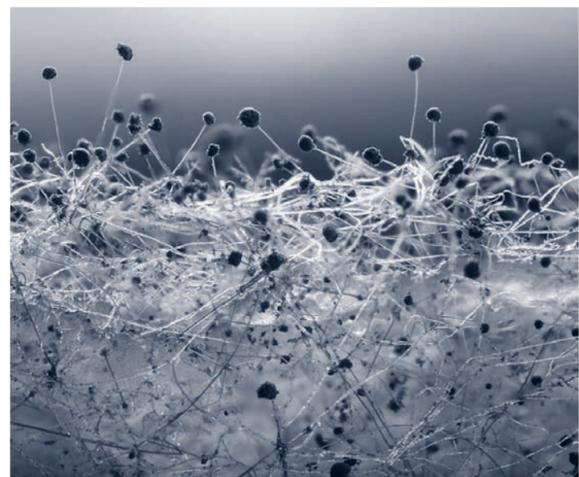


THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND &

BODY

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The Pandemic Contributor We Don't Talk About

Toxic exposures can undermine your immune system
and make viral infections deadly



JOSEPH MERCOLA

The COVID-19 pandemic has focused on a singular target—SARS-CoV-2—and how to neutralize it using an injection. But the issue of viral illness is so much larger than a single virus or one pandemic. Humans and viruses coexist. It's a daily reality that you'll be exposed to one or more of them, but not everyone will get sick.

What determines how you fare when exposed to any given virus is a complex mix of genetics and toxic stressors that degrade your immune system. Those "toxic stressor exposures," which can be chemical, physical, biological, or psychological in nature, hinder your immune system's ability to fight off viruses, and they deserve greater recognition in the fight against COVID-19 and future pandemics.

As noted by a team of researchers in the journal *Food and Chemical Toxicology*, the role of toxic substance exposures is underreported in the COVID-19 pandemic:

"Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and previous pandemics have been viewed almost exclusively as virology problems, with toxicology problems mostly being ignored.

"This perspective is not supported by the evolution of COVID-19, where the impact of real-life exposures to multiple toxic stressors degrading the immune system is followed by the SARS-CoV-2 virus exploiting the degraded immune system to trigger a chain of events ultimately leading to COVID-19."

Viruses Won't Be Going Away

The notion of injecting our way out of viral illness ignores the crucial fact that viruses are all around us, and it's impossible

to develop an injection for every one that's dangerous. Currently, there are about 263 viruses from 25 viral families known to infect humans. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. More than 1,100 viruses have been identified in animals and humans, but even this doesn't give the full picture of how many viruses are circulating around us.

The Global Virome Project revealed that about 1.67 million viral species may have yet to be discovered in mammals and birds, and up to 827,000 of them have zoonotic potential, meaning they're capable of being transmitted from animals to humans.

It should be noted that viruses aren't all bad.

Some viruses may offer beneficial effects, like helping to regulate gut microbiota and to protect against noninfectious diseases.

Continued on Page 4

5%

COVID-19 DEATHS

According to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only about 5 percent of COVID-19 deaths list only COVID-19 on the death certificate.

Is Resentment Stopping You From Feeling Grateful?

Resentment can act as a beacon, helping us to identify an area undermining our well-being

KERRY HOWELLS

I have been researching gratitude for 25 years, mainly in the field of education. No matter what the context or country, when I raise the topic of resentment in my workshops, the mood of the discussion starts to shift.

Participants are generally more engaged, and relieved to know that it's OK to struggle with the idea that gratitude can be applicable to all situations. Many come up to me afterward and ask me, "OK, I get gratitude,

but how can I be grateful when I feel so resentful?"

In researching the interplay between gratitude and resentment, my focus is on the smaller "everyday resentments," rather than those that arise from personal or collective trauma, gross inequities, or historical injustices, for example. No doubt you have experienced everyday resentment in your life: a brother or sister who appeared to be favored by your parents; a neighbor

Continued on Page 6



Any action we take to move away from resentment is a step toward gratitude.

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CHINESE WISDOM FOR SEASONAL LIVING

Cover Your Neck and Chest for Better Health This Season

Solar Term: 'Cold Dew' (Oct. 8–22)

MOREEN LIAO

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

little bit later than normal, falling on Oct 14. But still, due to COVID-19 this year, we'd be wise to be careful and protect ourselves.

Traditionally, ancient Chinese people used water from deep wells to make wine and medicinal pills with seasonal herbs on the day of the Double Ninth Festival.

Ensure good circulation and hydration to keep the immune system working well.

Solar Term: 'Cold Dew'

2021 Date: Oct. 8–22

"Cold Dew" is the 17th solar term. It begins when the sun reaches the celestial longitude of 195 degrees and ends when it reaches the longitude of 210 degrees.

It might sound confusing that there was a White Dew in early September. What's the difference between White Dew and Cold Dew? White dew is the reflection of the increasing moisture in the air and looks misty, while the temperature is not yet so cold; and cold dew refers to when the temperature has dropped dramatically so it stays in water droplet form, or even becomes frost in the northern part of the world.

Markers of Cold Dew

Several events mark the passage of Cold Dew: Geese migrate south for warmer weather; clam season arrives, and chrysanthemums bloom yellow.

It was during this term that Chinese people once celebrated the Double Ninth Festival, as first recorded more than 1,700 years ago. It was a time when people believed they should leave populated cities and hike high into the hills, as ancient Chinese people believed this was the time when things reached an extreme, including viruses or bad fortune.

The idea behind it is based on an ancient understanding of numerology. The number nine is, of course, the largest number between zero and nine; after nine, it goes back to zero, so it's a risky moment and a time to review with humility. Also, according to the ancient Chinese prophetic Book of Changes, odd numbers belong to yang, while even numbers belong to yin. Thus, nine is the biggest number in yang, and double nine makes the power even stronger.

On the ninth day of the ninth month in the traditional Chinese calendar, ancient Chinese believed it was easy to attract bad things. Going hiking in the mountains and avoiding crowds was not just to avoid disease, but to show respect to heaven and to review one's behaviors. Going hiking in the mountains and avoiding crowds was not just to avoid disease, but to show respect to heaven and to review one's behaviors. October is also normally a peak season for flu and pandemics.

This year, the Double Ninth Festival comes a

Living in Harmony With 'Cold Dew'
Although we have to be careful with the flu and similar types of infections, we still want to enjoy some nice activities that can achieve the desired results. Here are some tips:

Drink lukewarm or room temperature water. It is particularly important to maintain good circulation and hydration, to keep the immune system functioning well. Then if a virus or bacterial infection hits, the body can eliminate it efficiently.

One should also cover the neck and chest to protect them from temperature changes.

If we get caught by rain at this time of year, we can use a hairdryer to dry the area. This trick can also work for those having respiratory or circulation problems; point the hairdryer at the center of the chest to warm it. Those who often suffer from neck pain, headache, or tensed shoulder can point it at the back of the neck. There are many important acupressure points there, and the center of our chest is particularly important to boost our immune function.

Seasonal Foods to Eat

The best foods to eat at this time include goji berries, ginkgo berries, white asparagus, yams, chestnuts, walnuts, almonds, white fish, chicken, rice, oatmeal, celery, soy milk, and coconut milk.

Essential Oils

Beneficial oils for this period include eucalyptus, peppermint, cedarwood, niaouli, cypress, Roman chamomile, and German chamomile.

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



The best foods to eat at this time include goji berries.

MEDICALLY CORRECT

The Power of Placebo

Our mind plays an important role in our recovery

PETER WEISS

L.B. was a 42-year-old who had suffered from chronic headaches for years. Some medications worked for her, some not so much. She related a very interesting story about her "headaches" and something that worked for her.

L.B. took several medications for other conditions, but nothing serious. She also took several supplements. Her headaches were constant, but her doctor could find nothing wrong. She was, however, under stress with work, kids, and elderly parents. She was given a new headache medication from her doctor because she bugged him about a new drug she saw on TV.

She was going on a business trip to New York, and she usually took all her medications and supplements and mixed them in a single container for ease when traveling. When she got back, she called her doctor and said the medicine was amazing, absolutely great. She didn't have a single headache all week.

Then she called her doctor back a few hours later to tell him that she found the bottle of the new medication he prescribed unopened on her bathroom counter.

L.B. realized she had accidentally filled the headache medicine from a new simple vitamin container, one she was already taking, but in a different shape and color. In other words, she thought she was taking a new powerful headache medicine, when she was really taking a simple vitamin she had already been taking.

Webster's definition of "placebo" is: "a usually pharmacologically inert preparation prescribed more for the mental relief of the patient than for its actual effect on a disorder." "an inert or innocuous substance used especially in controlled experiments testing the efficacy of another substance (such as a drug)."



An unknown author said it best, "The placebo effect is the single greatest indicator that your capacity to heal starts in your mind."

Placebo really is more than its definition. A placebo is more than just positive thinking. The mind and the body really can work together to improve one's health. While a placebo will not lower your cholesterol or destroy a tumor, it can work on symptoms modulated by the brain. It can treat fatigue, nausea, anxiety, depression, hot flashes, or pain. It can give you a sense of well-being. Placebos will not treat a broken bone, acute appendicitis, a ruptured cyst, or a stab wound.

A randomized controlled trial by Ted Kaptchuk and other researchers, published in Science Translational Medicine in 2014, found that "the placebo was 50 percent as effective as the real drug to reduce pain after a migraine attack." They also made an interesting observation that we can provide a sort of self-placebo benefit without taking a pill and that self-help methods such as exercise, healthy eating, yoga, meditation can provide some of the key components of a placebo effect.

Most clinical trials now use placebo pills as a key component of a study, with the patient not knowing which pill he or she is taking. The thought process is to see if the pharmaceutical pill is more effective than the placebo. The really interesting thing is

when the placebo has a positive effect. The mind is really very powerful.

Faith Brynie wrote an interesting article published in 2012, in Psychology Today, stating that placebo is not deception or self-delusion. She says that two placebo pills are more effective than one. Placebo injections are more effective than pills. Placebo effects follow traditional medication curves. The human brain is actually adjusting its response to the ailment. Placebo success varies from as low as 15 percent to as high as 72 percent, according to Brynie. I find in most of my readings that a placebo can have about a 30 percent success rate. That's a pretty high number. This means that 30 percent of people will feel better from a simple "pill," with no side effects. That's actually good news.

In the past, the idea of a placebo was met with derision. But if you get a positive outcome from a placebo, it's still a positive outcome. The placebo effect is even seen in people who are told they're being given a placebo. This may have to do with changes in brain chemistry, possibly with a release of endorphins.

We find placebo effects in both traditional Western and Eastern medicine. Two interesting older studies support this. Crum and Langer published an article in 2007 in Psychology Science out of Harvard. Their finding was "Exercise affects health in part or in whole via the placebo effect." As stated earlier, self-help techniques such as exercise have a multifaceted approach to improving our well-being. Of course, Crum and Langer's relatively small study of 84 participants doesn't negate the overwhelming volume of research documenting the many and varied physiological benefits of exercise. It does, however, amplify the significance of mindset in any health-promoting activity. An unknown author said it best, "The placebo effect is the single greatest indicator that your capacity to heal starts in your mind." The same is true of our capacity to create illness. We would do well to tend to our thoughts and beliefs.

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.



Placebos reveal the mind's remarkable ability to heal the body.

Tylenol Could Be Risky for Pregnant Women

Review of 25 years of research finds acetaminophen may contribute to developmental disorders in children

ANN Z. BAUER

A mounting body of evidence shows that the use of acetaminophen—widely known by its brand name Tylenol—during pregnancy may pose risks to the fetus and to early childhood development. That was the conclusion of a new review study on which I was a lead author.

Acetaminophen, which has the chemical name paracetamol, is a go-to-over-the-counter medication that's widely recommended by doctors to relieve pain and reduce fever. Our study, based on an assessment of 25 years of research in the areas of human epidemiology, animal studies, and in-vitro studies, concludes that prenatal acetaminophen exposure may increase the risks of reproductive organs developing improperly. We identified a heightened risk of neurodevelopmental disorders, primarily attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and related behaviors, but also autism spectrum disorder, language delays, and decreased IQ.

In our consensus statement—a broad agreement by our multidisciplinary international panel of experts—published in Nature Reviews Endocrinology in September, 91 clinicians and researchers have called for caution and additional research.

Why It Matters

Acetaminophen is an active ingredient in more than 600 prescription and over-the-counter medications. It's used by more than

50 percent of pregnant women worldwide and at least 65 percent of pregnant women in the United States. Research suggests that acetaminophen is an endocrine disruptor and may interfere with the hormones essential for healthy neurological and reproductive development.

Current guidance recommends acetaminophen as the pain reliever of choice during pregnancy, as other pain relievers such as ibuprofen and aspirin aren't considered safe after mid-pregnancy.

Rates of reproductive disorders and neurodevelopmental disorders, such as ADHD and autism spectrum disorder, have been increasing over the past 40 years.

Over the same time period, the use of acetaminophen during pregnancy has gone up. We conclude that because acetaminophen is so commonly taken during pregnancy, if its use is responsible for even a small increase in individual risk, it could contribute substantially to these disorders in the overall population.

What Still Isn't Known

It's unethical to do experiments that could

harm human life, so to gain a better understanding of the direct effects of acetaminophen during pregnancy, we must rely on human observational and experimental studies to assess the possibility of causal connections. But to really get at these questions, we need human cohort studies that can precisely capture when and why acetaminophen is taken during pregnancy. We would also like to see research that gives us a better understanding of the biological pathways.

Notably, acetaminophen is also the medication most commonly given to infants. More research is needed to determine whether this practice is safe for the developing brain.

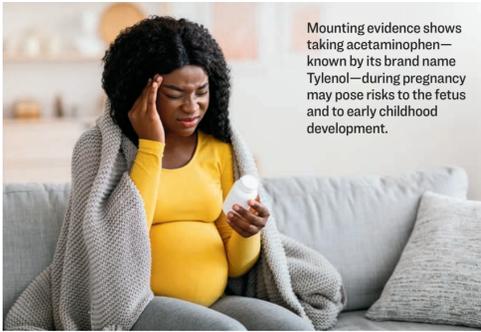
What's Next

The current near-ubiquitous use of acetaminophen during pregnancy is due in part to the widespread perception—even among doctors—that it has limited side effects and negligible risk. But a growing body of research suggests that the indiscriminate use of acetaminophen during pregnancy—especially for conditions such as chronic pain, low back pain, and headaches—may be unwarranted and unsafe.

In our consensus statement, we urge for the education of health professionals and pregnant women about the risks and benefits of acetaminophen use during pregnancy.

Based on our extensive review of the evidence—and the recognition that there are limited alternatives for the necessary treatment of high fever and severe pain—we recommend that pregnant women refrain from using acetaminophen unless it's medically recommended by a doctor. Women should also minimize risk to the fetus by using the lowest effective dose for the shortest possible time.

Ann Z. Bauer is a postdoctoral fellow in epidemiology at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell. This article was first published on The Conversation.



Mounting evidence shows taking acetaminophen—known by its brand name Tylenol—during pregnancy may pose risks to the fetus and to early childhood development.

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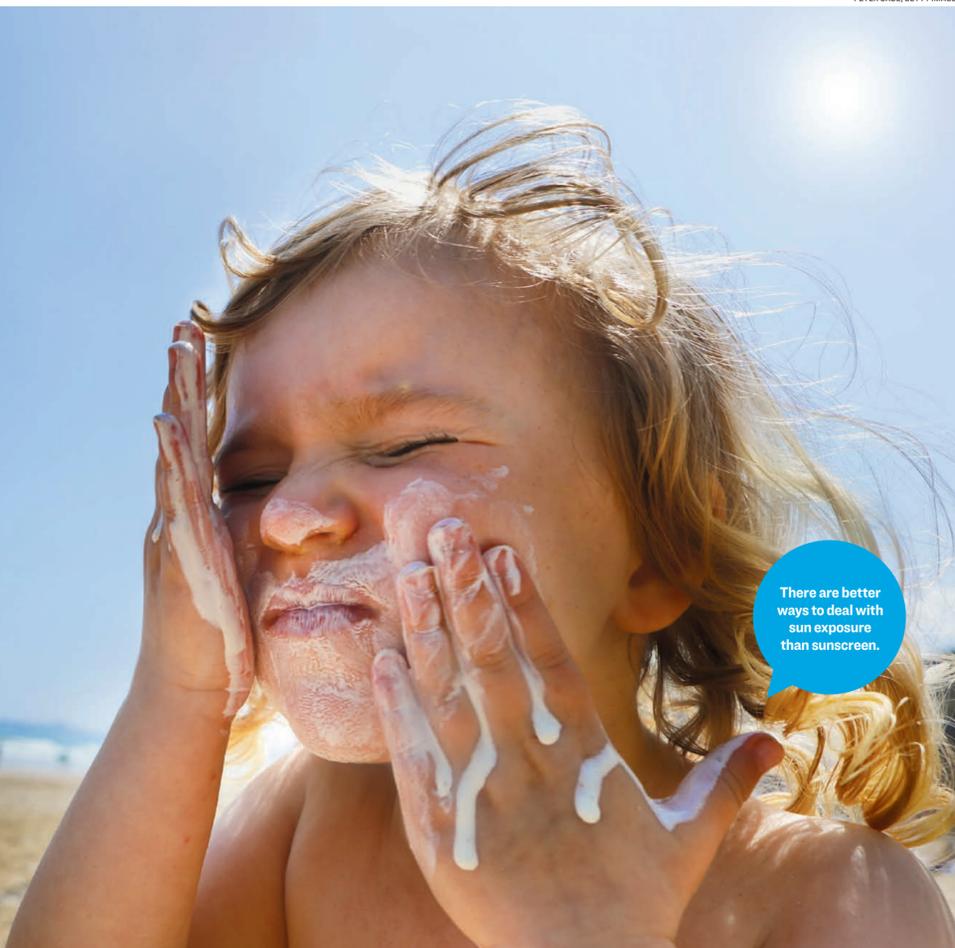
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PRODUCT SAFETY

Carcinogen Found in Coppertone Sunscreens

Benzene continues to trigger recalls in products people apply to their skin



There are better ways to deal with sun exposure than sunscreen.

JENNIFER MARGULIS

Coppertone, which is owned by the German multinational skin care company Beiersdorf and headquartered in Whippany, New Jersey, has recalled five aerosol sunscreen sprays, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) announced on Sept. 30. These products have all been found to be tainted with benzene, a known carcinogen.

According to the FDA, 12 lots of aerosol spray products, all manufactured between Jan. 10 and June 15 are being voluntarily recalled. The specific products under recall are:

Coppertone Pure & Simple SPF 50 5.0 ounce aerosol sunscreen spray: Lot TNO0CJ4 and Lot TNO0BR2

Coppertone Pure & Simple Baby SPF 50 5.0 ounce aerosol sunscreen spray: Lot TNO0857, Lot TNO0CJV, Lot TNO0854, and Lot TNO0855

Coppertone Pure & Simple Baby SPF 50 5.0 ounce aerosol sunscreen spray: Lot TNO09GH, Lot TNO083K, Lot TNO083J

Coppertone Sport Mineral SPF 50 5.0 oz aerosol sunscreen spray: Lot TNO08KU and Lot TNO08KV

Travel-size Coppertone Sport Spray SPF

50 1.6 ounce aerosol sunscreen spray: Lot TNO0BU3

But Coppertone isn't the only company that has been inadvertently selling contaminated sunscreen. This past July, Johnson & Johnson Consumer Inc., a New Brunswick, New Jersey-based company, voluntarily recalled all lots of four Neutrogena products and one Aveeno aerosol sunscreen product after their own internal testing identified benzene in the products.

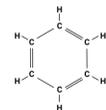
The Bad News About Benzene

Benzene is a colorless sweet-smelling liquid that evaporates quickly when exposed to air. It's present in nature—from forest fires and volcanic activity—and is also a natural part of cigarette smoke, crude oil, and gasoline. However, the most human exposure to benzene comes from human activities.

In fact, benzene is among the most widely used chemicals in the United States, according to the American Cancer Society. Benzene is used to make other chemicals, including detergents, drugs, dyes, lubricants, pesticides, and plastics.

One of the main ways humans are exposed to benzene is through breathing contaminated air. It's harmful to breathe benzene-tainted fumes from art supplies, gasoline, glues, and paints, which is why

Benzene is among the most widely used chemicals in the United States.



Benzene is used to make other chemicals, including detergents, drugs, dyes, lubricants, pesticides, and plastics.

good ventilation is important. Benzene can also be absorbed through the skin via consumer products.

Benzene is a known carcinogen, according to peer-reviewed scientific studies done in both animals and humans. Benzene exposure is known to damage bone marrow and cause anemia and has also been found to increase your risk of getting leukemia, as well as non-Hodgkin lymphoma and other cancers.

Laura Orlando, who has been teaching classes on environmental health at Boston University for almost 20 years, argues that carcinogens such as benzene may play a role in triggering many different cancers.

"I'm exposed to benzenes because I live in a city, from car exhaust and cigarette smoke," she said.

Orlando, 58, was diagnosed with breast cancer that had traveled into her lymphatic system six years ago.

"Exposure to benzene can occur through inhalation, oral, and skin and it could, depending on the level and extent of exposure, result in an increased risk of cancers including leukemia, and blood cancer of the bone marrow and other blood disorders which can be life-threatening," the FDA's Coppertone recall information reads.



Benzene does occur in nature but most people encounter it due to industrial processes and man-made products.



Benzene continues to end up in products it shouldn't, like hand sanitizer and sunscreen.



Benzene fumes are one reason you're advised to ensure rooms are well ventilated while painting.

Another Benzene-Tainted Product Recall

In March 2020, New Haven, Connecticut-based product testing company Valisure added benzene to the list of compounds they regularly tested for. Unfortunately, the company found detectable quantities of benzene in hand sanitizers.

Valisure, which then filed a Citizen Petition with the FDA, found that 17 percent of the 260 bottles of hand sanitizer that they had tested contained benzene. The benzene content in 21 of the bottles was above the FDA's safety limits for alcohol-based hand sanitizer.

"It's shocking and frustrating to be detecting any levels of benzene in such a broadly used consumer product," David Light, CEO of Valisure and father of five, told a reporter for Health.com.

"Benzene's toxicity in humans has been well known in the scientific community for over 120 years. It is arguably one of the most, if not most, known chemicals that can cause cancer in humans even at trace levels," Light said.

About a month after Valisure filed the Citizen Petition, the FDA announced that one sanitizer manufacturer, Scentsational Soaps & Candles, was issuing a voluntary national recall of its scented hand sanitizer because of

"Daily exposure to benzene at the levels detected in these affected Coppertone aerosol sunscreen spray products would not be expected to cause adverse health consequences based on generally accepted exposure modeling by numerous regulatory agencies."

Children Most Vulnerable

While the overall risk of exposure to benzene from these contaminated sun sprays may be small, the fact that two of the Coppertone products are specifically designed for babies may be cause for concern.

According to scientists from the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York and the Instituto de Salud Carlos III in Madrid, Spain, writing in the journal Environmental Toxicology, "Children are uniquely susceptible to chemicals."

Infants and small children are at greater risk than adults because their bodies and brains are still developing, and they aren't able to metabolize toxic compounds as effectively as adults.

"The skin surface area of children relative to body weight is greater for children than for adults," the scientists said, "resulting in a higher potential dose absorbed through the skin of about three times greater for infants than for adults."

reported the Alliance for Natural Health. As the researchers noted, this includes factors such as:

- Lifestyle—This includes physical inactivity, smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, poor diet including ultra-processed foods and refined grains, and chronic sleep deprivation.
- Pharmaceuticals and other medical side effects—Among adults 65 and older, 54 percent take four or more prescription drugs. Additionally, immunosuppressants, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), acetaminophen, antidepressants, antibiotics, nanomedicine products, adjuvanted vaccines, surgical stress, anesthesia, and ionizing radiation therapy can all degrade the immune system.
- Biotoxins and biomaterials—These refer to mold including aflatoxin, as well as viruses and bacteria.
- Occupational and environmental exposures—This type of exposure can include endocrine-disrupting chemicals, microplastics, heavy metals, pesticides, air pollution, radiation, PFAS, fine particulate matter, disinfection byproducts, and more.

- Psychosocial and socioeconomic factors—From depression to chronic stress, social isolation, stressful life events, and childhood adversity, these issues can also contribute to poor health.

For instance, researchers from the University of Bologna in Italy analyzed 482 COVID-19 patients hospitalized between March 1, 2020, and April 20, 2020. "Obesity is a strong, independent risk factor for respiratory failure, admission to the ICU, and death among COVID-19 patients," they wrote, and the extent of risk was tied to a person's level of obesity.

Even patients with mild obesity had a 2.5 times greater risk of respiratory failure and a five times greater risk of being admitted to an ICU compared to non-obese patients. Those with a BMI of 35 and over—moderate or severe obesity—were also 12 times more likely to die from COVID-19.

Also, as with many viral infections, COVID-19 appears to have a nutritional component, by which you may lower your risk of severe outcomes by using vitamins and minerals therapeutically. Despite that, nutrient deficiencies continue to be ignored as official risk factors for COVID-19. COVID-19 patients given a combination

of vitamin D, magnesium, and vitamin B12, for instance, were significantly less likely to require oxygen therapy or ICU care compared to patients who were not, according to a cohort study published in Nutrition in 2020.

Focusing Only on Virology Misses the Importance of Toxicology

The COVID-19 pandemic response has focused on short-term emergency measures like quarantines, lockdowns, and injections, which do nothing to address the long-term outlook for helping humans fight pathogenic viral diseases. Strategies that focus on boosting the immune system, however, are inexpensive, numerous, and readily available. Such strategies could save lives now and in future pandemics, say Ronald N. Kostoff and other researchers from the United States, Russia, Spain, and Iran in a review published in Food and Chemical Toxicology in 2020.

"There are strong misconceptions about the role played by SARS-CoV-2 in the emergence of COVID-19, especially the severity of COVID-19 in selected demographic groups. These misconceptions result in treatments focused on virology without any consideration of toxicology: contain-

ing/attenuating SARS-CoV-2 exposure/viral loads rather than intrinsically strengthening the immune system," they wrote.

"These virology-based actions do not address the underlying toxicology-based problems that must be addressed properly in order to decrease human vulnerability to infectious diseases, including COVID-19."

Infectious diseases like COVID-19, SARS, and influenza have a lot in common, including that only a small fraction of those who are exposed develop symptoms and, of them, an even smaller percentage die from the infection, often due to pneumonia or acute respiratory distress syndrome.

Those most likely to die from these infectious diseases include the elderly with underlying conditions. Having a comorbidity such as heart disease, chronic respiratory disease, cancer, obesity, or diabetes is a more reliable indicator of impaired immunity than even chronological age among older adults, the researchers wrote.

Toxic stressor exposures contribute to these underlying conditions as well as metabolic stress. And those with chronic conditions often suffer elevated baseline inflammation, which further increases the risk of dying when exposed to a virus such

as SARS-CoV-2. All of these factors add up to increased vulnerability to infectious disease—vulnerability that likely could be prevented, according to the researchers. "The most severe consequences from COVID-19 and influenza stem from a degraded/dysfunctional immune system, and the exploitation of the degraded immune system by the virus. For a healthy immune system, the virus would be unable to overcome its strong defenses, and would be neutralized," the researchers wrote.

In order to protect the public, however, a "quarantine" from toxins—in ultra-processed foods, environmental chemicals, wireless radiation, and much more—would be far more effective than quarantining from one virus, they wrote.

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

"Tons of people are taking vitamin D supplements. Vitamin D is a huge protector from COVID-19. But getting vitamin D through sunlight exposure is much better than taking a supplement," said Stephanie Seneff, author of the book "Toxic Legacy" and senior research scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge. "We need a lot more sun than we're getting."

Seneff recommended more outside time for both children and adults, which will help the body build up its natural resistance to sunburns.

"If children are exposed to the sun in the spring, they develop a nice tan that will protect them from the summer sun," Seneff said. "So then kids can handle the summer sun without burning. If you're out of doors all the time, you'll naturally get tan and the summer sun will be safe because of that tan. The tan provides protection."

Seneff insists that many sunscreens, even if they aren't tainted with benzene, are toxic. "Aluminum is one of the intentional ingredients in many sunscreens," she said. "And aluminum gets absorbed through the skin and is very toxic."

The safest sunscreens don't contain aluminum, according to Seneff.

"You don't want to burn," she said. "But the way to avoid it is to get a tan or just be careful. But there are better ways to protect against burns than sunscreen."

Seneff recommended staying in the shade, limiting exposure to the sun until your skin has naturally tanned, and wearing sun-protective clothing as alternatives to using sunscreen.

The Pandemic Contributor We Don't Talk About

Continued from Page 1

Further, the very exposure to viruses is a necessary evil, one that primes, maintains, and strengthens your optimal immune response:

"The mammalian virome includes diverse commensal [symbiotic] and pathogenic viruses that evoke a broad range of immune responses from the host. A subset of the virome (in particular, zoonotic viruses that appear to be pathogenic in humans) challenges the immune system continually.

"This process appears to be a dual-edged sword. Healthy immune systems respond



There is so much we can do to bolster our immune systems, easily and inexpensively.

optimally to viral challenges and are further strengthened by the continual challenges, offering additional protection against other viral challenges."

Chronic Conditions Linked to COVID-19 Severity, Death

According to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, only about 5 percent of COVID-19 deaths list only COVID-19 on the death certificate. The other 95 percent have other comorbidities and underlying conditions that contributed to

the death, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, cancer, or diabetes.

Many of these underlying conditions that increase the risk of severe COVID-19 and death are caused by toxic exposures, such as poor diet, environmental chemicals, inactivity, and stress.

"In short, it is the pervasive, constant exposure to toxic stressors in our environment, in combination with genetic factors, that cause us to develop diseases that impair our immune systems and make us susceptible to serious COVID-19 infection,"

IAKOV FILIMONOV/SHUTTERSTOCK



Practicing gratitude can displace resentment and boost our health and happiness.

DAVID TROOD/GETTY IMAGES

Is Resentment Stopping You From Feeling Grateful?

Resentment can act as a beacon, helping us to identify an area undermining our well-being

Continued from Page 1

who won't deal with their barking dog that keeps you awake for hours; a colleague who undermines you behind your back; a partner who doesn't do their share of the housework or of looking after the children—and the list goes on.

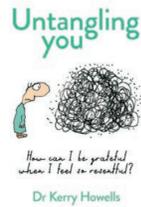
Resentment is known as the “emotion of justice,” as is usually accompanied by the sense that we need to hold on to our resentment in order to take a moral stance on unacceptable behavior. To give up our resentment can often feel like we are letting the other person off the hook or condoning their behavior.

Philosopher Robert Roberts's analysis of the concepts of gratitude and resentment shows that they are mirror opposites of each other, completely opposite states or ways of being. This doesn't mean that we don't have both gratitude and resentment as part of who we are. We can't have functioning relationships without some gratitude, and most of us are rarely totally free of resentment. What it does mean is that if we are wanting to be genuinely grateful to someone, we can't be resentful toward them at the same time. First, we need to address any resentment we may have toward them.

Perhaps this perspective can give us a new way to think about gratitude. It isn't just about feelings or actions that help us be more thankful for what we have; instead, any action we take to move away from resentment is a step toward gratitude. In my new book, “Untangling You: How Can I Be Grateful When I Feel So Resentful?,” I explore a range of strategies that can help us to make this shift.

How Resentment Detracts from Well-Being
The meaning of the word resentment comes from the Old French word *resenir*, which means “the re-experiencing of a strong feeling.” Two distinguishing features of resentment are that it causes us to ruminate—that is, to go over and over the situation in our minds—and that it lingers over time. We are often initially so shocked by what has happened to us that the disappointment, frustration, or anger we feel becomes lodged and it's difficult to move on. Although research on the health implications of resentment is still in its infancy, and not nearly as prolific as that on gratitude, some evidence suggests that resentment has the opposite effect on our well-being than gratitude.

In one of the few books covering resentment research, “On Resentment: Past and Present,” various contributors describe the negative effects of resentment as including anxiety, depression, and embitterment. Contributor Pilar León Sanz, historian of medicine and medical ethics, summarizes the impacts of resentment as



“Untangling You: How Can I Be Grateful When I Feel So Resentful?” Major Street Publishing, 2021, 208 pages.

People who can't forgive tend to experience stress that accelerates the aging process and leads to a variety of diseases.

Kerry Howells, Ph.D., is an author and award-winning educator who has spent over 25 years researching, teaching, and practicing gratitude. She is passionate about harnessing the role of gratitude to bring about flourishing relationships, a respectful workplace culture, and, ultimately, a more peaceful world. For more information visit KerryHowells.com. This article was originally published by the Greater Good Science Center.

detailed in more than 270 articles that were published in the journal Psychosomatic Medicine from 1939 to 1960. She concludes that these studies showed that resentment could be implicated in the development of ulcers, gastric disorders, heartburn, cardio-respiratory symptoms, cardiac disease, intolerance to exercise, headache, backache, joint pain, insomnia, and stress.

Of course, this doesn't mean that resentment is the only cause of these ailments, but the evidence is significant enough to suggest it could be playing a part. Indeed, it's common to find the impact of resentment discussed in our everyday language, such as complaining that someone is a “pain in the neck” and makes our head hurt, or that we feel hurt by another “in the pit of our stomach,” or that someone has “hardened our heart” or left us feeling “broken-hearted.”

Research suggests that, adjacent to resentment, unforgiveness and rumination lead to a similar erosion of health. For example, according to neuroscientist Emiliano Ricciardi and his colleagues, people in these states may have trouble sleeping, experience changes in cardiovascular activity and stress-related hormones, and, over time, develop clinical conditions including depression. In other studies, people who can't forgive tend to experience stress that accelerates the aging process and leads to a variety of diseases.

Like wise, rumination has been found to have a negative impact on healthy coping and to be a contributing factor in chronic illnesses, such as heart disease and cancer.

Moving Away from Resentment
Gratitude has an amazing power to illuminate where it's missing and, in particular, where its opposite—resentment—is residing. We can start to notice this in situations where we want to express gratitude but find it hard to do so authentically because we are actually feeling pain or reticence of some



When we create homes and workplaces where people feel appreciated, we ward off the toxic presence of resentment.

kind. I often describe this state as “murky” because we know something isn't quite right, but it's also hard to give it a name or to acknowledge it fully to ourselves, let alone the other person.

To start, we might take one difficult relationship where we recognize that we have resentment and make this our focus for a period of time. It's best to choose a situation just a little out of our comfort zone, rather than anything traumatic or in need of professional help. For example, if your workmate is promoted when you thought you were the likely candidate, your relationship with that person may have fractured when you heard the news. Yet you need to work with your colleague and want to find some way of getting along and getting over the seeming injustice of not being selected.

However, we might be too afraid to admit that we are resentful because we want to keep our image of being a nice and positive person, or we don't want to upset the status quo. Unlike other more “upfront” emotions such as disappointment, anger, or frustration, resentment tends to carry a sense of shame. It exposes us, making us seem a bit weak or not the sort of person we would like to think we are, or would like others to see us as.

In order for resentment to come out of hiding, we need to acknowledge it. We need to find ways of giving our resentment a voice, a shape, a place at the table for discussion, without shame or guilt, without self-judgment or the judgment of others. Only then can we see how much our resentment is robbing us of our gratitude and destroying our relationships and sense of well-being.

Just by giving the hurtful, murky, stuck feelings a name—resentment—and recognizing its damaging effects on our well-being and those around us, we can be more empowered and motivated to do something about it. Although it may take some time, we can gain a greater sense of objectivity and a greater sense of agency in the situation because we see that we can choose our response in moving forward. This opens the door for us to remember what we were grateful for about this person in the past.

When we recall this gratitude, we have a greater capacity to attend to the relationship with the other person rather than the pain of what has happened.

Moving Toward Gratitude

Another important point to consider is that any step away from gratitude is a step toward resentment. In other words, when we let our gratitude slip, we are more likely to allow resentment to creep in. As gratitude researcher Philip Watkins argues in his “amplification theory of gratitude,” our feeling of gratitude plays a crucial role in helping us to remember the good in the other, so that our memories of the bad don't take over.

Leading on from this, if we create families and workplaces where people feel valued and appreciated, we are reducing or even warding off the toxic impact of resentment that can lead to conflict or low morale.

One powerful way to enact this is through warm greetings. My research has shown that greeting with a heart of gratitude—with a heart of recognizing what we have received from someone—can help them to feel a sense of connectedness to us, a sense of belonging. We don't necessarily have to use a “thank you” or appreciation in our greetings. The power lies more with the inner attitude with which we offer the greeting.

Another way to help gratitude to thrive is to grow our cross-cultural awareness of the different ways it has meaning for others. We can make efforts to understand how a person from a different socio-cultural background likes to give and receive gratitude—and, in turn, offer gratitude in ways that are meaningful to them, whether that's through checking if effusive or overt offerings of gratitude are customary in their culture, or if they would feel shy or awkward in receiving gratitude, for example. By doing this, we are again recognizing them in ways that enhance the relationship and sense of belonging.

Importantly, none of this means that we use gratitude to cover up our resentment. This would be putting a positive veneer over a negative situation that's crying out for attention. Rather, the approach I am advocating is that we take up gratitude as a practice, in which we take small steps away from resentment and therefore toward gratitude. The notion of “practice” means that this is not just a one-off action, but something we try out over time, with a clear purpose and in sustained action. It also means that it's OK to not get it right all the time. We aren't trying to be perfect, as we are practicing something new.

I wrote my new book to answer a question asked by my research and workshop participants, and with the hope that it can help people around the world take courageous action. Addressing resentment can allow our gratitude to play the important role it has in giving us more personal and collective peace and harmony.

Life Lessons From a Year of Simplicity

You can focus your limited time and energy better with good habits and some helpful tips

MOLLIE DONGHIA

What does it mean to live life more simply and embrace the practices of simplicity?

What's simple to you may be different than for someone else. This difference lies in what motivates, encourages, and enriches your own life. Your journey should be unique, where the habits you choose and the routines you establish are meaningful to you and bring your life joy and contentment.

Sure, there are many great posts online about how to cultivate a more simple life, such as our 101 Simple Living Tips, but simplicity should be an opportunity for you to create a life of meaning and sustainability.

Over the last year, as we've been mindful to live more intentionally, we've realized some life lessons that have allowed us to grow and to create ways of living that were right and helpful for us.

What follows are 10 lessons that I've learned from simplicity. Living more simply is not a destination or a goal that has an endpoint. Rather, it's a journey we've chosen, one that allows us to embrace the beauty and richness of life by being mindful to slow down, own less, and be more intentional about where we focus our energies.

As you read, keep in mind that these are personal lessons I've learned along the way. What's worked for me may not be right for you in this season of life. Embrace what brings you joy and learn to be content with the journey you're on.

10 Life Lessons I've Learned From Simplicity

1. Having fewer choices is less overwhelming. Each evening before bed, I open my closet to choose the clothes I'll wear the next day (if you've never tried this habit, it's one of my favorites). Seeing only options of clothes that I love and fit well is much less overwhelming than sifting through a sea of items I no longer wear but that remain in my closet just taking up space.

2. Leaving margin in your life allows more time to be present. Our days of being quarantined at home in 2020 resulted in several healthy insights. One of these was that leaving more margin in our week creates more opportunities to just be (be still, be less busy, be more rested). This allowed us to enjoy more of life's free pleasures (like sunshine, nature, and loved ones) and create sustainable routines that we value.

3. Saying ‘no’ to many good things leaves room to say ‘yes’ to a few better things. Saying “no” can be hard—especially for people-pleasers like me. But I've learned that it pays off. You can't do everything, and certainly not well. Learn to say “no” to opportunities, even if they are indeed good, to make room for what matters most.

4. Comparison is a thief of joy. When we allow comparison to enter our lives, we subconsciously admit that what we have isn't enough. We begin to believe that if we could have what others have, it would make us happier and more content. I'm still learning this truth, but I find it so freeing to focus on my own journey rather than what others have accomplished.

5. Focusing on the journey, not the destination, brings more contentment. Minimalism isn't the end goal that we have. There's no finish line or gold star of approval once we've accomplished certain ideals. We choose to enjoy this journey that we're on by celebrating the satisfaction that our habits produce. Such as enjoying the benefits of a less cluttered home by deciding to do things such as 2-minute habits (making our bed, clearing flat surfaces, and so forth), and doing them on a regular basis.

6. Self-reflection on your routines and goals is a healthy way to move forward. Taking time to evaluate and reflect upon the goals and routines that I've begun is healthy because it allows me to see if these practices are actually benefiting me or just adding something more to do. Our circumstances change from season to season, so what works today may not be as beneficial a year later. Learn to let things go if they're not actually helping you, and keep doing the things that improve your life.

7. Fasting from some of life's pleasures allows you to enjoy them even more. One of the most rewarding things in life is appreciating life's novelty—such as sipping a hot drink from my favorite coffee shop, traveling to new cities, or eating out at a good restaurant. But if I do these things too often, it's inevitable that the thrill it once provided begins to dwindle. Taking a fast from some of life's pleasures for a time is one way that I'm able to preserve the pleasure that these experiences bring.

8. Impulse buying is too easy, so apply the 48-hour rule. Before we began our minimalist journey, I'll admit I was a chronic impulse buyer. I wasn't a shopa-

Leaving more margin in our week creates more opportunities to just be.



Life tends to throw a lot at us. To deal with the overwhelm, it helps to have some methods to simplify and focus.

holio or hoarder, but if the idea of “needing” something nestled its way into my mind, I didn't think twice about purchasing it. Today, I'm much more mindful of how I spend our money. Being the gatekeeper of our home, I try to apply the “48-hour rule” as often as possible. Hold off on purchasing an item (unless it's essential) for 48 hours to see if you still feel the same need to purchase it after that time is up. Chances are you'll change your mind and decide that you were able to manage just fine without it. Give it a try!

9. Quiet time is a daily necessity. Being a stay-at-home mom while also homeschooling has many beautiful benefits. One aspect I've come to realize is that I can't pour from an empty cup. If I spend every bit of my mental and physical energy taking care of, teaching, and entertaining my children all morning, I need time to rest so I can continue doing it well. Our afternoon quiet time is a regular routine that benefits all of us. They get a chance to nap, read books, or do a quiet activity, while I get a chance to have the time and space I need to be rejuvenated.

10. It's more important to take away than to add. When thinking about how to improve something, many people start by seeing what can be added or changed. But one important rule of thumb that we've come to rely on is called addition by subtraction. Instead of adding a new habit to solve a problem, you see what can be removed or avoided. We wanted to reduce the amount of clutter in our playroom, so instead of creating an elaborate organization system, we simply reduced the number of toys by half to solve the problem.

Mollie (and her husband Mike) 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.

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HOURLY RULE

Hold off on purchasing an item (unless it's essential) for 48 hours to see if you still feel the same need to purchase it after that time is up. Chances are you'll change your mind and decide that you were able to manage just fine without it.



FASTING FROM PLEASURES

Taking a fast from some of life's pleasures for a time is one way that I'm able to preserve the pleasure that these experiences bring.



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Do You Feel Guilty Relaxing?

People who don't value leisure time are more prone to stress and mental health issues

IAN KANE

In this busy, modern culture, there can be a lot of pressure to be on the go, doing something "productive." This societal attitude can make us feel as though we're wasting time whenever we engage in activities such as watching TV shows (or sports), having whimsical conversations with friends or family, or simply spending time outdoors relaxing.

I've felt this myself when doing something leisurely, which used to make me feel rather guilty. Although I knew it wasn't particularly healthy to work every second from the time I hop out of bed in the morning to the time that I go to sleep at night, I'd still have this nagging feeling that I should be busier, doing more work-related activities, rather than "any of that fun stuff."

But when we pull back and look at the messaging we're bombarded with—whether in podcasts, motivational videos, or psychology articles—it's understandable that we can sometimes feel as if we're not spending our time as wisely as we should. However, recent research indicates that this pervasive cultural perspective isn't good for our health—or our longevity.

Fun Isn't Always a Waste of Time

Okay, if you're reading this article, you've probably been made to feel (at one time or another) the pressure to be constantly doing something productive. You may have also been made to feel that work should come first and that having fun is akin to "goofing off."

This common societal viewpoint may come with unsettling side effects, according to research published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. People who held this view not only enjoyed their off-time less, the research found, but they were also more prone to experiencing heightened levels of stress and mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.

Selin Malkoc, associate professor of marketing at The Ohio State University and co-author of that research article, summarized a dynamic that many people may have experienced even if they weren't aware of it.

"There is plenty of research which suggests that leisure has mental health benefits and that it can make us more productive and less stressed," Malkoc said. "But we find that if people start to believe that lei-



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sure is wasteful, they may end up being more depressed and more stressed."

Another of the study's co-authors, Rebecca Reczek, professor of marketing at Ohio State, agreed.

"If leisure can be framed as having some kind of productive goal, that helps people who think leisure is wasteful get some of the same benefits," she said.

Since participants in the study viewed doing any sort of leisure activities as a waste of time, they also felt less joy when engaging in them. This perspective was prevalent across the board, whether the leisure activity was passive (such as watching TV), active (such as working out), social (such as enjoying time with friends), or even solo (such as practicing meditation).

Overall, these same participants who were averse to leisure activities experienced less happiness and higher levels of anxiety and depression.

"We were giving them a break from oth-

er, more boring activities. And still, those who believe leisure is wasteful didn't think watching the videos as fun as others did," Malkoc said.

Fun and Productivity Aren't Mutually Exclusive

Perhaps we need a different approach when it comes to changing perspectives about the importance and value of leisure activities.

Researchers conducted another study that involved asking participants what they did for Halloween a few days after the holiday. Among the activities they could choose from were doing fun things for fun's sake (such as going to a party), or doing something leisurely that also involved some sort of objective (such as taking their kids trick-or-treating).

The outcome of the study indicated that the more leisure-skeptic people experienced less of a drop in enjoyment of the leisure activity when they engaged in something with an objective, as they felt that their leisure activity wasn't as wasteful.

"If leisure can be framed as having some kind of productive goal, that helps people who think leisure is wasteful get some of the same benefits," Reczek said.

When people shift their perspectives of leisurely activities in this way, maybe they'll be able to better appreciate the value of letting their hair down and allowing themselves to have more fun in life.

Ian Kane is an U.S. Army veteran, author, filmmaker, and actor. He is dedicated to the development and production of innovative, thought-provoking, character-driven films and books of the highest quality. You can check out his health blog at IanKaneHealthNut.com

Since participants in the study viewed doing any sort of leisure activities as a waste of time, they also felt less joy when engaging in them.

You may have been made to feel that work should come first and that having fun is akin to "goofing off."



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FOOD AS MEDICINE

Eat More Plants

Here are 5 ways to enjoy the slimming nutrition of plant foods

Try putting out a plate of beautiful, colorful, fresh vegetables, as well as fruits, nuts, and seeds, at every meal.



If you make these nutritious, delicious foods easy to eat, they will get eaten.

JENNIFER MARGULIS

The most significant thing you can do to improve your health, vitality, and energy levels, according to nutrition scientist Dr. T. Colin Campbell, is to change the way you eat. This doesn't mean following the fad diet du jour, joining Overeaters Anonymous, or counting every calorie. It means, at least according to Campbell, simply eating more real foods, especially plants.

So, there you have it. Your mom was right when she told you to eat your vegetables. As Campbell explains in his provocative, thoroughly referenced, and fascinating best-seller "The China Study: The Most Comprehensive Study of Nutrition Ever Conducted and the Startling Implications for Diet, Weight Loss and Long-term Health," first published in 2004, eating a whole-food, real-food, plant-based diet is not only protective against cancer, adult-onset diabetes, and heart disease, it can actually reverse these conditions.

Lessons From the Philippines

It was while Campbell was doing original research in the Philippines that he uncovered what he calls "a dark secret" in his book. That dark secret was that Filipino children on the highest protein diets seemed to have the worst health outcomes. "Children who at the highest-protein diets were the ones most likely to get liver cancer!" Campbell wrote.

After observing this paradox, Campbell, who has published more than 300 peer-reviewed scientific articles, found a provocative research report from India. A team of Indian scientists had studied two groups of rats, exposing each group to a cancer-causing mold that often contaminates peanuts and corn called aflatoxin. One group of exposed rats was fed a diet that contained 20 percent protein, which is similar to the amount of protein that most Westerners consume. The other group was fed a diet of only 5 percent protein.

The study results were both surprising and unexpected: Every single rat that ate the higher protein diet showed evidence of liver cancer. Conversely, every rat on the low protein diet avoided the cancer.

His own mentor was so skeptical that he told Campbell the Indian researchers must have made an egregious mistake by mislabeling the rats in each group, so Campbell and his graduate students replicated the research several times over in a series of experiments conducted in his own laboratory. He and his colleagues published their findings in the early 1980s in several peer-reviewed science journals, including *Cancer Research*, the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*, and *Nutrition and Cancer*, among others.

Campbell's research at the time was controversial and remains so to this day. Critics—especially those who promote meat and dairy-based diets—insist that a diet high in fat and cholesterol is the healthiest.

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How Hazardous Is Your Home's Air?

Research reveals we are inhaling chemicals that put children at particular risk



NS1/SHUTTERSTOCK

JOSEPH MERCOLA

Mounting research reveals the danger posed by a group of man-made chemicals developed in the 1930s that are resistant to water, heat, and oil. They're used in paint, upholstery, cookware, carpeting, packaging, clothing, cosmetics, and more to make products nonstick, stain repellent, and waterproof.

Among the health effects these products

are linked to is the startling and little-discussed decline in human fertility.

New research shows that these chemicals—per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS)—aren't only contaminating water and food, but also the air you breathe.

There are more than 4,700 synthetic chemicals in the group with different properties and applications. In 1967, there was a deadly fire on the Navy aircraft carrier USS Forrestal, killing more than 130 sailors. Not

long afterward, manufacturers developed a PFAS firefighting foam mixture that continues to be used to this day in the military and some fire departments.

PFOA and PFOS are the most extensively studied classes of PFAS. Experts estimate that 98 percent of the population has detectable levels of PFOA in their bloodstream.

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Although those with rheumatoid arthritis may feel that not straining their body is wise, the opposite is true. Research has found that exercise can relieve symptoms.

MADE TO MOVE

Why Exercise Improves Rheumatoid Arthritis Symptoms

Multiple studies have affirmed that exercise can ease the pain and progression of rheumatoid arthritis

MATTHEW FARROW

Many people with rheumatoid arthritis avoid exercise for fear that it may make their arthritis worse. While it may be hard to exercise with arthritis, staying as active as possible has actually been shown to reduce pain and improve symptoms.

This is because our bodies are designed to move.

Rheumatoid arthritis, which affects approximately 400,000 adults in the United Kingdom and more than 1.3 million people in the United States, is a long-term condition that causes pain, swelling, and stiffness in the joints due to inflammation. Muscle weakness and fatigue are also commonly reported symptoms. People may also experience flare-ups, which are periods when their symptoms become worse.

Although there's no cure for rheumatoid arthritis, there are many treatments available, such as disease-modifying anti-rheumatic drugs. These ease symptoms, slow the condition's progress, and reduce joint pain and inflammation. Lifestyle changes may also be recommended—including changing diet or attending physiotherapy, which can help improve fitness, flexibility, and strength.

But evidence also suggests that physical activity and exercise may help to manage rheumatoid arthritis. As people with rheumatoid arthritis often have worse muscle health—even when in clinical remission—than those without the condition, exercise may help improve strength and reduce weakness.

Get Moving

According to research, exercise has anti-inflammatory effects. This is important as chronic inflammation may lead to certain diseases such as diabetes. Exercise reduces inflammation by reducing fat and increasing the production and release of anti-inflammatory molecules from our muscles. Given that inflammation is a primary cause of joint pain in rheumatoid arthritis, this may be why exercise is shown to improve symptoms.

One study published in 2013 investigating the effects of exercise on rheumatoid arthritis showed that just 12 weeks of regular exercise improved physical function and quality of life for patients with rheumatoid arthritis. The study looked at 108 patients in total. Half of the patients only received standard rheumatoid arthritis treatments, and the other half followed an exercise regime alongside this standard treatment. Exercise plans included cardiovascular exercise and strength training exercises for both the upper and lower body.

After 12 weeks, there were statistically significant differences in physical function—as shown by hand-grip strength (a measurement of upper body strength and overall strength)—between those who exercised and those who didn't. Those who took part in exercise also had lower disease activity than those who didn't, meaning they had fewer swollen joints and signs of inflammation in their blood.

A study published in 2020 found the same thing: Exercising alongside standard treatment helps to improve symptoms. The study looked at 66 people with rheumatoid arthritis, half of whom followed a personalized, three-month exercise program. Those who exercised had a reduction in inflammation in the blood and had better hand-grip strength and cardiovascular fitness alongside improved cognition.

It's recommended that people with rheumatoid arthritis get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity each week.

Based on all available evidence, it's recommended that people with rheumatoid arthritis get at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity each week. The type of exercise can be anything from brisk walking to cycling. But to see benefits, it's important this exercise is at least vigorous enough that it leaves you slightly breathless.

Patients should also do a variety of strengthening, stretching, and balancing exercises to improve strength and flexibility. Some examples of these include pilates, yoga, or swimming.

There are still many questions that we need to answer—including what type of exercise is best for managing symptoms, and the minimum amount needed to reduce inflammation. We also don't know what types of exercises are better suited to patients at different stages of the disease. But while researchers continue to search for these answers, we do know that exercise can be used to help improve the lives of sufferers from this debilitating condition.

Matthew Farrow is a lecturer in anatomy and musculoskeletal science at the University of Bradford in the UK. This article was first published on The Conversation.

How Hazardous Is Your Home's Air?

Research reveals we are inhaling chemicals that put children at particular risk

Continued from Page 9

The presence of the chemical has been linked with higher levels of cholesterol and uric acid, which may lead to kidney stones and gout.

Since they are nearly indestructible and don't break down easily, PFAS chemicals have earned the name "forever chemicals." The Environmental Working Group (EWG), characterizes the damage this way: "Today, nearly all Americans, including newborn babies, have PFAS in their blood, and up to 110 million people may be drinking PFAS-tainted water. What began as a 'miracle of modern chemistry' is now a national crisis."

PFAS in the Air Correlates With Blood Serum Measurements

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, when humans or animals eat food or drink water contaminated with PFAS, it can be absorbed and build up in the body. Because the chemical doesn't break down easily, it can also be stored in the body for long periods of time.

The EPA says that people are exposed to PFAS through food packaging that contains the chemicals, equipment used during food processing, as well as contaminated soil and water used to grow the food. However, current research also finds that PFAS may be absorbed from the air you breathe as particles break off from carpeting, clothing, and other products and float in the air with other dust.

The new study, published in Environmental Science and Technology Letters, sought to quantify the amount of PFAS that humans are exposed to, since most people typically spend 90 percent of their time indoors.

The research team from the University of Rhode Island and Green Science Policy Institute tested 20 sites in 17 different locations, including several kindergarten classrooms, an outdoor clothing store, and offices. Tom Bruton, a senior scientist at Green Science and on the research team, said that indoor air pollution is "an underestimated and potentially important source of exposure to PFAS."

Air Exposure May Be More Dangerous for Children

In the current study, the researchers found that volatile chemicals, specifically fluorotelomer alcohols (FTOH) were widespread. Measurements in a California kindergarten classroom revealed 6:2 FTOH in concentrations from 9 to 600 ng m⁻³ (nanograms per cubic meter).

Interestingly, the concentrations in the air, carpet, and dust were closely related. This indicated to the researchers that PFAS originating in carpet and dust are the major sources of FTOH in the air. They determined that breathing air contaminated with FTOH was the largest exposure risk in young children.

Research has found a correlation between high levels of PFAS measured in the air in carpeted homes treated with Scotchgard and amounts found in human blood serum. The current researchers theorized that kindergartners may be exposed to more PFAS chemicals in indoor air pollution than in the food and drink they consume. In April 2020, the Environmental Defense Fund reported on two publications by Food and Drug Administration scientists, in which the scientists confirmed findings that 6:2 FTOH bioaccumulates and the bioaccumulation is greater with lower exposure.



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“Today, nearly all Americans, including newborn babies, have PFAS in their blood, and up to 110 million people may be drinking PFAS-tainted water.”

The Environmental Working Group

Current research also finds that PFAS may be absorbed from the air you breathe as particles break off from carpeting, clothing, and other products and float in the air with other dust.

The FDA scientists also found that the toxicity and risk have been significantly underestimated.

Initially, short-chain PFAS chemicals were claimed by the industry as safer alternatives, including 6:2 FTOH. However, as the studies from the FDA showed, 6:2 FTOH is more toxic, in large part because of breakdown products that also bioaccumulate.

The EWG also reports that 6:2 FTOH on its own has demonstrated the ability to harm the immune system, thyroid, and mammary glands as well as has a potential carcinogenic effect in animals.

Chemical Giants Knew of the Dangers in 2009

The most prevalent PFAS found in the current study was 6:2 FTOH, which is found frequently in stain guards, floor waxes, and food packaging. On May 12, The Guardian published an investigative piece that revealed DuPont and Daikin, both chemical giants and producers of PFAS chemicals, knew of the dangers to human health as early as 2009.

However, they hid company studies from the FDA and from the public. The Guardian saw the studies after the Environmental Defense Fund and independent researcher Maricel Maffini obtained them from the companies and the FDA through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request.

They discovered that Daikin had withheld a study finalized in 2009 that showed 6:2 FTOH was toxic to lab animals' livers and kidneys. DuPont's company studies were finalized in 2012 but weren't shared with the FDA or the public. It revealed the chemicals stayed in lab animals much longer than was originally anticipated.

Maffini spoke with a reporter from The Guardian, indicating that if the FDA had been aware of the data, it was unlikely the agency would have approved 6:2 FTOH. But it took the FDA until 2020 to work with manufacturers to voluntarily withdraw 6:2 FTOH from food packaging, also giving manufacturers five years to accomplish the goal.

Documents acquired through the FOIA show that the FDA had been aware of DuPont's hidden study in 2015.

Independent researcher Erika Schreder, science director for Toxic-Free Future, has called for PFAS to be regulated as a class.

It wasn't just the manufacturers who had information about 6:2 FTOH. In 2008, DuPont submitted studies that demonstrated lab animals suffered from liver damage, mottled teeth, and kidney failure. Yet, the FDA determined that exposure to humans would be lower. Without any supporting evidence, they decided the short-chain PFASs wouldn't bioaccumulate.

Tom Neltner, the chemicals policy director with the Environmental Defense Fund, believes that some of the deficiencies inside the FDA's chemical approval process include an insufficient amount of safety data upfront and no systematic reassessment after the chemicals are on the market.

Although the FDA defended their process, Neltner said the issues with 6:2 FTOH suggest the process is not sufficient. As the FDA has done in the past and continues to do in the current climate, Neltner said, "They're making grossly inaccurate assumptions that are not defensible."

Will Sperm Count Reach Zero in 2045?

One of the major concerns with PFAS is its ability to disrupt human hormone function.

If Shanna Swan's estimates are correct, we may be headed for an unpopulated Earth, and chemicals such as PFAS are the reason; Swan is an environmental and reproductive epidemiologist at Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York.

In her book "Count Down," she describes the devastation to fertility that has been the result of hormone-disrupting chemicals such as PFAS.

Swan is on a team of researchers who did a systematic review and meta-analysis of sperm counts from 1973 to 2011.

They discovered there has been a 60 percent sperm count reduction in men living in North America, Australia, Europe, and New Zealand. Using projections from this data, she believes that sperm counts in men across the world will reach zero in or about 2045.

In the book, Swan and co-writer Stacey Colino point to chemical exposures that are threatening human fertility.

Swan isn't the first to find that PFAS chemicals have a significant effect on human reproductive health. One study published in the Journal of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism in 2019 found that increasing levels were positively correlated with "a reduction of semen quality, testicular volume, penile length, and anogenital distance."

The scientists concluded that the chemicals have a substantial impact and interfere with hormones, "potentially leading to male infertility." Falling sperm count is mirrored in the global fertility rate, which fell to 2.4 in 2019 from 5.05 in 1964.

We Drink, Eat, and Breathe Ubiquitous Forever Chemicals

On July 31, 2020, the FDA announced three companies would voluntarily phase out specific short-chain PFAS chemicals used in food packaging. These are found in fast-food wrappers, pizza boxes, and to-go boxes. The announcement followed the FDA literature review that noted 6:2 FTOH persists much longer than had been anticipated.

However, the phase-out might take several years. Once the company stops manufacturing, it can take an additional 18 months to sell out the products that have already been produced. In other words, the manufacturer can take up to 4.5 years to phase the chemicals out of production.

Tap water and bottled water are other sources of PFAS exposure. According to the EWG, while most drinking water gets a passing grade from regulatory agencies, the EPA hasn't added a new contaminant for regulation in more than 20 years. In July 2019, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts issued an advisory for bottled water from Spring Hill Farm Dairy, which tested positive for PFAS.

In May 2015, 205 scientists from 38 countries signed a consensus statement called the Madrid Statement. Their focus was on PFAS, warning about its potential harmful effects including liver toxicity, adverse neurobehavioral effects, hypothyroidism, and obesity.

Scientists recommend avoiding all products containing PFAS. You may find helpful tips in the EWG's "Guide to Avoiding PFCS." In the past, I have also recommended avoiding:

- Pretreated or stain-repellent treatments on clothing, furniture, and carpeting
- Products treated with flame-retardant chemicals, including furniture, carpets, mattresses, and baby items
- Fast food, microwave popcorn, unfiltered tap water and carry out foods
- Nonstick cookware and treated kitchen utensils
- Personal care products containing PTFE or "fluoro" or "perfluoro" ingredients such as Oral-B Glide floss

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



Try eating different fruits and vegetables, and you'll find the ones you like.

FOOD AS MEDICINE

Eat More Plants

Here are 5 ways to enjoy the slimming nutrition of plant foods

Continued from Page 9

They accuse Campbell of simplifying the science and leaving out key information in the studies he highlights in the book.

Despite the controversy, there's something empowering and exciting about the research Campbell details. It suggests that, even though we often can't control our over-exposure to toxic chemicals or eliminate all of the carcinogenic substances we come in contact with throughout the day, we can win the fight against cancer just by improving our diet. In Campbell's words: "Nutrition trump[s] carcinogens, even very potent carcinogens."

And, although the debate about whether a plant-based diet is truly best is far from settled (a long and detailed article by Denise Minger, a self-described "recovered" vegan, insists that vegan diets are not healthy), experts and consumers do seem to agree that eating highly processed and highly refined packaged foods is the least healthy choice for humans.

So if you want to eat more fresh vegetables, colorful fruits, and whole foods, how do you do it?

Here are five ways to improve your bad eating habits and incorporate more whole plants into your diet. Some of these suggestions may seem a little wonky at first. Suspend disbelief and try them anyway.

If you do, you will be pleasantly surprised by the results. The more whole foods you eat, the fewer blood sugar spikes and dips you'll experience



Visiting your local farmers market is a great way to find new and in-season foods to try.

Having healthy food options within easy reach at mealtime and for snacks will help you stop being a junk food junkie.

throughout the day, the more energy you'll have, and the trimmer your waistline will become.

You're likely to notice other positive changes as well. If you're prone to acne, your skin will likely clear up. If you've had trouble moving your bowels in the past, you'll find your trips to the toilet more productive. And if you've been struggling with feelings of self-doubt and sadness, you may even see a lift in your mood.

1. Add Crunch to Your Breakfast

Most Americans eat highly processed sugar-coated cereal for breakfast. According to data compiled from the U.S. Census and Simmons National Consumer Survey, which was then calculated by Statista, more than 283 million Americans ate cold breakfast cereal in 2020. If processed cereal is your go-to, it's time to switch to Swiss-style muesli, made from rolled oats, rye, and barley; almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds, and other nuts; and dried fruits such as raisins, cranberries, and date pieces.

But even if you want to stick with the toasted Os, thank you very much, you can make your morning meal healthier and less processed by adding some chunks of fresh organic apples and pears to give any breakfast cereal some color and sweetness.

Or take it one step further: Chop some purple and green cabbage or thinly slice some carrots and add them to your breakfast bowl. Cabbage and carrots in breakfast cereal? Both will add a delightful crunch. And soon you may decide to give up the processed cereal completely and instead enjoy a more Mediterranean-style breakfast of hummus; vegetables such as cucumbers, celery, and carrots; olives; and fresh figs or other seasonal fruit.

2. Drink Your Vegetables

You can also upgrade your morning meal—or any meal throughout the day—by swapping out the pasteurized homogenized cow's milk for a plant-based liquid such as coconut water or homemade almond, oat, or soy milk.

Dr. Meredith McBride, a recently retired surgeon based in Sonora, California, stopped drinking dairy in order to help mitigate the troublesome symptoms of an autoimmune disease.

"When I don't drink milk or eat dairy, I have less autoimmune flares—less joint pain and GI upset, swelling, headache," McBride said.

McBride makes her own soy milk from tofu. She puts a high-quality soft tofu (she says to choose one that's organic and doesn't contain any additives or binders) into the blender with water and a pinch of salt. Add water in a three to one ratio of water to tofu. Blend on high until creamy. "You just drink it, it's really creamy and smooth," McBride said. "It's very similar in texture to whole dairy milk and it pours nicely."

A whole-food fruit smoothie with a handful of added greens (such as kale, spinach, arugula, or lettuce) is often filling enough to constitute an entire meal. Try making a smoothie from The Epoch Times list of smoothie recipes: [TheEpochTimes.com/t-smoothie-recipes](https://www.theepochtimes.com/t-smoothie-recipes)

3. Make It Deceptively Delicious

When I interviewed Moorea Malatt, a Los Angeles-based parent coach and educator, about how to get kids to eat more vegetables for a Jefferson Public Radio audio feature, she pooh-poohed the idea of secretly adding vegetables to food.

"Your job is to decide which foods are healthy for your child and put them on the table frequently," Malatt told me. "And your child's job is really to decide whether they are going to eat them or not."

Unlike Malatt, I'm a big fan of sneaking vegetables (and other healthy extras) into my family's meals. Food writer Michael Pollan, author of the bestselling book, "Food Rules," advises eating "junk food" only if you make it yourself. So why not add some vegetables to your homemade treats?

I'm not just talking about making carrot muffins and zucchini bread, though those are delicious and nutritious "junk" food options. Campbell would likely advise that you make them with whole grain flour and use whole-food sweeteners such as dates or applesauce in the place of refined sugar. Adding black beans to your homemade brownies is another great trick.

But I'm talking about putting vegetables into other dishes. I like to grate a half cup or more of a combination of any of the following: broccoli, cabbage, kale, squash, carrots, and spinach. Then I cover the grated vegetables with water and simmer them on the stove until they're softened. I add this mixture to cake recipes, pancake batter, savory muffins, and pasta sauces.

My eldest was born in 1999, and I've been doing this since my kids were little. So I was delighted when Jessica Seinfeld published a cookbook in 2008, "Deceptively Delicious: Simple Secrets to Get Your Kids



Plants are full of nutrients and low on calories, making them a delicious way to fuel your body without thickening your waistline.

Eating Good Food," which recommends adding pureed cauliflower to mac and cheese, avocado puree to quesadillas, and kale to spaghetti and meatballs.

Another excellent way to eat more vegetables, advocated by Dan Buettner, longevity writer and author of "The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who've Lived the Longest," and several other books, is to replace some meat (in sausages, meatballs, meatloaf, or hamburgers, for example) with chopped mushrooms.

Though they're technically not plants (mushrooms are fungi), mushrooms are a low-calorie nutrient-dense food with a variety of health benefits. If you chop them in a food processor with the S-shaped blade, they have a similar consistency to meat. Well-seasoned mushrooms are both nutritious and delicious. An excellent whole-food meat substitute. Yum.

4. Offer Your Family (and Yourself) Colorful Plants at Every Meal

Freshly picked strawberries. Roasted yams. Slices of red, orange, and yellow pepper. A bowl of shelled green pistachio nuts. Green beans. Belgian endive. Purple grapes. Kohlrabi. Endive.

"If it's a plant, eat it," is Michael Pollan's Rule No. 19. "If it was made in a plant, don't."

As you strive to eat less processed food and more whole-plant-based foods, try putting out a plate of beautiful, colorful, fresh vegetables, as well as fruits, nuts, and seeds, at every meal.

Highly processed snack foods have that perfect factory-tested taste and texture, which is why we reach for them so quickly, eat more than our fair share, and easily become addicted. Potato chips, anyone? Having healthy food options within easy reach at mealtime and for snacks (there's no law that says snacks have to be sweet) will help you stop being a junk-food junkie.

5. Try New Things With Vegetables

I've seen many an adult wrinkle their nose and heard them protest that they "don't like turmeric" or "My kids would never eat that!"

If the only plant you ate growing up was mashed potatoes, you might think that improving your diet to eat more vegetables just isn't possible for you. Don't give up so quickly. Just like any other habit, you can change the way you eat.

Experiment with eating different vegetables, and you'll find the ones you like. Okra, popular in the South, tastes better every time I eat it. Jicama, a crunchy white tuber, has a light, cool, pleasing flavor (like a cross between a turnip and an apple). Whole steamed artichokes are great fun to eat, leaf by leaf, all the way to the heart. My husband's favorite vegetable is broccoli rabe, because it's bitter and crunchy at the same time. He also loves bitter dandelion greens.

Make a point of trying new vegetables and experimenting with different ways to cook and serve them as often as you can. You'll have fun discovering new flavors and textures as you incorporate more whole, real plant foods into your diet.

Though Meredith McBride, the surgeon in Sonoma, has been eating almost entirely vegan food of late, she says she doesn't espouse a vegan diet for everyone and that it's important to eat the foods that make your body feel good. But for McBride, eating plant-based whole foods not only keeps her autoimmune disease in check, it also makes her feel less self-reproach. "Once I had been following a plant-based diet, I realized how much I enjoyed the freedom from carnivore-guilt," McBride told me. "You do it for health reasons, but I always had this nagging guilt every time I read an article about the commercial meat industry or saw a post about how awful commercial feedlots are. It feels really freeing to not participate in that anymore."

Jennifer Margulis, Ph.D., is an award-winning science journalist and book author. Learn more at [JenniferMargulis.net](https://www.jennifermargulis.net)



If processed cereal is your go-to, it's time to switch to Swiss-style muesli.

Small Changes You Can Make Today to Prevent Weight Gain

CLAIRE MADIGAN & HENRIETTA GRAHAM

Between the ages of 20 and 55, most adults gain between 1 and 2 lbs (.5 kg to 1 kg) per year, which could see some people become overweight or obese over time. This weight gain isn't usually the result of overeating large amounts of food. Instead, it's usually caused by eating a small amount—around 100 to 200 extra calories—more than is needed each day.

The good news is that we may be able to prevent ourselves from gaining weight by making small changes to our diet or physical activity. Our recent review found that eating 100 to 200 calories less, or burning an extra 100 to 200 calories each day, may be enough to stop us from gaining weight in the long run. This is known as a "small-changes approach," which was first proposed in 2004 by James Hill, an American expert on obesity, to help people manage their weight.

Many small studies have investigated the use of the small-changes approach for weight management. We combined the results of these smaller studies into a larger review to get an average (and more statistically reliable) result of the effect of this approach on weight management. We looked at 19 trials—15 of which tested a small-changes approach to prevent weight gain, and four that test this approach for weight loss.

We analyzed the data of nearly 3,000 people in weight-gain prevention trials, and 372 people in weight-loss trials. Participants were aged between 18 and 60, 65 percent of whom were female. In those who used the small-changes approach to prevent weight gain, we found that participants gained almost 2 lbs (1 kg) less compared with those who didn't use this approach over a period of 8 to 14 months. The difference was statistically significant, meaning it was unlikely to be the result of chance.

While the small-changes approach was shown to be effective for preventing weight gain, it wasn't proven to be effective for weight loss.

Preventing Weight Gain

The trials we looked at used a number of different small changes to help participants prevent weight gain. Here are some of the successful techniques used in these trials:

1. Get off the bus one stop earlier and walk the rest of the way. You may end up walking 10 to 15 minutes more, and this could help you burn up to 60 calories. Doing this on the way home as well could mean you burn up to 120 calories.
2. Skip the fries that come as a side. Small portions of fries served alongside main meals contain hundreds of calories. Saying no to these—or opting for a salad or



We may be able to prevent ourselves from gaining weight over time by making small changes to our diet or physical activity.

Weight gain can happen over time due to small daily choices that add up. The good news is that you can make adjustments today that change this course.

Claire Madigan is a senior research associate at the Centre for Lifestyle Medicine and Behavior at Loughborough University in the UK, and Henrietta Graham is a doctoral researcher of sport, exercise, and health sciences at Loughborough University. This article was first published on [The Conversation](https://www.theepochtimes.com).

vegetables as a side instead—could help you reduce your daily calorie intake by up to 200 calories.

3. Have an Americano instead of a latte. The milk in a regular latte can contain up to 186 calories, so switching to an Americano could prevent weight gain.
4. Add one less tablespoon of oil while cooking. One tablespoon of olive oil, for example, contains slightly over 100 calories, so using less can be one way of avoiding additional calories.
5. If you have something sweet, save half of it for tomorrow. Eating only half a KitKat, for example, could reduce your calorie intake by about 102 calories—and give you something to look forward to tomorrow.
6. Take phone meetings while walking. You could burn an extra 100 calories if you opted to take a 30-minute phone call on the go.
7. Avoid sweets. Saying no to cakes, cookies, and other sweets could help you easily cut an extra 100 to 200 calories from your diet—maybe more, depending on the food.
8. Take your dog for an extra 30-minute brisk walk each day. The dog will appreciate it, and you could burn more than 150 calories.

The small-changes approach has many advantages for managing weight. First, small changes are easier to incorporate into everyday life than larger ones. For example, it's easier to eat 100 to 200 fewer calories per day than to eat 500 fewer calories each day (basically an entire meal). Small changes are also easier to maintain in the long run, which is key to managing weight. And if people succeed at making these small changes, it may lead them to make bigger changes in their life.

Not All Aches and Pains Are Created Equal

Be alert to persistent pain while walking or climbing, as it could indicate peripheral arterial disease

MAT LECOMPTÉ

Aches and pains are one of the drawbacks of aging. Regardless of your physical condition, some knee, neck, or back pain seems to be unavoidable.

Sometimes it's nothing. Maybe you slept in an awkward position, spent a lot of time on your legs, or really taxed your muscles with a good workout.

But other times, it can signify something more serious, particularly if it persists without explanation. If the pain is occurring in your legs, it could signify peripheral artery disease. Peripheral artery disease, or peripheral arterial disease (PAD), happens when plaque accumulates in the arteries of your legs. It happens gradually and limits blood flow to the lower extremities, which can lead to some severe problems. It affects roughly 10 million people in the United States.

The symptoms can begin as simple pain when walking or climbing. You may notice you can't walk very far without some discomfort, and you may require frequent breaks. Numbness and cramping may occur.

If left unchecked, the symptoms can worsen and become quite severe. You may notice wounds on your feet or lower extremities that don't heal. Infections can occur and painful foot ulcers may also develop. Gangrene and amputations aren't out of the question.

This is all happening because blood isn't able to move into the area. Your risk of developing PAD is not only age-related. Conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, kidney fail-

ure, and obesity can all significantly boost the likelihood of PAD.

Smoking is also a major risk factor. If you're feeling some pain in your lower extremities and can't figure out why, it's worth a trip to the doctor. If PAD is caught early enough, some lifestyle changes such as boosting exercise, eating better, and losing some weight may help.

In diabetics, it may require a better job managing blood sugar.

If PAD is too far advanced, surgery is a likely outcome. Keep an eye on random aches and pains as you age. Sometimes it can be serious.



Peripheral arterial disease happens when plaque accumulates in the arteries of your legs. It gradually limits blood flow to the lower extremities.

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

6 Causes of Burnout at Work

A new book explains why we won't solve burnout without changing work culture

JILL SUTTIE

Job burnout is on the rise, according to several surveys. People are feeling emotionally exhausted, detached from their work and colleagues, and less productive and efficacious. This makes them more likely to suffer health consequences, need sick days, and quit their jobs.

Not too surprisingly, burnout has become even more prevalent during the pandemic, particularly among health care professionals, causing widespread concern. But while many employers recognize the problem, they often don't recognize the solutions, says journalist Jennifer Moss, author of the new book "The Burnout Epidemic: The Rise of Chronic Stress and How We Can Fix It."

She argues that employers need to stop blaming employees for not being resilient enough and instead change the policies and workplace cultures that breed burnout in the first place.

"If you want to address the burnout problem, the first step is repeating and internalizing this mantra: Burnout is about your organization, not your people," she writes. "Yoga, vacation time, wellness tech, and meditation apps can help people feel optimized, healthier. But when it comes to preventing burnout, suggesting that these tools are the cure is dangerous."

Her book argues that we can better address burnout if we recognize the signs, understand its causes, and take steps to combat it at its roots. Only by doing so will we really make work healthy, productive, and enjoyable—as it was meant to be.

What Organizations Shouldn't Do

Understanding what causes burnout can help organizations better match their policies to the needs of their workforces. But too often employers try to offer simple solutions without changing anything substantial.

For example, giving employees on-site perks (such as free meals and workout rooms) can backfire, says Moss, as people stay too long at work, missing out on the benefits of being with friends and family. Offering unlimited vacation time means nothing if people feel they can't take it—or, worse, return to a huge backlog of work after they do. Enforced team-building or holiday parties meant to build social bonds at work can become an added pressure too if they take away from employee personal time.

Some employer attempts at preventing burnout fail because they're Band-Aids to a larger problem or because employees believe that their bosses don't care about worker welfare as much as productivity. To counter that, organizational leaders should listen to their employees and understand their situation before implementing programs designed to help, Moss says.

Causes of Burnout—and How to Fix Them

In her book, Moss combs through the research on burnout, showing what's at the heart of burnout.

"Burnout is a complex constellation of



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Overall, changing organizational cultures to be more purpose-driven, kinder, and rewarding for workers is bound to help prevent burnout.

Having a sense of belonging is necessary for mental health and well-being.

poor workplace practices and policies, antiquated institutional legacies, roles and personalities at higher risk, and system, societal issues that have been unchanged, plaguing us for too long," Moss writes.

Basic things must be in place for people to thrive at work—what she calls "good hygiene." This includes paying people what they're worth (and on time), making sure they're physically and mentally safe, and providing the tools and resources they need to do their jobs.

Beyond that, there are six main reasons people tend to burn out at work, she writes—each of them with a potential workplace solution:

1. Workload

Overwork is a main cause of burnout. Working too many hours is responsible for the deaths of millions of people every year, likely because overwork makes people suffer weight loss, body pain, exhaustion, high levels of cortisol, sleep loss, and more.

Yet telling people to "just say 'no'" to working more is bound to backfire, says Moss. People recognize that working less is interpreted as not showing initiative or not stepping up, and it may be punished, formally or informally.

Instead, Moss says, employers need to help identify low-priority goals for their employees (so people don't push themselves too hard to meet goals that aren't urgent), match people's strengths to their job duties, provide more support when needs change suddenly, and have open and safe lines of communication, where feedback is encouraged and people can admit to mistakes. She also suggests things such as implementing a four-day workweek, encouraging frequent walking breaks, and eliminating "work lunches" to help lessen workloads.

2. Perceived Lack of Control

Studies show that autonomy at work is important for well-being, and being micro-managed is particularly de-motivating to employees. Yet many employers fall back on watching their employees' every move, controlling their work schedule, or punishing them for missteps.

Instead, it's important to help employees feel a sense of autonomy by backing off and acting more as a coach, Moss says. Sure, it helps if you hire people with the right skills

in the first place. But you can also increase autonomy by inviting employees to ask questions and express their needs, letting people set their own schedules and goals, and encouraging employees to find meaning in their jobs, she writes.

3. Lack of Reward or Recognition

Paying someone what they're worth is an important way to reward them for their work. But so is communicating to people that their efforts matter.

"When we don't acknowledge each other, both as peers and leaders, we lose our sense of value to the greater organizational mission and we stop feeling good about ourselves," Moss writes.

Of course, rewards and recognition must be genuine and not fake or manipulative. And, while it's important to express appreciation for a job well done, it's also important to avoid pitting employees against one another or recognizing only certain people. Moss cautions employers not to implement recognition programs that elevate one part of a team over another.

These instill jealousy or anger if people feel overlooked or believe the awards are undeserved.

She suggests gratitude from top leadership and peer-to-peer gratitude—and not just for meeting work goals, but for showing empathy and care for colleagues, too.

4. Poor Relationships

Having a sense of belonging is necessary for mental health and well-being. This is true at work as much as it is in life. When people feel part of a community, they're more likely to thrive. As a Gallup poll found, having social connections at work is important.

"Employees who have best friends at work identify significantly higher levels of healthy stress management, even though they experience the same levels of stress," the authors write.

Of course, the opposite is also true—that poor relationships at work can lead to burnout. That's why Moss suggests that employers pay attention to social needs and give people spaces where they can connect with colleagues around non-work-related topics. Encouraging volunteerism and building more inclusive cultures that are less competitive and more cooperative are also helpful.



Knowing what causes burnout can help organizations better match their policies to the needs of their employees and avoid Band-Aid solutions.

5. Lack of Fairness

Unfair treatment includes "bias, favoritism, mistreatment by a coworker or supervisor, and unfair compensation and/or corporate policies," Moss writes. When people are being treated unjustly, they're likely to burn out and need more sick time.

She suggests that organizations need to have complaint mechanisms in place, respond to every grievance, and act promptly to resolve issues. Otherwise, resentment is bound to fester and grow. Additionally, unfair treatment due to racial or gender bias must be rooted out, as discrimination boosts the chance of burnout substantially.

6. Values Mismatch

"Hiring someone whose values and goals do not align with the values and goals of the organization's culture may result in lower job satisfaction and negatively impact mental health," writes Moss. It's likely that someone who doesn't share in the organization's mission will be unhappy and unproductive, too.

Values mismatches may be avoided through the hiring process. But workers can also become disillusioned if an organization doesn't stand up for its own values, leading to withdrawal. Organizations that communicate values clearly and strive to fulfill their mission will more likely have satisfied employees.

The Role of Individuals in Burnout

While organizations can do much to prevent burnout by setting kind, considerate workplace policies and improving workplace culture, individuals have a role to play, too. Understanding what burns you out and trying to alleviate it is important to keeping you happy on the job.

Some people with particular personality traits or career paths may suffer burnout more easily, Moss writes. For example, those who have higher levels of neuroticism (overworry), conscientiousness (especially if it leads to perfectionism—a potential problem), and introversion (in a highly social office) may be particularly susceptible.

Also, health care workers and teachers have higher levels of burnout than other professions, Moss says, because of the nature of their work and the personality types drawn to those jobs. And their potential stressors have only increased since the pandemic, as teachers scrambled to switch to remote teaching and health professionals witnessed increased suffering and COVID-19 deaths.

To help individuals do what they can to reduce burnout in themselves, Moss recommends saying "no" to things that are not necessary to do your job, without fear of "missing out" or disappointing others. She also suggests doing more of what you're good at and less of the stuff that drains you—perhaps skipping the Zoom meeting with multiple people and phoning a person you need to talk to instead. Lastly, she notes how important it is to have friends—at work and outside of it—whom you can lean on when times are hard.

"We need to notice the roles we play and the moments they get too big for us," she writes. And, she adds, "We need others to look out for us and protect us from the worst."

Overall, changing organizational cultures to be more purpose-driven, kinder, and rewarding for workers is bound to help prevent burnout. By stopping overwork, communicating organizational values, fostering social bonds, and being fairer, more appreciative, and less controlling, organizational leaders can make sure they're supporting and not hindering worker well-being.

"Though employees are ultimately responsible for their own happiness, it is our responsibility to provide the conditions that support, and not detract, from their happiness," Moss writes.

Jill Suttie, Psy.D., is Greater Good's former book review editor and now serves as a staff writer and contributing editor for the magazine. This article was originally published by the Greater Good online magazine.

The Power of the Room

The space you inhabit—and what you allow in it—will decide who you become

DONNA MARTELLI

In what room are you living? What's the mental and emotional space you inhabit? Who do you share it with? Did you consciously choose your room, or did you just kind of drift into it?

Within your room are the people you spend time with regularly. They've introduced you to many of the mindsets, ideas, and viewpoints you now hold. Additional transforming influences came to you from things you viewed, such as TV or the internet.

Step back and take a look at your room. Do you want to be like the people you share it with? Is it the best place for you to live? If not, you can change it.

Who Do You Let In Your Room?

We're transformed by our associations. That makes it vitally important that you choose the right room. You'll become like those around you. They become a kind of social gravity, always pulling you to their level. Of course, you also pull them to yours. But on the whole, it's harder to pull others up than it is to be pulled down.

Matt Tommeyer, creator of the Created to Thrive Artist Mentoring Program, has some fantastic insights on this subject.

"If you find out you are the smartest person in the room, then the smartest thing you can do is find a new room," Tommeyer said. "If you continue to stay in the same room, around the same people doing the same thing that you have always done, then you're going to get the same results or maybe even worse."

"Find another room with people who can help you elevate what you see as possible. Spend your time around people who are further along than you, where you can be mentored and grow."

Always be forward-thinking. You have so much God-given potential that will blossom from being in a room that nurtures and challenges you.

What Do You Let in Your Room?

Be very wise about what you look at. To be a successful person, you must counter the negativity around you with truth, positivity, and righteousness. Often you must close your door when harmful things try to enter the space you inhabit.

There's power in seeing. For example, have you ever seen a pizza commercial on



We each inhabit a space, and often share it with others or outside influences, like television or music. What fills our space, fills our hearts and minds as well.

You have so much God-given potential that will blossom from being in a room that nurtures and challenges you.

Donna Martelli, formerly a professional dancer with the Harkness Ballet of New York, served on the dance faculty at Butler University in Indianapolis, and is now also a certified personal trainer, and certified Pilates instructor in Indianapolis, Ind. She conducts classes, seminars, and workshops in the United States and Europe. She is the author of "When God Says Drop It" and "Why the Dance," available on Amazon and wherever books are sold.

TV over and over, and then you just had to have pizza? Of course you have. I have too. We desire appealing things, especially if they're always in sight—even if we know they can harm us. We may not want all of these things, but we each have our weak spots, and these messages are designed to compel us.

Advertisers count on the power of seeing. Our viewing habits influence our thinking, political preferences, and even our cognitive abilities. Our eyes are "gates" to our brains: Where we look is where we go.

Practically speaking, you must sometimes close the door to your room. For example, if you embrace a healthy lifestyle, instead of watching cooking shows or food commercials on TV, watch something that encourages you in your healthful journey. You'll be amazed at how much this one decision will help you stay on course.

Never forget that your viewing habits greatly influence your thinking. You must choose TV shows and movies that will enlighten you and build you up rather than lure you into endorsing evil, immorality, and violence. You must not allow such things to sidetrack you.

What Is the Best Room for You?

Take inventory from time to time and be sure your room is filled with people who know more than you do and can help you grow. They'll mentor you and challenge you. Allow only images, thoughts, and viewpoints beneficial to you, the others in your room, and those outside of it. If they don't, find another room.

Because transformation occurs by association, ask yourself if you want to be like the people who live in your room with you or like those in the things you watch. Realize your power to choose the room you inhabit.

New Study Suggests You Can Unlearn Chronic Back Pain

Chronic pain reshapes the brain in self-perpetuating ways that one treatment helps to change

MAT LECOMPTE

Chronic back pain affects millions of Americans. Most, however, cannot identify the source. Neither can all the x-rays, tests, or other tools that doctors have to diagnose problems.

And perhaps unsurprisingly, most treatments don't work.

About 85 percent of people who report chronic back pain don't have a test result to highlight a cause. They go through physical therapy and medication to no avail. But a new study suggests that a few weeks may be all that is needed to unlearn pain.

Most treatments for chronic pain operate under the assumption that it's caused by the body. This new work was done under the premise that the brain can generate pain in the absence of an injury or after an injury has healed. By unlearning that pain, sufferers may be able to relieve their suffering.

The study had very strong results. It involved 151 men and women who experienced back pain for at least six months. They were divided into three groups, a treatment group, a control group that continued with their routine treatment, and a placebo group that received a subcutaneous saline injection in the back. The treatment group took part in a four-week psychological treatment called

Researchers explained that neural pathways are partly to blame for how people experience pain.



FOXSHOOTER/ISTOCK

pain reprocessing therapy, attending eight one-hour sessions.

The findings were published in JAMA Psychology on Sept. 29, 2021.

Results showed that two-thirds (66 percent) of the treatment group were pain-free or nearly pain-free after treatment and they stayed that way for one year. That compared to 20 percent who got the placebo, and 10 percent who continued with routine treatment.

Researchers explained that neural pathways are partly to blame for how people experience pain. Different brain regions are activated more often during chronic pain than acute pain. Certain neural networks in chronic pain patients are sensitive to over-react to mild stimuli.

Therefore, by thinking about pain as something safe instead of threatening, patients may be able to neutralize it.

This seems to be what happened during the study. Brain scans revealed that brain regions associated with pain processing had quieted significantly after treatment.

If you've been experiencing untreatable chronic pain, this is an avenue worth exploring. It may have lasting effects to help you restore a pain-free life.

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

Research showed promising results for a chronic pain treatment that works to reshape the brain's relationship with pain.



When people feel part of a community, they are more likely to thrive.



While employers may institute programs to support employee well-being, even these efforts can end up contributing to burnout.

Self-care is sometimes viewed as being selfish, but in an age when productivity has become the highest virtue, it's essential to take care of yourself.



ANTHONY TRAN/UNSPLASH

How to Identify and Deal With Mental Exhaustion

It's easy to get overwhelmed—and essential to take care of yourself

IAN KANE

Have you ever felt as though your obligations to friends, family, or work have become frustrating or draining, or tasks that you've been assigned have accumulated to monstrous levels and seem insurmountable? If so, congratulations—you're human.

This is known as mental exhaustion, mental fatigue, or burnout, and it's more common than you might think. But when people are going through it, they sometimes feel as though it's only happening to them. Feelings involving heightened stress and anxiety, irritability, and the dark shroud of depression can creep into your life and make things seem perpetually gloomy.

This state can also make people feel jealous of people they perceive to lead stress-free lives, which is usually far from the truth. People suffering mental exhaustion may compound the issue through negative self-

Taking time out of your daily or weekly schedule to restore yourself can work wonders for reducing stress levels.

talk and internalize this state, making it a part of their identity.

Here are some ways you can identify the symptoms of mental exhaustion and alleviate them.

Signs You're Mentally Exhausted

When your stress level rises too high, it exceeds your body's ability to sustain the biochemical chain reaction involved, and you hit burnout—mental exhaustion. This state comes with emotional, behavioral, and physiological symptoms.

Emotional Symptoms

A lack of self-esteem and negative self-talk that preoccupies your thoughts for inordinately long periods of time, such as most of the day. This may also involve feelings of detachment, isolation, and a lack of focus, as well as anger, cynicism, and deep depression.

Behavioral Symptoms

There may be a sudden shift in one's normal social patterns, such as being withdrawn and avoiding other people, even close friends and family. This may also include eating differently, substance abuse (as a coping mechanism), and backing out of obligations—whether those involve work or socializing.

Physical Symptoms

Feeling overly tired and exhibiting an unusual lack of energy is a symptom of mental

fatigue. Another physical symptom is becoming uncoordinated and clumsy, such as when getting ready for work or trying to accomplish some other physical task. Other symptoms include muscle soreness or headaches.

Ways to Deal With Mental Exhaustion

The mind and body are resilient and are capable of making a full recovery from the most severe physical injuries. This holds true for mental exhaustion as well. The biggest challenge is to admit you need to make a change in order to recharge mentally and not feel guilty about it. The following are some simple tips that don't require much energy but will set you on a path toward mental rejuvenation.

Take Breaks

One of the easiest things people can do to alleviate mental exhaustion is to go somewhere quiet and relax. If your stress level builds up and you don't have ways to relieve it (such as working out or enjoying the beach), you'll start to see symptoms pop up.

Even if you're at work, taking a lunch hour walk to a quiet cafe down the street, or a park nearby, can brighten your mood and relieve stress.

Meditate

Meditation and deep breathing are practical and effective ways to alleviate the stresses of modern-day life. There are many different techniques you can use to help calm your mind and live more at peace with yourself and your surroundings. Create your own eye within the storm and reset.

Prioritize Self-Care

Self-care is sometimes viewed as being selfish, but in an age when productivity has become the highest virtue, it's essential to take care of yourself. Taking time out of your daily or weekly schedule to restore yourself can work wonders for reducing stress levels. This doesn't mean you have to go on extravagant vacations or luxurious spas—it simply means doing things for the explicit purpose of taking care of yourself.

Ian Kane is an U.S. Army veteran, author, filmmaker, and actor. He is dedicated to the development and production of innovative, thought-provoking, character-driven films and books of the highest quality. You can check out his health blog at IanKaneHealthNut.com



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