

MIND & BODY

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RETHINKING

the War on Salt

Salt has been wrongly vilified, with guidelines based on flawed science, say experts

CONAN MILNER

After sweet, salty is probably our favorite flavor. Yet for decades, health experts have warned us to watch our sodium intake. Too much salt is said to cause high blood pressure, the top risk factor in heart disease, kidney disease, and strokes.

But according to Dr. James DiNicolantonio, author of "The Salt Fix: Why the Experts Got it All Wrong—and How Eating More Might Save Your Life," many of us may actually be salt starved.

For nearly a decade, DiNicolantonio, a cardiovascular research scientist at Saint Luke's Mid America Heart Institute in Kansas City, has sifted through the history, research, and policy regarding salt and its impacts on our health. His new book paints a very different picture of salt than the one typically promoted in modern medicine.

DiNicolantonio noticed the dangers of salt deficiency early in his medical career as a community pharmacist. Patients came in to pick up their prescriptions and complained of dizziness, dehydration, and a rapid heartbeat. All of them were on medications to lower their blood pressure, so in every case, doctors had also told them to restrict their salt.

But their symptoms suggested signs of low sodium, so DiNicolantonio sent patients back to their doctors to get their levels tested.

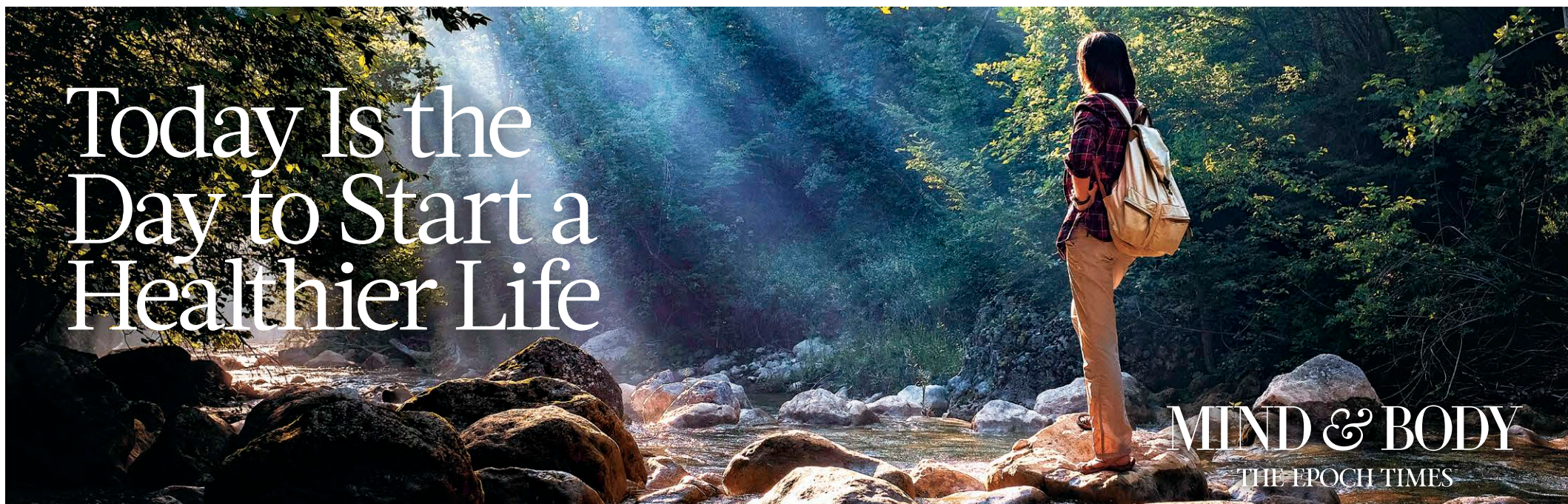
"Sure enough, when their doctors tested their sodium levels, they were very low," DiNicolantonio said. "At that point, the doctor either stopped the medication or cut the dose in half, and the doctor would tell them to add salt back to their food."

Continued on Page 4



Concerns about our favorite spice look to have been overblown.

Research strongly suggests that not getting enough salt could be a more dangerous risk than getting too much.

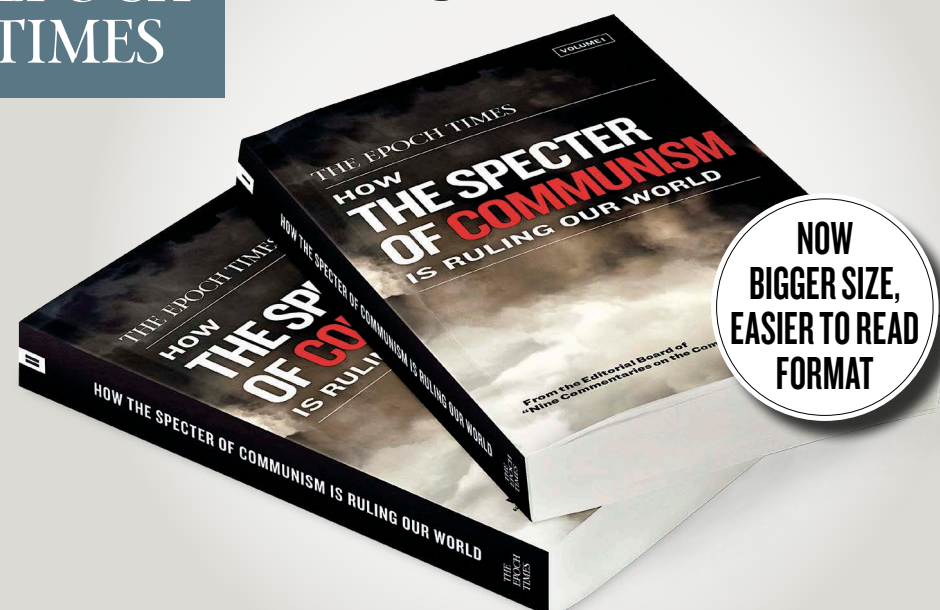


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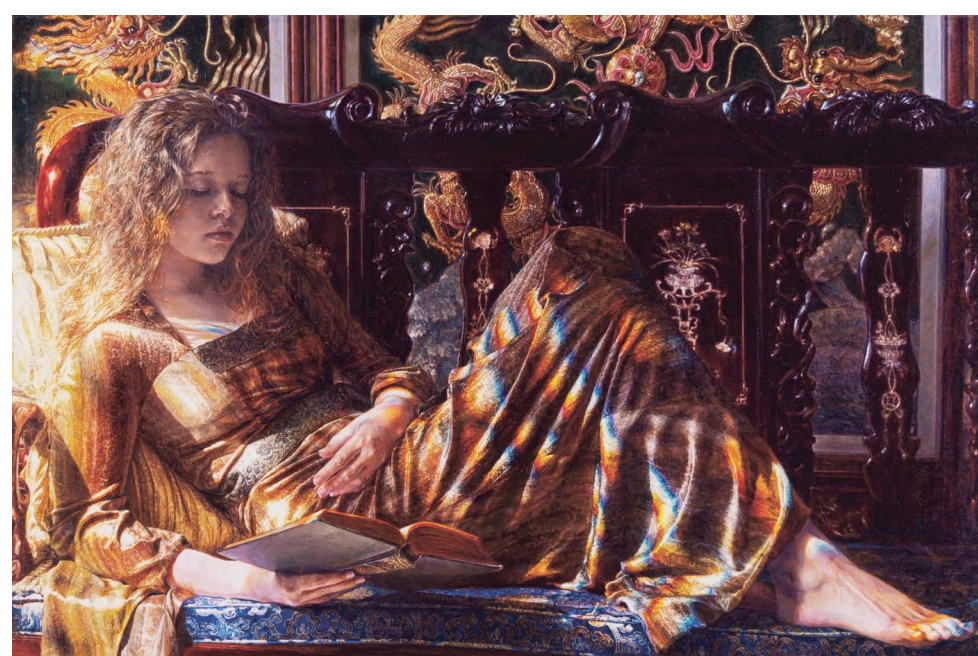
“The Truth, as horrifying as it is, shall set us free. This should be on this country's academia's list of required reading.”

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CHINESE WISDOM FOR SEASONAL LIVING

When Nature Balances Its Yin and Yang, Our Bodies Correspond

Solar Terms: ‘Spring Equinox’ (March 20 to April 3)

MOREEN LIAO

A solar term is a period of about two weeks and is based on the sun's position in the zodiac. Solar terms form the traditional Chinese calendar system. The calendar follows the ancient Chinese belief that living in accordance with nature will enable one to live a harmonious life. This article series explores each of the year's 24 solar terms, offering guidance on how to best navigate the season.

Solar Term: ‘Spring Equinox’

2021 Dates: March 20 to April 3

When the “Spring Equinox” arrives on March 20, day and night are exactly equal, and the universal yin and yang energies are perfectly balanced both on Earth and inside our bodies.

From this point forward, the yang energy associated with the light begins to build in the body as the days lengthen, suppressing the dark yin.

According to traditional Chinese solar terms, at the spring equinox, we are already halfway through spring. In other words, it's the peak of spring. Before this time, spring's energies are intangible yet gradually moving beneath the surface.

Yet, the Western calendar says spring begins at the equinox. This contrast is a perfect example of the difference between Eastern and Western approaches. Chinese culture values intangible phenomena and philosophical concepts and treats them as being just as important as the tangible. Western culture tends to value the material world or what can be seen directly.

Another example of the Chinese approach is seen in the work of renowned Tang Dynasty medical doctor Sun Simiao (581–682), who classified disease into three stages:

- Prior to the arrival of disease
- Disease just setting in
- Having the disease

Sun said: “Ancient people were good at being medical doctors. [At that time,] the best doctors worked on preventing disease, mediocre doctors worked on disease just setting in, and the lowest level doctors worked on diseases that already existed.”

This theory emphasizes the importance of preventative medicine, nutrition, or more fundamentally, the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle both physically and mentally.

Spring Equinox is a very important date for plantation. In ancient China, before this date, farmers were growing beans and peas, for the protein in them for both living creatures to consume and for supplementation of the land for following crops. Rice was usually the one to grow after the Spring Equinox.

Living in Harmony With ‘Spring Equinox’

The universe's relatively balanced state during the solar term Spring Equinox (March 20 to April 3 in 2021) presents a great opportunity to adjust our body to its most balanced state.

Consider the symbol of the tai chi. In it, the yin and yang are perfectly balanced, with a dot of yang existing in the yin, and a dot of yin existing in the yang. In this harmonized state, the tai chi rotates ceaselessly. What we don't want is these energies fighting with each other.

The main concern is that preexisting health conditions and diseases may appear, much like grass popping up in spring. This may be seen particularly in the areas of sleep quality, mental and emotional health, menopause, circulation-related problems, and other issues related to the eyes, blood, and heart.

This happens because when the yang energy is revolving inside one's body and overtaking the yin energy, the blockages built up from a heavy diet and lack of movement in the winter come to the fore. When the energy circulation hits the places where we are already weak, we feel discomfort.

We have already said that yang energy is pouring in at this time, so we must be careful that this energy isn't too hot, as it can overpower the yin, and cause stress or problems to our bodies.

To avoid hot energy, try to detox in early spring by emphasizing fresh seasonal vegetables and beans. This prepares our bodies to let the yang energy flow through and strengthens overall health. Barefoot walks on the grass, in forests, and in fields, can help our bodies wake up and absorb the yang energy from nature.

To help open up all the body's energy channels and meridians, try gentle pressing at their entry points, located on both sides of your fingertips and on the fingertip pads. Also, touch and press gently on the edges of the facial bone below both eyes. This helps reduce pressure on the eyes, enhances eye and face health, and beautifies the skin.

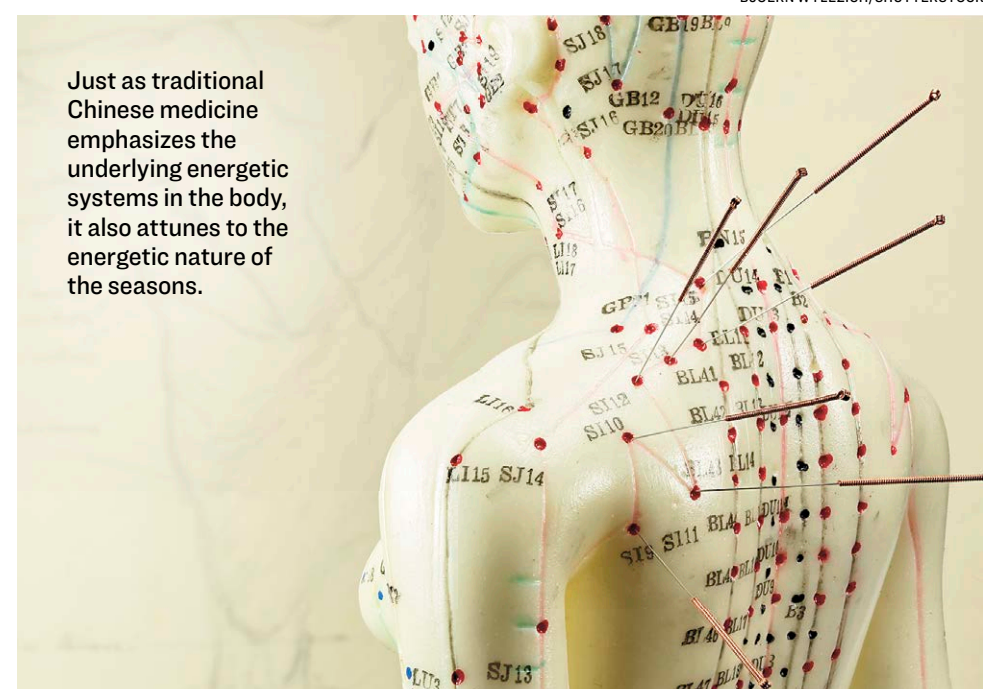
The peak seasons for flowering plants are just right around Spring Equinox. Those who have weaker respiratory systems should wear face masks to avoid pollen.

Seasonal Foods

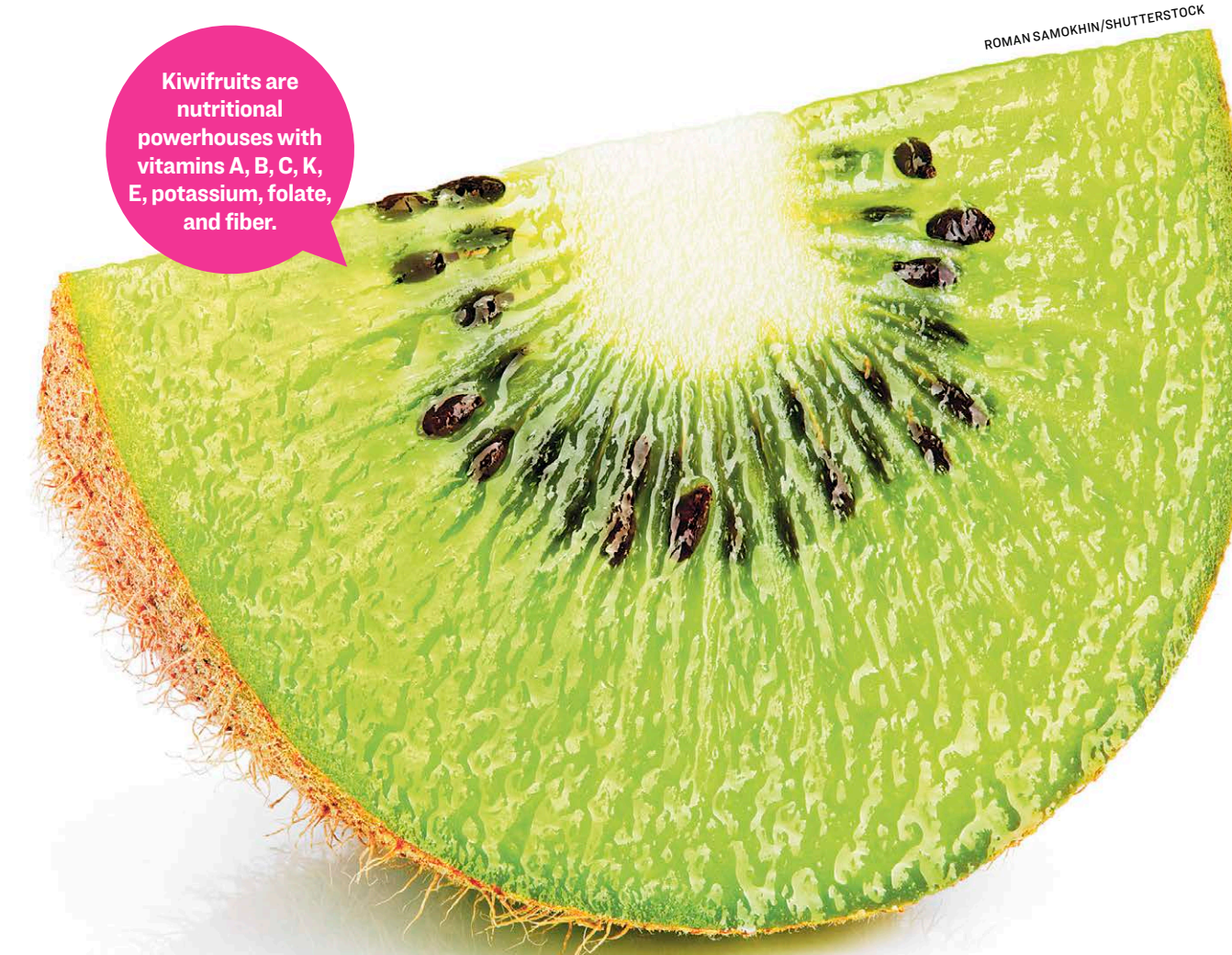
This is a good time to eat fennel, spinach, spirulina, leeks, chives, dark green vegetables, black beans, green beans, black sesame, and soy products.

The herbs Roman chamomile, German chamomile, geranium, frankincense, cedarwood, and Douglas pine are also good.

Epoch Times contributor Moreen Liao is a descendant of four generations of traditional Chinese medicine doctors. She is also a certified aromatherapist, former dean of the New Directions Institute of Natural Therapies in Sydney, and the founder of Ausganica, a certified organic cosmetic brand.



Just as traditional Chinese medicine emphasizes the underlying energetic systems in the body, it also attunes to the energetic nature of the seasons.



What Is Kiwifruit Good For?

This ancient Chinese berry offers health protection in a delicious package

JOSEPH MERCOLA

Known in ancient China as Yang Tao, the kiwifruit earned its place in Chinese culture not just for its flavor, but also its medicinal properties, which science has substantiated in areas such as digestive health and metabolic health.

The commercially grown varieties of kiwifruit can be traced to a China and a Church of Scotland mission station in Yichang in 1878. They were referred to as “Chinese gooseberry” before kiwifruit became the moniker.

Kiwifruit is named in honor of New Zealand's native bird—the kiwi—by an enterprising food distributor, and its subsequent cultivation grew around the globe. Today, France, Italy, Greece and the United States are some of the biggest producers of kiwifruit. China remains at the very top of the list. Kiwifruit is not only a scrumptious food but is used to tenderize meats due to the compound actinidin.

Kiwifruit is both unique and surprising. While it's small and has a light brown outer surface, the inside of the fruit is lime green, studded with tiny black seeds, and packed with a flavor similar to a strawberry or pineapple. Peeled, sliced, and chilled, kiwifruit can be an excellent addition to any fruit salad combination or served by itself.

Health Benefits of Kiwifruit

Kiwifruit provides 92.7 milligrams of vitamin C, a nutrient that helps boost the immune system to stave off colds and scurvy, in every 100-gram serving. It has 40.3 micrograms of vitamin K—best known for its role in bone health and cardiovascular function.

Kiwifruits contain vitamin A (great for the skin, respiratory health, and vision), vitamin E (for lowering the risk of platelet aggregation), and potassium to help balance the body's electrolytes and manage blood pressure levels.

Kiwifruit is one of the few foods that contain vitamin B6, which supports the immune system. B6 is particularly important for pregnant mothers to support them throughout their gestation. The folate in kiwifruit, on the other hand, is more helpful for the fetus. It may protect against neural tube defects and congenital heart disease.

You'll find 3 grams of dietary fiber for every 100-gram serving of kiwifruit. Dietary fiber has been shown to help keep the digestive system running well, while

Kiwifruit is one of the few foods that contain vitamin B6, which supports the immune system.

Kiwi fruit provides special benefits for pregnant mothers and their fetuses.



reducing the risk of diseases such as diabetes, stroke, and hypertension. Finally, the antioxidant power in kiwifruits may help neutralize free radicals that can damage cells.

Despite these benefits, be sure to consume kiwifruit in moderation, as it contains fructose, which can be harmful to your health in excessive amounts. That said, the water, fiber, and phytonutrients in fruit make a fructose binge from kiwifruit an entirely different thing from getting the same amount of fructose from a can of soda.

Studies on Kiwifruit

Research has shown kiwifruit to have a notable protective effect against asthma and other respiratory difficulties, such as wheezing. One report indicated that young children eating 6 to 7 servings of kiwifruit and other vitamin C-rich foods per week had a 29.3 percent lower incidence of wheezing. Even those eating these foods only once or twice a week had fewer symptoms, in comparative studies.

Both the green and gold varieties of kiwifruit are rich in polyphenols and were studied to compare their antioxidant strengths. Researchers found that not only were the kiwifruit antioxidants more potent than those in oranges and grapefruit, the gold kiwifruit variety was found to have greater antioxidant strength. Researchers concluded that kiwifruit consumption may be useful in reducing the development of diseases caused by oxidative stress.

Another small study explored the effects of kiwifruit on patients with irritable bowel syndrome. The study involved 54 patients and 16 healthy individuals eating either kiwifruit consumption or placebos in a six-week study. Researchers found the colon transit time significantly decreased in the group consuming kiwifruit, and concluded that eating kiwifruit improved bowel function in adults diagnosed with irritable bowel syndrome.

Kiwifruit Fun Facts

Before the kiwifruit became its given name, other names, such as “melonette,” were considered. If the kiwifruits you purchase are underripe, placing them in a brown paper bag for 4 to 6 days will help them ripen. Keeping them in a paper bag with an apple or a banana will speed up the ripening process even more.

Summary

Kiwifruits can legitimately be called a super fruit. This fuzzy brown powerhouse with bright green flesh contains vitamins A, K, E, and B, potassium, folate, and fiber. The health benefits kiwifruits provide translate into protection against heart disease and stroke, potential relief from asthma and irritable bowel syndrome, and support for pregnant mothers and their fetuses.

Kiwifruit is a sweet little fruit that expands the diversity of your plate with its color, flavor, and health advantages.

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

High Blood Sugar Is No Good for Your Brain

MAT LECOMPTE

When you hear about high blood sugar, what comes to mind? Diabetes risk, weight gain, and maybe a risk to heart health? But what about your brain? High blood sugar—even below diabetes levels—may boost the risk of dementia.

A new study from University College London in the United Kingdom found that “prediabetes”—a condition where blood sugar levels are high but not as high as full-blown diabetes—may threaten brain health. The research was published in the journal Diabetes, Obesity, and Metabolism.

Looking at data from the UK Biobank on a half-million people between the ages of 40 and 69, researchers found people with prediabetes had a 42 percent higher risk of mental decline over four years than people with normal blood sugar.

When blood sugar is high, it can lead to inflammation and arterial blockages that reduce blood flow to the brain.

They were 54 percent more likely to develop vascular dementia, a common type of dementia resulting from reduced blood flow to the brain, over eight years. Researchers found no association with Alzheimer's risk.

When the team examined people with full-blown Type 2 diabetes, they were three times more likely to develop vascular dementia and more likely to get Alzheimer's than people who had normal blood sugar.

It's easy to compartmentalize health and overlook how interconnected your entire body is. But the blood sugar to brain connection is quite strong.

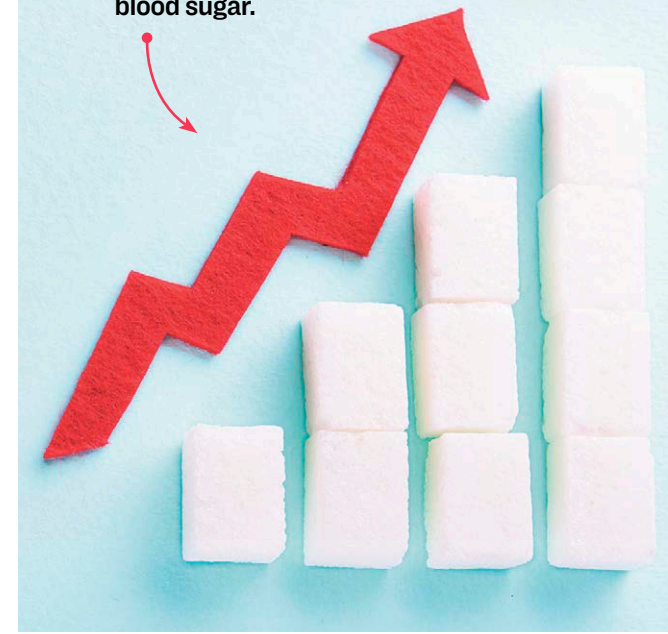
When blood sugar is high, it can lead to inflammation and arterial blockages over time. This can lead to reduced blood flow to the brain, which is associated with dementia.

You might be able to limit the risk for dementia by regulating blood sugar levels. A diet low in processed and refined foods, including sugary snacks and beverages, is the best place to start. Regular exercise can help, too.

When you can keep blood sugar at safe levels, you can prevent the onset of prediabetes and full-blown diabetes, potentially protecting your brain in the process.

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

A new study found people with prediabetes had a 42 percent higher risk of mental decline over four years than people with normal blood sugar.



RETHINKING the War on Salt

Salt has been wrongly vilified, with guidelines based on flawed science, say experts

Continued from Page 1

Blood Pressure: A Red Herring?

In the ancient world, salt was sacred and valuable. It gave flavor to bland ingredients, helped to preserve food, and was even considered a medicine. Over the past century, attitudes toward salt have changed dramatically.

In the past 40 years in particular, doctors, health officials, and leading health organizations have reframed salt as a dangerous and addictive drug. According to the Center for Science in the Public Interest, salt is “perhaps the deadliest ingredient in our food supply.”

Salt mostly consists of two essential minerals, sodium and chloride, but it's the sodium that gets the side-eye. Our body requires sodium for many processes: fluid balance, cardiovascular function, transmission of nerve impulses, and muscle contraction. But because salt can also increase blood pressure, health experts urge us to consume as little as necessary.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration recommends that we consume no more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium (about a teaspoon of salt) per day.

Most people consume double this amount in their diet. But health experts argue that cutting our intake could save lives and money. According to the American Heart Association (AHA), if all Americans changed their intake to 1,500 milligrams of sodium per day, it could result in an estimated \$26.2 billion in health care savings and reduce deaths from cardiovascular disease by almost 1.2 million over the next decade.

These figures make a strong case, but something doesn't add up. A number of studies show that the drop in blood pressure by virtue of less salt is quite small (from 1 to 5 points), and it's a phenomenon that only affects a fraction of the population. Other studies show that low levels of salt consumption actually cause more damage than benefit.

A Cochrane review (typically considered the gold standard in independent scientific analysis) of 185 randomized controlled sodium studies found that low-sodium interventions lowered blood pressure an average of one point for people without high blood pressure (5.5 points for people with hypertension) while significantly raising levels of kidney hormones, stress hormones, and triglycerides.

DiNicolantonio says that the mortality risks of high levels of sodium are actually much lower than that of low levels. But experts are so focused on the blood pressure-lowering effect of minimal sodium that they ignore the damage it inflicts on the body when it gets too little: increased heart rate, hypothyroidism, elevated insulin lev-

More than a flavoring, salt has been used medicinally and as a preservative throughout history.



LOW ON SALT?

A study published in The Lancet found a link between low sodium intake and increased risk of cardiovascular events and death in people with or without hypertension.

els, and insulin resistance. A lack of salt has also been shown to increase artery-stiffening hormones—the same hormones that medications designed to prevent strokes and heart attacks are used to block.

“There are very few people who are getting too much salt,” he said. “We know that because low sodium levels in the blood are the most common electrolyte abnormality in both the inpatient and outpatient setting.” Further studies reveal that a low salt diet may reduce a woman's chances of becoming pregnant and increase the likelihood of miscarriage, infant mortality, and preeclampsia.

“Somehow they've gotten away with sweeping those harms under the rug,” said DiNicolantonio.

Dehydration Danger

Health experts use a simple story to illustrate salt's damage: More salt makes us thirsty, so we drink more water. This causes the body to hold that extra water in order to dilute the saltiness of the blood. The resulting increase in blood volume leads to higher blood pressure.

But a critical detail missing from this illustration is that for most of us, our bodies can effectively manage this salt-fluid balance, even if we consume large amounts of sodium.

However, all bodies will run into problems when our salt level is too low. Since the medical establishment recommends we consume the minimum amount of sodium necessary for survival, many people may be inadvertently hurting their health, says DiNicolantonio.

Sodium helps manage hydration by controlling the movement of water in and out of our cells. When we're dehydrated, the sodium in the blood increases because it has to work harder to pull water out of the cells and into the blood where it's needed. That's why highly concentrated sodium in the blood is almost always a sign of dehydration.

It is also why you need more salt when you exercise. One hour of vigorous activity can cause us to lose 1,500 milligrams of sodium—the amount some experts suggest we should consume for an entire day.

People healing from burns, trauma, and hemorrhages may require even more salt. Research shows that salt needs also increase when one is pregnant or nursing, fighting infections, suffering from inflammatory bowel disease, and more.

Food Preservation

Only about 5 percent of our salt intake comes from the shaker—most comes from the prepared foods we eat.

Food manufacturers have always loved salt because it provides flavor and prevents spoilage. Before refrigeration, salt

was our main food preservative because it protected against unhealthy pathogens, while allowing healthy bacteria to proliferate. Cheese, pickles, and sauerkraut—and all the lacto-fermented foods that researchers now say are so beneficial for our microbiome—are traditionally made with large quantities of salt.

Our ancestors ate a lot more fermented foods, so they likely ate a lot more sodium. In ancient Rome, where nearly every major city was built near a salt source, the average Roman consumed about three times the salt we do today. In 17th-century Sweden, the average intake of salt was up to 10 times more than today, thanks to all that salted cod.

Today, health organizations pressure governments, restaurants, and food manufacturers to lower the sodium in prepared foods, but this advice may have unintended consequences.

Lower salt intake can actually encourage bacterial overgrowth, increasing the risk of foodborne illness. And since salt is the most natural and longest-tested food preservative, any chemical substitute is likely to be more harmful.

Salt also provides food with a touch of sweetness because it cuts the bitterness. So food manufacturers inevitably add more sugar (or flavor-enhancing chemicals) to low-salt foods in order to make them taste more appetizing.

Less salt may also cause us to eat more in order to satisfy our sodium needs. Most people generally seek between 8 and 10 grams of salt (about 2 teaspoons) per day, says DiNicolantonio, so eating low-salt foods may prompt us to eat much more to satisfy our bodies' needs.

“We're over-consuming refined carbs, over-consuming sugar, and that's obviously going to drive diabetes and obesity,” he said.

Sugar's Free Pass

While health officials have pushed for decades to limit our salt intake, they've been extremely slow to take note of sugar. That's strange, because if improving our health is the goal, sugar poses many more problems to take issue with. For one, while your health suffers if you don't get enough salt, it will probably improve if you remove added sugar.

Calories from sugar are especially detrimental when it comes to weight management. That's in large part because increased sugar intake stimulates more insulin resistance and fat storage than other types of calories.

For decades, studies have also implicated sugar in the very symptoms for which salt gets blamed—high blood pressure, kidney disease, and heart disease.

The November 2016 issue of JAMA reports that researchers already saw signs

that sugar led to coronary artery disease in the 1950s. But in the decades that followed, the sugar industry sponsored a Harvard research program that successfully cast doubt on the hazards of sugar while promoting fat as the cause of the disease.

DiNicolantonio says that the demonization of salt happened in a similar fashion.

“If a health organization is funded by the sugar industry, which white crystal do you think they're going to pin their hats on?” he asked. “All of the harms that have been placed on salt lie at the feet of sugar, and people are just starting to realize that.”

Whereas our taste for salt stays fairly constant, our taste for sugar escalates like in any other addiction. This wasn't a problem in the past, because our sources of sweetness (primarily fruit) were harder to come by and were conveniently packaged with water, fiber, and phytonutrients.

Today, with mass production of refined sugar, we eat about 30 times as much sugar as our ancestors did. A growing body of research reveals that all this sugar is at the heart of our modern chronic disease epidemic.

Voices of Dissent

Although the medical establishment suggests that the verdict on sodium restriction is settled science, doctors and researchers have been railing against low-salt recommendations since the correlation between sodium consumption and elevated blood pressure was first proposed more than a century ago.

In a 2015 Washington Post article questioning the validity of low-sodium recommendations in the U.S. Dietary Guidelines, Suzanne Oparil, professor of medicine at the University of Alabama-Birmingham and former president of the AHA, said the low-salt advice is “based on almost nothing.”

“Some people really want to hang on to this belief system on salt. But they are ignoring the evidence,” Oparil said.

An analysis of salt studies involving more than 130,000 people from 49 countries published in the July 30, 2016, edition of the Lancet found an association between low-sodium intake and “increased risk of cardiovascular events and death” in people with or without hypertension.

Since a low-salt diet was found to only have a modest effect on blood pressure, study authors concluded that sodium restriction was “best targeted at populations

with hypertension who consume high-sodium diets,” not as a blanket restriction that applies to everybody.

In a press release, Andrew Mente, contributing researcher and professor at McMaster University in Ontario, said that in addition to a small reduction in blood pressure, restricting sodium can also adversely raise certain hormones, “which may outweigh any benefits.”

“The key question is not whether blood pressure is lower with very low salt intake. Instead, it is whether it improves health,” Mente said. But these voices of dissent aren't likely to change official policy anytime soon. According to the AHA website: “The science behind sodium reduction is clear. Robust evidence has linked excess sodium intake with high blood pressure, which increases the risk of heart attack, stroke, and heart failure.”

Sounds convincing, but those low sodium recommendations are still far from proven, says DiNicolantonio.

“There has never been a single study where people are given the same diet but the only difference is the level of salt intake to prove their recommendations,” he said. “We can say that with certainty.”

Choosing a Healthier Salt

Table salt provides sodium and chloride, but there are unhealthy byproducts that come along with it. Modern salt is bleached to make it bright white, has a bit of added sugar, and also contains anti-caking agents to allow for a free flow from the shaker.

Celtic sea, Himalayan pink, Hawaiian black, and other artisan salts have come to market in recent years to offer consumers a more natural product. But even some of these pricier, unrefined salts may also contain unwanted additions, such as radioactive elements, ocean pollution, and microplastics. Some of these fancy salts also lack iodine, and other essential minerals that we otherwise lack in our diet.

To minimize contamination, DiNicolantonio advises consumers to choose a salt harvested from an ancient, dried-up body of water, rather than a modern ocean. His top pick is Redmond Real Salt. It comes from an ancient lake in Utah, is much less expensive than a lot of the unrefined sea salts on the market, has much less contamination, and contains a good amount of iodine and calcium.



Humans have cooked with salt for millennia and some research suggests our ancestors ate far more of it than we do.

MADE TO MOVE

Research Links Activity With Health Care Costs

Staying active throughout adulthood pays dividends in later years, study finds

DIARMUID COUGHLAN

Exercise is good for your health at every age—and you can reap the benefits no matter how late in life you start. That said, our latest research has shown that in the United States, people who were more physically active as teenagers and throughout adulthood had lower health care costs.

For our study, we drew on data from the National Cancer Institute's study on diet and health, which looked at more than half a million adults. As part of this study, adults in 1996 who were aged 50 to 71 were asked how physically active they were during this time in their life. They were also asked to estimate how much exercise they got in late adolescence and early and middle adulthood.

We followed up with participants between 2004 and 2006. During this time, some consented for their study responses to be linked with their Medicare data. Medicare is the major health insurance program for American adults aged 65 years and older.

To ensure results were accurate, we only looked at respondents who were 65 years of age, as this is the age a person first qualifies for Medicare. We also adjusted our results to take into account other things that could influence the outcome, such as ethnicity, education, marital status, and whether a person smoked. This way we could be fairly certain that we were only looking at the effect of physical activity on health care costs.

Based on our data, people were clustered into groups according to their exercise habits throughout adulthood. We identified nine groups, which fell into four main categories: maintainers (36 percent of the group who maintained moderate to high activity throughout adulthood), decreasers (30.5 percent of the group who were active in early adulthood but became less active as they aged), and increasers (14.5 percent of the group who weren't active in early adulthood but became more active throughout their lives). Around 18.5 percent of the group were consistently inactive throughout their lifetime.

A Lifetime of Activity

We found that adults who maintained or increased their physical activity from adolescence throughout adulthood had lower average annual health care costs than adults who were consistently inactive over time—between \$824 and \$1,874 per year. This is around 10 percent to 22 percent lower than those who were less active or inactive.

In contrast, adults who were active earlier in life but less active in middle-age (decreasers), didn't benefit from lower health care costs after age 65, despite being active earlier in life. In fact, their Medicare costs were akin to those who had been consistently inactive all their life.

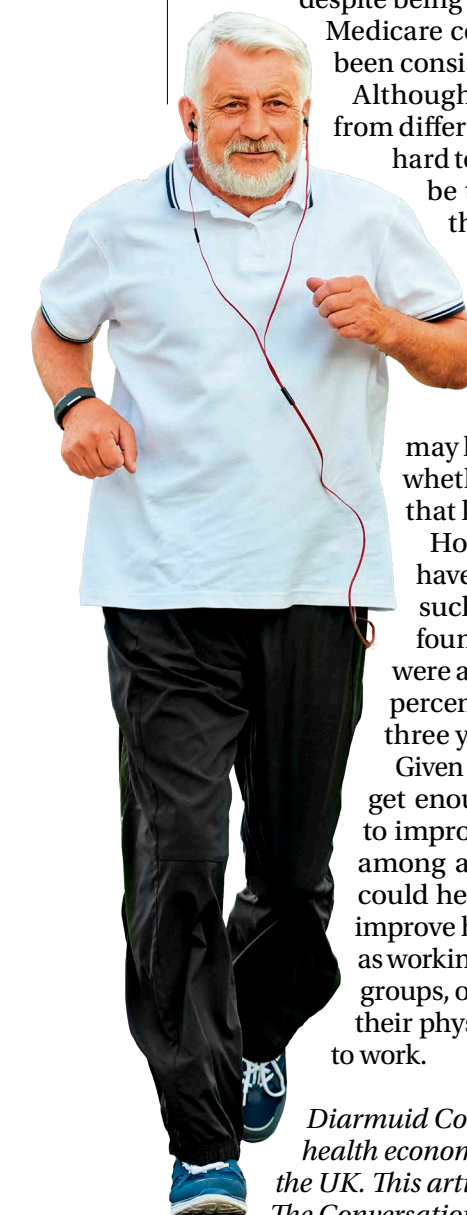
Although the study's respondents came from different parts of the United States, it's hard to say whether these results would be true for people in other parts of the world. And, as our study was based on self-reported information obtained from a survey, we can't say whether activity levels caused lower health care costs. Also, we weren't able to control for all factors that may have affected the results, such as whether a person developed an injury that limited their activity levels.

However, similar findings to ours have also been seen in other research, such as an Australian study which found that middle-aged women who were active throughout their life had 40 percent lower health care costs over the three years that the study took place.

Given that 1 in 4 adults worldwide doesn't get enough exercise, large-scale efforts to improve physical activity—especially among adolescents and young adults—could help reduce health care costs and improve health later in life. Strategies such as working with people one on one, in small groups, or on a community level to change their physical activity levels are all proven to work.

Diarmuid Coughlan is a research associate in health economics at Newcastle University in the UK. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.

SEBASTIAN BORNIAK/SHUTTERSTOCK



Think Well to Live Well

Your thoughts are the ingredients to a powerful fuel that can either warm or burn you

JEFF GARTON

Before arriving to work in the morning, you'll have processed 7,500 thoughts. By noon, that total will have risen to 22,000. Then as you're falling asleep, you'll have reached approximately 66,000 thoughts for the day. That's about one thought per second.

Thoughts aren't just words floating in your head or spewing out in an effort to connect and communicate. Each thought is material. It's an electrical and chemical event within the most complex structure in the known universe. From that mysterious formula, which science knows only so little about, comes emotion.

Emotion is an immediate reaction. It comes from the limbic system deep in our brain. As we look at the event that spurred the emotion, thinking about what has happened and what it means for us, we form feelings from emotion. Feelings come from the abstract thinking happening at our frontal lobe.

This is the distinction between emotions and thoughts in the eyes of some researchers and clinicians, and it's useful for this article.

So as your thoughts process the emotion's chemical-electrical explosion, you experience a feeling. Whether that feeling is pleasant or painful depends largely on how you think about whatever it is that happened.

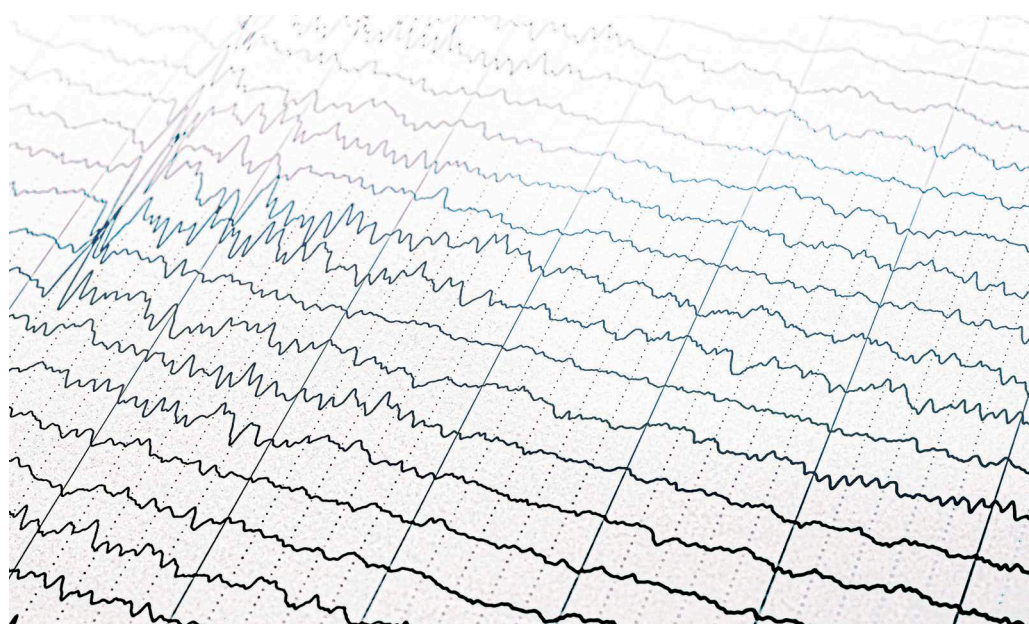
Emotions tend to pass. Feelings are a force of their own and can siphon our thoughts for the fuel they need to keep burning. Thinking generates feelings.

Supervising your thoughts is important since feelings can supply your self-motivation. If you want to do something, create something, or change yourself in some meaningful way, you'll depend on the support of your feelings.

You'll likely not be able to supervise every thought. That is an achievement

When our emotions flare, our mind can reel. This is when we need to take a breath, calm ourselves, and take control of our thoughts.

Emotion is an immediate reaction. It comes from the limbic system deep in our brain. Feelings come from the abstract thinking happening at our frontal lobe.



You process more than 60,000 thoughts. Many of them will leave you feeling stressed or worse. You could change that.

Spring Cleaning the Mental Doldrums

With passing of winter comes the warmth we need to plant our dreams

MONROE MANN

Every spring, I get rejuvenated.

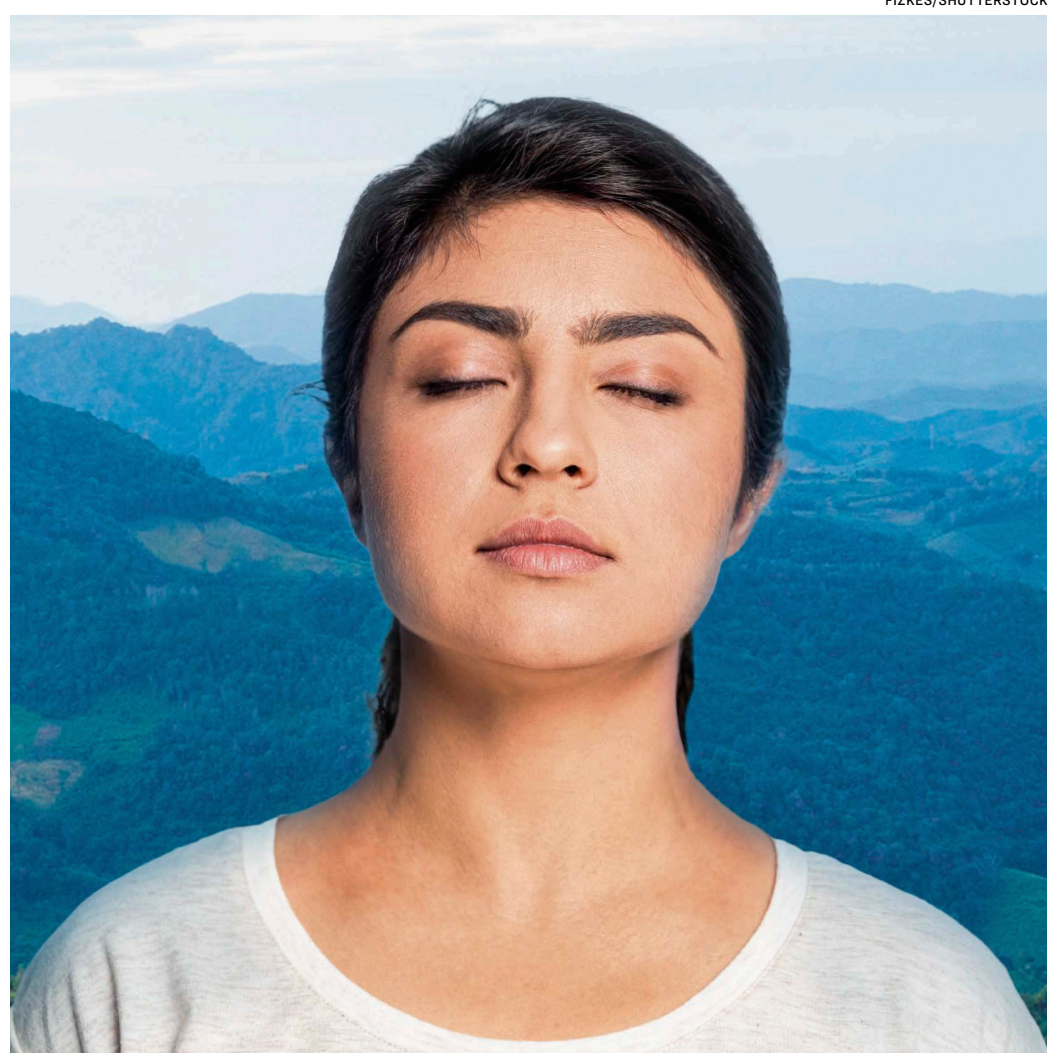
In the northern latitudes, people notice when the "harshness" of winter fades. In this climate, when the snow melts and warmer weather arrives, you feel inspired. No matter how down you felt during win-

ter, spring brings magic. Your dreams grow bigger, your vision grows clearer, and every goal becomes more attainable.

And this spring may be the most powerful you ever experience.

Why?

Because this has been one of the toughest winters of our time thanks to the added



FIZKES/SHUTTERSTOCK

worth a lifetime of effort, one made much easier if you don't think quite so much. For most people, there are too many thoughts flying through our heads at lightning speed.

The idea is to prevent yourself from thinking habitually without regard to the feelings you're creating. You have to own the experience you create through your own mental proclivities. If you can't still your mind, it's wise to think intentionally with the purpose of emotional self-regulation. Think purposefully to create helpful feelings.

The notion that events outside of you cause your feelings is untrue. Only you have the power to create and regulate your feelings. You may have an initial emotional response to the events of life, but the long-term experience of your feelings is a whole other matter.

By supervising your thoughts, you gain the option to create any emotion you think will help you deal with life's challenges.

Consider what this means. If you're thinking well when something unpleasant happens, you can still cause yourself to feel well and perform well. You don't have to feel sad, blue, frustrated, or anything unless you allow these feelings.

There are surely unique experiences that challenge our ability to do this. Sometimes awful things need to be felt for their own reality, and the mental effort needed to generate an unnatural feeling would likely be self-defeating.

But in the vast majority of situations, how you feel and perform isn't caused by external events, but by whether you take ownership of your thoughts.

Few people think about supervising their thoughts.

Here's an example. Let's say your job requires placing a conference call to several individuals whom you don't enjoy speaking with. As the time of the call approaches, your palms become sweaty, and instead of preparing for the call, you distract yourself with cat videos. Each time you look at the phone, you become more nervous. You send an email saying you're tied up and will have to postpone the call until later.

You don't intend for this wimpy behavior, but your motivation to make the call was sabotaged by the unintended feelings of fear and worry. Buzzing furiously at some level of your mind were thoughts of dread about this call. You can try to distract yourself, but a belief is a thought and it can generate a feeling. And in this instance, you believed that conference call was an unpleasant and unwelcome intrusion on your day.

Keep yourself mentally fit to supervise your thoughts with good rest, exercise, diet, and hydration.

Jeff Garton is a Milwaukee-based author, certified career coach, and former HR executive and training provider. He holds a master's degree in organizational communication and public personnel administration. He is an originator of the concept of and instruction on career contentment.

Let's say this call is routine, and every week it's awful. And so over the weeks, you've unwittingly engaged in the same habitual thoughts each time the call loomed. A terrible and beautiful thing about the brain is that once it has learned something, even a repetitive thought, it is easier to formulate that thing later. All those weeks of ill thinking turned an idea into a rut.

Think of your thoughts as the engine to human performance and your resulting feelings as the fuel. To ensure you deliver the best performance, you need solid control over the engine and the best fuel you can formulate.

Here are a few examples that will help you think well to work well:

Don't live or work in response to circumstances you can't control. Live and work in response to what you can control—most importantly your own thoughts.

Choose to think intentionally in a non-negative manner as often as possible. Keep your thoughts realistic but also energized with optimism. "I don't enjoy placing those calls, but it's not that bad and I do feel more connected to the different departments."

If you're anticipating that an upcoming event may be difficult, prime the feelings you prefer to experience by planning how you'll think when the event occurs.

Although thoughts create feelings, you can choose a helpful feeling and use it to energize your thoughts. Think enthusiastically about performing the task. Think toward courage to rise above any fears.

Create an affirmation and use it repeatedly. "I help others in making those calls. I'm good at handling those conversations. I get excited when we solve problems together."

Use your imagination to envision yourself enjoying a task and succeeding with a high degree of confidence and enthusiasm. See yourself making the call without any fears or worries. See yourself smiling while placing those calls.

Decide how you'll reward yourself for successfully performing a task and think how good you'll feel when enjoying that reward.

Keep yourself mentally fit to supervise your thoughts with good rest, exercise, diet, and hydration.

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stress and isolation of the pandemic. Think about it: Most of us rarely leave the house these days because we're all working from home. When we do leave the house, most of us rarely hang out with other people. When we do have the good fortune to see others, it's usually at the supermarket, or at work, and always with masks covering our faces. Worse, as a result of the masks, it's harder to talk and understand each other, and worst of all, we have been suffering from a huge smile deficit for more than a year now.

Think about that last point: Most of us haven't seen smiles very often over these past 12 months, and that has a real

This spring may be the most powerful you ever experience.

BECOMING MINIMALIST

Spring Decluttering Is Better Than Spring Cleaning

Before you take the time to dust and polish, make sure it's worth the effort

JOSHUA BECKER

'Tis the season for spring cleaning.

No doubt, all over the internet and in countless magazines, there are going to be articles in the next month about how to spring clean your home. And I get it, I lived in that world for many years.

I lived through plenty of winters growing up and can fully appreciate the arrival of spring and the feeling of life and newness that accompanies it. And I know the beauty of being able to open the windows and doors after being cooped up in the house all winter.

Spring is a natural time of year to deep clean your home. And I'm all for it. I think you should do it and do it well.

However, before you jump into your spring cleaning, and every time you stumble upon an article about spring cleaning, I want you to remember one phrase:

Spring decluttering is better than spring cleaning.

In fact, the best spring cleaning begins with spring decluttering. Because the less you own, the easier it is to clean.

Plus, the benefits of decluttering extend far beyond the springtime. Spring decluttering results in a home that is easier to clean every week of every season. And owning less results in a home that is calmer and more peaceful every day.

Consider just 3 rooms as an example:

Living Room

One of the first rooms we decluttered on our minimizing journey was the living

Spring cleaning should always begin with spring decluttering.

room—including the decorations. We had shelves and shelves of them. I remember vividly removing the decorations that were no longer important to us, leaving just a few that told our story.

When I was finished, I decided to dust the shelves and immediately noticed how much easier it was to dust the shelves with fewer items on them. Go figure. I don't know why this had never occurred to me. Fewer things to move meant the room was easier to clean.

Toy Room

Another great example is the toy room. Our kids were 5 and 2. We eventually decluttered many of the toys they didn't need, had stopped using, or had broken along the way. Everything that remained fit comfortably against one wall.

The following evening when we went to clean up their toys, the entire project took less than a few minutes. Fewer toys meant the entire room was easier to clean, daily.

Closets

A third example is the closet. While we didn't begin our decluttering journey in the closet, I eventually removed 75 percent of the clothes from my side of the closet. My closet immediately became stream-lined,

Make Better Decisions by Only Making Them Once

Reduce decision fatigue by automatically putting some tasks on your list—with no option to back out

JAY HARRINGTON

Most mornings, I'm a model of productivity. I get up early, make coffee, and am at my computer by 5:30 a.m. I get important work done, make a to-do list for my day, and fit a workout in before my kids get up. I eat a healthy breakfast, get the kids off to school, and then it's back to work. In other words, I have a good morning routine.

However, by the time the sun sets, things typically start to unravel. By the time the kids get to bed, I'm usually exhausted and default to beer and Netflix. Often, I complete the gluttonous trifecta with a salty snack. It's pretty obvious: My evening routine, if you want to call it that, is lacking.

Of course, I'm not alone in making sub-optimal decisions, especially late in the day. And that's largely the result of having to make so many decisions throughout the day.

For example, one study found that we make an average of 217 food-related decisions, alone, in a single day. Is it any surprise, then, that I'm reaching for chips instead of an apple at night?

Every decision we make throughout a day progressively depletes our ability to make good decisions. This is called "decision fatigue." We run short on mental energy. The more decisions we make throughout the day, the harder each one becomes for our brains. We start defaulting to easy, comfortable choices, which helps explain why my morning routine is solid but my evening one is lacking.

One-and-Done Decisions

The antidote to decision fatigue: Make a decision once, so you never have to make it again.

Here's a small example of how one-and-done decision-making works.

In October, I decided to post content on LinkedIn every day. LinkedIn is the most important platform for our marketing agency to develop new business, so it's important for me to be visible to our audience there.

Had I decided to post on LinkedIn "more often" or "three times a week," every day I would have been confronted with the decision of whether or not to post. That would have made it easy to decide that tomorrow would be better or that I didn't have anything interesting to say.

By making the decision once, I didn't have to grapple with it every day. I don't have to rely on willpower. I just do it habitually. It's automatic.

Undoubtedly, there are people who have greater willpower and discipline than I do for whom a one-and-done approach isn't necessary. But for me, and perhaps for you, too, if I leave the door open even a crack, I'll find a way to make an exception despite my best intentions. It's far easier for me to shut the door completely so that I leave no choice but to take some beneficial action.

I remove the variable of my fatigued decision-making.

This principle can be applied to things big and small in life, from exercise and in-

spacious, and easier to keep organized.

But more than that, the positive effects spilled over into other rooms as well. Returning clothes at the end of the day became easier so there were fewer clothes left out in the bedroom. Putting clothes away after the laundry cycle became less burdensome. As was returning accessories: shoes, belts, jewelry, even coats and gloves. The less we owned, the less we cleaned. That is why I say spring cleaning should always begin with spring decluttering.

Here are a few quick tips to get you started:

1. Start in your easiest spaces.

Don't try to declutter your attic, home office, or sentimental collections first. Start with easier wins such as the living room, bedroom, or car.

2. Begin in your lived-in areas.

Again, avoid the attic and the basement when getting started. You can spend hours decluttering, shut the door, and never see the results.

But if you declutter your living room, you'll notice the calm every time you sit to watch television. If you declutter your kitchen, you'll notice it the next time you prepare a meal and again when you clean up afterward.

3. Physically touch every item in your home.

When you hold an item in your hand, you are forced to make a decision about it. Every item you touch can either be relocated, removed, or returned. Put as many things as you can in the remove pile.

4. Ask 3 questions.

Ask yourself three questions for every item you touch:

- Do I need it?
- Why do I have it?
- What would I use if I didn't own it?

5. Donate, donate, donate.

As you begin removing clutter from your home, donate as much as you can. Trying to sell all your clutter only adds stress and burden to an already difficult process. Expensive items (or if you desperately need the money) are the only exceptions.

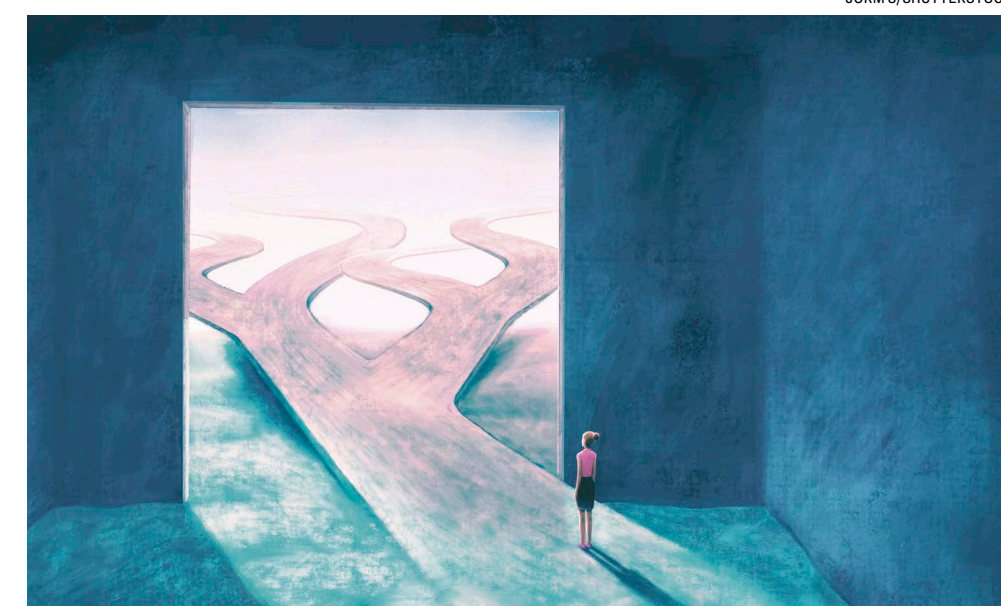
For the most part, find a local charity that you believe in and donate your things there.

6. Find inspiration to keep going.

Find as much motivation and inspiration as you need. The reality is this process is going to take more than one day, or even one weekend. So, find your places of encouragement. You can watch my YouTube channel, check out my blog, or download the Clutterfree App.

Either way, the more you are reminded that owning less is better, the easier it will be to declutter your stuff—and keep it clean.

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



JORM S/SHUTTERSTOCK

Examine what decisions you routinely wrestle with.

vesting, to snacking and website browsing.

Here's how: Examine what decisions you routinely wrestle with.

Systematize as many of them as possible by making one big decision, not many little ones.

Continue looking for ways to simplify your life to the point at which the decisions you do have to make relate to things you really care about.

Nobody is perfect. Willpower rises and falls. There's no way to get around the fact that decision fatigue will result in Netflix binges and one too many beers. But it's possible to take some small, positive steps forward by taking more decisions off the table. "One and done" is an approach that can help you make fewer decisions, and therefore make those decisions better.

Jay Harrington is an author and lawyer-turned-entrepreneur who 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.

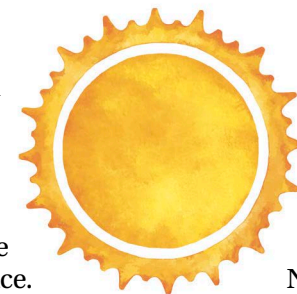
Each day we have to make hundreds of decisions. This is exhausting. That means whatever you can do to stop remaking the same decision over and over will save you energy.

effect on our moods.

The feeling that we get when someone smiles at us is palpable. Even when we don't know the person. Those pleasant interactions with strangers at the grocery store tell us the world is a safe and pleasant place. But over these past 12 months, we've heard that strangers are dangerous, and we need to stay away.

And those smiles we once shared freely? When we've needed them the most, we haven't been able to see them.

Sure, in some states, such as Florida, and



After the past 12 months of COVID winter, we are all ready to spring into action.

ROLAU ELENA/SHUTTERSTOCK

perhaps Texas, mask wearing hasn't been as pronounced. Nonetheless, life has been very different everywhere these past 12 months. That's added an emotional and psychological weight on us, whether we realize it or not.

And now is the season for that weight to lift.

Despite everything, these next 12 weeks

are worth getting excited about. It's time to put together bold plans based on big visions and forge ahead with great hope.

Don't let this year of pandemic winter keep you down. Ever since I graduated college, with the arrival of every spring, I would always say to myself, "This is the summer when everything comes together!" That beautiful summer never quite arrives precisely as I envision it. But this year, this summer, summer 2021, I am starting to feel it like never before.

Make it happen. Don't give up. Don't stay depressed. If you lost your job, or if your

world tour got canceled, get over it and make a new plan. If you lost that promotion, create the plan to find a replacement position. Or if you have just been going stir crazy being stuck inside with nothing to do but scroll and stream, take heart—summer has returned.

Monroe Mann holds a doctorate in psychology, an MBA, a law degree, and is also a bronze-star nominated Iraq war veteran. He is the founder of the positive psychology-based social network, *BreakDown.io* and the author of "Time Zen," "Successful New Year," and "T.R.U.S.T." For more info, visit MonroeMannLaw.com



Alcohol can offer a numbing respite from grief but it doesn't truly help us recover from the loss of a loved one.

The Subtle Dangers of Alcohol and Grieving

Alcohol can numb certain kinds of pain but only at the risk of creating another

CHRISTINE LISTER

My history with alcohol has been fairly tame. In my teen years, I partied with friends, but eventually my drinking tapered off as I got older and focused more on physical and spiritual health.

Over the years, my attitude toward drinking ranged from indifference to suspicion as I noticed how others used or misused alcohol. My own use as an adult went through long periods of complete abstinence. My late husband, John, and I weren't regular or heavy drinkers. But we did have the occasional bottle of wine, and he liked his microbrews.

Prior to my husband's death in 2017, we had steadily increased our alcohol consumption as a result of influence from friends who were wine connoisseurs. We even joined a local wine club the month before John died. We'd spent our last wedding anniversary at a winery and on a whim we joined their club. We had planned to make it a monthly date day out when we'd go pick up our two bottles. That never happened.

I thought I'd cancel my membership after he died since I didn't need to spend the money on two bottles of pricey wine each month, but as with many things, I balked at doing so (the psychological impact of a partner's death brings many



surprises). Initially, I kept the membership as a memorial to something we had done together before John died. But that meant I now would have a regular supply of wine whereas before I didn't buy wine for daily use.

Along with my two bottles a month, I could partake in a free wine tasting every day of the year, and I could include a friend. The winery was a short 50-minute drive that included scenic rolling hills of other vineyards. My first drive was alone, and I used that time to contemplate what would've been. When I got to the winery to pick up my wine, I sat on the same bench where John and I had taken a selfie weeks before and just wept. I couldn't let go of the connection to that winery.

Instead, I drank more wine. At first, I'd give a bottle away to someone I knew couldn't afford expensive wine as I knew they'd appreciate it. But soon I found that I could polish off two bottles a month. Eventually, I let go of the wine club and switched to buying less expensive brands at Trader Joe's or Sprouts. My wine intake stayed steady at about two bottles a month. The amount I drank wasn't the issue—my motive for drinking was.

One night when I had had enough of being sad, crying my eyes out, and just feeling grief-weary, I downed a glass. I immediately poured myself another glass and proceeded to drink that. In that moment, I knew I was misusing alcohol. Before I

finished the second glass, I started feeling the effects of the first one. In a split second, I knew I was on the verge of choosing something dangerous.

I looked at my young adult daughter and asked her to take away my glass and (gasp) dump the rest of the bottle down the drain. To my surprise, I didn't have the strength to do that on my own and I didn't have the willpower to stop.

Grieving is hard work. It takes energy and effort, and often wipes you out.

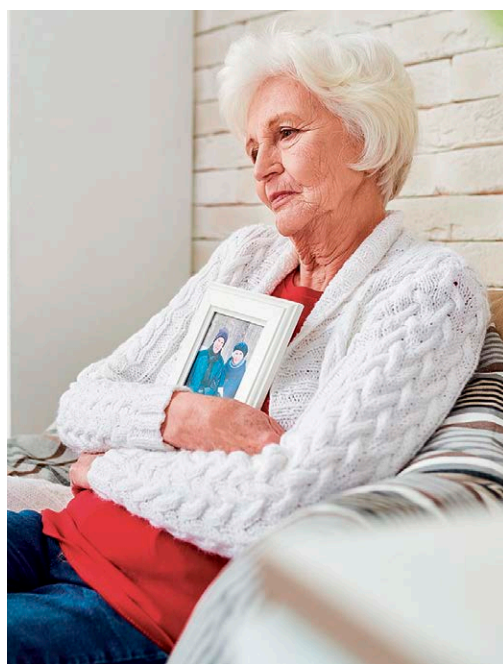
My vulnerability in that moment scared me. I'm a lightweight by nature so the two glasses I had downed hit me hard. As I waited for the effects to wear off, I realized I was in trouble. I quit drinking right then. I needed to institute a period of abstinence to get clarity. What surprised me was how easy it was for me to misuse alcohol. I didn't have an "issue" with drinking, but it suddenly became an issue when I drank with impure motives.

I eventually reintroduced alcohol back into my dining experience but with an increased awareness of how and when my grieving may influence my drinking. I periodically hit the pause button on alcohol consumption if I sense I've had a lot of grief triggers and the temptation to imbibe too much is high.

This experience taught me how important it is to be brutally honest with myself in my grieving. Grieving is hard work. It takes energy and effort, and often wipes you out. To ensure I use healthy coping methods, I have tried to be more mindful of how the energy drain of grief affects my normal capacities. Alcohol is an easy trip to numbing land but doesn't aid my grief progress.

These days, I stay attuned to what's triggering a sad moment, adjust my expectations of myself, and express my grief as needed. No hiding. No numbing. Just being real and raw with the ebb and flow of my grieving when it comes.

Christine Lister is a licensed therapist in private practice in Southern California, offering in-person and telehealth sessions. She specializes in anxiety, grief (especially loss of spouse), parenting, and young adult transitions from a faith-based perspective as desired. To find out more about Christine, visit her website: ListerCounseling.com



The pain of losing a loved one can be hard to bear, but avoiding it with drugs or alcohol can lead to even greater suffering.

MINDSET MATTERS

How Anxiety Hides in Your Habits

Before trying tips to lower your anxiety, a new book encourages you to understand your anxiety routines



When anxiety strikes, we can ward it off better if we take a moment to contemplate the habits that feed it.

KIRA M. NEWMAN

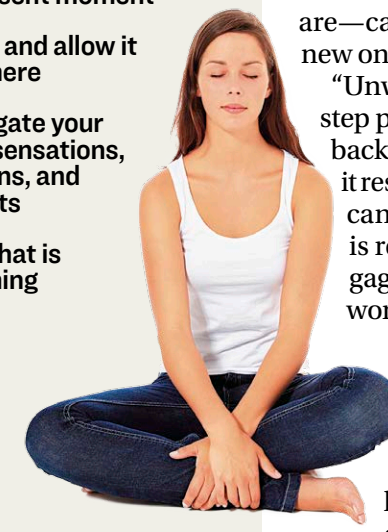
I don't know about you, but I'm a little tired of reading the same tips over and over about how to calm down and destress. I want other options besides slowing my breathing when my chest feels heavy, or questioning the worst-case scenarios running through my head.

That's why psychiatrist Judson Brewer's new book "Unwinding Anxiety" is so refreshing. Yes, it has tips—but they come later in the book. In fact, his main point is that tips alone won't help those of us who struggle with anxiety.

Brewer shows how anxiety exists inside the habits of our everyday lives—and habits are sticky. Habits like shallow, tense breathing don't go away just because we tell ourselves to breathe. As crazy as it sounds, our brain is attracted to these anxiety habits because they create some sense of reward.

Counter Anxiety With Mindfulness

- Recognize and relax into the present moment
- Accept and allow it to be there
- Investigate your bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts
- Note what is happening



KAESLER MEDIA/SHUTTERSTOCK

Implementing tips and tools skips an important step, Brewer argues. Before we can try to change anything, we have to spend some time observing our anxiety-related habits. Only then—by showing our brain viscerally how unrewarding these habits are—can we move on to actually creating new ones.

"Unwinding Anxiety" offers a three-step process to help you do exactly that, backed up by Brewer's extensive habit research. While many wellness books can feel overwhelming, his approach is reassuring in its simplicity and engaging enough to feel like it just might work.

STEP 1 Map Out Anxiety Habits

If you struggle with anxiety, it's likely that anxiety has become a habit for you, Brewer writes. Many of our habits were meant to help us

reduce stress or satisfy emotional needs, he says. Unfortunately, many of these efforts are short-term only, and don't always benefit us long-term. Eating comfort foods may be one example. Our habits exist in loops that consist of a trigger, a behavior, and a result. For example:

TRIGGER: Feel anxious
BEHAVIOR: Eat something sweet
RESULT: Be distracted from anxiety
Sometimes anxiety can trigger a habit loop, but it can also be the result in a habit loop:

TRIGGER: Feel unmotivated at work
BEHAVIOR: Read news
RESULT: Feel anxious about the state of the world
But the most pernicious anxiety-related habit is this basic pattern, which many of us fall into, where anxiety reinforces itself:

Continued on Page 12

MADE TO MOVE

Exercise Spurs Molecular Change

Exercising spurs thousands of biochemical reactions that scientists still know little about

JOSEPH MERCOLA

In the most comprehensive study to date of the molecular changes that occur in your body due to exercise, researchers have seen "an orchestrated choreography of biological processes." Researchers at Stanford University found that one exercise session leads

to changes in a remarkable 9,815 molecules in your blood.

The findings reveal exercise does far more than simply raise your heart rate and cause you to break a sweat. Physical activity leads to a system-wide molecular response in your body, including changes in inflammatory markers and meta-

bolic pathways.

This gives a glimpse into why the very straightforward act of getting moving is associated with so many benefits to your physical and mental health, from boosting your immune system to protecting cognitive function.

Continued on Page 14



New research has revealed a wider picture of the sweeping impacts exercise has on our biochemistry.

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THE EPOCH TIMES

TRUTH AND TRADITION

BECOMING MINIMALIST

You Need Less Variety Than You Think. Embrace It.

Our cultural obsession with novelty runs counter to our natural inclination for simplicity

JOSHUA BECKER

The first time I ever heard about someone eating the same meal every day was from the family practice doctor in Wisconsin who delivered my son and soon became a valued friend. The doctor—old enough to be my father—ate a taco salad every day for lunch.

A few years later, I was at another friend's parents' house and he showed me their basement pantry loaded with shelves of canned tuna. He told me that his dad, a professional fisherman, ate a tuna sandwich every day for lunch.

I didn't give the idea much thought beyond occasionally being jealous that my doctor friend ate a taco salad every day for lunch. Mmm.

Life continued, 10 years passed, and I picked up a copy of Tim Ferris's book "The 4-Hour Body."

In his chapter on "Rapid Fat Loss," he offered a passing sentence when asked about boredom with the limited food options in his prescribed diet: "Most people vastly overestimate the variety of their meals."

My mind immediately raced back to my role models in Wisconsin from so many years ago, both of whom had chosen to eat the same meal every day for lunch. They had discovered a routine that worked well for them.

Rather than fighting against routine in their diet, they had embraced the practice.

It's worth noting that this isn't an article about nutrition, it's an article about the patterns of our daily lives and how to create these more consciously for our own well-being. While some meals are certainly healthier to repeat daily than others, this article is about the benefits of simplicity in our lives.

Instagram and advertising encourage us to want for something new every day, whether that be a meal or material item.

You Could Already Be There

As a writer and overall promoter of the benefits of minimalism, I have often seen how people overestimate the number of material possessions they need. So when I read the sentence in Tim's book that "most people vastly overestimate the variety of their meals," I believed it.

I have seen "overestimating variety" to be true in clothing, entertainment, books, linens, and any number of other examples. Why not food?

The Pareto principle is proven true over and over again—roughly 80 percent of the effects come from 20 percent of the causes.

We wear 20 percent of our clothes 80 percent of the time.

We use 20 percent of our kitchen gadgets 80 percent of the time.

We watch 20 percent of the same channels 80 percent of the time.

And, generally speaking, we eat 20 percent of the same food 80 percent of the time.

Just think about what you have had to eat for breakfast over the past week. Most likely, you've eaten the same couple of meals. Or how about lunch?

My breakfast these days, when I eat it, is two eggs and four strips of turkey bacon. My lunch consists of rotisserie chicken or a salad (with chicken).

And I know I'm far from alone in these kinds of habits. According to one study conducted in Great Britain by Whole

Foods Market, almost 33 percent of us eat the same lunch every day.

Here's the reality: We tend to eat many of the same foods over and over again. And yet, we contend that variety is the spice of life. We are inundated with advertising messages from childhood onward that urge us toward what is new, novel, and upgraded. We are taught that sticking with the same thing, whether it be fashion or food, is all but uncouth. We think repetition reflects poorly on how cultured

or creative we are, that it says something about how sophisticated our palate or adventurous our spirit. Instagram and advertising encourage us to want for something new every day, whether that be meal or material item.

But that message overlooks the real benefit of leaning into the reality that we crave stability in our meals. There is something tried and true in eating the same side with soup. And that truth shows in the fact that most of us have a stable of staple meals we trot out regularly.

Why You Should Say Yes to Meal Routine

Speaking at a conference several years ago, I was asked by a mother how to keep down food waste and costs in her home.

I was already a convert to meal repetition, so I answered: "Accept the fact that you eat less variety of foods than you think. Don't fight against it. Don't believe society's pressure that you need to be dreaming up something new for every meal. Find your family's favorite meals and serve them often. You'll lower your monthly food costs, waste, and time spent in preparation."

Of course, if your recycling is overflowing with processed food packages, you will want to incrementally convert your family toward more fruit, vegetables, whole grains, healthy fats, and lean proteins. But regardless of that, consider the benefits to us (and our families) of establishing a regular meal rotation:

1. Money savings. When you begin to establish a weekly routine of your family's favorite meals, you save money by wasting less, learning the correct portion size, recognizing sales and good



SEBASTIAN COMAN PHOTOGRAPHY/UNSPLASH

We tend to overvalue variety and indulgence, which can create unrealistic expectations for mealtimes. More important than our food experience is our experience connecting with other people.



MONKEY BUSINESS IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK

A weekly pizza night lets everyone get really good at making a family favorite and offers a doughy platform to try new things.

prices, and knowing which spices or condiments to purchase.

2. Time savings. Not only does a weekly routine of meals save time hunting for recipes or new ideas, but we become more and more efficient at preparing each of the meals that we do enjoy.

This "time saved" may be more precious during specific seasons of life (when you have young children at home, for example), but extra time in the day can be appreciated by everyone.

3. Better health. A thought-out and intentional routine of meals offers greater opportunity to align our diets with nutritional recommendations.

4. Less food waste. According to the USDA, about 133 billion pounds of food is wasted each year in the United States. That's about 364 million pounds a day, equivalent to about a pound of food, or one-third of the daily calories that each American consumes. This waste takes a toll on our household budget.

5. Weight control. Many people who eat the same lunch every day attest that the practice is helpful in weight control, contending they eat less because of it. It's called "school cafeteria syndrome," and according to researchers, it really works in reducing the amount of food we eat. When you eat to appease your hunger and fuel your body, rather than entertain your taste buds, you'll naturally eat a more appropriate amount.

6. Fewer failed recipes. As I will mention in a moment, there's still room for trying new foods and recipes, and I recommend it with young kids at home. But establishing a stable routine of meals each week and experimenting with fewer new recipes means fewer failed meals.

That means avoiding the disheartening experience of spending hours preparing a meal, only to have it flop at the dinner table.

7. Benefits for kids. The more children see specific foods in front of them, the more likely they are to learn to enjoy them. Creating a routine certainly doesn't eliminate all "eat your vegetables" negotiations at the dinner table, but people generally appreciate things more when they become more familiar. Meal repetition also sets an expectation and can help compel a picky child to expand their palate.

8. Greater simplicity. Embracing a meal routine (whether daily or weekly) promotes simplicity, reduces stress and anxiety, removes decision fatigue, and frees us to pursue more important things than answering "What's for dinner?"

How to Implement a Meal Rotation

How do we go about this in our own unique families? Here are some thoughts to get you started:

1. Start on your own.

If you eat lunch every day at the office, it's easy to choose your one or two favorite meals and repeat them each day. The same is true for breakfast if you eat it alone. As mentioned above, breakfast and lunch are where I embrace the most routine.

Embracing a meal routine (whether daily or weekly) promotes simplicity, reduces stress and anxiety, removes decision fatigue, and frees us to pursue more important things than answering 'What's for dinner?'

2. Determine your family's favorites.

Take each person into account. Are there specific meals that everybody likes?

If so, those are obvious places to start establishing a routine. I'd recommend identifying five or six family favorites.

If you can't get that much agreement in your family, be sure to think about those with pickier palates and what accommodations can be made.

3. Write out a weekly schedule.

Take into account your weekly commitments. Does someone have volleyball practice on Tuesday night? Youth group on Wednesday? Or a business meeting on Monday? Factor in both the time you have to prepare and the time to sit down and eat.

My family loves tacos on Tuesdays. And we serve pizza on Sunday evenings, because my son typically works late and my wife and I take my daughter to church that night.

4. Don't sacrifice health.

Eating foods you enjoy doesn't mean sacrificing healthy habits. If you're serving pizza or pasta, pack it with vegetables, or add some to the side. If you encounter resistance, you incrementally upgrade the nutrient density of your weekly pizza over time, another benefit of repetition.

I actually find it easier to eat well when a routine is established because we intentionally include fruits and vegetables every evening.

5. Don't sacrifice variety for simplicity.

Rare is the family for whom a week's schedule doesn't vary. Variety in meals is inevitable, and it can also be scheduled. You can decide that every Monday is new-recipe day, or you can choose variety when you eat out.

Establishing a meal routine five nights of the week still leaves room for plenty of gustatory variety.

6. Proceed with trial, error, and adjustments.

If you discover that one meal takes longer to prepare than you want, change it. If one meal is no longer enjoyed by your family, pick a new one. If you discover that a routine works well for one month but then you want to make a new one, go for it.

The goal is to find something that works for your family and saves you time and money.

Eat. Repeat.

One of my favorite things about minimalism is that removing unneeded things typically leaves me with better stuff, whether that be meals or shoes. Minimalism also removes distraction, and gives me more money, time, energy, and peace.

We all have our favorite foods. Accept that and embrace eating the foods you most enjoy over and over again. You'll be grateful every time you sit down to eat—and you'll save money and time along the way.

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

If You Want Better Sleep, Avoid the Late-Night Snack

MAT LECOMPTE

When you settle into a movie or watch your favorite team play, you might want to hold off on the snacks. It's not so much about the extra calories but about how it could impact sleep.

Eating in the evening doesn't help you sleep, even if it makes you feel tired. A big dinner at 8 p.m. will likely lead to tossing and turning until 4 a.m. Even a snack can hold you back from getting some good shut-eye.

Your body naturally starts to prepare for sleep when the sun starts going down, whether or not you realize it. Your microbiome, hormones, and organs all enter a sleep-preparation phase so that you can enter unencumbered slumber each night.

The first step is to try to avoid a big calorie dump within about three hours of bedtime.

Filling up the tank with a bunch of calories, however, sends the complete opposite signal. So, even though you may feel physically and mentally tired, the digestion and absorption of nutrients and calories turn your body back up to full blast.

Think of it this way: You've just filled up with gas. But unlike your vehicle, you can't just turn it off. You're up and running until the food has been processed.

A good strategy is to go heavy on your calories through the morning and afternoon, then light for dinner.

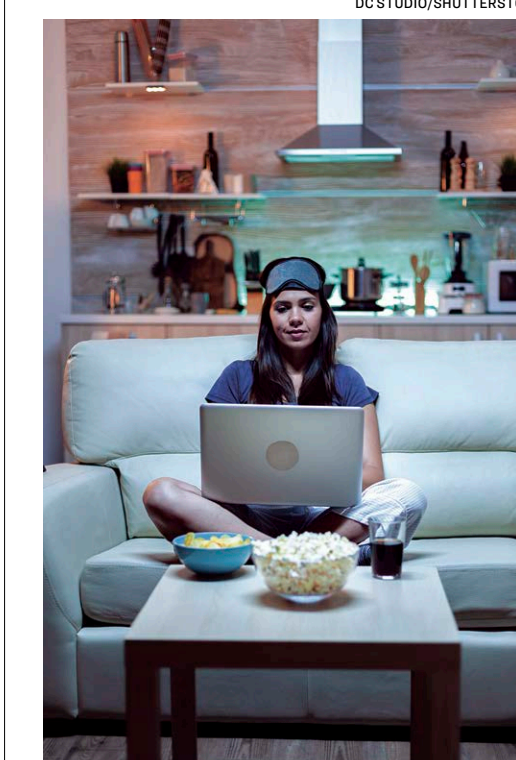
What can you do? The first step is to try to avoid a big calorie dump within about three hours of bedtime. You can plan to eat dinner a little bit earlier, or if that isn't an option, you can alter how you consume calories during the day.

A good strategy is to go heavy on your calories through the morning and afternoon, then light for dinner. Front-loading calories may help you get better sleep.

If you are feeling peckish in the evening, it's best to turn to nutritious and easily digestible options. Things like carrot sticks, fruit, or even a little bit of air-popped popcorn are good options.

Sleep trouble can be caused by a variety of factors, and food timing is certainly one of them. Try minding your meal times during the day for better sleep at night.

Mat Lecompte is a freelance health and wellness journalist. This article was first published on [Bel Marra Health](https://BelMarraHealth.com).



Your body doesn't store food for later. It digests it all right away, in a process that can keep you awake.

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MINDSET MATTERS

How Anxiety Hides in Your Habits

Before trying tips to lower your anxiety, a new book encourages you to understand your anxiety routines

Continued from Page 9

TRIGGER: Feel anxious
BEHAVIOR: Worry (ruminate on what's wrong, what could go wrong, etc.)
RESULT: Feel more anxious

What reward could we possibly get out of a self-perpetuating anxiety cycle? Well, Brewer says, the act of worrying can sometimes feel good—or at least better than just sitting with our anxiety. Worrying sometimes (rarely) allows us to come up with solutions, which makes it seem productive. We think we're solving problems. Some of us are afraid we'll be unprepared for the future if we don't worry, and worry gives us a sense of control, even when all we do is churn through the same fears over and over.

One of the studies Brewer contributed to (currently under peer review), explored the effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction among a group of doctors. The intervention used an app to help doctors become aware of worry habit loops. For the doctors, this awareness reduced their burnout and cynicism.

But mapping out your habits is just the first step.

STEP 2 | Work With Your Brain's Reward System

As Brewer says, our brain stores a "reward value" for different people, places, and things we encounter. The more rewarding our brain thinks a behavior is, the stronger the habit around it will be.

But reward values can become skewed or outdated. For example, we might have developed a passion for cake as an anxious teen—but in adulthood, we now find ourselves in a queasy sugar coma after three slices.

"The only sustainable way to change a habit is to update its reward value," writes Brewer. That means taking a fresh look at how a habit is affecting us now. And we need to do this over and over, each time we repeat the habit in our daily life, until our brain updates its reward value and stops being drawn to the habit.

What does this mean in practice?

Once you've identified your habits that support anxiety, you need to be mindful when they occur. If you're anxious and you start worrying about the future, make a mental note; observe the tight-

ness in your chest, the lump in your throat, how little you get done at work that afternoon.

The good thing about this approach is that moments of anxiety become an opportunity to learn about yourself, not something to be afraid of, and not a failure in your quest for calm. (Self-judgment, apparently, seems to go hand-in-hand with anxiety.)

If you have trouble being aware of habits in real time, you can also look back on your day or your week to see the effects of a particular behavior. If your anxiety made you snap at your partner, how did that feel? Rather than analyzing it, just try to re-experience it in your body.

Over time, Brewer suggests, our brain will naturally become disenchanted with our anxiety habits without us having to use so much willpower, allowing more space for new habits to form.

STEP 3 | Create New Habits

This step is where most other advice begins: the healthy habits and behaviors that we want to engage in. But it makes sense that there isn't much room for these new behaviors until our brains detach from the old ones.

Brewer suggests a variety of mindfulness-related behaviors that you could insert into your habit loops when a trigger arises, many of which may be familiar to you already:

- **Curiosity and mindfulness:** Rather than judging yourself for being anxious, or getting obsessed about where your anxiety is coming from, just get curious. What does it feel like, and where? How does it change? Brewer even recommends saying "Hmmm!" out loud to yourself, to encourage that sense of curiosity.
- **Breathing:** Tune in to the breathing sensations in your body. Breathe into places where anxiety shows up, and breathe out anxiety. See how things change.

Our brain is attracted to these anxiety habits because they create some sense of reward.



- **RAIN:** This is a mindfulness practice where you Recognize and relax into the present moment; Accept and allow it to be there; Investigate your bodily sensations, emotions, and thoughts; and Note what is happening.
- **Noting:** This is a practice of labeling what experiences are predominant in your mind moment to moment, including any of your senses (hearing, touch, sight), thinking, or feeling.
- **Loving kindness:** The practice of sending kind, caring thoughts to people, including yourself, and feeling that sense of warmth in your body.

To reinforce these habits, Brewer suggests you can apply techniques from step 2—but this time, instead of observing the detrimental effects, you observe how good it feels in your body to be curious or generate loving feelings.

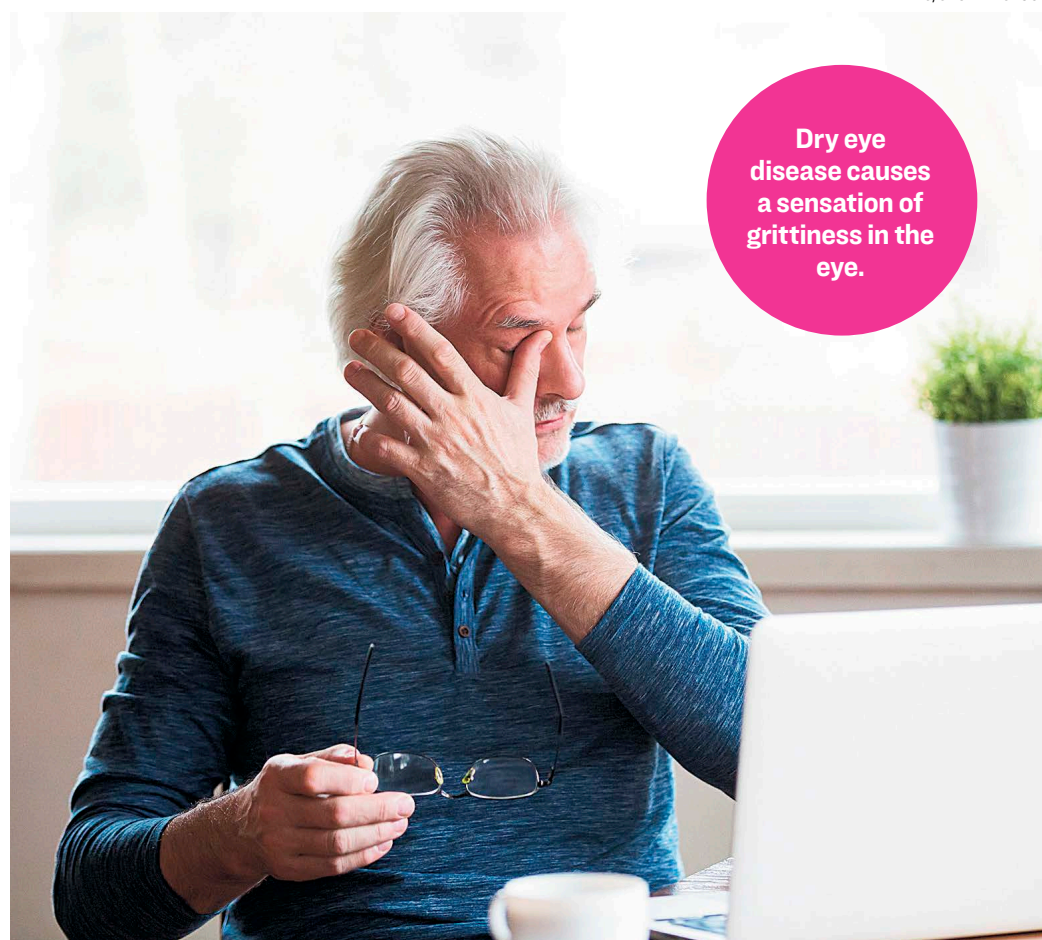
Brewer is a habit expert—much of his research has focused on smoking and eating disorders. Although his book is about anxiety, the overall framework could apply to many habits in our lives. His insights reveal why so many of our good intentions to exercise, meditate, and otherwise improve don't translate into action. Brewer gives us tools we can use to work with our brains, rather than have our brains work according to anxiety-creating habits.

Kira M. Newman is the managing editor of Greater Good. Her work has been published in outlets including The Washington Post, Mindful magazine, Social Media Monthly, and Tech.co, and she is the co-editor of The Gratitude Project. This article was originally published in Greater Good online magazine.

Take a moment to probe how anxiety feels in your body.

Dry Eye Disease Harms More Than Vision

Study links dry eye disease with broader health concerns and other conditions



People with dry eye disease have problems carrying out daily activities and work productivity due to adverse effects on visual function.

SARAH COWNLEY

Patients suffering from dry eye disease face vision problems, and new research shows how this condition can also harm physical and mental health. The study shows that these patients have a lower quality of life compared to those without symptoms.

Dry eye disease is a condition that can affect people of any age but is most prevalent in women and older people. It's estimated that up to a third of adults over the age of 65 have the condition, which includes symptoms such as irritation and redness in the eyes, blurred vision, and a sensation of grittiness in the eye.

This new study, led by the University of Southampton, explored how dry eye disease affects the lives of adults in the UK. It included 1,000 patients with the condition and 1,000 without. All patients were required to answer a questionnaire from the National Eye Institute about their visual function and a EuroQol questionnaire on health-related quality of life. Participants who declared that they had experienced dry eye were required to answer further questions to assess the severity of their symptoms.

It was found that a higher proportion of participants with dry eye disease had problems with mobility and experienced more difficulties in their day-to-day activities compared to patients without the condition. The study also revealed that they were more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety.

Patients with the most severe symptoms were more likely to report a negative impact on their social and emotional func-

tion and work productivity. The findings suggest people with dry eye disease have problems carrying out daily activities and work productivity due to adverse effects on visual function.

Dr. Parwez Hossain, who led the study, said: "This study provided some very useful information on the burden that dry eye disease places on patients. As well as confirming the impact on work and social lives, we also discovered that the extent of the effects are consistent with the severity of symptoms. We also found that participants with dry eye disease symptoms were a lot more likely to suffer from other comorbidities, twice as many suffered from arthritis, hearing loss or irritable bowel disease compared to the cohort without symptoms."

Researchers do note that some environmental factors could impact the symptoms patients with dry eye disease may encounter. While all participants in the study reported similar digital screen use levels and reading, those with dry eye disease symptoms reported more exposure to environmental factors such as air conditioning, forced heating, or air pollution. More research is needed to confirm whether these factors could contribute to the disease or be noticed more by sufferers.

Sarah Cownley earned a diploma in nutritional therapy from Health Sciences Academy in London, and she enjoys helping others by teaching healthy lifestyle changes through her personal consultations and with her regular contributions to the Doctors Health Press. This article was originally published on Bel Marra Health.

Pandemic Babies Raise Worrying Questions

Researchers call for greater focus on how COVID-19 has affected child development



Babies born after March 11, 2020, will have only known a world in the grip of a pandemic. They may never have met anyone who isn't their parent, or they may only ever have seen their grandparents from a distance. They certainly will not have had the same opportunities to interact with other children as those born in the years before.

What are the implications for these pandemic children? As researchers, while we do think that most babies will have had an opportunity to thrive, there's still a lot we don't know, and we are clear that the first months and years of life are vitally important for a child's long-term health, development, and well-being.

Development takes place at an extraordinary rate during a baby's first year when the brain doubles in size. This early development depends crucially on experience, and particularly social experience, which stimulates, tunes, and hones the brain's unfolding architecture.

A stimulating, varied, and responsive environment supports the development of language, cognition, and emotional and social competencies. This dependence on environmental input makes the brain exquisitely flexible and capable of adaptation. But, by the same token, it also means that babies are highly susceptible to the negative impacts of adversity.

One thing we also know with great certainty is that parental stress and mental health problems pose serious risks to children's later development, affecting their language and cognitive development, their emotional well-being, and putting them at risk of depression and anxiety themselves.

One thing we also know with great certainty is that parental stress and mental health problems pose serious risks to children's later development.

Unfortunately, support systems for babies and their families have been profoundly disrupted by the pandemic. As is sadly often the case, it's the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children who depend on these services and support networks the most.

For example, many health visitors, who provide advice and resources and who are often the main source of support and connection to health services for families with young babies, have been redeployed into the frontline COVID-19 response during the pandemic. Those who remained have reported that their work

with families was considerably affected by very high caseloads and the barriers created by social distancing measures.

Many expressed concerns about their ability to monitor children's development and refer families to specialist support services when parents were experiencing mental health problems.

On top of that, friends and family have had their ability to visit loved ones and their babies drastically curtailed.

Social support from friends, family, community groups, and professionals is normally considered vital not only because it provides infants with variety, stimulation, and opportunities for learning, but also because it's good for the well-being of parents, on whom babies are so dependent.

So in these circumstances, what can parents do to help their babies? The evidence suggests that the key to optimal development is play and stimulation, those back-and-forth interactions between caregivers and babies.

Following a child's lead when they take an interest in some item, naming objects, talking, laughing, singing, and reading—all simple, no-to-low cost activities—keep babies learning and developing even when the world outside is in difficulty.

Babies at Risk

There are good reasons to be concerned about infant and early child development during this time and, like so many other things, these risks will not be evenly distributed.

The lack of support structures, the economic pressures, and the drastic reduction in professional contact with health visitors and social workers during the pandemic is almost certainly placing large numbers of babies at greatly increased risk of harm, including risk of maltreatment and even death.

The effects of abuse on child development are profound and long-lasting, including long-term physical disability, emotional distress, and mental health concerns. To give a striking example, nearly half of all adult mental health conditions are associated with a history of childhood maltreatment.

In normal times, maltreatment affects approximately 12 percent to 23 percent of children. Children in economically disadvantaged circumstances are five times more likely to be subjected to abuse. In the United Kingdom, 51,510 children were on a child protection plan in March 2020 when the pandemic began.

During the pandemic, local authorities reported more than 300 serious incidents of injury and death involving children between April and October 2020—up by a fifth from the same time in 2019. An increased proportion (almost 40 percent) involved children under the age of 1.

We also know that rates of domestic violence have increased greatly during the pandemic and babies are profoundly affected by this.

Indeed, domestic violence is the single

Development takes place at an extraordinary rate during a baby's first year.

most common factor leading a child to be referred to a child protection service. We sadly under-invest in the most vulnerable children at the best of times. We should be extremely concerned about them in times like these.

The Baby Blind Spot

Babies need stimulation, social contact, and responsive caregiving, and all of these will have been affected during the pandemic in complex ways, but we lack good evidence about how this is playing out.

Oxford Brookes University has conducted a study focused on how the pandemic is affecting children of the youngest ages, and in due course will provide us with much-needed insights. But it's a concern that even now, a year in, we have very poor information about how babies and preschoolers have been affected by the momentous events that have taken place.

This highlights a key point: Despite babies being among the most vulnerable in society and most dependent on nurturing care and stimulation, their needs are almost always the last to be noticed. The recent Working for Babies report called this the "baby blind-spot" with good reason.

At this point in the pandemic, we are desperately in need of good data to understand how babies have been affected and may continue to be affected in the coming years. It's clear that the time has come to step up in our responsibility for all of the babies born into these strange times.

Sunil Bhopal is an academic clinical lecturer in pediatrics at Newcastle University in the UK, and Pasco Fearon is the chair of developmental psychopathology at the University of California—Los Angeles. This article was first published on The Conversation.

The key to optimal child development is play and stimulation, those back-and-forth interactions between caregivers and babies.



MADE TO MOVE

Exercise Spurs Molecular Change

Continued from Page 9

‘Omics’ Reveals

Molecular Choreography

The term “omics” is used in the field of biological sciences to describe the study of large sets of biological molecules. Proteomics, for instance, refers to the study of proteins within a cell, while metabolomics refers to molecules in the blood that influence metabolism, and genomics delves into molecules related to gene expression.

While previous omics studies have looked into how exercise affects specific areas, such as metabolomics, the featured study, published in *Cell*, took it a step further.

“We performed longitudinal multi-omic profiling of plasma and peripheral blood mononuclear cells including metabolome, lipidome, immunome, proteome, and transcriptome from 36 well-characterized volunteers, before and after a controlled bout of symptom-limited exercise,” the researchers stated.

In other words, researchers look at molecular changes across a large swath of the body’s vast biochemical systems before and after 36 people exercised.

This is the most comprehensive study to date of the molecular changes that occur in your body due to exercise, providing an unprecedented glimpse into the details of the body’s physiological response. The study demonstrated that “an orchestrated choreography of biological processes” occur, including those relating to:

- Energy metabolism
- Oxidative stress
- Inflammation
- Tissue repair
- Growth factor response

The study subjects were between the ages of 40 and 75, with a mix of fitness levels and health. Some participants were insulin resistant. The volunteers completed a treadmill endurance test lasting about eight to 12 minutes, with blood draws occurring before and two minutes after the session, along with 15, 30, and 60 minutes later.

Blood draws also took place before and after a period of rest, which acted as the control.

“Everybody knows exercise is good for you, but we really don’t know what drives that at a molecular level,” Michael Snyder, professor and chair of genetics at Stanford University, said in a statement. “Our goal at the outset was to conduct a highly comprehensive analysis of what’s happening in the body just after exercising.”

In all, 17,662 molecules were measured, 9,815 of which changed in response to exercise, with some going up and others going down. Certain molecules also spiked immediately after exercise then quickly dropped, while others remained heightened for an hour.

“It was like a symphony,” Snyder told *The New York Times*. “First, you have the brass section coming in, then the strings, then all the sections joining in.”

Molecular Changes

Varied by Timing, Health Status

One intriguing finding was how different the metabolic changes were in individuals depending on their health status, particularly relating to insulin resistance, which plays a role in virtually all chronic diseases. In those with insulin resistance, a reduced inflammatory response was noted, and there was a dampened immune response after exercise.

Significant differences were also noted depending on when the blood was drawn, with the researchers describing an “intense flurry of molecular activity” in the body in the first two minutes post-exercise. In those first minutes, molecular markers of inflammation, tissue healing, and oxidative stress, which is a byproduct of metabolism, rose sharply.

Further, in the first couple of minutes, molecular markers suggested the body tended to metabolize amino acids for energy, but then switched to the sugar glucose at about 15 minutes after the workout. “The body breaks down glycogen [a form of stored glucose] as part of its exercise recovery response, so that’s why we see that spike a little later,” Snyder said.

Could a Blood Test Reveal

Your Level of Fitness?

A strong correlation was found among a set of molecules and an individual’s



Exercise science has entered a new era of molecular biology.

aerobic fitness level, leading the researchers to suggest it may be possible to use a blood test to monitor fitness level.

Thousands of molecules were correlated with aerobic fitness level, researchers found, after looking at those who performed better on a treadmill endurance test. The test measured peak VO2 as a proxy for aerobic fitness. This test measures your body’s ability to transport and use oxygen.

Molecules linked to fitness also serve as markers of immunity, metabolism, and muscle activity.

“At this point, we don’t fully understand the connection between some of these markers and how they are related to better fitness,” Snyder said. There is also limited application of that insight, should it develop, given that such molecular profiling would currently be too expensive and extensive for doctors to use in clinics.

However, with further research, it may be possible to detect which biomarkers are most useful for determining fitness levels based on those that are most highly correlated with peak VO2 results.

“It gave us the idea that we could develop a test to predict someone’s level of fitness,” study author Kevin Contrepois, director of metabolomics and lipidomics in Stanford’s Department of Genetics, said. “Aerobic fitness is one of the best measures of longevity, so a simple blood test that can provide that information would be valuable to personal health monitoring.”

While other fitness tests exist—grip strength, for instance, may be associated with your risk of heart attack and stroke—a blood test for fitness would allow you to monitor how changes in your fitness routine are working, and adjust accordingly.

Extend Your Lifespan

in Just Minutes a Day

The featured study’s findings are impressive, in part because of the magnitude of changes prompted by just one brief session of exercise. “I had thought, it’s only about nine minutes of exercise, how much is going to change?” Snyder said. “A lot, as it turns out.”

In terms of “bang for your buck” when it comes to your health, exercise is one of the most effective uses of time. Some of the biochemical changes induced by exercise are already well established and may affect cancer risk and the following pathways:

- Insulin-like growth factor
- Epigenetic effects on gene expression and DNA repair
- HIF 1-alpha
- Oxidative stress and antioxidant pathways
- Heat shock proteins
- Testosterone
- Negative regulator of myostatin
- Immunity
- Chronic inflammation and prostaglandins
- Energy metabolism

Insulin resistance research has also shown that exercising for 15 minutes a day, or an average of 92 minutes per week, lowers all-cause mortality by 14 percent and extends life expectancy by three years compared to being inactive.

This was true even among people with risk factors for cardiovascular disease, and every additional 15 minutes of daily exercise reduced all-cause mortality by another 4 percent.

On the other hand, people who were inactive had a 17 percent increased risk of mortality even compared with those who exercised for just 15 minutes a day. This means that you don’t have to log two hours on the treadmill or at the gym to get meaningful results—beneficial changes happen in far less time. Researchers are still pinning down the extent of these changes, but when they encompass 9,815 molecules, suffice it to say they’re significant.

Lack of time is one of the most common excuses used for not exercising, but the changes in the featured study occurred in about 10 minutes. Other studies have found exercise benefits after just seven minutes of moderate-intensity activity, including improvements in muscle strength, endurance, and aerobic fitness.

A New Era of Exercise Science

As researchers delve deeper into how molecular biology intersects with exercise physiology, there will be exciting advancements in understanding how exercise is crucial to human health. Exercise science has entered a new era, and using metabolomics and other omics technologies, researchers will likely be able to advance to more personalized exercise interventions rather than generic recommendations like “get at least 150 minutes of exercise per week.”

Already, more specialized techniques such as blood flow restriction (BFR) training are being adopted by the NFL and other major professional sports organizations for recovery and rehabilitation. BFR training improves strength and builds muscle using very light weights, while, metabolically, it decreases your risk for sarcopenia and most other age-related diseases, making it particularly useful for the elderly.

Other types of exercise, like yoga, with its unique combination of physical movement, breathwork, and meditation, may be particularly beneficial for brain function, while other more targeted exercises, like deadlifts, also have their place.

The Stanford University researchers are following up on their study with plans to establish whether molecular data could be used to determine which types of exercise, such as resistance or endurance training, are best for individuals, as certain people may have higher aerobic endurance, for instance, while others have a molecular profile that may favor a different type of training.

For now, since such individualized targeting isn’t available, the important take-home message to remember is just how immense the effect of exercise is on your body at an individual level. It’s important to take advantage of its massive health-boosting potential by getting active and making physical fitness a regular part of your life.

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

What Is Asparagus Good For?

This delicious perennial offers delicate flavors and exceptional nutrition

JOSEPH MERCOLA

Asparagus officinalis belongs to a large genus of plants grown for ornamental purposes, though it’s one of the few members of this family that’s cultivated for food. Since its domestication, asparagus has become a favorite for its sweet flavor and tender quality, which allows it to be prepared in various ways. You can steam, poach, roast, or add a handful of its stalks to soups and frittatas for added texture.

Health Benefits of Asparagus

Asparagus is one of the first vegetables to come up each spring. The part we eat of this perennial plant is the shoot it sends up that will eventually go to seed. If you keep breaking off the shoots, the plant keeps trying to go to seed and sends up more shoots. Aside from its delectable taste, asparagus offers numerous vitamins and minerals, including calcium, folate, iron, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, and vitamins A, K, and C. It also contains trace amounts of niacin and vitamin E. Because of these nutrients, adding asparagus to your diet may offer the following benefits:

Improved cardiovascular health—In a 2017 study from *Nutrients*, it was stated that numerous vegetables (including asparagus) may protect and support heart health. This may be due to the high amounts of dietary fiber and vitamins in these vegetables.

Healthier fetal development—As one of the best plant-based sources of folate, asparagus may help lower the risk of miscarriage and neural tube defects in unborn children.

Lower osteoporosis risk—Asparagus contains considerable amounts of both

vitamin K and calcium, nutrients essential in maintaining bone health. Adequate levels of vitamin K in the body ensures effective absorption of calcium, lowering the risk for bone fractures.

Studies Done on Asparagus

The active components of asparagus have been the subject of numerous scientific studies, mainly focusing on steroidal saponin content. In a 1997 study from *Planta Medica*, researchers isolated two oligofurostanosides from asparagus seeds, which were found to have cytotoxic effects on human leukemia cells. This coincides with a 2010 study published in *Phytochemistry Reviews*, where triterpene and steroid saponins triggered apoptosis (programmed cell death) in tumor cells and cytoskeleton disintegration.

Asparagus is one of the first vegetables to come up each spring.

Asparagus officinalis extracts may also protect against oxidative stress and liver and kidney damage as reported in a 2018 animal study from *Toxicology Reports*. Wistar rats were co-administered bisphenol A (BPA) and asparagus officinalis extract (AOE), with BPA inducing oxidative stress in both the liver and kidneys. AOE provided the rats with liver and kidney tissue protection, signifi-

Asparagus is considered one of the oldest cultivated vegetables.



PHOTO: ZOOLO/SHUTTERSTOCK

cantly lowering the effects of BPA.

Asparagus stem extracts were found to have dermatological benefits as well. A 2018 study from *Environmental Health and Preventive Medicine* shows that asparagus extracts may help prevent photo aging by inducing the expression of HSP70 during UV-B irradiation.

Asparagus Fun Facts

Asparagus is considered one of the oldest cultivated vegetables, with the earliest documentation dating back to 200 B.C., with Cato the Elder discussing its culture and cultivation.

Pliny the Elder also noted that asparagus needed “the most delicate attention” when it came to its farming. It was first introduced in North America in the 1700s by European settlers, and is now cultivated across the country in gardens.

Summary

The wealth of nutrients offered by asparagus is truly remarkable, especially since it is so nutritionally balanced. Ongoing studies are revealing that this vegetable may have more benefits for the human body than we’re currently aware of. Luckily, it’s a tasty vegetable with a long list of ways to prepare it, making it an in-season favorite.

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.

References: For a full list of references, please find this article at [Theepochtimes.com/author-dr-mercola](https://www.theepochtimes.com/author-dr-mercola)

ASPARAGUS AND AVOCADO SALAD

- 4 to 5 thick asparagus spears
- 1 avocado, halved, pitted, and peeled
- 16 fresh mint leaves, chopped
- 1/2 lime
- 2 tablespoons coconut oil
- Himalayan salt, to taste

PROCEDURE

- Cut away about 2 inches of the base of each asparagus spear.
 - Shave the entire asparagus into thin strips from bottom to top with a vegetable peeler, reversing your grip and rotating as necessary to shave as much as possible.
 - Divide the asparagus strips among four salad plates.
 - Cut each avocado half into four sections. Place two wedges on each salad.
 - Sprinkle the mint leaves. Squeeze lime juice over the salad, drizzle evenly with the oil, and sprinkle with salt.
- Recipe adapted from Epicurious*

Add Fiber to Beat Diverticulitis

MAT LECOMPTÉ

Diverticulitis can be excruciatingly painful. But adding some bulk to your diet may help tame symptoms and stop them from occurring. It’s possible that bulk may prevent diverticulitis from ever affecting you.

What’s bulk? The one and only fiber. Diverticulitis is when little pouches that grow along your intestines—called diverticula—become infected and inflamed. It’s entirely possible that you’ve got diverticula and don’t even know it. Often, they are harmless and go completely undetected.

Other times, they can turn into diverticulitis that can result in painful flare-ups or continuous pain.

Early signs that you may have diverticula include constipation, diarrhea, bloating, thin stools, and pain in the belly. Diverticulitis would be marked by these symptoms in addition to abdominal pain.

Although there are a host of risk factors for diverticulitis, including weight and activity levels, one potential fix is adding more fiber to your diet. Fiber is an indigestible compound in plant-based foods that helps add bulk to stool and helps it pass

through your digestive system more easily.

If you have diverticulitis, of course, that may sound like it can make things even more painful. And it can. So, here’s the process on how to do it with as little pain as possible.

Flare-ups are often treated with a liquid diet and rest. This hopefully results in less stimulation and rubbing along the intestinal wall to limit inflamed diverticula. Once symptoms have resided, it’s time to start slowly boosting fiber.

Easing back into a high-fiber diet is the way to go. You would begin by going with easily digestible low-fiber food. White bread, eggs, and even some meat are staples. Once the digestive system is reintroduced to solid foods for a couple of days, you can start increasing fiber.

Whole grains, fruits, and vegetables are where you’ll get it. After a few days—and even a slight bout of bloating and constipation as your body adjusts—the fiber will begin to soften and bulk up stool to help it move through you.

The result, hopefully, is a lower risk for painful flare-ups. Ultimately, you should be aiming for 25 to 35 grams of fiber per day. You are very lucky if you’ve never expe-

rienced the pain of diverticulitis. To keep it that way, including more fiber in your diet, getting more exercise, and limiting processed foods may help.

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



PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/BOB PATRICK

Nature Can Boost Teens' Pandemic Well-Being

Outdoor activities offer children an important way to build mental resilience

LAURA OLENIACZ

Outdoor play and nature-based activities can help buffer some of the harm the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the mental health of adolescents, a new study suggests.

Researchers said the findings point to outdoor play and nature-based activities as a tool to help teenagers cope with major stressors like the pandemic, as well as future natural disasters and other global stressors. They also underscore the mental health implications of restricting outdoor recreation opportunities for adolescents, and the need to increase access to the outdoors.

"Families should be encouraged that building patterns in outdoor recreation can give kids tools to weather the storms to come," said Kathryn Stevenson, assistant professor of parks, recreation, and tourism management at North Carolina State University and co-author of the paper in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.

"Things happen in life, and getting kids outside regularly is an easy way to build some mental resilience," Stevenson said.

In a survey conducted from April 30 to June 15, 2020, the researchers asked 624 children and teenagers between the ages of 10 to 18 years to report their participation in outdoor recreation both before the pandemic and after social distancing measures went into effect across the United States. They also asked participants about their subjective well-being, a measure of happiness, and mental health.

The findings reveal the pandemic had an impact on the well-being of many teens in the survey, with nearly 52 percent reporting declines in subjective well-being. The researchers also saw declines in teens' ability to get outside, with 64 percent reporting their outdoor activity participation fell during the early months of the pandemic.

Despite these declines in outdoor activity participation, nearly 77 percent of teens surveyed believed that spending time outside helped them deal with stress associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.



WILLIAM PERUGINI/SHUTTERSTOCK

Few of us could have imagined that teenagers would one day be denied the opportunity to walk outside with friends.

Children who got outside both before and during the pandemic maintained higher levels of well-being.

"We know that a lot of outdoor activities that kids engage in happens during school, in youth sports leagues or clubs, and those things got put on hold during the pandemic," said lead author Brent Jackson, a graduate student in the Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology Program. "Based on our study, they were getting outside less—we think not being in school and having those activities really contributed to that."

Benefits Across the Board

When they broke down recreation by type, the researchers saw participation in outdoor play activities such as sports, biking, going for walks, runs, or skating declined by 41.6 percent; nature-based activities such as camping, hiking, fishing, hunting, and paddling dropped by 39.7 percent; and outdoor family activities declined by 28.6 percent. In those early months of the pandemic, about 60 percent of teens said they spent time outside once a week or less.

"We saw declines in all three types of outdoor recreation participation," Jackson said. "Nature-based activities had the lowest participation before and during the pandemic, which may point to the need for

more access to natural spaces in general."

The results show a link between well-being and outdoor recreation trends. They also show that the negative impacts of the pandemic affected teens' well-being and participation in outdoor recreation regardless of race, gender, age, income community type, or geographic region.

Kids who didn't get outside as much saw declines in well-being, but those who got outside both before and during the pandemic maintained higher levels of well-being.

"This tells us that outdoor recreation can promote well-being for kids when it happens, and can potentially take away from well-being when it doesn't," Stevenson said.

Outdoor Play Can Do a World of Good

Teens who had high rates of outdoor play before the pandemic were more resistant to negative changes in social well-being. Those who got outside frequently before the pandemic were more likely to experience a lesser decline in well-being, regardless of participation during the pandemic. And, for teens able to play outside or get involved in nature-based activities during the pandemic, their well-being was on par with pre-pandemic levels.

"Kids who were able to continue participating in outdoor play and nature-based activities had subjective well-being levels that were similar to what they were before the pandemic, but kids who weren't able to participate saw much greater declines," Jackson said.

The study's findings also point to strategies to help kids navigate future global stressor events, as well as the importance of ensuring access to outdoor recreation. They help define the risks associated with policies that reduce kids' ability to get outside.

"Going outside and participating in activities that provide exposure to nature, physical activity, and safe social interaction during the pandemic were really powerful in terms of improving kids' resilience," Jackson said.

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