deals with insurers secret,” said Fisher. “What these rules do is give the American consumer the power of being informed.”

*Julie Appleby is a senior correspondent who reports on the health law's implementation, health care treatments and costs, trends in health insurance, and policy affecting hospitals and other medical providers. This article was originally published on Kaiser Health News, which is a national health policy news service. It is an editorially independent program of the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, which is not affiliated with Kaiser Permanente.*



Researchers are delving into coffee's many benefits.

## Coffee Boosts Survival in Colorectal Cancer Patients

Coffee is loaded with antioxidants, has anti-inflammatory properties, and can protect against disease

Does coffee help you get through the day? If so, you may be poised to live a longer, healthier life thanks to these truly magical beans.

Coffee, one of the world’s most popular beverages, is revealing a range of potential health benefits. Loaded with antioxidants, coffee has been shown to imbue anti-inflammatory properties and disease protection when consumed in moderation.

Researchers at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute published a large observational study nested within a clinical trial of novel drug treatments for patients with colorectal cancer. The study, published in the journal JAMA Oncology, analyzed dietary patterns and long-term health outcomes for a cohort of patients who had completed phase three of the randomized clinical trial sponsored by the National Cancer Institute.

Data was collected from more than 1,500 patients being treated for advanced or metastatic colorectal cancer. Dietary intake and lifestyle questionnaires were obtained during and post-treatment, then correlated and analyzed for patterns over time.

Specific analysis of coffee intake was included, with participants being excluded from the coffee cohort for aberrant caloric intake (less than 600 or more than 4200 calories for men; or less than 500 or more than 3500 calories for women) and if cancer had worsened or death had occurred within 90 days of enrollment. Final data analysis was performed on information from 1,171 patients.

Patients who reported drinking 2 to 3 cups of coffee a day were likely to live longer overall and had a longer time before their disease worsened compared to those who didn’t drink coffee. In good news for the caffeine-sensitive, the anticancer benefits were observed in both caffeinated and decaffeinated coffee drinkers.

These results confirmed the findings of prior studies on coffee’s effects on cancer and add scientific weight to coffee’s growing reputation as a disease-fighting superfood. But can more of a good thing be too much?

### Another Cup of Coffee?

Despite such promising research findings, many believe that drinking multiple cups of coffee each day can lead to ill health. For individuals with caf-

feine sensitivities, moderation should be exercised. That being said, for the colorectal cancer patients enrolled in this study, the benefits increased the more coffee they consumed.

The impressive life-extending and cancer-delaying benefits were observed at 2 to 3 cups daily, however the greatest measure of benefit was observed in patients who consumed four or more cups each day.

Researchers posit that these benefits may be related to coffee’s ability to decrease blood insulin levels by sensitizing tissues to the effects of insulin, or to coffee’s antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and antiangiogenic (tumor-inhibiting) effects.

**Patients who reported drinking two to three cups of coffee a day were likely to live longer overall and had a longer time before their disease worsened.**

### Coffee's Anticancer Effects

While this study highlights the association between daily coffee consumption and improved outcomes in patients with metastatic colorectal cancer, the authors point out that association doesn’t equal causation and further study is needed to determine if there is a causal relationship.

According to senior author, Dr. Kimmie Ng, “Although it is premature to recommend a high intake of coffee as a potential treatment for colorectal cancer, our study suggests that drinking coffee is not harmful and may potentially be beneficial.”

Since coffee’s anticancer effects have been demonstrated on a variety of different cancers, including colorectal, liver, breast, head, and neck cancers, its potential as an anticancer treatment is attracting attention from researchers.

A meta-analysis examining coffee consumption and colorectal cancer risk detected a significant protective

effect from coffee in seven U.S. studies. But the health benefits of coffee may offer a veil of protection for both body and mind.

### Coffee for Disease Prevention, Longer Life

Coffee consumption was the focus of a meta-analysis of the PubMed and Web of Science research databases through March 2019 reviewing 40 studies involving nearly 4 million individuals. Researchers found that intakes of around 3.5 cups of coffee per day lowered the risk of all-cause mortality, results that were irrespective of age, weight, alcohol consumption, smoking status, and caffeine content of the coffee.

Another impressive benefit of coffee involves its ability to stabilize the body’s insulin response. In a meta-analysis published in the American Diabetes Association’s Diabetes Care journal, which included 28 studies involving more than 1.1 million people, coffee consumption was shown to be inversely associated with the risk of Type 2 diabetes, another effect that was dose-dependent and applied to both caffeinated and decaffeinated coffee types.

### Coffee: Good for Energy and Mood

While the energy-boosting effects of coffee are legendary, did you know that coffee can also improve your mood? A 2011 study showed that coffee can stimulate the release of dopamine, the neurotransmitter associated with enhanced mood effects, in the brain. That said, some people also experience a drop in mood after the coffee buzz wears off.

To learn more about the holistic benefits of coffee, explore the scientific abstracts on GreenMedInfo.com.

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## Sweet Foods That Can Help You Manage Blood Sugar

Retrain your taste buds with a gradual change from added sugars to naturally sweet foods



Fruit offers a real alternative to sugary snacks—once you’ve given your taste buds a chance to reset.

### MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

Cutting sugar from your diet isn’t easy. Sugar cravings kick hard and can be difficult to ignore. Worse, sugar is lurking in a number of products that you may never suspect.

Although it might be difficult, limiting sugar is an essential component of good health. And if you’re trying to control blood sugar or battling a condition such as heart disease or diabetes, it’s essential.

Cutting sugar cold-turkey is nearly impossible. Added sugars take sweetness to a level that can’t be matched by natural foods. So, regardless of the “sweet foods” you eat, it seems like the sensation you seek is unreachable.

Artificial sweeteners can make it even harder. These products are often significantly sweeter than sugar and can make cravings even stronger.

Instead, try cutting sugar incrementally. Cut out products with added sugars that don’t taste sweet. Next, try cutting back on the amount of sugar you add to coffee or tea or the amount of soda you drink each day.

Over time, your taste buds will adjust, and naturally sweet foods such as apples, berries, and even plain yogurt can hit you with the sweetness you’re looking for.

Here’s a list of some naturally sweet foods that can help manage blood sugar, reduce the risk of illness, and add some healthful sweetness to your diet:

- Apples
- Pears
- Berries
- Melons
- Mangoes
- Grapes
- Dark chocolate (in small servings)
- Chia seeds (for chia pudding)
- Nuts
- Sweet potato
- Plain yogurt (with nuts/nut butter/berries)
- Flavored whey protein (usually has artificial sweetener, but does have plenty of nutritional value to help with a craving)
- Chewing gum

Each of these items is naturally sweet and can help you get over a craving. Remember to give your taste buds time to recalibrate because these items are much less sweet than straight sugar or other sweeteners. Give yourself a couple of weeks to adjust: a small sacrifice for a much healthier future.

**Your taste buds will adjust, and naturally sweet foods such as apples and berries can hit you with the sweetness you’re looking for.**

*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.*

### FOOD AS MEDICINE

## Herbs to Boost Immunity—Deliciously

Take healthy foods to new and potent places with herbs that help keep you healthy

### SACIA ASHE

Immunity takes on increased importance in the midst of COVID-19, cold winter days, and cold and flu season. Luckily, food can play an integral and delicious role in boosting our ability to fight disease.

A nutrient-poor diet increases our susceptibility to illness. While no one food can improve the health of a person with inadequate eating habits, there are ingredients that can offer a meaningful boost to someone with a diet rich with fresh, healthy foods.

An easy and tasty way to increase the immune-boosting properties of any meal is with spices. Some spices can help lower inflammation and keep the immune system humming along. Others can help warm the body from the inside out, helping to stave off any chills as the weather gets colder.

### Turmeric

Turmeric is a bright spot, literally, in the world of spices. With its distinctive yellow, turmeric is a bold spice with a long list of researched therapeutic uses. Among other things, it helps to lower inflammation in the body, which means that the immune system can fight invaders instead of misfiring and attacking the body, aka, chronic inflammation.

Curcumin, turmeric’s most important compound, fights against free radicals, in-



### Garlic

Garlic is a potent immune-boosting spice that can help reduce the severity of cold and flu symptoms. Garlic is also an anti-inflammatory and can help stimulate the immune system.

Studies have shown that garlic can even lower blood pressure. Garlic can easily be incorporated into dishes with other immune-boosting spices for a supercharged meal. While some people swear by eating raw garlic to fight a cold, there isn’t evidence to show that consuming raw garlic trumps cooked.

Overall, spices are a great way to help support the immune system during these trying times. However, it’s important to remember that you can’t out spice a bad diet! Fortunately, spices can make eating nutritious foods exciting and new. Try to incorporate herbs in your diet daily—they’re sure to enhance your health and spice up your plate.

*Sacia Ashe is a dancer, health food lover, and blogger who has a passion for wellness. Through sharing recipes, glimpses into her own life, and wellness tips and products, she strives to help others find a life that aligns with their values and health vision.*

▲ Ginger combats nausea; garlic is anti-inflammatory.

**Some spices can help lower inflammation and keep the immune system humming along.**





Classical music may not have the thumping beats most people consider essential to a workout playlist, but it does have what you need to take your mind off the pain.

# Classical Music Could Upgrade Your Exercise Playlist

Classical music helps us exercise by distracting us from our pain and fatigue

COSTAS KARAGEORGHIS, DAWN ROSE & ELIAS MOUCHLIANITIS

For many people, an essential part of any exercise regime is the music that accompanies it. Whether you're a runner, a rower, or a bodybuilder, there's a good chance you have a favorite selection of tunes and some headphones to help you through. The right choice of music can inspire, energize and provide much needed distraction. Elite athletes of every discipline are often seen deep in thought, their ears covered by snazzy headphones in the moments ahead of a big match or race. So what is it about music that helps us to push our bodies toward or through physical discomfort? We've been exploring this question using a variety of scientific methods. So far, most of our focus had been on various forms of popular music, including rock, dance, hip-hop, and R&B, but recently we have been considering the benefits of classical music as an auditory aid to exercise. As a genre, it is easy to see why classical music appears to be overlooked in terms of people's choice of workout soundtrack. It often lacks a rhythmic "groove," and when there are lyrics, they're not easy to sing along with. Yet there's an inherent and timeless beauty attached to many pieces from the classical repertoire that might justify their use. Think of the scintillating majesty of Beethoven's Eroica Symphony.

So how can we tap into the beauty of such music and use the sonic peaks and troughs to our advantage during a workout? First, we must understand what the benefits of any music might be in the context of physical exercise. The role of any workout music is to dull the pain, raise the spirits, and possibly make

time pass a little faster. Scientists refer to the "dissociative effects" of music, meaning that it helps to distract the mind from internal fatigue-related symptoms. Recent neuroimaging work by our group has shown the propensity for music to reduce exercise consciousness—essentially, the parts of the brain that communicate fatigue communicate less when music is playing. And although music can't reduce exercisers' perceptions of exertion at very high work intensity, it can influence the mood-related areas of the brain right up until the point of voluntary exhaustion. So an aesthetically pleasing piece, such as the finale of the William Tell Overture, won't affect what you feel when your lungs are burning on the treadmill, but might influence how you feel it. In essence, pleasant music can color one's interpretation of fatigue and enhance the exercise experience. It doesn't stop at feelings and perceptions though. Music can also have an "ergogenic" or work-enhancing effect. The psychologist Mária Rendi used slow and fast movements from Beethoven's Symphony No. 7 in A major (op. 92) to examine how music tempo influenced sprint rowing performance over 500 meters. Her findings indicated that both kinds of music led to faster sprint times compared to a no-music control, with the faster tempo (144 beats per minute) leading to a 2.0 percent performance improvement, and the slower one (76bpm), a 0.6 percent improvement.

**Classically Trained** Some members of our team often listen to classical music during a daily run. We find that classical music fires the imagination and generally augments the running experience, particularly when enjoyed in tandem with an inspiring landscape. But perhaps classical music has the

The role of any workout music is to dull the pain, raise the spirits, and possibly make time pass a little faster.



most potent effect when used either before or immediately after exercise. Pre-exercise, its central function is to build energy, conjure positive imagery, and inspire movement. Pieces such as Vangelis's Chariots of Fire, the title track of the eponymous movie, with its pulsating underlying rhythm and familiar cinematic link to glory, can work particularly well. For a post-workout application, the music needs to be calming and revitalizing in order to expedite the body's return to a resting state. An archetypal piece for this is Erik Satie's Gymnopédie No. 1, a timeless piano solo that envelopes the listener and treats tired muscles to a sonic massage. To optimize your choice of classical music for exercise, it's important to think of the energy that will be expended during different segments of a workout. The warm-up and stretching will be at a relatively low intensity and the session then builds gradually toward its heart-pumping zenith, with a period of warm-down and revitalization to end. Music selection—of any genre—should ideally follow the path of energy expenditure in a workout session (see the list below for some suggestions). Likewise, a particular piece could be saved for those segments that the exerciser finds most arduous, like high-intensity cardio. Overall, whether classical music and exercise are a good match is something each of us needs to decide—musical taste is very personal. But why not mix it up a little? Variety in exercise keeps us fresh and invigorated, so consider a switch in musical accompaniment to keep yourself moving. Swap the rave music for Ravel and substitute breakbeat with a glorious blast of Beethoven. And if you want some inspiration, here is a playlist compiled by Brunel University London research assistant Luke Howard:

1. Boléro, by Maurice Ravel, with an average tempo of 70bpm, is excellent for mental preparation before you move. The gentle start, with a tempo close to resting heart rate, belies the transcendent power of this classic.
2. Juba Dance, from Symphony No. 1 in E minor, by Florence Price, is an engaging symphonic piece that will gently elevate the heart rate during a warm-up phase. It ends with an exhilarating crescendo, leaving you suitably ready for what's to come.
3. Part IV. Finale, Allegro Assai, Symphony No. 40 in G minor, by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, is a rousing musical work for low-to-moderate intensity segments of your workout. It features what is known as a "Mannheim rocket," a roller coaster of a melody, which will get the heart and lungs pumping.
4. Prélude to Act 1 of Carmen, by Georges Bizet, has a rip-roaring tempo (128bpm) that whisks you through any demanding high-intensity segments of your workout. The exquisite melodic and harmonic features of this piece enable you to dissociate from the pain.
5. Concerto No. 1 in E Major, Op. 8, 'La Primavera', by Antonio Vivaldi, is great for a warm-down, and keeping a spring in your stride as you gradually return toward a resting state. The beautifully orchestrated strings give this opus a pronounced recuperative quality.

Costas Karageorghis is a professor of sport and exercise psychology and the divisional lead for sport, health, and exercise sciences at Brunel University London. Dawn Rose is a senior researcher at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Switzerland. Elias Mouchlianitis is a postdoctoral research fellow at Brunel University London. This article was first published on The Conversation.



# Ready to Try an Old Approach to a New Year's Resolution?

Saint Ignatius offers guidance on holding to long-term goals for self growth

GORDON RIXON

Making and breaking New Year's resolutions is a familiar and discouraging annual ritual for many people. Almost inevitably, in a few short weeks, maybe around now, many find they are unable to meet their goals of self-improvement, be it keeping a positive attitude, improving one's health, or looking for the best in people. Some might even feel diminished as a result of this failure. The problem, I believe, is that most people set their resolutions without identifying a practical path for the journey. As a scholar of systematic theology, I believe that Saint Ignatius of Loyola, a 16th-century Spanish courtier, provides insightful guidance. He managed to reverse his life's direction to pursue a spiritual path.

**Who Was Ignatius?** Born in 1491, Íñigo, later known as Ignatius, was the youngest son of a minor noble family in the Basque region of Spain who left home at the age of 18 to win his place at the royal court. More than a decade later, as he lay confined to bed recuperating from injuries suffered in the Battle of Pamplona against the French, he daydreamed about potential future exploits at court or service to God and humanity.

It was at that time that he started to notice the subtle development of his feelings. When he dreamed about courtly heroism he later felt depleted, but when he reflected on serving God he felt a deep, lasting, and energizing peace. Reflection about his growing self-awareness led him to make a radical change in the direction of his life. He chose to put aside his quest for glory to serve God and creation, especially his fellow humans, whether friends or strangers. He met a group of university students who became his companions. In 1540, they together founded the Society of Jesus, commonly known as the Jesuits, a community of priests and brothers that became known throughout the world for spiritual development, preparatory and university education, and justice advocacy.

**Challenges Before Ignatius** This path wasn't smooth for Ignatius. In the course of his work, he suffered many setbacks, such as suspicion and rejection by church authorities, but he came to a better understanding of himself and his path through those challenges. As Ignatius narrates in an account of his life, which he related to a fellow Jesuit just before his death, the key isn't to become suddenly perfect but to learn how to walk



Unflinching about relating his own faults, Ignatius encourages individuals to reflect on their desires, resources, and vulnerabilities as a way to grow.

patiently and deliberately to grow in love and service despite imperfection. Ignatius relates his self-driven determination to preach to pilgrims in Jerusalem. His intention, however, wasn't well received by church authorities, who thought he was poorly prepared. This rejection led him to further his education and become more flexible about how he understood his role in serving God. He writes about how he was easily provoked to self-righteous anger. Once he took offense when a fellow traveler made an insulting comment about the Virgin Mary. Only the stubborn donkey he was riding saved him from pursuing the other traveler and acting on a murderous rage. In the sharing of his story, Ignatius doesn't want his biography to become the center of attention. He provides an example of moving beyond the isolated facts of his life journey to reflect on their interconnected meaning and a way of looking beyond. As the scholar of renaissance rhetoric Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle suggests, Ignatius is using the story about himself to redirect his readers' attention to God and a higher purpose. Unflinching about relating his own faults, Ignatius encourages individuals to reflect on their desires, resources, and vulnerabilities as a way to grow.

**Practical Guidance from Ignatius** In the "Spiritual Exercises," his manual for prayer guides, Ignatius suggests a five-step daily process, known as the "Examen," as a way to tell and retell life-transforming stories. These, I believe, are practical recommendations that could help people realize their resolutions in the New Year.

- Start with a realistic, accurate, and encouraging assessment of your current situation. Ignatius would always begin his moments of reflective self-assessment by reaffirming



Sticking to our long-term goals requires dedication and perseverance, and sometimes the ability to tell ourselves a better story.

his gratitude for life and opportunities to serve in a project larger than himself. Acknowledge strengths, vulnerabilities, positive and negative feelings, and areas of encouragement and discouragement as gifts. • Be open to the light of a larger perspective. Call upon the assistance of a higher power to reveal the big picture that holds together the pieces of the journey through the day. Expect to be surprised by new insights. • Focus on the events of today. Create a story that links the episodes of the day and your goals together. Ignatius would move beyond just listing strengths, weakness, and feelings to discover how they advanced or impeded his goal to serve God and others. • Identify the moments of darkness and discouragement that resist being drawn into your story. Ask what episodes disrupt your understanding of yourself and the world. Find new perspective by deepening your commitment to a higher purpose.

Much like the beliefs in other religions, Ignatius turns to his faith to find a new perspective during difficult moments. Christianity and other religious traditions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Judaism help find purpose in a compassionate and merciful love that inspires and guides day-to-day actions, each in their own way. As a Christian, Ignatius looked especially to the example of compassionate self-sacrifice in Jesus's death on the cross to hold difficult moments in a higher faith perspective. By committing to accept the cost of positive action in the face of his own failings or opposition by others, Ignatius was able to move through obstacles and find encouragement and strength to advance his story. Finally, reflect on how your story offers direction and energy to move forward to the next day. By incorporating discouraging moments into the flow of a larger story, Ignatius learned how to move beyond the shame and confusion caused by failure and misdeeds to a healthy sense of sorrow. It helped Ignatius find a higher purpose. Like Ignatius, many of us may need to revise our resolutions and reflect on how we may proceed, even when we feel discouraged.

Gordon Rixon is an associate professor of systematic theology at Regis College in Massachusetts and the University of Toronto in Canada. This article was first published on The Conversation.

# We're All Monastics Now

We might be stuck at home, but that doesn't mean we can't grow

LEO BABAUTA

My Zen teacher Susan recently told a group of her students at the end of a Zen meditation retreat, "We're all monastics now." In this pandemic, we're in an era of isolation, retreat. We're also in an era of heightened uncertainty. This can be a terrible thing and drive us to loneliness and distraction—or it can be a time of practice, reflection, and deepening. We can choose to see ourselves as monks deepening into the stillness of a monastery. It's our choice. If you're staying home these days, it can be a time of endless



We can choose to see ourselves as monks deepening into the stillness of a monastery.

Lockdown can be a time of endless internet distractions, or the opportunity to grow through beautiful solitude.

internet distractions, or you can open to the opportunity to use the beautiful solitude for meditation, reading, writing, contemplation, and journaling. It can be a time of practice. If you're feeling the anxiety of the moment, it can be a time of near breakdown and freneticism, or it can be a moment to slow down and be still. Practice mindfully with whatever feelings are coming up. You can go to the latest memes and viral videos (which are fun!), or you can find a text and study it. You can get caught up in frustration with how others are acting during this crisis, or you can

practice opening in compassion, with compassion meditations. This is a great opportunity to deepen into mindfulness and practice, to learn to face head-on the uncertainty and fears that arise in us, and to connect to the humanity going through this rather than disconnect from them. We're all monastics now—how will we use this time? 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



MINDSET MATTERS

# We Can’t Control What Happened—Only What Happens Next

Our only real power is the ability to choose how we respond to the vagaries of life

JAY HARRINGTON

We all know people like this: When something bad happens, the first thing they do is blame someone or something else. It gets old, right?

But let’s be honest: We are all that person, at least some of the time—and probably more often than we’d like to admit. I certainly count myself among those who, despite knowing better, catch myself taking credit when things go well and looking for a scapegoat when they don’t.

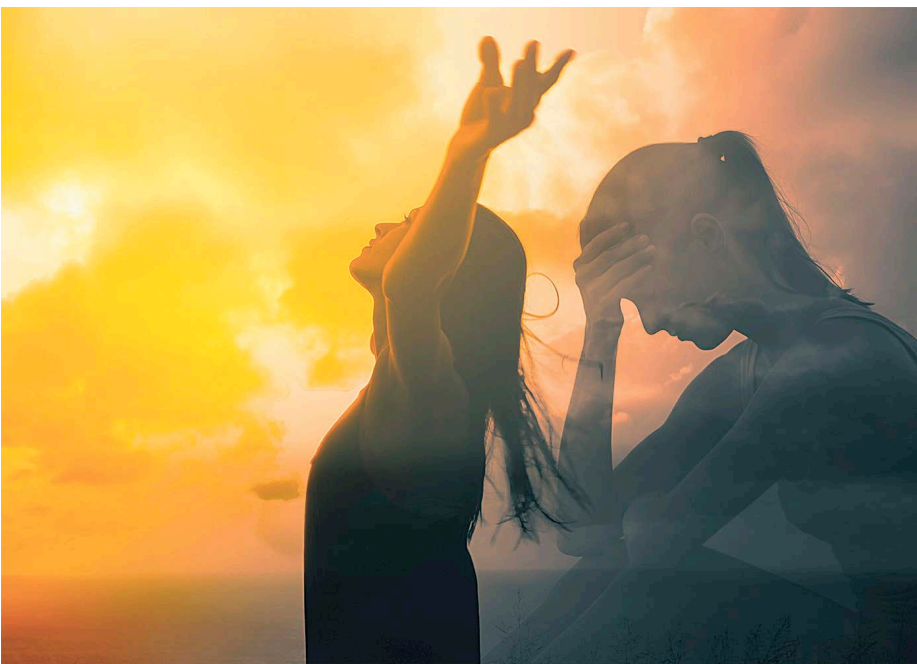
We can all benefit from holding a mirror up to ourselves to examine whether our own action or inaction played a role when things do not go our way. But many times bad things happen that are, in fact, completely outside of our control. So what then?

A natural and understandable response is to lament the unfairness of it all. Blame it on bad luck. Accept that the deck is stacked against us. Believe that we are defective in some way.

It’s OK to have these feelings. But it’s how we act in response to negative circumstances, in spite of our feelings, that will determine the arc of our lives. Will we be dragged down, laden with regret and recrimination? Or will we rise above, recognizing that we have little control over what happens, but absolute control over how we react to what happens?

This stark, binary choice plays a big role in determining whether we live empowered, enriching lives, or fatalistic, powerless ones. And it’s a choice that we, as a species, have grappled with for millennia.

Thousands of years ago, Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus wrote: “The chief task in life is simply this: to identify and separate matters so that I



There is much in life we have no control over, but that doesn’t matter as much once we learn to choose our thoughts and emotions.

One of life’s most important lessons is that we have no power over external circumstances. Our power resides, exclusively, within ourselves.

can say clearly to myself which are externals not under my control, and which have to do with the choices I actually control. Where then do I look for good and evil? Not to uncontrollable externals, but within myself to the choices that are my own ...”

More recently, American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr captured the same sentiment in the Serenity Prayer, written in 1933, which encourages us, in part:

“To accept the things I cannot change; Courage to change the things I can; And wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time; Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace ...”

**A Year of Externalities Like No Other**  
One of life’s most important lessons,

which is devilishly hard to internalize, is that we have no power over external circumstances. Our power resides, exclusively, within ourselves.

At no point in my lifetime has that message been more urgent and salient than the challenging year of 2020. From COVID-19 and political/cultural unrest to economic uncertainty and prolonged isolation, we have been buffeted by relentless challenges—mostly not of our own making—during this tumultuous year.

For many of us, myself included, the notion of relinquishing control, of letting go, in the face of these circumstances seems counterintuitive and counterproductive.

But letting go doesn’t mean sitting idly by. It means recognizing that we can do nothing to affect what happened, but a great deal to impact what happens next, be it in our personal lives or in the world around us.

When we try to control the uncontrollable, we rob ourselves of the ability to experience joy, be present, be available, and make a difference moving forward.

Every time we are faced with such a challenge, we can—and must—choose how to respond. These are the “crux” moments in life that determine our happiness. In rock climbing, the most difficult part of every climb is called the crux. It’s the spot on the rock face at which most climbers fail.

Push on or back down? The choice is ours.

*Jay Harrington is an author, lawyer-turned-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.*

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