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THE EPOCH TIMES

DENIS BELITSKY/SHUTTERSTOCK Looking to nature, we can find the imprint of the divine. The VISCOIN on Nature

The way of the natural world can give us guidance for our human lives

TATIANA DENNING

"And into the forest I go, to lose my mind and find my soul."

—John Muir

Ah, nature. It's a balm for the spirit and an education for the soul.

It has nurtured a wealth of poetry and literature, inspired some of the most treasured works of art, and moved musicians to create soul-stirring compositions.

Take Beethoven, for example, who is said to have developed a love of nature in his youth, enjoying strolls along the Rhine River with his father. Despite losing his mother at a young age, having a father who was an alcoholic, and starting to lose his hearing at the age of 28, Beethoven created some of the most beautiful music the world has ever known—with nature often acting as his in-

Nothing stays unchanged and nothing lasts foreverwhether it be a house, the stars in the sky, or who we are at this moment.

spiration. Nature spoke, and Beethoven listened, translating what he heard into music.

"No one can love the country as much as I do," he said. "For surely woods, trees, and rocks produce the echo which man desires to hear."

Nature nourishes the soul, inspires us to dream, and grants us a nightly magical wish upon a star.

As Haruki Murakami said, "Not just beautiful, though—the stars are like the trees in the forest, alive and breathing. And they're watching me."

Yet when its inescapable fury manifests, nature can humble us, instilling a sense of awe and respect. Despite technological advancements, modern science can only understand nature in small parcels and points—its immense intertwined complexity is beyond our ability to quantify or control.

Continued on Page 4

CHELSEA FLOWERS

Chad and Brogan Metcalf hold their younger daughter and son, both born through unassisted labor.

Some Women Choose Unassisted Birth, Here's Why

There are compelling reasons some mothers choose to have their babies at home without a midwife or doula

JENNIFER MARGULIS

"Mom, where did the seaweed find a job?" My 8-year-old daughter read from a list of jokes that she'd prepared for me. "Where?" I asked, smiling at her and

trying not to moan.

"In the kelp-wanted ads!"

I threw back my head and roared with laughter. I'd recently read that laughter can help ease labor pains. And at that moment, as I was trying to ride the wave of a contraction, my daughter's silly joke was the funniest thing I had ever heard.

A Warm-Up or the Real Thing?

You would think that after giving birth to three children—one in the hospital, one at home with a certified nurse-midwife and her assistant, and one at home with a lay midwife and a medical doctor (there as a friend)—I would've known whether or not I was in labor.

But in all honesty, I wasn't entirely sure. I'd been having light contractions all morning. Was I in labor or were these just Braxton Hicks: the warm-up contractions that, according to the American Pregnancy Association, last between 30 seconds and two minutes and that serve to tone the uterus and increase blood flow to the placenta? Continued on **Page 5**

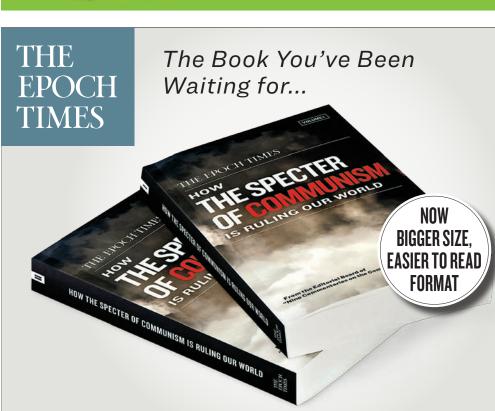
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"Extremely well researched and true." "The Truth, as horrifying as it is, shall set us free. This should be on this country's academia's list of required reading."

HOW THE SPECTER OF COMMUNISM IS RULING OUR WORLD

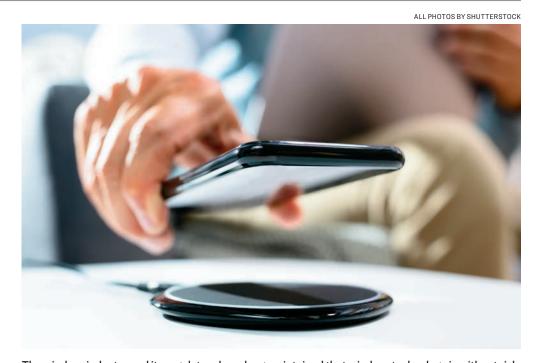
The specter of communism did not disappear with the disintegration of the Communist Party in Eastern Europe

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The wireless industry and its regulators have long maintained that wireless technology is without risk, but a recent ruling is forcing the FCC to address emerging and substantial evidence of harmful effects.

Court Demands FCC Reconsider Its Wireless Safety Standards

After dismissing evidence of potential harm during a public inquiry, FCC must now address the concerns

CONAN MILNER

Smartphones, and the wireless frequency that runs them, have revolutionized the way we live. But are they as safe as we are told? A federal court ruled that regulators must reconsider the nation's wireless safety standard due to extensive evidence of harm.

Since 1996—back when cellphones were rare and brick-sized—the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) deemed that exposure to the non-ionizing radiation emitted from wireless devices caused no health issues.

Even with this win. wireless safety standards may still not change, but the FCC has to now explain why.

Since then, our daily exposure to wireless radiation has increased considerably. And with 5G just around the corner, more of this invisible pulsed frequency is projected to saturate even more of our environment in the years to come.

Wireless devices generate the same radiation as a microwave oven. But both the wireless industry, and the agency that regulates them, say it's the threshold of heat that makes microwave exposure dangerous. Since cellphones don't emit radiation intense enough to cook you, they're considered safe.

For years, regulators have held firm on this conclusion. In 2012, the Government Accountability Office urged the FCC to take another look. So, the agency opened a public inquiry for evidence of whether its wireless safety guidelines genuinely required an update. Over the course of six years, thousands of studies, personal stories of health problems related to wireless exposure, and comments from doctors, scientists, and medical organizations all sent the agency the same general message: sub-thermal microwave exposure can cause health problems.

At the end of 2019, the FCC wrote a report in response to the comments they received. Despite the evidence, the agency once again concluded that its previous standard was sufficient to ensure public safety, even with 5G.

"After reviewing the extensive record submitted in response to that inquiry, we find no appropriate basis for and thus decline to propose amendments to our existing limits at this time," states the report. "We take our duty to protect the public from any potential harm due to RF exposure seriously."

Soon after the report was published, a lawsuit was filed by the Environmental Health Trust (EHT) and Children's Health Defense (CHD). The goal was to force the agency to take another look.

And it worked. On Aug. 13, the court ordered the FCC "provide a reasoned explanation for its determination that its guidelines adequately protect against harmful effects of exposure to radiofrequency radiation unrelated to cancer, in accordance with the opinion of the court filed herein this date."

Getting the opportunity to sue a federal agency is rare, and the cases that make it usually don't end with the changes that petitioners hope for. That's why Scott Mc-Collough, CHD's lead attorney for the case against the FCC, called it "an historic win."

"The FCC will have to re-open the proceeding and for the first time meaningfully and responsibly confront the vast amount of scientific and medical evidence showing that current guidelines do not adequately protect health and the environment," Mc-Cullough said in a statement.

The evidence presented to the court consisted of 11,000 pages showing harm from 5G and other wireless equipment that most people carry with them, or are exposed to in their homes, schools, and workplaces

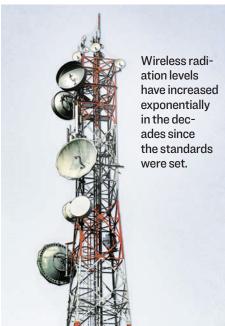
Petitioners pointed to multiple studies and reports published after 1996 showing that wireless radiation at levels below the FCC's current limits caused negative health effects, such as reproductive problems, and neurological problems that span from effects on memory to motor abilities. They also showed evidence of human sperm and DNA damage at low levels of RF radiation, and blood-brain barrier permeability with

Much of the evidence presented in court had previously been sent to the FCC in an attempt to convince the agency that there were flaws in its conclusions about microwave exposure and safety. Attorney Dafna Tachover, CHD's director of 5G and Wireless Harms Project, says this judgment will force the FCC to recognize the immense suffering millions of people have already suffered due to outdated and unfounded safety standards.

"Finally, the truth is out. I am hopeful that following this decision, the FCC will do the right thing and halt any further deploy-

Even with this win, wireless safety standards may still not change, but the FCC has to now explain why. The court concluded that regulators must address the evidence showing harm from sub-thermal micro-

"The FCC completely failed to acknowledge, let alone respond to, comments concerning the impact of RF radiation on the environment," the judgment states. "The record contains substantive evidence of potential environmental harms."



MEDICALLY CORRECT

Choose Your Surgeon by Their Skill

Feel free to kick the tires before you commit to a surgeon

PETER WEISS

.V. was referred to me by her friend. She was a 35-year-old with what everyone thought were fibroids. These non-cancerous lumps grow in the uterus and can cause various symptoms. She had seen a doctor who wanted to remove the rapidly growing fibroids through laparoscopic surgery (surgery through tubes sticking into the belly). S.V. was a successful writer and had a busy schedule. There was something odd about her presentation and clinical findings. This was about 15 years ago, and laparoscopic resection surgeries of fibroids were just getting started as a first-line surgery. The surgeon she was going to for the operation was fine, but he had the reputation of being a little aggressive for his abilities.

Needless to say, I suggested that she see another pelvic surgeon whom I had worked with in the past. This surgeon was also a gynecologic cancer surgeon. He was excellent in the operating room and, most importantly, knew his limitations. S.V. met with him, but ended up going with the younger, more aggressive surgeon. She liked this surgeon partly because he had a very effective social media presence. At that time, social media was also just starting but had already become a powerful tool to influence people.

It turns out S.V. had what is known as uterine leiomyosarcomas, a very rare form of cancer arising from the smooth muscle of the uterus. The surgeon she used spent 5 hours trying to remove these "fibroids" by laparoscopy before calling in a cancer surgeon to help. By the time they finished, this poor woman had her localized cancer spread throughout her body.

The 5-year survival rate for leiomyosarcoma is 63 percent at best, but goes down to 14 percent if the cancer is spread throughout the pelvis. S.V. died less than 6 months after her surgery.

S.V. would have probably died from her cancer even with the surgeon I recommended, but she may have lived for several more years. For her, that would have been a lifetime.

manner, gender, race, social media skills, or their "woke-ness."

This was an extreme example of poor clinical judgment by the surgeon. A good surgeon must know his or her limitations. In this case, the surgeon unwittingly spread her cancer throughout her body by continuing with his laparoscopic approach. Minimally invasive surgical techniques like this were still in their early stages of development then. He failed to recognize his limitation and call in the cancer surgeon at the appropriate time. This surgeon forgot the paramount rule as a physician, "Above all, do no harm." There are many such errors, which the patient never sees, occurring in daily medical practice. Some arise from a simple lack of basic surgical skills, which may not be life-threatening but still affect the quality of the surgery.

Medical legal experts use the term "standard of care." Notice how they don't

use "excellence of care," but "standard." There is a reason for this. Not all surgeons are excellent, some are better than others. The same can be said about general physicians or even airplane pilots. Think of Captain Scully and the miracle on the Hudson. However, surgery cuts straight to the point. We want the best surgeon possible.

My old medical school roommate is a retired Lt. Colonel and thoracic (pertaining to the chest) trauma surgeon who was stationed in Iraq. Dr. Don Reed Jr. is an exceptional surgeon who saved many soldiers' lives with his surgical skills. The Excellent surgical skills and good stories he tells are heart-wrenching. He is judgment are the paramount qualities now back into the private world where he we want in a surgeon, not their bedside witnesses subpar surgeons and can only hope they don't get in over their heads.

According to a paper published by the National Center for Biotechnology Information, there are some 200 million surgical procedures performed globally each year. There are at least 4,000 surgical errors occurring each year in the United States. Operating on the wrong body part

An error is completely different from complications or poor outcomes from surgery. Mediocre surgery is not negligence. Mediocre surgeons are not committing malpractice by any stretch of the imagination, it's just not "excellence of care." We should all want excellence.

Remember that AT&T commercial where this couple asks the nurse in the hospital just before surgery, if they ever worked with Dr. Francis? The nurse responds, "Yeah, he's okay," and the couple says, "Just okay?" Great commercial, and no, we don't want that type of surgeon.

Excellent surgical skills and good judgment are the paramount qualities we want in a surgeon, not their bedside manner, gender, race, social media skills, or their 'woke-ness.'

Now, all of this is not meant to scare you, but to inform you. You have choices. You can research your surgeon. Obviously, if you were brought to the emergency room for acute appendicitis, you'll get the surgeon on call. Those are pretty straightforward surgeries, and you don't need to be the best of the best to perform them well. If you need a planned surgery, such as cardiac bypass, or cancer surgery, do your homework. Ask a doctor or nurse give you a lot of helpful information. Ask

friend if you know any. The internet can the surgeon about his or her experience. How many of these surgeries have they done before? Who will be their assistant? Also check out the hospital where you will have the surgery. The nursing staff as well as the anesthesiologist are critical. It really is a team effort. It's just that your surgeon is the one holding the scalpel. The surgeon must have strong knowledge of their specialty as well as good motor skills. However, one of the most critical skills of a good surgeon is common sense. That has kept me out of trouble so many

To this day, every time I operate, I say a little prayer to myself just before I cut, "Please God, let me do good today."

Dr. Peter Weiss has been a frequent guest on local and national TV, newspapers, and radio. He was an assistant clinical professor of OB/GYN at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA for 30 years, stepping down so he could provide his clinical services to those in need when the COVID pandemic hit. He was also a national health care adviser for Sen. John McCain's 2008 presidential campaign.

mitting malpractice by of the imag ination, it's "excellence

A Dangerous Combination

Study finds weak muscles and abdominal fat pose risks for older people

Weak muscles and abdominal fat can be a dangerous combination for older adults who have difficulty walking. A new study from the Federal University of São Carlos suggests that these two physical traits can directly affect the loss of gait speed.

"Our comparative analysis showed loss of gait speed occurring mainly when abdominal fat and weak muscles were associated. Gait speed didn't decline so sharply in older people who had only abdominal fat or only weak muscles," study author Tiago da Silva Alexandre said.

A slower gait is often a natural part of aging. However, mobility issues can result if walking speed falls quickly. This can increase the risk for seniors in daily activities such as crossing the street. A slow gait can also increase the risk of falling and lead to a gradual loss of independence if the condi-

The study, published in the journal Age and Aging, analyzed data from 2,294 individuals aged 60 or more who participated in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA). Participants were divided into four groups based on their ELSA data for gait speed and muscle weakness (dynapenia). The groups were: neither dynapenic nor abdominally obese; abdominally obese only; dynapenic

At the beginning of the study, none of the participants had problems with mobility

only; and both dynapenic and abdominally

or gait speed. However, in the eight years of monitoring, gait speed declined in most participants who had abdominal obesity.

According to Roberta de Oliveira Máximo, the first author of the paper, "In the participants with abdominal obesity and muscle weakness, we observed a loss of 0.15 m/s in the eight-year period. At this rate, there may come a time when they can't cross the street in the time allowed by traffic lights."

Inflammation Caused by Abdominal Fat

The researchers noted that an accumulation of abdominal fat could create inflammation that consumes muscle mass and reduces strength. Previous studies have also found that these common traits among the elderly are associated with a heightened risk of falls,

changes in carbohydrates, glucose, and

cholesterol metabolism, and even death.

declines, it can create mobility problems that make even crossing the street daunting.

When a senior's walk-

Health Sciences Academy in London, and she enjoys helping others by teaching healthy lifestyle changes through her per-

traits with mobility.

sonal consultations and with her regular contributions to the Doctors Health

Press. This article was originally published on Bel Marra Health.

However, this is the first study to link the

This study can help health care workers to

and muscle strength while in a clinic

gait speed in their patients.

or hospital can help predict a loss of

It can also help to diagnose

mobility problems and their

potential to incapacitate older

people. Fortunately, abdominal

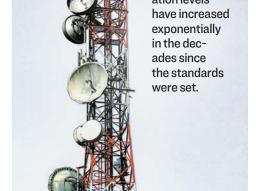
fat and muscle weakness can be

corrected by exercise training

Sarah Cownley earned a diplo-

ma in nutritional therapy from

understand that measuring abdominal fat



ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOC

Learning from nature can deepen our understanding of fundamental truths of life in this world.

The Wisdom on Nature

The way of the natural world can give us guidance for our human lives

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Nature's beauty and power also contain valuable lessons.

Going With the Flow

Nature has its own rhythm, its own ebb and flow. Everything is accomplished in just the way it should be and at just the right time. It exists in a state of interconnectedness and interdependence, and every cell and molecule has a role to play. As Blaise Pascal said, "The least move-

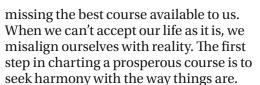
ment is of importance to all nature. The

entire ocean is affected by a pebble." Nature moves in cascades, with each

element impacting the next. And should any one thing fail to fulfill its role, the whole will be affected.

Nature doesn't resist, nor does it look for the easy way out. It's simple and effortless, existing in a state of ease and harmony with the universe. We see examples of this wherever we look, from the migration of birds with the change of seasons to the babbling brook meandering along its destined path.

Our lives also have a path that naturally unfolds before us. When we find ourselves complaining, wishing things were different, and fighting to make things go a certain way, we might be



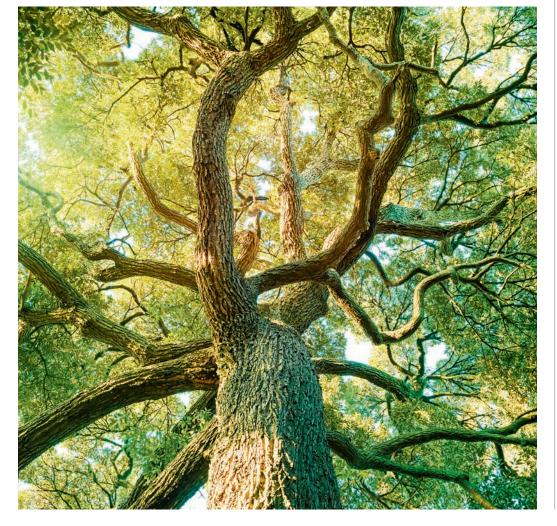
Of course, there are times when something is truly wrong. And just as the mother bear will challenge any threat to her cubs, there are times when we must resist deadly infringement. And just as there are times when the weather grows too hot and the leaves wither, there are if we find ourselves in a state of steady resentment, we may be seeking conflict instead of cooperation.

The things we push will push back against us. While we may appear to be in conflict with the outside world, often we're really in conflict with ourselves. When we understand that the things

we encounter can help us grow, our fear, resistance, and urge to control can transform into faith, trust, and surrender. Our hearts can become lighter, and we can find calm acceptance and gratitude.

Change Is a Part of Life

Change is inevitable and impossible to avoid. It's a constant in nature and ubiquitous: Day gives way to night, summer gives way to fall, and the



Things in nature must endure their own form of hardship, as spring gives way to winter, or a storm destroys everything in

Nature doesn't resist, nor does it look for the easy way out.

The patterns of nature have inspired classical music, poetry, and art. These patterns can also nspire our personal lives through the ways nature responds to change and

clouds give way to the sun.

ice, we, too, are ever-changing, through infancy, to adulthood, and into old age. Lao Tzu said, "If you realize that all things change, there is nothing you will try to hold on to. If you are not afraid of dying, there is nothing you cannot achieve."

Just as the caterpillar changes into a

butterfly and water can become vapor or

Fear of change, as Lao Tzu pointed out, can interfere with our progress. Rather than fearing and resenting change, if we can engage it with interest and something we can expect, it can engage

Because things are ever-changing, it's a waste of energy to try to resist. To attach ourselves to anything as it currently exists is foolhardy. Nothing stays unchanged and nothing lasts forever whether it be a house, the stars in the sky, or who we are at this moment.

Only by letting go and accepting change are we free to learn and grow. Being tied to things as they are will only keep us mired in misery, and act as a weight to prevent us from elevating. Though we aren't granted foresight, what we fear letting go of may actually be replaced by something more wonderful.

As Chuang Tzu (another famous Daoist) once said, "Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over, it became a

Hardships Make Us Stronger Hardships come in a variety of shapes

and sizes. Things in nature must endure their own form of hardship, as spring gives way to winter, or a storm destroys everything in its path. Despite such hardship, nature doesn't complain, nor does it give up. It pushes through, and before long, the first blade of grass appears, in an act

Nature doesn't try to avoid difficulties, nor does it force things to go its own way. Even in a storm, the willow tree doesn't resist the harsh winds—it bends, but doesn't break—it's flexible and resilient. It lives in the moment, accepts the chal-

lenge, and rises up to meet it. Like the willow, we must persevere. And most importantly, we must look for the lesson and opportunity to grow.

As counselor Craig Lounsbrough said, "Without mountains, we might find ourselves relieved that we can avoid the pain of the ascent, but we will forever miss the thrill of the summit. And in such a terribly scandalous trade-off, it is the absence of pain that becomes the thief of life."

As we encounter hardship, we're tempered. We learn how to endure, be patient, and have tolerance. We learn adaptability and resilience, we grow stronger, and we learn gratitude. We learn that, without the storm, we wouldn't appreciate the calm.

Though it may take time to see it, there's always something profoundly positive in any hardship. And as the saying goes, it's not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves.

Tatiana Denning, D.O., is a preventive family medicine physician and owner of Simpura Weight Loss and Wellness. She believes in empowering her patients with the knowledge and skills necessary to maintain and improve their own health through weight management, healthy habits, and disease prevention.

Some Women Choose Unassisted Birth, Here's Why

There are compelling reasons some mothers choose to have their babies at home without a midwife or doula

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My husband had left to bicycle the kids to school. I set my professional camera up on a tripod and took a photograph of myself holding a handwritten sign with the words, "Coming Soon?"

In fact, it wasn't until I sat down to work— I had an article due for a major women's magazine—that I realized that I was in full-blown labor. I couldn't concentrate on the story I was writing. So instead of sending a final draft to my editor, I asked for an extension.

But here's what I didn't do: I didn't pack a hospital bag. I didn't call a midwife. And I didn't phone any relatives, friends, or a

As crazy as it may sound if you've never thought of having a baby outside of the hospital, my husband and I—after many months of soul-searching, meditating, reading books, and talking to moms—had decided to have our baby by ourselves, unassisted.

Most parents | who choose unassisted birth are very well educated on it, they know what the risks are and how to identify those risks, and they know what to do if something comes up.

Audrey Bird, midwife and unassistedbirth mother.

Unassisted Birth

Unassisted childbirth, also known as free birth or sometimes do-it-yourself (DIY) birth, is when a mom or an expectant couple chooses to have a baby without the assistance of a doctor, a midwife, or any other professional birth attendant.

"Women who choose this rou give birth in their own time and their own way, free from any government or insurance or hospital-imposed restrictions," said Laura Shanley, 64, who has been an advocate for natural childbirth for more than 40 years.

"Even most midwives have a list of requirements that they're supposed to adhere to. Many states have restrictions on VBACs [vaginal birth after cesarean], multiples, or a breech birth. The midwife has to choose if she wants to answer to the woman or the state, and even the kindest, gentlest midwives will go against the mother or their own intuition because they're afraid of losing their license or even going to jail."

No Numbers on Unassisted Birth

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), of the 3.75 million babies born in the United States in 2019, some 38,506 (a little more than 1 percent), were born at home. In the same year in Oregon, where I live, about 2.4 percent of babies were born at home. However, there's no reliable way to track the actual number of unassisted births in the United States, planned or unplanned.

Though the CDC doesn't collect data on unassisted birth, there's reason to believe that the number of home births increased in 2020 and 2021, as many hospitals stopped allowing pregnant women to have their loved ones with them during labor and started requiring women in labor to wear masks, even if they tested negative for COVID-19. "We've seen a lot of families birthing at

home, without midwives, and they invite as many educated people in their family as they can convince to be there, they learn as much as they can, and they kind of piece together what they can do," Tayo Mbande, a doula based in Chicago, told a reporter from US News & World Report in March.

Because of COVID-19 restrictions, as well as for other reasons, unassisted births may also be on the rise in other countries as well. One study conducted in April 2020 by a team of researchers in the UK found that roughly 5 percent of pregnant women, women who had recently given birth, and their partners had considered or were considering unas sisted birth.



Regulations and imposing doctors and nurses have compelled some mothers to have their children at home, trusting in a process as old as humanity.

According to the British newspaper The Guardian, since the National Health Services suspended home birth services in March 2020, more birthing couples than ever before feel as though their only choice is to have an unassisted birth.

Choosing to Birth Unassisted We often hear about babies born so quickly

that their parents don't make it to the hospital, such as Susan Anderson, a Florida mom whose baby Julia came so quickly that the midwife rushed out to the parking lot to help her deliver. There was also the Brookline, Massachusetts, mom, Arielle Chernin, whose baby, born on Aug. 18, came so fast that she delivered in the bathroom, as reported by ABC's WCVB5. Then there was the mom who gave birth on the side of I-805 in Southern California recently, after the car that was taking her to the hospital overheated, KGTV reported.

Those precipitous births sometimes end up being unassisted because of circumstance, not design. It's much less common to hear about families, such as mine, that make a conscious and informed decision to have their babies on their own, privately. without birth attendants.

Audrey Bird and her husband Peter are one such unassisted birth family. Trained as a midwife, Bird gave birth to her first baby in the hospital and her second child at home, unassisted. When their second baby was born, the Birds lived in a small from a hospital. They knew the hospital was there if they needed it, but they felt that they would have a better, safer experience by themselves.

That second birth wasn't easy. Audrey had some heavy postpartum bleeding after her daughter was born. While a doctor may have treated that as a crisis, she and her husband—who was working as a deputy sheriff at the time and had been trained in emergency childbirth—knew just what to do. He helped her out of the birth tub, massaged her uterus (to help it contract and stop the bleeding), and gave her an antihemorrhage drug.

Their reasons for giving birth to their third child, Piper, without any professional assistance were both practical and spiritual. By then, the family had moved to a remote island in Alaska. Going to the hospital wasn't really an option.

"We live 150 miles from a road." Audrey Bird said when I interviewed her by phone a few years ago. "You have to fly in, and then cross over on an hour boat ride to our house!"

Practical issues aside, Bird also felt that an unassisted birth was a better, gentler, more natural option.

"As a midwife, when I attend a birth, I sit back," Audrey said. "I allow the mom's body to do what it needs to do. I'm there as a lifeguard in case something happens. Usually it doesn't. Most parents [who choose unassisted birth are very well educated on it, they know what the risks are and how to identify those risks, and they know what to do if something comes up. For me, when I have an unassisted birth, my husband knows what to do. We are paying attention the entire time to the baby's heart rate and to our instinctual feelings. We are prepared. Birth generally happens the way it needs to when it is undisturbed."

That baby, whose birth was actually filmed by a Lifetime television crew for a show called "Born in the Wild," was born face up on an outdoor platform surrounded by aspen trees. As idyllic as this sounds, Piper's asynclitic presentation (which is when the baby's head is tilted and not centered on the cervix) made it a difficult birth. Audrey said she vocalized through it, and though the birth was longer and harder than she expected, it was worth the effort.

"This is how people used to be born all the time," she said. "It was beautiful and grounding and humbling. My daughter was born face up and she saw the trees and the birds and the glow from the sun. I just love that."

'I Felt Safer at Home'

Two of Brogan Metcalf's and her husband Chad's three children were both born unassisted. And the Metcalfs, who live on Waltown in southern Utah, just 20 minutes away any other way. Their first child, who's 7 years ences; some who ended up transferring to old now, was born in the hospital, where the hospital; some who eventually changed they felt bullied by the nurses and doctors.

> "There was so much that I disliked about that experience," Brogan said. "I hated the hospital setting and being told how to birth—as if they somehow knew more about my body than I did."

> So when the Metcalfs became pregnant with their second child in 2016, they decided to have the baby by themselves. Brogan spent the most intense part of her labor in the bathtub, her toddler Dalila by her side. "She was so calm, just taking it all in," Bro-

> gan told me. While Brogan remembers that she start-

ed to fall apart during transition, just before pushing (at one point, she yelled at her husband to just "pull the baby out!"), Dalila wasn't worried at all. After two pushes, their baby boy, Lincoln Grey, slid out into **own terms, without** the water. No pulling was necessary, but her husband did need to gently lift off the cord, which was wrapped around Baby Lincoln's neck. "Oh, baby!" Dalila crooned.

"Even though I manifested my birth dream," Brogan later said in a blog on my website, "I was surprised how calmly and perfectly it all happened."

When the Metcalfs found out that they were pregnant again, Brogan was excited to have another unassisted birth.



Chad and Brogan Metcalf sit with their three children. Their younger daughter and son were both born through unassisted

"There was no other way, going back to the hospital was not in my cards," she said. "I felt way safer at home."

Still, that third labor was unexpected. Brogan said she had more fear around the birth. and the labor lasted much longer than she thought it would—about 15 hours. Mila will turn 2 years old in October.

Looking back, Brogan realizes that her labor began at dawn, but her contractions stalled after her two kids got up for the day. Twenty minutes after her kids were in bed, Baby Mila was born. She was squatting in the middle of the living room with her husband supporting her and a pillow underneath her, candlelight flickering around

"I was really present and connected," Brogan said. "My favorite part was when I saw her. We didn't know if it was a boy or a girl. I cried like a baby. I just looked at her and was sobbing. It was the most beautiful thing."

Having Faith

"Our bodies are amazing," said Brogan, 33. Shanley, whose four children were all born unassisted, agrees. While she can quote studies and statistics that show that home birth is as safe or safer than hospital birth, for Shanley, having an unassisted birth is about faith. Faith, she said, is at the heart of her work.

"We do have inner guidance. We do have inner health." Shanley told me. "We are guided just as any animal is guided. We need to trust that. I never felt alone when I was birthing my children. I always felt a presence that was there helping me."

For Shanley, the largest obstacle to having an unassisted birth was negative self-talk and fear. If we step out of the way and let our bodies do what they've been designed to, labor becomes easy, she said.

"Just as you have faith that there is a loving God that knows how to grow a baby inside you, that God—or larger consciousness or whatever you want to call it—knows how to complete the process, if we can relax and stay out of the way," Shanley said. "I believe you have to not trigger your fight/flight reflex, and then your body knows how to deliver your baby. It doesn't have to be a long, drawn-out, difficult process."

Learning About Unassisted Birth So if you want to learn more about unassist

ed birth or are even considering having your baby by yourself, where would you begin? I started by talking to freebirth and homebirth families—some who had incredible, lops Island, Virginia, wouldn't have had it empowering, life-changing birth experitheir minds and hired midwives.

> I also read Shanley's "Unassisted Childbirth" cover to cover, twice, (full disclosure: my daughter's birth story is included in the most recent edition of Shanley's book,) in addition to a 76-page manual called "Emergency Childbirth" that an unassisted-birth mom recommended. And I met in person with no fewer than five local homebirth midwives, as well as with some of the families whose babies they delivered.

I wanted to have my baby my way, on my considering anyone else's opinions (or paperwork) and without any interruptions.

I was impressed with those midwives: They had vast experience and expertise. But I also realized I didn't want or need a midwife at my birth. Even though I was over 40 and would have been categorized as "high risk" by an obstetrician, I wanted to have my baby my way, on my own terms, without considering anyone else's opinions (or paperwork) and without any interruptions.

And that's just what happened. Just 3 1/2 hours after Athena told me the kelp joke that had me roaring with laughter, our fourth and final baby was born in our bedroom, slipping quietly and calmly out of my body and into the world.

Jennifer Margulis, Ph.D., is an award-winning science journalist, a Fulbright grantee, and a sought-after speaker. She is also the author of "Your Baby, Your Way: Taking Charge of Your Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Parenting Decisions for a Happier, Healthier Family." Learn more about her at www. JenniferMargulis.net

COURTESY OF DR. SINA MCCULLOUGH

The simple

truth is, you

can't change a

habit you don't

know you have.

That means

that you need

to raise your

awareness of

the habit itself

as well as what

it's costing you.

Kate Hanley, author

of 'How to Be a Better

Person: 400+ Ways to

Make a Difference in

Yourself—and the World'

Habit gurus and ancient philosophers help us learn to live the good life

JENNIFER MARGULIS

ou know that smoking is taking years off your life. You wish you would stop checking your phone first thing in the morning because looking at Instagram photographs of your friends' beach vacations is making you miserable. You're determined to start taking a daily walk, but no matter how firm your resolve is the night before, you just can't bring yourself to get out the door in the morning.

We all have things about ourselves that we wish were different: habits that niggle at us, actions we take that we know aren't good for our health and well-being. We want to change, sure. But how do we do it?

Why Do We Get Into **Bad Habits in the First Place?**

"Writing is a habit," Mark Bauerlein, professor emeritus, used to tell his students when I worked as his teaching assistant at Emory University in Atlanta. "And a habit is something you do without thinking."

A habit is a repeated behavior that you do so often it becomes automatic. As annoying as our bad habits are, habits serve a crucial function: They put our brains on autopilot so we no longer have to make conscious decisions about what to do. While this doesn't sound good, it actually is.

"Habits reduce cognitive load and free up mental capacity, so you can allocate your attention to other tasks," James Clear wrote in his book "Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones."

The reason we humans want to automate, Clear wrote, is that we have a limited amount of conscious attention and we need the space to use it on the most important tasks.

"Your brain is always working to preserve your conscious attention for whatever task is most essential," Clear wrote.

In other words, he says, the more our everyday behavior is habitual, the more energy our brains have to focus on and solve the larger problems that come our way.

Good Habits Pave the Way to Better Health

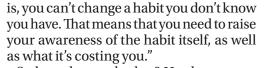
What that means is that habits aren't bad in and of themselves. Clear argued that good habits can give you better health, more financial freedom, and a greater ability to learn new things.

"If you're always being forced to make decisions about simple tasks—when should I work out, where do I go to write, when do I pay the bills—then you have less time for freedom," Clear wrote. "It's only by making the fundamentals of life easier that you can create the mental space needed for free thinking and creativity."

So the issue isn't that you don't want to have habits—routines that help you live your life more smoothly—but that you don't want to engage in habitual behavior that reduces your health and well-being.

Becoming Aware of What

You Want to Change The first step toward fixing bad habits is awareness, according to Kate Hanley, author of "How to Be a Better Person: 400+ Ways to Make a Difference in Yourself and the World," who also hosts a daily podcast by the same name. "The simple truth



So how do you do that? Hanley recommended writing down three lists: the things that precede the bad habit (the triggers), the circumstances that make you want to indulge in that bad habit (the context), and the negative effects of the habitual behavior you want to change (the costs).

"When you're making these lists, don't think too hard," she said. "But don't limit yourself, either."

If your bad habit is eating unhealthy snacks in the afternoon, the triggers could be a growling stomach, a dip in your energy level, and your ability to focus after lunch; the context might be that you skipped lunch or you didn't sleep well the night before; and the costs could be that the unhealthy food upsets your stomach, you're not hungry at dinnertime so you miss out on a chance to eat more nutritious foods, and every time you weigh yourself, you see the numbers going up. Maybe you also chastise yourself for your lack of willpower.

Once you can see those three factors clearly, your new awareness will help you develop a strategy that works, according to Hanley. That could be eating a healthy lunch or preparing a nutritious snack (such as carrot sticks and almond butter or a handful of nuts and dried fruit) in anticipation of your late afternoon cravings. Or maybe you take a walk to recharge yourself and refresh your mind instead of wolfing down a doughnut. You might also make a point of going to bed at a decent hour so

you're not so exhausted in the afternoons. "It's less about willpower and more about giving yourself what you truly need so that you don't need to fall back on your bad habit to help you get through the day," Hanley said.

Automating Cues to Trick Your Brain Into Good Habits

What Hanley calls a "trigger" is what Clear refers to as a "cue": a signal that sets off a craving, leading to a response, and then to a reward. Clear believes one of the most effective ways to break a bad habit is to eliminate the cues that start a cascade of bad habits, while simultaneously giving your

brain cues to implement good behavior. For example, you feel like you're drinking too much caffeine and it's impeding your ability to sleep. Once you're aware of the problem, you also realize that you always buy a double espresso when you walk by your favorite café on your way home from work. Now that you've gained that awareness, you can eliminate the cue by chang-

ing the route you take home. At the same time, you also realize part of the bad habit of drinking coffee late in the day is because you enjoy the aroma of the coffee, the satisfaction of wrapping your hands around a warm mug, and the moment of pause in your otherwise busy life. To give yourself the same reward, first you need to find a non-caffeinated beverage that's as tasty and satisfying as coffee (try golden milk or rooibos tea). Now you need your cue. In the mornings before you go to work, leave your favorite mug on the counter. The mug will serve as a visual reminder for you to brew yourself a cup of non-coffee when you come home from work, helping you replace your bad habit with a good one.



Having an accountability buddy-someone who helps you gain awareness of the habits you're trying to fix and keeps you on task with your new, healthier behaviors can work wonders. Even without a buddy, sometimes just the act of committing to something out loud to several people who love you can help you change. An accountability group is also an excellent idea. Or, if you're already in a book group that meets weekly or monthly, suggest that the group read some books about better habits for your upcoming meetings.

I have another trick that works, though I'm not sure if behavioral experts would approve. My teens and I like to do weekly, or sometimes monthly, bets. We each commit to the habit we're trying to cultivate (exercise, creative endeavors, spending X amount of time on summer homework assignments). We draw up a contract and sign it. Then we add a monetary penalty if we don't meet our daily commitment. Sometimes we do "roll-over" bets, which means if we mess up one day and don't do the 20 minutes of reading or math, we're allowed to make it up by doing 40 minutes the next day. Sometimes we do "sudden death," which means that we must complete our self-imposed assignments (good habits) by midnight that night or pay the other person the fine.

Perhaps this playful approach doesn't result in lifelong good habits, but it certainly helps everyone in our family spend more time doing the things we love, but often don't prioritize.

Tiny Changes Lead to Remarkable Results

compiled after he died in 479 B.C.

The book details how high Confucius held his elbows, who he talked to when he walked into a room, and how he ate his meals. While attention to those small details hardly seems of great philosophical importance, Confucius believed that the question of how you're living your life on a daily basis was the key to finding the answers to large philosophical dilemmas. Confucius taught his disciples that small

things matter. "How you do anything is how you do everything," is how my friend Dave Nourie, an internationally known trick cyclist, put it. Whether you agree with that idea or not, there's no question that fixing bad habits and cultivating better ones—making small upgrades to your life every day will help you lead a longer, healthier, happier life.

Iennifer Margulis, co-author of "The Addiction Spectrum" and a frequent contributor to The Epoch Times, is an award-winning science journalist based in Oregon. Sign up for her weekly emails, read her articles, and learn more about her at www.JenniferMargulis.net

MINDSET MATTERS

How I Reversed an Autoimmune Disease (Part 2)

From crippling illness to complete recovery with a change in thought that changed my life

SINA MCCULLOUGH



In part one, I shared the story of how I nearly died from an advanced stage of an autoimmune disease and how I achieved "remis sion" by creating a healing road

map that addressed the physical triggers involved with disease formation. Now I'd like to share how I moved out of remission and into a space where complete healing exists. This journey begins with perception.

How you think about disease determines whether you fully heal, stay sick, or remain stuck in remission. That may sound odd, especially coming from a doctor such as myself. However, science supports the claim that your perception creates your reality. For example, people have healed from diseases such as cancer, irritable bowel syndrome, and migraines after consuming a sugar pill because they thought they were receiving a remedy and they believed the pill would heal them. But it was their belief that actually did the healing. This is known as the placebo effect.

The corollary to the placebo effect is the nocebo effect, which is a belief that you should be sick or are going to get sick, and so you become sick. A documented example of the nocebo effect is The Framingham Heart Study, which is the most comprehensive and influential investigation into heart disease in history. It established traditional risk factors for heart disease, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, and it analyzed women with similar risk factors. In theory, since they all had similar risk factors, all the women should have developed heart disease in similar numbers. But that's not what happened.

The women who believed they were prone to heart disease were nearly four times more likely to die from heart disease compared with women who didn't believe they were prone to heart disease. This is a powerful, documented example of how negative belief or perception can make you sick.

This power of perception played a critical role in my story. Many people would view my remission from serious autoimmune disease as a good thing. And in fact, remission is usually the goal when you have an autoimmune disease, because it's often believed these diseases can't be cured. But what is "remission"?

According to The National Cancer Institute, complete remission means "all signs and symptoms of cancer have disappeared, although cancer still may be in the body."

So, does remission mean you're healed? No. Furthermore, the dictionary defines remission as a "temporary recovery" or "to abate symptoms for a period" of time. That's exactly what I experienced. Once the physical triggers were addressed, such as food sensitivities, nutrient deficiencies, and heavy metal toxicity, I went into remission. I no longer had physical symptoms of the autoimmune disease, but the disease could come back; I would experience a "flare-up." For example, if I ate too much sugar, even

if it was fruit, I felt pain in my right forearm. That was my unique indicator that I was inflamed and needed to make changes or the disease could return.

I decided I didn't want to remain stuck in remission, only keeping the symptoms at bay, waiting for the disease to come back if I ate the wrong food or stressed too much.

Consequently, I changed my perception. Instead of rejoicing that I had achieved remission, I chose to believe that remission doesn't exist. In a sense, remission is the belief that your disease is still with you, waiting.

Remission is a limiting belief that is overwhelmingly embraced by our culture. As a limiting belief, it can prevent you from achieving complete healing, largely by keeping you stuck in a space of fear—afraid that if you don't behave in a specific way, the disease will come back. It sustains the nocebo, you could say.

I wanted to be fully healed and not stuck in fear. So I decided not to settle for remission and continued searching for answers. I soon realized that in order to fully heal from a disease, you have to address the I soon realized that in order to fully heal from a disease, you have to address the root cause.



Dr. Sina McCullough. Donnie, and

The beauty of forgiveness is that you don't have to confront the person, because forgiveness is not about the other person; it's about you deciding not to carry the burden any

longer.

Dr. Sina McCullough

is the creator of GO

WILD: How I Reverse

Chronic & Autoimmune

Disease, and author of

"Hands Off My Food!:

Industry Have Cor-

Easy Ways to Fight

Back" and "Beyond

Labels: A Doctor and a

Farmer Conquer Food

Confusion One Bite at

a Time." She holds a

doctorate in nutrition

from the University

of California-Davis.

She's a master herbal-

ist, Gluten Free Society

and homeschool mom

certified practitioner,

of three.

rupted Our Food and

How Government and

the physical manifestation of the underlying root problem—stress. We instinctively know this to be true. It's why we practice stress management and why we feel better when we "escape" the daily grind while on vacation. Yet most of us continue to look for physical answers to our seemingly physical problems, including chronic and autoimmune diseases. That's why practitioners who only address the physical realm are only able to help their patients achieve remission, as opposed to achieving complete reversal of disease. In order to fully heal myself, I realized I had to address the root cause, which ex-

often doesn't exist on the physical level.

For instance, Western medicine acknowl-

edges that roughly 90 percent of all disease

is either caused by or related to stress. Have

When you're stressed, physically, mentally,

or emotionally, your sympathetic nervous

system is activated, which causes a release of

adrenaline, cortisol, and other biochemicals

that are designed to get you out of a stressful

This fight-or-flight mechanism is a fan-

tastic tool that can save your life in an

acutely stressful situation. However, most

in fight-or-flight, which can lead to dis-

ease. For instance, chronically elevated

levels of cortisol can contribute to obesity,

diabetes, and chronic fatigue. In each of

these examples, what was it that caused

the disease—elevated levels of cortisol, or

Cortisol is not the root cause; it is simply

situation: to fight or run away.

chronic stress?

you ever heard the phrase "stress kills?"

ists on the emotional or energetic level. Forgiveness, in particular, is essential for reversing disease, as well as maintaining optimal health.

For example, the medical literature contains numerous examples of diseases, including cancer, that have spontaneously reversed after an act of forgiveness. Consequently, I began the process of forgiving everyone, including myself—which was the hardest.

I know from research studies that childhood traumas are the most overlooked risk factor for disease, so I began my journey by recalling every unsettling event from that season of my life.

One by one, I forgave each person. Some were easy to forgive. Consequently, I was able to transmute the associated emotions quickly. However, some were challenging and took more time.

For instance, my stepfather molested me for eight years. That childhood trauma left a deep wound that I had adopted as part of my identity. Consequently, forgiving him came in stages. I would forgive and then, days or weeks later, a deeper level of forgiveness presented itself and I worked through the process of forgiving all over again. Eventually I was able to completely forgive him and transmute all of the associated emotions.

The beauty of forgiveness is that you don't have to confront the person, because forgiveness is not about the other person; it's about you deciding not to carry the burden any longer. Consequently, I wrote a letter to my stepfather. I never mailed it; I didn't have to. In the letter, I wrote everything I ever wanted to say to him. I didn't hold back; I used every hateful word that came to mind. I dumped all of the negative, toxic energy into the letter. In doing so, I gave the toxic energy back.

After I finished venting, I said these words out loud: "I refuse to carry your toxic energy of us spend roughly 70 percent of our day any longer. I command every last ounce of toxic energy to leave my body immediately I release you and I set you free. Right here, right now, I set myself free."

> Then, I took a deep breath and exhaled all of the toxins. I visualized the toxins moving out of my body and being released into the air through my mouth as I exhaled. They were no longer a part of my body or my identity.

> Remarkably, once I completely forgave my stepfather, I realized that the door to love is opened through forgiveness. It's difficult to love yourself or others when you're trapped in a space of fear or anger. Consequently, holding onto those negative emotions prevents you from complete healing. But when you release those emotions, it makes room for love, gratitude, and peace,

> which ultimately brings a deeper level of Forgiveness has such a profound impact on your biology that it has become part of my daily wellness routine, right alongside

> eating clean food and drinking clean water. My healing from the autoimmune disease was complete once I took full responsibility for my health, including changing my diet, lifestyle, and perspective, as well as practicing forgiveness.

> The "flare-ups" disappeared, and the autoimmune disease became a distant memory of a person I no longer was. Additionally, my energy level has increased so dramatically that, at times, my children can't keep up with me!

> Looking back, I was never surprised that the disease was gone; I always believed that complete healing was possible. But I was surprised at how free I felt. I reached a level of mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical freedom that I never imagined possible. And, with that freedom came immense

> joy—the type of joy you hear in a baby's laugh or see on a child's face on Christmas

I owe it all to God; He gave me a second chance at life and happiness. Many people are searching for their second chance, too. They might not know what that path looks like, just like I didn't. But I hope they know the power to heal themselves—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—is inside of them. And we all deserve a second chance.



Be Accountable to Someone Else

As Harvard professor of Chinese history Michael Puett and his co-author, Christine Gross-Loh, explain in their book "The Path: What Chinese Philosophers Can Teach Us About the Good Life," the Chinese philosopher Confucius explores the minutia of life in the "Analects," the collection of conversations and stories that his students

ALL IMAGES BY SHUTTERSTOCK

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

Fall Shows Us the Beauty of Letting Go

This is the season to turn from the external to the internal and give yourself a little love

EMMA SUTTIE

Fall signals the change from summer to winter. Long summer days finally cool and leaves offer vibrant yellows, oranges, and reds before they fall from the trees. It's the time when we go from the relaxed, carefree attitudes of summer to the more serious and introspective energies of fall.

In the five elements theory of Eastern medicine, fall represents metal. You can think of that in terms of the qualities of this element. It is rigid and refined. This season governs organization, setting limits, and protecting boundaries.

In fall, we move from the external exin spring or summer and enjoy the results to begin projects that focus on the internal, cultivating body and mind.

Fall, the Lungs and Grief In Eastern medicine, every season has an

organ and emotion associated with it. Fall is the lungs and grief. The energy of the lungs is "letting go," so fall is a good time to be mindful of anything we may be hanging on to so we can make room for new experiences. The lungs are associated with clear thinking and communication, openness to new ideas, positive self-image, and the ability to relax, let go, and be happy.

When the lungs are out of balance, or you're dealing with excess grief, you will have difficulty dealing with loss and change. You may feel a sense of alienation and experience

a sense of sadness that doesn't improve. The lungs represent our sense of attach-

ment, so if you have a hard time letting go of people, places, or experiences or spend a lot of time reliving the past, this can point to a deficiency of the lungs.

Eastern medicine talks about qi, which is an energy created through the air you breathe and food you eat. It can be weak, or strong, and is affected by several factors.

If the energy or qi of the lungs is weak, you may experience an overwhelming, constant state of grief that doesn't ease. If prolonged, this deficiency can lead to depression and other health issues.

By contrast, grief that's expressed fully is strengthening both physically and psychologically. Therefore, it's not avoiding grief, but rather dealing with it in a healthy way that's the key to being happy and balanced in all

Take in the New, Let Go of the Old

The lung has a partner organ, and that is the large intestine, and they work in tandem to keep the body healthy.

The lungs are responsible for taking in the new. This manifests physically as breathpansive nature of summer to the internal ing in the clean crisp fall air, filling us with contractive energies of autumn. It's a good the oxygen we need to think clearly and idea to finish up any projects you started allow our bodies to function optimally. The large intestine is responsible for letof all your hard work. It's also a good time ting go of the waste. It is the last stage of digestion and takes everything the body doesn't need and releases it, only keeping what's vital for us to function.

> Emotionally, this is why fall is a good time to look at things we might be hanging on to and working through them so we can let them go for good. Elimination problems like constipation often point to problems with letting go in some form or another, and lung problems can also be due to grief lingering inside the body and psyche.

> How can we work at letting go this fall? Here are some ideas to help you start letting go of what's no longer serving you so you can make space.

Clean, Reorganize, and Donate

The best time to strengthen the lungs is in the fall when the lung's energy is at its peak. Fall is the perfect time to take stock Letting go doesn't mean ignoring grief or problems, but dealing with them in a healthy way that ultimately makes us stronger and more clearminded.



Fall is the perfect time to take stock of things in your life, organize, and let go of anything you no longer need.

of things in your life, organize, and let go of anything you no longer need. This is a good practice in the physical world as well as the emotional one.

Go through your closet and take out all the old clothes you haven't worn in ages and donate them to a local charity so they can be new for someone else.

Clean out your computer, deleting anything you no longer need. If your computer is anything like mine, this should take a while, but feels great and makes

Organize your cupboards and rearrange your furniture.

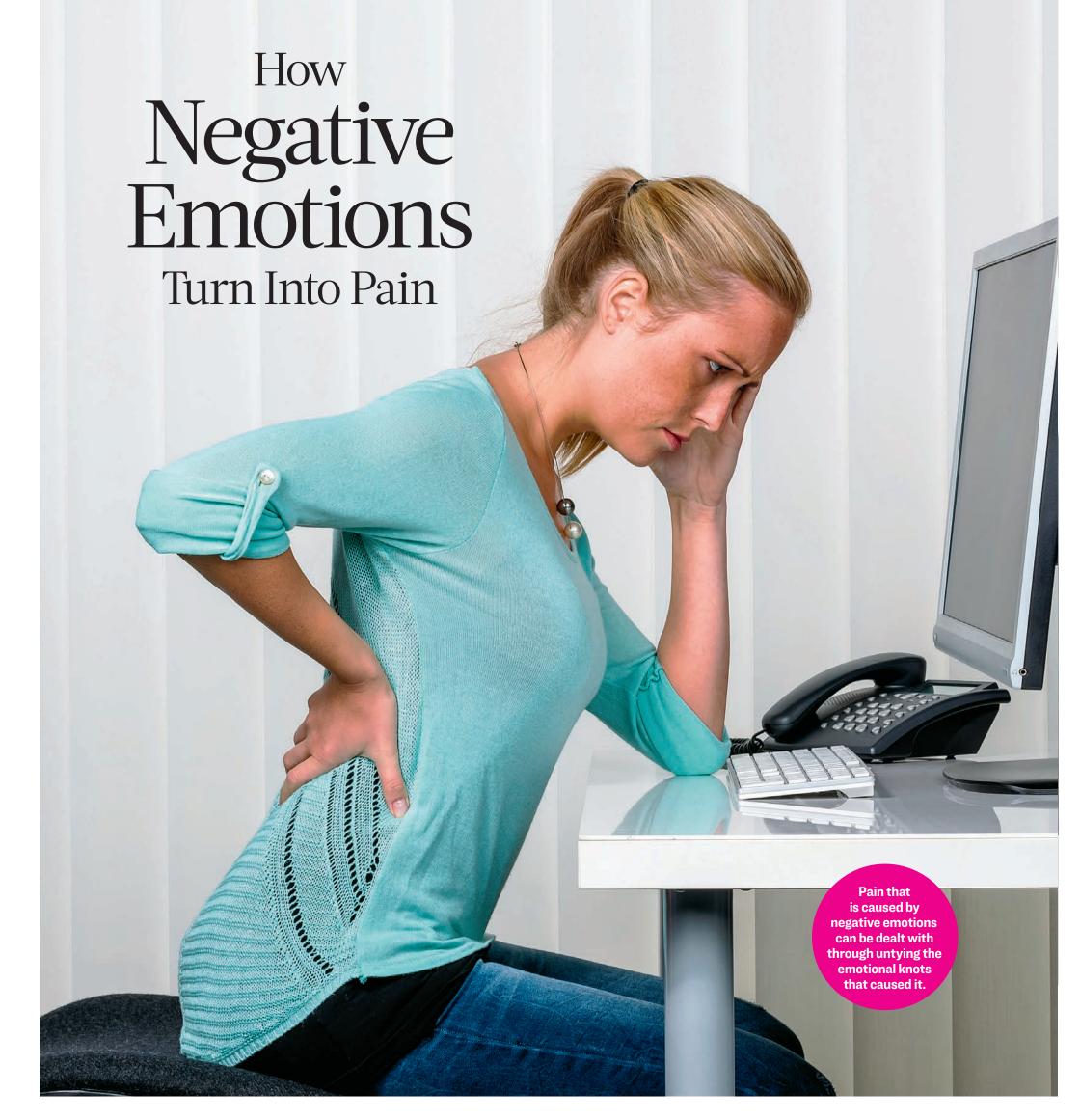
All of these activities can be incredibly liberating and are in harmony with the fall season and strengthen the lungs' function of letting go.

In Eastern philosophy, to have optimum health, we must learn about the nature of each season and live in harmony with its spirit. If we're living in harmony with the world around us, we see that in the fall, nature is slowing down, contracting, and preparing to rest.

It's good for us to do the same.

Sleeping a little longer, eating warming, nourishing foods, and moving inward, paying a little more attention to our internal lives—these are good practices at this time of year. Because the metal element within each of us gives us our sense of self-worth, this is the season to give ourselves some extra attention and self-love. Instead of seeking value outside—like chasing status, money, or accomplishment—we can work to be content inside and know that we have (and always have had) everything we will ever need to be happy, healthy beings

Emma Suttie is an acupuncture physician and founder of Chinese Medicine Living—a website dedicated to writing about how to use traditional wisdom to live a healthy lifestyle in the modern world. She has lived and practiced in 4 countries and now works through her consulting practice Thrive Consulting. She is a lover of martial arts, the natural world, and a good cup of tea.



Different feelings can lead to different strains on our body

LYNN JAFFEE

ou've heard the expressions "pain in the neck" or "pain in the butt" and assumed that they're just figures of speech to describe a person or a situation that's unpleasant. However, I know firsthand that stress, trauma, and emotional issues can morph into a pain in your neck, in your butt, and many other places in your body.

Here's how it happens: When you get frustrated or overwhelmed, your muscles tense up, and after a while, the layers of those tight muscles begin to "stick" to the layers of muscle above and below them. Those

adhesions are called knots, which you can feel as a lump in your muscle below the surface of the skin. They can be painful, tight, and often tough to get rid of.

When you relax, knots may also relax or resolve completely. After a massage or when you've been away on vacation, you may notice that the knots are gone. Sadly, chances are good that your knots will return once you're back at the daily grind an indication that when you relax, your muscles do, too. If you have a health condition or chronic

pain, your emotions and how you think about that pain can either alleviate or aggravate your symptoms. It's long been known by researchers that holding on to negative emotions, worrying about your symptoms, and anxiety can make your pain worse. That's because your body and mind are interconnected and work together. So your thoughts, attitudes, and fears affect the way your body processes pain.

you avoiding the physical and social activities that you once enjoyed. Over time, this can feed into a negative spiral of loss of strength and function and a loss of social relationships—all factors that further contribute to your pain.

Can you do anything about the pain that's caused by negative emotions? The answer is yes, but there are a couple of steps involved. First, think about how you're actually feeling. It's so easy to blame everything on stress, but it's far more helpful to pinpoint exactly what's going on with your

For example, being "stressed" could mean that you're dealing with trauma, feeling anxious about an upcoming problem or event, or have a sense of being overwhelmed and out of control by the circumstances in your life. When you move closer to exactly what you're feeling, it also brings you closer to what's causing your pain.

The fear of having pain can also result in *Continued on Page 14*

It's long been known by researchers that holding onto negative emotions, worrying about your symptoms, and anxiety can make your pain worse.



Be Inspired.

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While there is a need for C-sections sometimes, they may be overperformed in the United States.

The Overlooked Harms of Cesarean Birth

This common procedure can be a life saver—if it isn't overused

JENNIFER MARGULIS

Aimee Wright and her husband Scott, who live in Lake Mary, Florida, planned to have a home birth seven years ago. Wright was 33 and had a lot of friends who had given birth at home successfully. She saw no reason for a healthy pregnant woman to birth in the hospital.

"In my mind, hospitals are where people go when they're sick or dying," Wright said. "I don't think pregnancy and childbirth

Several studies have linked a disrupted microbiome in infants with cesarean birth. require that."

But Wright didn't go into labor until two weeks after her due date. Then, after 24 hours of laboring at home, she felt like she was hitting a wall. At first, her husband encouraged her to stay home, but Wright intuitively felt as though her labor wasn't progressing.

They went to the hospital, where Wright labored for another 12 hours.

Continued on Page 12

What People Are Saying



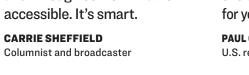
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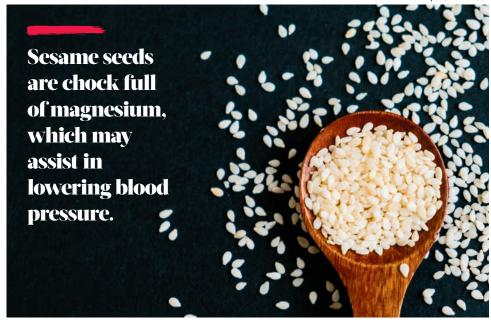
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Sesame seeds can be sprinkled over meals for added flavor and nutrition.

5 Reasons to Eat Sesame Seeds

These tiny seeds are nutrient dense, full of flavor, and helpful against many ailments

In "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves," the evaluated the effects of a sesame seed legendary phrase "open sesame" opens the mouth of a cave where a treasure lies hidden. In a delightful bit of symmetry, opening sesame pods also delivers a treasure of benefits for human health and well-being.

Sesame seeds are a reservoir of nutrients, including important vitamins and minerals, phytosterols, polyunsaturated fats, tocopherols, and lignans such as sesamin and sesamolin.

The presence of lignans (a type of polyphenol), tocopherols (which have vitamin E activity), and phytosterols (which are similar to cholesterol but can lower LDL cholesterol) can protect against reactive oxygen species and the oil from easily becoming rancid. In fact, sesame has earned the title "Queen of Oilseeds" because it is highly resistant to oxidation 4. Treats Type 2 Diabetes and and rancidity.

Sesame seed, in particular, boasts excellent nutritional value, including high protein, vitamin B1, and dietary fiber content. Southern Indian cuisine relies on sesame oil for cooking, just like Chinese cuisine, where it was the only cooking oil until fairly recently.

The seed can be consumed raw or • White sesame seed oil mitigates blood roasted. Here are five reasons to consume sesame seeds and make them a part of your regular diet.

1. Lowers High Blood Pressure

Sesame seeds are chock full of magnesium, which may assist in lowering blood pressure. A 2017 study showed that sesame consumption can reduce systolic and diastolic blood pressure, potentially owing to its high polyunsaturated fatty acids, fiber, phytosterol, and lignan content. High blood pressure is a major risk factor for heart disease, myocardial infarction,

stroke, and renal failure. In a separate study, subjects with high blood pressure at 2.5 grams (g) of powdered black sesame seeds in capsules every day. At the end of four weeks, they had significantly decreased systolic blood pressure, suggesting potential anti-hypertensive effects via improving antioxidant status and decreasing oxidant stress.

2. Reduces Inflammation

A sesame-rich diet can help address atherosclerosis by controlling inflammation and regulating lipid metabolism. Atherosclerosis has been recognized as a chronic inflammatory condition.

A 2020 study also concluded that sesame oil has anti-inflammatory properties, suggesting a favorable role against inflammation in ulcerative colitis.

A separate study also found that orally supplementing with sesamol and sesamin, compounds in sesame seeds and their oil, controlled inflammatory and oxidative stress markers in animal models. The team advocated the use of the two components as an adjunct therapy where both inflammatory conditions and oxidative stress are a concern.

3. Soothes Knee Arthritis

Osteoarthritis is the most common culprit behind joint pain, frequently affecting the knees. Arthritis may be various factors coming together, such as inflammation and oxidative damage to the cartilage tasked with cushioning the joints.

In a study out of Tabriz University of LLC. Sign up for the newsletter at www. Medical Sciences in Iran, researchers GreenmedInfo.health

supplement on clinical signs in knee osteoarthritis patients. They divided 50 subjects with knee osteoarthritis into two groups, with one group receiving 40g of sesame seed daily for two months along with standard drug treatment and the other getting 40g of placebo powder along with standard medical therapy.

At the end of the trial, the sesame seed group showed significant decreases in markers of inflammation and oxidative stress. The researchers suggested sesame may benefit knee osteoarthritis patients and offer complementary treatment in this cohort. In separate research, sesamin was found to have anti-inflammatory and antioxidant action, potentially protecting your cartilage.

Its Effects

Growing evidence shows that sesame seeds may help protect against diabetes. Here are some relevant studies:

- Sesame seed paste may help reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease in Type 2 diabetics
- glucose levels, slashes oxidative stress. and enhances biomarkers of blood and renal function in Type 2 diabetes pa-
- It may work synergistically with antidiabetes medication glibenclamide in helping Type 2 diabetes patients and
- improving hyperglycemia Sesamol has favorable effects against diabetes-associated cognitive decline in animal models, with chronic treatment significantly reducing acetylcholinesterase, oxidative stress, and inflammation
- Sesamol helps suppress neuropathic pain linked to diabetes, mainly through mechanisms such as modulating oxidative stress and inflammatory cytokine release in diabetic animal subjects

5. Promotes Hormone Balance **During Menopause**

Sesame seeds are a rich source of phytoestrogens or plant compounds similar to estrogen, potentially benefiting women in menopause, whose estrogen levels drop. This makes them likely helpful for women at this life stage. Phytoestrogens, for instance, may help control hot flashes and other signs of low estrogen.

These compounds may also assist in pushing down the risk of cancer during menopause, such as breast cancer. You can learn more about the impressive health benefits of sesame seeds on the GreenMedInfo.com database online.

For links to studies mentioned in this article, please see the article online at TheEpochTimes.com

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The 12 Worst **Endocrine Disruptors** in Your Body

Avoid these chemicals and the consequences of their hormonedisrupting effects

GINA-MARIE CHEESEMAN

Endocrine disruptors are scary. These synthetic chemicals are absorbed into the body and either mimic or block hormones and disrupt the body's normal function.

in many products, as the Environmental Working Group's (EWG) Dirty Dozen List NaturallySavvy.com

People are

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of Endocrine Disruptors reveals. The list includes the worst endocrine disruptors. Since these 12 are so scary and so pervasive, the following is an overview of what each one is and how to avoid exposure.

Unfortunately, endocrine disruptors are Gina-Marie Cheeseman is a freelance writer. This article was first published on Industrial chemicals known to be hazardous to us remain prevalent in our products and



1. BPA

been linked to cancer and can affect the reproductive systems of laboratory

BPA, which stands for bisphenol A, tops the list. It's used to make polycarbonate plastics, including plastic dinnerware and some toys. BPA epoxy resins are used to line food cans. It has been linked to breast and other cancers and shown to affect the reproductive systems of laboratory animals. A Centers for Disease Control study of 2,517 participants ages 6 years and older found BPA in the urine of almost all of the people tested.

The best way to avoid BPA exposure is to swap canned foods for fresh ones or look for BPA-free canned foods, often available in most natural food stores. Some products now tout being BPA-free, but be warned, many replacements, such as BPF, BPS, appear to be just as bad.



2. Dioxins

nine hygiene products.

Dioxins make the No. 2 spot; they are a class of chemical contaminants formed during combustion processes such as waste incineration or some industrial processes, including paper pulp bleaching. People are mainly exposed to dioxins through eating contaminated food and through feminine hygiene products. Dioxins have been found to cause reproductive and developmental problems, interfere with hormones, and damage the immune system.

All people have background exposure to dioxins and a certain level of them in the body, according to the World Health Organization. The food found to be contaminated the most with dioxins includes meat, milk, eggs, butter, and fish, which means the best way to reduce exposure is to eat fewer animal products.



Atrazine is one of the most widely used pesticides in the United



A great way to avoid phthalates

3. Atrazine

Atrazine is one of the most widely used Phthalates are a group of chemicals used to pesticides in the United States. It's mainly used on corn, sorghum, and sugarcane and is applied most heavily in the Midwest. The pesticide has been banned in the EU. A 2009 analysis of drinking and surface water by the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) found "pervasive" contamination across the Midwest and South. Atrazine was found in 80 percent of drinking water samples taken in 153 public water systems. All of the 20 watersheds sampled in 2007 and 2008 contained atrazine. Sixteen of the watershed samples had average concentrations higher than the level shown to harm plants and wildlife.

to buy organic produce and get a drinking for "fragrance" listed as an ingredient. Most water filter certified to remove the pesticide. fragrances contain phthalates.

4. Phthalates

make plastics more flexible. They are used in all sorts of products, including vinyl flooring, adhesives, plastic clothes (raincoats), garden hoses, inflatable toys, and some personal care products (soaps, shampoos, hair sprays, and nail polishes). Some studies show that phthalates cause gender confusion in children exposed to them. A study of 145 preschool children found that mothers with high concentrations of two common phthalates in their prenatal urine had sons less likely to play with male-typical toys and

A great way to avoid phthalates exposure is to avoid plastic food containers. Another way The best way to avoid atrazine exposure is to avoid exposure is to read labels and look

The best way

to reduce

arsenic is

by using a

water filter

that lowers



perchlorate in much of the produce and milk in the United States.

5. Perchlorate

Perchlorate is both naturally occurring and a man-made chemical used to make rocket fuel, fireworks, flares, and explosives. (EPA) acknowledges that it may have "adverse health effects" because studies indicate it can disrupt the thyroid's ability to produce the hormones that are needed for normal growth and development. Both EWG and government test data found that perchlorate is found in much of the produce and milk in the United States.

It's almost impossible to avoid exposure, but you can reduce potential effects by making sure you have enough iodine in your diet.



6. Fire Retardants

The EPA classifies chemicals in some fire retardants as "persistent, bioaccumulative, and toxic to both humans and the The Environmental Protection Agency environment." The NRDC calls flame retardants a "classic example of a stupid use of a chemical." Studies have linked these chemicals to lower IQ and other serious health effects. There are several ways to avoid exposure,

> including using a vacuum cleaner with a HEPA filter, and being careful if you replace the old carpet.



paint and the aerators on faucets on a regular

7. Lead

Lead affects almost every organ and system in our bodies. Children 6 years of age and effects of lead, but adults and older children can also be affected. The EPA lists a number of ways to avoid lead, which include inspecting and maintaining painted surfaces to prevent a water filter that lowers arsenic levels. deterioration, cleaning debris out of outlet screens or faucet aerators on a regular basis, and washing children's hands and toys often.

Another way to reduce exposure is through eating a healthy diet because studies show that children who eat healthier absorb less lead.



arsenic

8. Arsenic

When you think of arsenic you are probably likely to think of murder by poisoning. younger are particularly vulnerable to the However, arsenic is found in some drinking water supplies. It can cause skin, bladder, and lung cancer.

The best way to reduce exposure is by using



Burning coal for power is the primary source of mercury pollution.

9. Mercury

Mercury is an element that occurs naturally and is found in air, water, and soil. Even just being exposed to a small amount can cause Perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs) are used serious health problems and could be a to make non-stick cooking ware. The EPA is hidden risk in your home. The World Health Organization (WHO) considers mercury to be one of the top 10 chemicals that are a major public health concern. It gets into the be toxic to laboratory animals and wildlife. air and oceans mainly through burning coal, according to the EWG.

The best way to avoid exposure is to eat safer seafood. Check out the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch pocket guide



Perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs) are used to make nonstick cooking

10. Perfluorinated Chemicals

concerned about PFCs because they are found all over the world in the environment, wildlife, and people. They have been found to Exposure to PFCs is widespread.

Ditching non-stick pans and avoiding water and stain-resistant clothing, furniture, and carpets are the best ways to avoid exposure.



and vegetables are contaminated with organophosphate pesticides.

11. Organophosphate Pesticides 12. Glycol Ethers Last but not least, glycol ethers are in

Organophosphate pesticides affect the nervous system by disrupting the enzyme that regulates the neurotransmitter, acetylcholine. The Pesticide Action Network is particularly concerned about them as a number of fruits and vegetables are contaminated with these toxic pesticides.

Buying organic produce is the best way to avoid exposure.



are found in items like cleaning products, soaps, and

Glycol ethers

Last but not least, glycol ethers are in a number of household products, including cleaning products, liquid soaps, and cosmetics. Animal studies have found reproductive and developmental effects from inhalation and oral exposure to glycol ethers.

You can avoid exposure by reading labels and looking for ingredients such as 2-butoxyethanol (EGBE) and methoxydiglycol (DEGME).

The Overlooked Harms of Cesarean Birth

This common procedure can be a life saver-if it isn't overused

Continued from Page 9

She was initially able to rest after being administered some pain medicine through an IV, but the two epidurals she was then given to help manage the pain both failed, she said. Finally, Wright had dealt with enough. She knew she needed a C-section. "Go get a surgeon," she told the labor and delivery staff.

Teddy, her son, weighed 8 pounds 12 ounces. He was born with an unusually long umbilical cord that was wrapped all the way around his body.

"I truly believe that it saved our lives," Wright said of the cesarean birth.

Ashley Burke, who lives outside of Houston, Texas, is also a C-section mom. But unlike Wright, Burke feels as though her first birth shouldn't have been surgical. Burke was 30 years old and the picture of good health: eating well and exercising every day. She was decidedly low risk. But when she was 39 weeks pregnant, her doctor warned her that the baby was "too big," and was "only going to get bigger" and insisted the baby needed to be born right away.

The nurse used Cytotec (misoprostol) to induce the labor. But when she tried to put the small white pill on Burke's cervix, she lost it in her vagina. So she tried again and lost that pill as well, Burke said. The third pill was placed correctly, according to what the nurse told Burke, but a few hours later she was given a fourth dose.

Burke later found out that Cytotec is an abortion drug used off-label to jumpstart labor and considered by many to be dangerous. That was the opinion of the late Dr. Marsden Wagner, a perinatologist (a specialist in maternal-fetal medicine) and former director of Women and Children's Health for the World Health Organization. She warned that using Cytotec carries the risk of uterine rupture.

Cytotec inductions have also been linked to both fetal and maternal demise because of amniotic fluid embolisms. Burke's Cytotec-induced contractions were excruciatingly painful. Then, when the labor didn't progress as fast as the hospital staff wanted it to, she was told the baby's heartbeat was too slow, and she would have to have a C-section or the baby would die.

"They put such fear in me. They kept saying, 'The baby's going to die. The baby's going to die. You need a C-section," Burke said. At 6 a.m., the doctor came in to do the

"I felt like the whole induction and everything was timed for the doctor. All lined up perfectly for her to get to work and see her patients in the morning," Burke said.

Burke may well have been right. As reported by Scientific American, most women who birth in U.S. hospitals do so during business hours, a phenomenon that's linked to doctor convenience, not human physiology. In Burke's case, as with 90 percent of women who are told their babies are too big, there was certainly no issue with the baby's size. Despite her doctor's insistence that he was dangerously big, her son Cooper weighed

Wright and

Teddy, seven

years ago, at

Lake Eola in

Orlando, Fla.

her son

3.75 million babies born in the United **States each** year, over 30 percent of them are delivered via Cesarean birth.

Of the

The World Health **Organization** estimates that a country's optimal cesarean birth rate should be much less: between **10 and 15**

percent.



just 8 pounds 4 ounces.

"My baby was a normal, perfect size," Burke said. "There was no reason I should have been induced. None. But I didn't know that at the time."

Of the 3.75 million babies born in the United States each year, more than 30 percent of them are delivered via cesarean birth, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. At the same time, the World Health Organization estimates that a country's optimal cesarean birth rate should be much less: between 10 and 15 percent.

There's no question that, when used judiciously, cesarean birth can be a life-saving operation. However, while Wright's cesarean may well have been the safest way for her son to be born, it's likely that hundreds of thousands of cesareans performed each year, like Burke's, aren't medically necessary. In fact, if the WHO's recommendations are correct (and many providers believe that a 15 percent C-section rate is actually too high), that means that at least 620,000 cesareans performed in the United States each year are unnecessary.

"There's definitely a time and a place for a C-section, and I'm grateful it's an option, because it certainly can be required for the safety of the baby and/or the mother," said Dr. Jani Rollins, a family practitioner based in southern Oregon.

Rollins estimated that she has delivered about 3,000 babies in 23 years. Before she ing Canada and Turkey, has shown that retired from obstetrics, despite having cesarean birth is associated with lower some high-risk women in her practice, her C-section rate was only 6 percent.

"It is a surgery, however, and there are complications," Rollins said. "And the risk of complications goes up the more C-sections a woman undergoes."

Problems With Surgical Birth Rollins said it's important for expectant moms to know about the possible prob-

lems that can arise with cesarean birth, both short- and long-term, for both the mother and the baby.

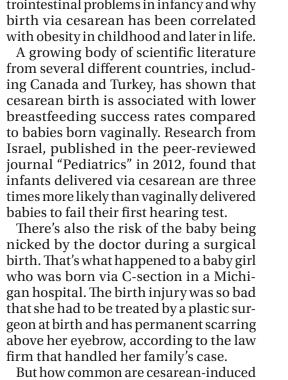
"One of my concerns about a C-section versus vaginal birth relates to the exposure of the baby to the mother's vaginal flora," she said.

Several studies have linked a disrupted microbiome in infants with cesarean birth. In a 2010 study published in the "Proceedings of the National Academy of Science," a team of scientists found that babies born via C-section have several potentially pathogenic bacteria in their gut microbiome, including Staphylococcus (a Gram-positive bacteria commonly found on the human skin that, when out





(Above 3) Ashley Burke in the hospital before and after delivering her second

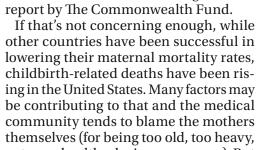


newborn injuries? A 2006 study of 37,100 surgical births found that 1.1 percent of the babies had identifiable injuries, including skin nicks, collarbone and skull fractures, and damage to the facial nerve. While this may not sound like a lot—and injuries can occur as well during vaginal birth, especially vacuum- or forceps-assisted births—if those numbers are correct, it means that more than 11,800 babies born in the United States each year

suffer from cesarean-induced injuries. Cesarean birth also puts mothers at greater risk. Injury to the mom's internal organs, the need for emergency hysterectomies, complications from anesthesia, and severe infection are among the well-documented adverse outcomes of

surgical birth for mothers. But perhaps the biggest concern is that a woman is as much as four to six times as likely to die during childbirth during a C-section than she is during a vaginal birth, according to research done in both the United States and in Europe. That's what happened to Doreen Plunkett, who died of an amniotic fluid embolism after undergoing a C-section in a Georgia hospital in August, according to Newsweek.

just after childbirth in the United States each year. While the absolute risk of dying in childbirth in the United States may be



low, our country has the highest mater-

nal mortality rates of any country in the industrialized world, according to a 2020

childbirth-related deaths have been rising in the United States. Many factors may be contributing to that and the medical community tends to blame the mothers themselves (for being too old, too heavy, or too unhealthy during pregnancy). But the countries that have the lowest maternal mortality rates, such as Norway and Japan, are also places where midwifeattended vaginal birth is the norm and surgical birth is only used as a last resort.

Being Proactive

Rollins attributes her low cesarean section rates to several factors. She said she worked closely with expectant mothers to help them be as healthy as they could be before getting pregnant and to maintain good health practices—such as eating whole foods and daily exercise—during pregnancy. She also feels as though her close relationship with the families (she was always on call for her patients and delivered them herself) helped them feel more empowered and less fearful when it was time to give birth.

"I knew them very well when they went into labor with their first baby or their sixth," Rollins said. "I also paid close attention to the position of the baby during the pregnancy, especially in the third trimester, and encouraged moms to stay active, eat a healthy diet, and do pregnancy exercises or yoga. I was careful to identify breech babies early on so that moms would have time to change the baby's position, and, if needed, we would schedule an appointment to turn the baby to head down.'

Another key factor was that the hospital where her patients delivered had doulas, according to Rollins. Those on-call birth attendants were available for free to any mother who wanted one. Several studies show that having a constant companion while giving birth not only puts women at lower risk of having complications, but also shortens labor and helps women feel more positive about their birth outcomes, whether the birth was vaginal or surgical.

Rollins helped develop a water birth program, so mothers could labor or even birth in the tubs. Rollins's second child, who's 18 now, was the first baby born in that waterbirth program.

"The benefits of water birth are mainly around allowing the mom to be comfortable and relaxed, which accelerates labor when used at the appropriate time during labor," she said. "Moms are able to move around and change their position easily, because they're floating, which allows the baby to move into the birth canal, rather than laying in the bed and not moving. We used walking, showers, hands and knees, yoga balls, all kinds of different positions. I had women crawling on the floor on a mat."

Freedom of movement is a key factor for women to birth vaginally, according

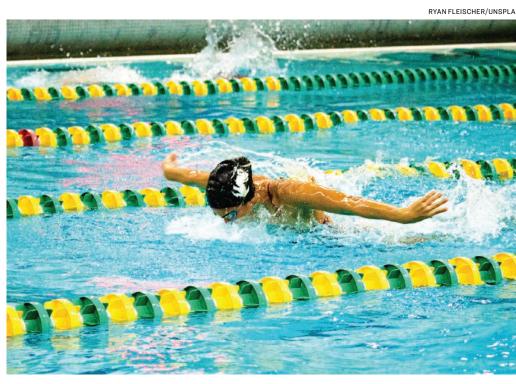
"My doctor told me that by the time my kids have kids, the majority of the births will be scheduled C-sections," said Jana Hollingsworth, a mother of three who lives in Brentwood, Tennessee.

Though her mother gave birth to her vaginally, all three of Hollingsworth's children were born via C-section. The family was living in Athens, Georgia, at the time. Each experience was harder than the last, she said.

On the one hand, she's grateful to have three healthy children. On the other, she didn't tolerate the pain medication well, the recovery from the C-sections—especially the first—was brutal, and she still remembers the unkind bedside manner of the hospital staff. Her last baby, who was born blue, didn't breathe for six minutes and was taken directly to the ICU.

The doctors mistakenly told Hollingsworth that her daughter had Down syndrome. Though she didn't, the baby was sent home with a heart monitor, and Hollingsworth was told that she needed early intervention. A year later, Hollingsworth wrote a letter to the hospital describing how bad her birth experience had been. Though she didn't ask for any compensation, the hospital sent her a check for more than \$40,000 as a partial refund for the birth.

Jennifer Margulis, Ph.D., is an investigative health journalist and science writer. She is also the author of the award-winning book, "Your Baby, Your Way: Taking Charge of Your Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Parenting Decisions for a Happier, Healthier Family." Find out more and sign up for her free newsletter at www.JenniferMargulis.net



The findings of a new study could help some people stick to fitness goals.

Study Finds Exercise Goals That Last

Researchers find people more likely to stick to goals that are self-selected and quickly enacted

FRANK OTTO

When people set their own exercise goals and then pursue them immediately, it's more likely to result in positive lasting changes, according to a new study.

The researchers made their findings among an underserved population at particularly high risk of having or developing heart conditions, making the work especially important.

"Most behavior change programs involve goal-setting, but the best way to design that process is unknown," said lead author Mitesh Patel, an associate professor of medicine at the University of Pennsylvania and vice president for Clinical Transformation at Ascension Health.

"Our clinical trial demonstrated that physical activity increased the most when patients chose their goals rather than being assigned them, and when the goals started immediately rather than starting lower and gradually increasing over time. These findings are particularly important because the patients were from lower-income neighborhoods and may face a number of challenges in achieving health goals."



Individuals who select their own goals are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to follow through on them.

Kevin Volpp, director of the Center for Health Incentives and Behavioral Economics

Who Sets Exercise Goals Matters

The study, published in JAMA Cardiology, consisted of 500 patients from lowincome neighborhoods, mainly in West Philadelphia but also elsewhere in and outside of the city. Participants either had a cardiovascular disease or were assessed to have a near-10 percent risk of developing one within a decade. These high-risk patients stood to greatly gain from increased physical activity.

Patel's previous work at the Penn Medicine Nudge Unit often focused on the use of gamification, a concept used to create behavioral change by turning it into a game. The work usually tested whether playing a game attached to physical activity goals could make significant increases against not playing a game, or between different versions of a game.

As with past studies, every participant was given a wearable step tracker that recorded their daily step counts through Penn's Way to Health platform. But what set this study apart from many of its predecessors was that the main outcomes of the research were less about participation in the games themselves and more about how exercise goals were established, as well as when participants were encouraged to pursue them.

Once every participant got their wearable step counter, they were given a week or two to get used to it. This time period also functioned as a baseline-setting period for everyone's pre-intervention daily step count. After that, researchers randomly assigned participants to the control group, which

didn't have step goals or games attached, or one of the gaming groups with goals.

MIND & BODY | 13

Those in the gamified group also went through two other sets of random assignments. One determined whether they'd have input on their step goal, or whether they'd just be assigned a standard one. The second decided whether each participant would immediately start working toward their goals (for the entire 16-week intervention), or whether they'd ramp up to it, with minor increases in goals, until the full goals kicked in at week nine.

Exercise Motivation

After analyzing the results, the researchers saw that the only group of participants who achieved significant increases in activity were those who chose their own exercise goals and started immediately. They had the highest average increase in their steps compared to the group with no goals, roughly 1,384 steps per day. And, in addition to raw step counts, the study also measured periods of sustained, high activity, amounting to an average increase of 4.1 minutes daily.

Comparatively, those who were assigned their goals or had full goals delayed for half the intervention only increased their daily steps above the control group's average by 500 to 600 steps.

"Individuals who select their own goals are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to follow through on them," said Kevin Volpp, director of the Center for Health Incentives and Behavioral Economics. "They feel like the goal is theirs and this likely enables greater engagement."

The study didn't end when the researchers turned the games off. Participants kept their activity trackers, and in the eight weeks following the intervention, the group that chose their goals and started immediately kept up their progress. In fact, they achieved almost the exact same average in steps—just three less than during the active games.

"It is exciting to see that the group that increased their activity levels by the most steps maintained those levels during follow-up," Patel said. "This indicates that gamification with self-chosen and immediate goals helped these patients form a

Many programs, whether offered through work or by health insurance companies, offer incentives for boosts in physical activity. But these goals are often fairly static and assigned based on round numbers.

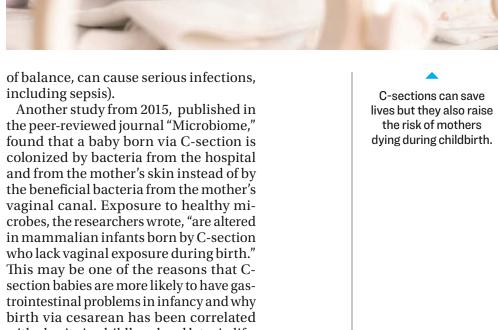
Patel, Volpp, and colleagues believe this research suggests that adjusting goal-setting in these programs can have a significantimpact. And if these adjustments lead to gains among people with lower incomes, whom cardiovascular disease kill at 76 percent higher rates, that could be particularly important.

"Goal-setting is a fundamental element of almost every physical activity program, whether through a smartphone app or in a workplace wellness program," Volpp said. "Our findings reveal a simple approach that could be used to improve the impact of these programs and the health of their

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from several different countries, includbreastfeeding success rates compared to babies born vaginally. Research from Israel, published in the peer-reviewed journal "Pediatrics" in 2012, found that infants delivered via cesarean are three

nicked by the doctor during a surgical birth. That's what happened to a baby girl who was born via C-section in a Michigan hospital. The birth injury was so bad that she had to be treated by a plastic surgeon at birth and has permanent scarring above her eyebrow, according to the law

Sadly, about 800 women die during or

childbirth during a **C**-section than she is during a vaginal birth, according to research done in both the United **States and** in Europe.

A woman is

as much as

four to six

times as likely

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problems can be solved by taking a

Being away from your smartphone may cause you anxiety, but that doesn't make it a disease

WUYOU SUI & ANNA SUI

hrough social distancing mandates, lockdown measures, and restrictions on gatherings and services, the pandemic has brought about widespread changes to how modern societies function. And everyone has become more reliant on smartphones.

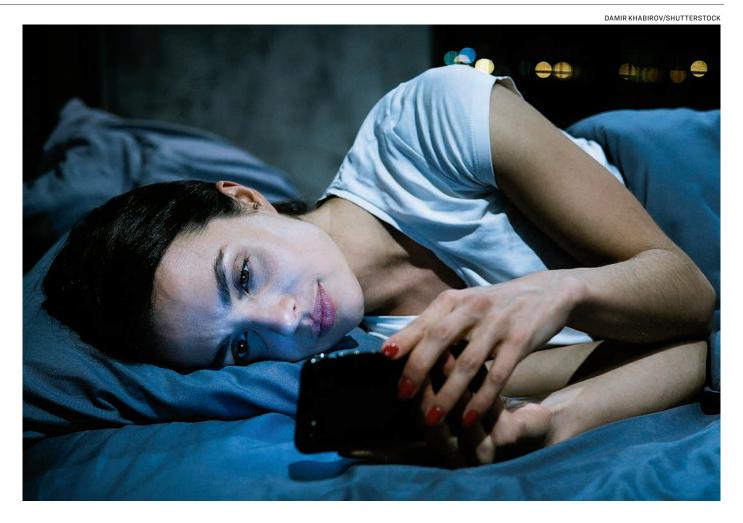
One study found smartphone use increased by 70 percent during the first few months of the pandemic. And a recent Canadian survey found more than 40 percent of respondents are spending even more time on their phones this year. The reliance on digital technologies, including smartphones, has increased tremendously because of the need to do everything from home—working, studying, staying connected, reading the news, and interacting with services such as food and grocery The relationships we form with smart-

phones have recently become of interest to researchers, especially the potential negative impacts when it comes to overuse and attachment.

One relationship in particular concerns the anxiety felt when people are unable to use or be in contact with their smartphones, known as nomophobia. Nomophobia, or no-mobile phobia, is thought to be a product of the intense attachments to our devices and is believed to be strongest among people who use their phones the most, such as teens and young adults.

Some researchers have gone so far as to argue that nomophobia should be introduced into the DSM-V (the manual for diagnosing psychiatric illnesses), or be treated through cognitive behavioral therapy and other psychological and pharmaceutical treatments. But these claims are rooted in a de-contextualized idea of nomophobia, which ignores many real-life interactions that necessitate the use of smartphones.

Smartphones Make Us Accessible 24/7 As digital health researchers who have



The concept of nomophobia oversimplifies both how these devices are used and the potential treatments for this device-related anxiety.

The anxiety associated with **smartphones** (or lack thereof) stems more from implied demands than the device itself.

Wuyou Sui is a postdoctoral fellow in the behavioral medicine of exercise science, physical & health education at the University of Victoria in Canada, and Anna Sui is a doctoral candidate in the school of health and rehabilitation sciences at Western University in Canada. This article was first published on *The Conversation.*

conducted (and are currently conducting) several studies examining problematic smartphone use in post-secondary students, we argue that treating nomophobia as a mental illness or a medical condition in need of treatment is flawed and poten-

tially harmful.

In a recently published study, we suggest that nomophobia, or the anxiety associated with not being able to access one's smartphone, has less to do with how often one uses their phone and more to do with the context in which the phone is used. The existence of smartphones has modified social and work expectations so that 24-hour availability is now often considered the norm.

There's no question that smartphones have become an important and arguably irreplaceable part of everyday life. Just as the automobile became irreplaceable because of urban sprawl that prioritized roads over walkways, the smartphone has become irreversibly embedded into our globalized and fast-paced lives. Unlike the automobile, which is typically used for a single function, smartphones can be used in many ways—some of which are beneficial to the user.

Anxiety Comes From the Implied

During the pandemic, smartphones enabled remote grocery pick-up and food delivery, facilitated friend and family checkins, and allowed services such as banking and doctor's appointments to continue. both how these devices are used and the

clear utility and convenience. Comparatively, some aspects of smartphone use are products of larger social and occupational norms. Modern work demands such as promptly answering emails and attending calls have been largely supported by smartphone functions and apps (such as email, video conferencing, modifying documents). This means many employers expect their workers to be available beyond 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and the anxiety associated with smartphones them are often constrained by external fac-(or lack thereof) stems more from these tors, such as employer demands.

implied demands than the device itself.

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Similar anxieties stemming from "smartphone use" have been associated with social media consumption. Specifically, research (including our own) has documented that the more time you spend on social media apps, the higher the nomophobia. Meaning the anxiety associated with being unable to use your phone stems from how it's being used rather than the

Part of Our Everyday Worlds

The complicated relationship we have with our phones is clearly demonstrated through how they're marketed to us and their features. Our phones are positioned as "creative outlets" and are reflections of our self-expression through customization and usage.

The commercial for the iPhone 12, for example, focuses on how it's the right gadget for everyone regardless of interests and use. The commercial goes so far as to visually suggest that the phone never needs to leave your hand and can perform any function you would need throughout your day.

The addition of features such as Apple or Google Pay, face ID, and digital assistants like Siri exemplifies the way in which smartphones are no longer a simple and passive device, but rather a way by which we interact with our everyday worlds.

Smartphones have become an integral technology to the fabric of modern society. The concept of nomophobia oversimplifies anxiety. Smartphones clearly extend a level of convenience, communication, and utility that not only allows us to operate within society but to impose ourselves on it.

We must be critical and consider how and when these devices are helping us, harming us, and changing us. The potential harms of treating nomophobia as a clinical condition ignore the complex and various ways we use our smartphones. What we use our devices for and how much we use

How Negative Emotions Turn Into Pain

Different feelings can lead to different strains on our body

Continued from Page 9

It's also important to understand where you're feeling pain. That's because certain emotions tend to be expressed by different muscle groups. Similar to using muscles in your face when you're happy and smile, you tend to feel tense in your upper back and neck when you're frustrated and overwhelmed and experience tightness in your chest when you're anxious.

Your rib muscles are also part of the emotion/pain equation. When you're happy, inspired, and upbeat, the muscles around your ribs open up your chest and making it easier for you to breathe more fully.

However, when you're depressed, a different set of rib muscles contract, pulling your chest inward and making it harder to breathe deeply.

The obvious solution is to do something about the situation and emotions that are causing your pain. Unfortunately, often that isn't possible or realistic. Sometimes, you have no choice but to coexist with an obnoxious boss, deal with a troubled child,



When you move closer to exactly what you're feeling, it also brings you closer to what's causing your pain.

or care for an aging parent. However, research has proven that as far as your feelings are concerned, you can "act as if" rather than dwelling on the negative aspects of your life.

"Acting as if" means you can:

Smile. By engaging the muscles involved in smiling, you actually activate neurotransmitters in your brain that improve your

Cultivate your sense of humor and look for reasons to laugh. Laughing also activates those feel-good brain chemicals.

Open up your chest and take a few deep breaths, especially when you're feeling overwhelmed. Deep breathing is often one of the first steps toward meditating because it helps you relax quickly. Meditate. It helps calm your brain and

release pain-relieving neurotransmitters. Pay attention to your posture, which does a world of good for opening up your chest and rib cage, pulling up your back muscles,

and allowing you to breathe more fully. When you're struggling with negative emotions, try to choose a thought that's just one step more positive than the one you're having at the moment.

Engage in good self-care, especially when you're anxious, frustrated, or overwhelmed. A good diet, adequate sleep, and moving your body can help prevent negative emotions from turning into pain.

The reality is that everyone struggles with loss, difficult circumstances, and negative emotions. However, with some selfawareness and a little effort, those negative emotions don't have to mutate into pain.

Lynn Jaffee is a licensed acupuncturist and the author of "Simple Steps: The Chinese Way to Better Health." This article was originally published on AcupunctureTwinCities.com

Via Negativa: The Study of What Not to Do

Sometimes the way to gain in life is through losing something

MIKE DONGHIA

hen thinking about how to improve something, most people instinctively focus on what can be added or changed. You want to improve your life, so you ask, "What new habits can I add?"

You want to improve your business, so you ask, "What processes need to be changed or adopted?"

You want to be smarter, so you ask, "What new knowledge can I acquire?"

You want to grow in your faith, so you ask, "What good deeds or disciplines must I perform?"

You want to improve your health so you ask, "What new diet or exercise routine can I try?"

But one important rule of thumb that I've come to rely on is that most complex problems are easier to solve backward. Instead of asking what can be added or changed to bring about improvement, start by looking to see what can be removed or avoided.

In theology and philosophy, that approach is often called "via negativa" or "by way of removal."

I like to think of it as the study of what not to do.

The Path of Subtraction

Via negativa has several advantages: It's often much easier to see what's wrong than what's right.

In a complex environment (pretty much all of life), even seemingly "good" additions can have unforeseen consequences. It's often easier to predict what will happen by way of removal.

Most people spend a lot of time thinking about what to add, so chances are high that you can find some low-hanging fruit by simply asking what can be removed. For example, you can improve your health by removing daily soft drinks from your diet, or you can make your home more inviting without spending a dime by removing clutter.

A lot of what we call "being successful" is simply showing up and avoiding the big mistakes that even smart people make. There's an enormous upside to simply not overspending your income or becoming unreliable because of your perfectionism or procrastination.

Removing things from your life allows you to focus on what's most important. Removing things from your life also gives you free options. For example, you can take advantage of the neighbor's lastminute offer for dinner by simply leaving more margin in your days and weeks. Op-

tionality is the option, but not the require-

ment to take advantage of the good things

that pop up along the journey. do is, by itself, a practice of via negativa. It's **Subtractive Additions** Below are some practical areas of your

simple to look at what you're already doing life that might be improved by simply reand ask what can be moving or reducing what's already there. removed.

Choosing to

study what not to

Instead of

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Perfectionism. Instead of letting the false need for a perfect result slow you down, try an experiment where you give yourself a certain amount of time to make a decision and go with it.

Clutter. Instead of organizing your house and your stuff, try reducing the amount you own. Distraction. Instead of searching for

new productivity tips, start by removing the major sources of distraction in your life. If you can't remove them, make them far less accessible. New knowledge. Instead of reading

another self-help book or blog (this one included), try writing down five things you've learned in the past year and spend the next year simply trying to master those.

Procrastination. Instead of searching for more time in your day or some secret to life that other people seem to possess, find a way to remove the source of your procrastination and do the real thing.

Habits. Instead of looking for new habits to add to your life,

> Diet. Instead of trying a new fad diet, simply eat less of the things you know are the worst for you. Another approach might be to occasionally fast from certain indulgences for a period of time. It's sometimes easier to be totally on or totally off.

Work. Instead of adding another meeting, project, or idea, look for inefficiencies within the current system that can be removed or addressed.

Finances. Instead of making a complicated budget to follow, start with your

current spending and look for a few areas that you can reduce your spending. Repeat this as often as desired.

Fasting. Instead of adding new pleasures and entertainment to your life as a defense against boredom, try a temporary fast from something you enjoy in order to renew your appreciation.

Chemicals. Instead of adding new products to your life with the goal of being healthier, consider what can simply be removed without any downside at all.

The Practice of Simplicity

In a nutshell, via negativa is just another application of the practice of simple living. There are many ways to simplify your life and benefit from that timeless, fool-proof way to help yourself and those around you.

Choosing to study what not to do is, by itself, a practice of via negativa. It's simple to look at what you're already doing and ask what can be removed. It's far harder to consider all of the potenstart by removing tial solutions (usually at some cost) that the bad ones first. society has to offer for your problems That path often leads to overthinking and overdoing.

> Best of all, the practice of simple living forces you to pare down and decide what's most important to you. It pushes you toward living more intentionally through the series of choices that you end up making. We hope that it proves as beneficial to you as it has been to us.

> Mike (and his wife, Mollie) blog at This Evergreen Home where they share their experience with living simply, intentionally, and relationally in this modern world. You can follow along by subscribing to their twice-weekly newsletter. This article was originally published on This Evergreen Home.

How to Treat Your Weekend Like a Vacation

MONKEY BUSINESS IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK



Adventure and fun experiences can happen anytime, even in a single weekend.

JAY HARRINGTON

Even though summer is coming to an end and school is back in session, that doesn't mean we have to stop indulging in our wanderlust. COVID-19 and more rigid schedules may prevent us from taking far-flung flights and long, spontaneous road trips, but we can still find adventure close to home.

It's not feasible for most—myself included—to take lots of uninterrupted blocks of time off for full-blown vacations these days, but one thing I've learned over the years is that it's possible to get some of the same benefits by approaching weekends with more of a vacation mindset.

There's even research that supports this assertion. Researchers conducted a study with 400 participants in which they asked one group to treat a weekend as a vacation and the other to treat it like a regular weekend. The results were clear: Those who treated the weekend as if it was a vacation were significantly happier when Monday arrived than those that didn't.

The researchers found that while the two groups of people engaged in different activities, the bigger impact came from a shift in mindset among the "vacationers." They were "more mindful of and attentive to the present moment

throughout their weekend's activities."

One of the best ways to take advantage of weekends is by planning "micro-adventures."

One of the best ways to take advantage of weekends is by planning "micro-adventures." Author and world traveler Alastair Humphreys is a big proponent of micro-adventures, which he describes as "something different, something exciting—but cheap, simple, short, and

on your doorstep."

Hiking a new trail. Camping in the backyard. Biking instead of driving. Exploring a new neighborhood. A cookout on the beach. With a bit of forethought, these types of activities can be easily fit into a typical weekend and will pay happiness dividends all week long. And even if you don't have an entire weekend to devote to micro-adventures, you can still gain the benefits of a vacation mindset by carving out a bit of intentional time in which you slow down, take notice, and have fun.

We have a weekend filled with soccer games, but we're still going to find some time to hit the beach to soak up what's left of summer. How about you?

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.

MIND & BODY Week 38, 2021 THE EPOCH TIMES

Be. Do. Go.

Dreams are built of firmer things than feelings and passing passion

DANAE SMITH

sat on my bed looking at the last page of a journal I've yet to use. Almost three years ago, a dear friend of mine wrote an encouraging note starting with the phrase "Go. Do. Be."

I remember walking into 2015 with this phrase at the forefront of my mind. Years later, this phrase resonated again, but from a different angle.

Living on purpose is choosing to be intentional with our world. I believe when we begin to live on purpose practically, it influences our world creatively. It also influences our dreams.

Go. Do. Be. When you look at this phrase you obviously start with go. But what if we read it from right to the left?

Be. Do. Go.

Before we can go into anything, go anywhere, or do anything, we first must be.

It's on the foundation of being that we can build the doing and going. Being is our resting state. It's the showing up in the mundane strides of life. It's the existing, the essence of living.

If we really want to go and do something, we must first be ready. We need to know rest and the power of taking care of ourselves. We must learn our boundaries and standards; what we bend for and what we stand for. We must be comfortable in this place of everyday life, embracing the highs and lows, and understanding the power of steadiness and consistency.

I believe how we walk our lives in the mundane everyday impacts how we do and go for the bigger things. If in this space where nothing is really happening, we are complaining a lot, comparing a lot, and compromising a lot (the unhealthy way), we're building a shaky foundation.

That shaky foundation affects how we go and do. When doing gets tedious, as it often will, or going gets risky, as it often does, we won't be able to endure.

On the other hand, if we are actively finding the gold where we are, consciously



By living mindfully and purposefully in the quiet and seemingly mundane moments, we are preparing solid foundations for building our truest dreams.

choosing gratefulness over focusing on what we lack, investing wisely, and learning to celebrate others where we are, we are building a firm foundation for the inevitable highs and lows that come with doing. When challenges of going arise, we are firm. We are steady.

Be. Do. Go.

Our dreams are big. They are wild. They sometimes seem impossible. There is an eagerness to unpack them, to build them, to make them our reality.

Something I love about dreams is the excitement and passion they conjure up. The inspiration that swirls and dances around the imagination. The thrill and hunger is unmatched. I believe this aspect of dreaming and pursuing dreams is beautiful. It's also the easy part, the exciting and riveting part.

The part that is often forgotten, the part that is often glazed over, is the process after the excitement: the doing and the going. Dream pursuit is built on fierce passion and wild inspiration. It is also built on perseverance and consistency. How we manage ourselves in the exciting part of the process influences how we manage ourselves in the challenging parts. How we manage ourselves when not a single dream is coming

true or the desire to dream is low, impacts how we manage ourselves when dreams are happening and new dreams are forming.

The way to live on purpose with your dreams is to honor where you are right now. Celebrate the seemingly mundane spaces of life. Humble yourself to the rhythm of routine without letting the fire go out. A dream cannot be built or pursued on emotions. Emotions are fickle. It must be built on grit, on truth. It must be pursued from a place that doesn't just long for the hype, but endures and even relishes the unattractive process.

How we walk our lives in the mundane everyday impacts how we do and go for the bigger things.

Be. Do. Go.

Whether you are just beginning to let yourself dream again or you are smack dab in the middle of your dream pursuit, remember to be. Give yourself room to breathe and grow where you are. Give yourself room to let your character and work ethic be honed and sharpened in the normal rhythms of life.

Remember to do. Get proactive with your dreams. Research. Study. Read. Try new things. Don't just wait for the perfect opportunity, create it.

Remember to go. Take risks. Step out of your comfort zone. Explore the world around you. Unpack the people around you.

Danae Smith is the founder of This Wondrous Life, a lifestyle blog rooted in pursuing a life lived simply, slowly, and with community. She believes there is more to the mundane than meets the eye. This article was originally published on This Wondrous Life.



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