

MIND & BODY

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How Zinc Can Boost Your Immune Health

Zinc's roles have come under closer scrutiny as researchers look for therapeutics for COVID-19

Zinc is a metallic element with countless essential roles throughout your body.



JOSEPH MERCOLA

Zinc is essential for the normal development and function of your immune system, as it protects against susceptibility to pathogens, mediates natural killer cells, activates T-lymphocytes, regulates macrophages, and is central to DNA replication.

You have at least 300 enzymes that require zinc to function normally.

Evidence shows zinc helps protect the body from COVID-19 by impairing viral replication in the cell, supporting ciliary growth and function in the respiratory system, and improving the respiratory epithelial barrier.

Colds Are Coronaviruses

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified several common human coronaviruses that are responsible for upper respiratory tract illnesses, like the common

cold. Although a cold is usually a minor condition, it is also responsible for most doctor's office visits every year.

A cold can last as short as a week, but in children and the elderly, it can last longer. Cold symptoms include a stuffy head, runny nose, sore throat, headache, and sometimes a fever. These are some of the same symptoms of influenza, but the symptoms are often worse and include fever and body chills.

It wasn't until the work of Dr. Ananda Prasad in the 1970s that zinc was acknowledged as an essential mineral. A decade earlier, Prasad was studying young men who had grown up in Egypt and never attained their normal height.

After supplementing with zinc, the men grew "significantly taller." In the 1970s, zinc was acknowledged by the National Academy of Sciences as a mineral fundamental to many aspects of health. Prasad collaborated with a scientist from the University of

It is estimated most people over 65 consume just 50 percent of the recommended amount of zinc.

Michigan to demonstrate that zinc influences immunity.

Research in the past decade has identified the crucial role that zinc plays in curtailing the length and severity of upper respiratory infections. A meta-analysis published in 2017 found those who took a zinc supplement of 80 to 92 milligrams (mg) each day at the beginning of cold symptoms saw a reduction in the length of their cold by 33 percent.

Although research has demonstrated the significant positive effect zinc has on the immune system and on shortening upper respiratory infections caused by common cold viruses, further research in 2020 demonstrated that zinc is crucial to immune system function and deficiency may be linked to individuals who have severe COVID-19 illness.

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Zinc deficiency is more likely among the elderly, vegetarians, and people with certain health conditions.

Antibiotics May Alter Infant Brain Development: Study

New research adds to growing evidence that antibiotics damage infant neurological development



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JENNIFER MARGULIS

A new study published in a special issue of the journal *iScience* links low doses of antibiotics around birth to significant changes in the infant microbiome. The study, conducted on mice, also linked antibiotic exposure to important changes in gene expression in parts of the brain responsible for neurodevelopment.

This research, "Effects of Early-Life Penicillin Exposure on the Gut Microbiome and Front Cortex and Amygdala Gene Expression," may help explain the disturbing rise in neurodevelopmental disorders that we're seeing in children in the United States and other industrialized countries around the world.

For many babies, antibiotic exposure usually begins before birth.

A team of scientists from the New York University Grossman School of Medicine divided the mice into three groups. One group of pregnant mice was exposed to penicillin the week leading up to birth. The second group of mice was exposed to penicillin during the week following birth. The third group of mice, the control group, had no antibiotic exposure.

The scientists dosed the mice with penicillin at amounts that would be on par with what humans would receive. The research team then compared the composition of microbes in the pups of the two exposed groups to that in pups in the control group.

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Solar Term: 'Frost's Descent' (Oct. 23 to Nov. 6)

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.

With the solar cycle of Frost's Descent, and the huge turning point it brings, our bodies have to adjust.

Solar Term: 'Frost's Descent'

2021 Dates: Oct. 23 to Nov. 6

Frost's Descent is the last solar term of autumn, when the first frost of the season in the northern hemisphere is quickly approaching, if it hasn't happened already. It's the last period of time for things to grow before the weather

makes conditions too difficult. As the last solar term before winter, Frost's Descent, symbolically, a time to look within, review one's life, and make improvements.

The turning point in the weather is caused by cold overnight temperatures that freeze the morning dew and blanket the earth with frost. There was a farmers saying in ancient China, "If there's no frost during the time of Frost Descent, there will be a famine the following year." They knew that if the weather didn't get cold enough during this time, the insects would chomp down the autumn harvest, and the spring harvest, too.

The first frost brings a lot of damage to the tender species of the plant kingdom, but for those that are hardy, a frost is actually beneficial. Chinese cabbage and certain types of grapes used to produce ice wines or dessert wines are notable for getting even sweeter after a frost.

Mulberry is a very important and popular plant in Chinese medicine. The leaves, bark, root, and berries are all used as traditional Chinese medicinal herbs, and they carry different properties to perform different functions. The highest-quality mulberry leaves for therapeutic purposes are suggested to be harvested after Frost's Descent. The plant moves the essential trace minerals and nutrients to the leaves when frost covers them up, so those leaves that can survive after the tough weather are strong and nutritious.

The same rule applies to tea. Some of the best tea is harvested after the frost, or even after snow. In order to protect the gentle buds and leaves from dying during the extreme conditions, the tea plants work hard. One can even smell the added aroma of the tea in the field right after a snow. After one to two weeks of frost or snow, the farmers can

see if the tea trees have survived or been killed. The quality of the tea that survives becomes superb. It's sweeter and more aromatic, though the overall yield is greatly reduced. These factors have made this type of tea expensive.

Frost-hardy plants teach us that if we can endure the hardships in our lives, we can transform our suffering into wisdom and positive energy.

Impact on People

The majority of our bodily functions—such as appetite and energy—are supported by enzymes. Our enzyme activity slows down with, and can even be impaired by, the temperature drop.

With the solar cycle of Frost's Descent, and the huge turning point it brings, our bodies have to adjust. During this time, blood vessels tend to contract and tendons may tighten. People with joint problems may experience more aches during this time. Those who suffer from any kind of ulcerations or inflammation are going to feel more uncomfortable now than at other times of the year. Young people may find their acne flaring up if they don't stick to a healthy diet and routine.



Some plants become better after a frost, like Chinese cabbage and certain types of grapes used to produce ice wines.

Living in Harmony With 'Frost's Descent'

As yin energy starts to become heavier, the coldness and humidity in the air take their toll on our bodies, especially on the lungs and respiratory system.

Stay warm. Those who catch a cold or a cough easily should wear a mask that covers both the nose and mouth.

Ancient Chinese people had a saying: Supplementing food in winter is not as beneficial as in Frost Descent.

Now is the time to nurture the digestive system by avoiding cold foods and spicy foods. Root vegetables, beans, quality vegetable oils, and lean meats are all helpful. Eating the right diet to prepare our bodies before winter arrives will set a good foundation to protect against diseases that may hit us hardest in the colder months to come.

This period of time is also the best time to make preserved food from vegetables, fruit, and meat. The beneficial enzymes and quality nutrients in these foods promote vitality in the cold winter days until spring arrives.

Seasonal Foods to Eat

The best foods to eat at this time are generally those that are white in color, as well as apples, pears, citrus, cashews, beans, dates, mushrooms, olives, onions, pine nuts, soybeans, and yams. Avoid alcohol, hot chiles, and deep-fried or greasy food.

Seasonal herbs and essential oils that are helpful at this time are aniseed, basil, dill, eucalyptus, niaouli, sweet fennel, and turmeric.

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

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As the last solar term before winter, Frost's Descent is, symbolically, a time to look within, review one's life, and make improvements.



Many illnesses are blamed on teething, but are actually due to the expiration of maternal antibodies.



During infancy, babies learn through their mouths.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH MATTERS

Teething Does Not Cause ...

Teething is an important and often misunderstood stage

PARNELL DONAHUE

Many studies have confirmed that teething does not cause irritability, chewing, drooling, coughing or diarrhea and only very rarely causes fever. Yet parents are frequently concerned that their otherwise healthy babies are drooling, chewing on everything they can get in their mouths, or have diarrhea, vomiting, or symptoms of colds. Even more troublesome, some parents rub all sorts of substances—creams, jellies, even brandy—on their baby's gums.

In 2018, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) reaffirmed its policy statement telling parents not to use so-called "teething gels or creams" to treat teething in young children. Since that time, manufacturers have stopped using toxic lidocaine in these products because it can cause seizures, brain injury, heart problems, and even death. But retailers continue to sell a bevy of objects for teething babies to chew and creams and jellies to rub on a baby's gums to relieve teething symptoms. Before purchasing such products, let's have a look at what these "symptoms" really represent and see what, if anything, is needed.

Sucking and Chewing

During infancy, babies learn through their mouths. This early learning is so important that I call the babies' mouths their learning centers.

Picture this: Baby Girl is lying in her crib and by chance, her hand falls into her mouth. Baby licks it, sucks on it, pulls it out, looks at it, and wonders, "What is this thing?" "Where did it come from?" Then she drops her sweet little hand and it lands again in her mouth. She gums it a little harder and pulls it away as she realizes that hurts. She soon realizes that thing is part of her. She'll also lick and suck her fingers, her thumb her forearm, even her toes. "Wow," she thinks. "I have a lot of parts."

Pacifiers block the schoolhouse door, which slows learning, especially speech development! It's okay to use a pacifier while baby is sleeping as some studies show it might reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome. And the AAP says

pacifiers may be used during sleep, but during waketime, babies should have their personal learning centers open and ready for use as much as possible.

Chewing on things helps your baby figure out what is part of them, what is food, and what is something that needs more study.

You may have seen babies with swollen, red, sometimes black and blue gums that look sore. If your gums looked like that, the last thing you would want to do is chew on a pretzel or eat an apple. Consequently, a baby may refuse a teething ring put in its mouth, or move it to a place that doesn't hurt.

Teething rings will teach your baby about teething rings, but they won't help her teeth come in or alleviate any pain. They are much more likely to cause pain.

Drooling is not a sign of teething.

How many times have you picked up a baby only to have her drool what seems like gallons of saliva all over your shirt or blouse? If you have a baby or have had a baby, you know what I mean. "Oh she's teething," your well-meaning neighbor will say with a laugh.

At about 6 months of age, babies need more nourishment than they can get from milk. More saliva is required to swallow and properly digest the new foods. Wise Mother Nature knows that, so expect that near 6 months of age your infant will start to make more saliva, much of which drools down her chin. Likewise, she'll develop teeth needed to chew the new foods. After several weeks of practice, she'll learn how to get the food and the saliva into her stomach without looking like a rabid puppy. Next time your neighbor says your baby is teething, you can laugh and say "Yep," and let it go.

Colds, vomiting, and diarrhea are not caused by teething.

During pregnancy, antibodies are transferred from the mother to her baby through the placenta. Antibodies are produced in response to illnesses the mother has had and from immunizations she has received. They are active in the baby until he's about 6 months old and keep him from developing

About 6 months after birth, first teeth appear, antibodies start to disappear, and babies become susceptible to illnesses. Colds, vomiting, and diarrhea, often with low-grade fever, are common at this age. The good news is that babies can now make their own antibodies and cure themselves. Before scientists learned about antibodies and their transfer from mother to baby, many people, including doctors, attributed these illnesses to teething. I call these "Old doctor's tales."

Teething does not cause high fever and sick-acting babies. We all have bacteria and viruses in our mouths that can penetrate our gums and enter our bloodstream when we brush our teeth or eat coarse foods. In healthy individuals, these germs are filtered out in the lungs and no harm comes. Infants can experience this same phenomenon when a tooth erupts, which can cause a short, low-grade fever.

Whereas a fever is a concern in any infant, babies who have just popped a new tooth, do not appear sick or uncomfortable, and continue to eat and chew on things are not a worry; a baby who has a fever and is not eating and active, or looks sick, should see his pediatrician regardless of the state of his teeth.

The next time you see a baby chewing on his hand and drooling, know that he's starting to learn about the world and reminding you to leave all the "teething" creams, gels, and devices in the store and start his college fund!

Enjoy the children in your life, and may God continue to bless you and your family!

We all have bacteria and viruses in our mouths that can penetrate our gums and enter our bloodstream when we brush our teeth or eat coarse foods.

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Chewing on things helps your baby figure out what is part of them, what is food, and what is something that needs more study.



Teething rings will teach your baby about teething rings, but they won't help her teeth come in or alleviate any pain.

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Oysters, kidney beans, pumpkin seeds, and mushrooms are great ways to add more zinc to your diet.

How Zinc Can Boost Your Immune Health

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Zinc Crucial for Immune System Development

Since the 1970s, scientists have discovered several facts about zinc and how it plays a central role in the immune system. Your immune system is your body's first line of defense. Whether this is against infectious disease, wound infections, or chronic disease, your immune system plays a crucial role.

Researchers have spent decades studying the different ways that you can support your immune system to improve function. Nutrients play a vital role in supporting your immune system, and one of those nutrients is zinc.

Early and outpatient treatment from the Front Line COVID-19 Critical Care Alliance, contains zinc, as does the protocol recommended and prescribed by Dr. Vladimir Zelenko. Zelenko created a website to facilitate crowd-sourcing medical data from frontline primary care doctors around the world.

There are academics who also support Zelenko's efforts, including some at the University of Texas, which hosts a download page describing the history and citations behind the Zelenko Protocol. Zelenko and the Front Line critical care doctors used their knowledge of the association between zinc and your immune system to develop their successful protocols. Data has shown:

- People who are deficient in zinc have an increased susceptibility to pathogens, including through the skin barrier.
- Zinc mediates nonspecific immunity, including natural killer cells and neutrophils.
- Zinc deficiency prevents the activation of T-lymphocytes, production of Th1 cytokine, and the ability of B lymphocytes to help. During deficiency, B lymphocyte development is also compromised.
- Deficiency affects the function of macrophage cells, which can trigger cytokine production and dysregulated intracellular death.
- Zinc is central to DNA replication, RNA transcription, and cell activation and division.

Evidence Zinc Helps Protect Against COVID-19

Campbell describes several functions by which zinc helps protect the body from COVID-19, including helping to stop viruses from entering cells. Zinc also supports the growth and function of ciliary hairs in the respiratory system that move microbes and debris up and out of the airways. These hairs move in a synchronized beat, like rowers in a boat.

One study published in the American Journal of Rhinology and Allergy showed

A zinc deficiency can significantly impact your immune system, but it can also result in a hyper-inflammatory response from pro-inflammatory cytokines.

For links to studies mentioned in this article, please see the article online at [TheEpochTimes.com](https://www.theepochtimes.com)

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

that zinc helps to stimulate the ciliary beat frequency and may help improve mucociliary clearance, which is essential for clearing the lungs of mucous. Another group of scientists found that supplementing animals deficient in zinc affected the length of the cilia and number of epithelial cells in the bronchus.

Research has shown zinc also functions to improve the respiratory epithelial barrier, the "skin" that lines your respiratory tract and is constantly exposed to particles and microbes from the air you breathe. Evidence has shown that zinc influences interferon-gamma, a type of cytokine. Cytokines are proteins that act like smoke signals to alert the immune system to an invader. Interferon-gamma plays a significant role in defending against intracellular pathogens. When there is a reduction in this cytokine, it results in immunological impairment.

While the jury is still out on whether interferon-gamma plays a role as an anti-tumor mechanism, some studies have shown that it does have a positive effect on patients' survival of certain cancers.

As you've likely heard throughout 2020, zinc also has a direct effect on viral replication inside the cells.

A great way to learn about zinc is a short video Dr. John Campbell posted on YouTube. He reviews some of the science behind the association between zinc and the immune system and shares his belief that zinc is one biological basis some people suffer more severe COVID infections.

Campbell describes some of the effects that zinc has inside the cells, including decreasing the effects of RNA-dependent RNA polymerase, often called replicase since it helps replicate the virus inside the cells.

Campbell points out that many conditions associated with a zinc deficiency are also known comorbidities for COVID-19. These conditions include:

- Arteriosclerosis
- Autoimmune diseases
- Bronchial asthma
- Cancer
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Diabetes
- Being on diuretics
- Advanced age
- Immunosuppression
- Kidney disease and liver cirrhosis/damage
- Tobacco smoking
- Obesity

Zinc Ionophores Improve Effectiveness

In a short MedCram video posted on YouTube, Dr. Roger Seheult reviews the compelling evidence that suggests how zinc ionophores (a chemical that helps ions cross cell membranes) improve zinc uptake into the cell. This is a crucial component of stopping viral replication. As Seheult explains, zinc cannot easily penetrate the fatty walls of the cell but needs to be inside the cell to stop viral replication.

There are several zinc ionophores that can do the job. In this video, Seheult describes the role that hydroxychloroquine and chloroquine play. Hydroxychloroquine is the ionophore that Zelenko uses

in his protocol to move zinc into the cells.

In his peer-reviewed study, the researchers compared 141 treated patients against 377 untreated patients from the same community.

The data collection showed only four of the 141 treated patients were hospitalized and 58 of the untreated patients were hospitalized. One patient in the treatment group died and 13 patients in the untreated group died.

There are also other natural compounds that may work to get zinc into cells, except for perhaps in the most serious cases. Two that have been studied include quercetin and epigallocatechin gallate (EGCG), which is found in green tea.

In a comparative study, researchers evaluated quercetin and EGCG as zinc ionophores. They demonstrated ionophore action on a lipid membrane system and concluded that these polyphenols may raise zinc levels in the cells and have a significant impact on the biological action of zinc.

Interestingly, quercetin is also a potent antiviral, and quercetin and EGCG have the added advantage of inhibiting the 3CL protease. According to a 2020 study in the Journal of Enzyme Inhibition and Medicinal Chemistry, the ability to inhibit SARS coronaviruses "is presumed to be directly linked to suppress the activity of SARS-CoV 3CLpro in some cases."

Zinc Vitamins May Trigger a Copper Imbalance

Zinc deficiency is not uncommon. Experts believe that about 17.3 percent of the global population is deficient and it is estimated most people over 65 consume just 50 percent of the recommended amount of zinc.

- Four common signs that your body may need more zinc:
- Lack of appetite
- Mental lethargy
- Impaired sense of taste or smell
- Frequent colds, flu, or infections
- Hair loss

While some tests used to identify deficiency include hair analysis, urine samples, or an oral taste test, blood plasma tests are the most common. The oral taste test can be done at home through mail-order labs but it is not always reliable. People who are at risk for zinc deficiency include:

- Those with malnutrition
- The elderly
- People with inflammatory or autoimmune diseases
- Vegetarians and vegans

Early zinc deficiency is largely subclinical—meaning you do not have symptoms that a doctor would treat—yet it does impact the immune system. Although you may be tempted to begin supplementing with zinc, it's important to realize that your body has an intricate method of maintaining a balance of trace minerals such as copper, iron, chromium, and zinc. The best way to readily achieve proper balance is to get your minerals from real food.

Although it may be necessary to supplement during illness when your body needs more zinc, I recommend trying to meet your daily requirement from foods. These are some of the best food sources of zinc:

- Alaskan King crab
- Oysters
- Kidney beans
- Lamb
- Grass-fed beef
- Cheddar or Swiss cheese
- Mushrooms
- Spinach
- Pumpkin seeds

AFRICA STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK

Antibiotics May Alter Infant Brain Development: Study

New research adds to growing evidence that antibiotics damage infant neurological development

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Low-Dose Penicillin Exposure Disrupts the Microbiome

The scientists found that exposure to even low doses of penicillin changed the composition of the microbiome in the mice. More specifically, the antibiotic-exposed pups had notably decreased numbers of the beneficial bacteria, lactobacillus, among other species of bacteria and notably increased numbers of Enterococcus, Enterobacteriales, and Pseudomonas, among others.

The scientists further found that these changes were linked to changes in gene expression in the brains of the exposed mice. Most disturbingly, perhaps, this experiment showed that multiple pathways crucial for normal neurodevelopment were negatively affected in the antibiotic-exposed mice.

Because the doses of penicillin were so low, the researchers argued that it's unlikely that the brain effects they observed were a direct result of the antibiotics themselves. Instead, they hypothesized that it's more likely that the brain changes observed in the mice were due to the changes in their microbiomes.

In other words, due to antibiotic exposure, "the gut-brain axis is perturbed leading to organizational effects that permanently alter the structure and function of the brain," according to the scientists.

They go on to conclude that early-life antibiotic exposure may harm the developing brains of human infants similarly.

"These results provide evidence that early-life antibiotic exposure in humans may have effects not only on the infant microbiome but also on gene expression within critical brain structures, including the frontal cortex and amygdala, which are vulnerable to perinatal insults," the scientists wrote.

"These initial findings require further validation but suggest a paradigm shift in early-life antibiotic use should be considered. Although not considered a potentially severe CNS [central nervous system] teratogen such as alcohol, cocaine, or toxoplasmosis ... early-life antibiotic use may have unexpected consequences."

Dr. Robert Zajac, a pediatrician based in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, who wasn't involved in the study, finds these results to be concerning, but not surprising. Zajac said that he and his medical team try to not use antibiotics unless they're absolutely necessary.

"Occasionally we recommend antibiotics when harmful bacteria grow beyond our immune system's ability to self-correct. But that same antibiotic (or worse, other antibiotics that are used without a benefit that justifies the risk) can wreak havoc on our healthy and helpful microbiome, disrupting our gut flora for months or even years," Zajac said.

Exposed Before Birth

For many babies, antibiotic exposure usually begins before birth. In fact, there's evidence that a large percentage—perhaps as much as one-third—of the 3.75 million babies born in the United States each year are getting dosed with antibiotics before, during, or just after birth.

AGE WELL

You Can Tame Chronic Inflammation

Inflammation should be a life saver, but all too often it's a hidden source of illness

MAT LECOMPTÉ

Inflammation is a part of life, and it can be a really good thing. It helps you heal from colds, illnesses, bumps, cuts, and more.

But too much inflammation, such as when it flares up when there's no need for it, is dangerous. And it happens to a lot of people. Called "chronic" inflammation, this type of inflammation sets the immune system into motion almost constantly.

Chronic inflammation is associated with a host of chronic health conditions, such as

One review article, published in 2015 in the journal *Pharmacotherapy*, found that antibiotics account for nearly 80 percent of all medications a woman might be prescribed during pregnancy and that between 20 to 25 percent of pregnant women will use antibiotics to treat urinary tract infections, sexually transmitted disease, and upper respiratory infections.

At the same time, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) now recommends that prophylactic antibiotics be given to all laboring women who test positive for Group B strep. Illness due to Group B strep remains relatively rare (approximately 1 in 600 live births). But another study, of more than 7,500 pregnant women, revealed that nearly one-third of pregnant women were given antibiotics. In that study, published in March 2013 in the journal *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, only 13 percent of pregnant women showed risk factors for Group B strep, but 31 percent of the participants received prophylactic antibiotics anyway.

While the 2013 study emphasized the success of the prenatal use of antibiotics to avoid Group B strep infections, which can be dangerous or even deadly for newborns, the data within it suggests that we're prescribing antibiotics to pregnant women far more often than necessary.

According to the CDC, 31.7 percent of all births in the United States are via Cesarean sections. For surgical birth, intravenous prophylactic antibiotics are almost always prescribed, ostensibly to prevent maternal infection. If these antibiotics are started during labor or any time before the infant's cord is clamped, the baby will be exposed as well. The baby will also be exposed to antibiotics via the mother's milk, as many antibiotics are secreted in detectable amounts in breast milk.

Falsely Assumed Safe
Antibiotic use before or around the time of birth has long been considered to have minimal adverse effects on babies. However, studies that suggest they're safe have only looked for the most obvious, short-term consequences of antibiotic over-use, such as increased thrush infections (an overgrowth of yeast usually kept in check by a healthy microbiome). These older studies haven't examined longer-term health consequences.

But in recent years, peer-reviewed scientific research has linked antibiotic exposure to an increased risk of obesity, an increased risk of asthma, and higher incidents of bowel diseases and even juvenile arthritis.

At the same time, a growing body of studies has shown the importance of a healthy infant microbiome. And though it may seem counterintuitive, the microbiome is particularly important to brain function. The brain contains around 100 billion neurons. These neurons communicate with each other via electrical and chemical signaling. As a baby's brain develops, the neurons form connections with thousands of other neurons. This process continues at a decreasing rate throughout our lifetime. And scientists are increasingly realizing that a healthy gut



microbiome is necessary for our brains to signal properly.

Experts now believe that the communication between the central nervous system and the intrinsic nervous system of the gastrointestinal tract, which has come to be known as the "gut-brain axis," is crucial not only for proper digestion and proper brain functioning, but also for overall health.

"There's clear evidence that the gut can have profound effects on the brain, and gut flora is part of that process," said Dr. Elizabeth Mumper, a pediatrician in private practice in Lynchburg, Virginia, who specializes in brain disorders. "So we know that certain flora in the gut can produce metabolic products that give chemical messages to the brain that can alter feelings, emotions, and potentially alter cognition."

It seems that early antibiotic exposure affects metabolism and inflammation, which can in turn affect brain structure, function, and gene expression. A September 2020 study conducted by a team of researchers in Minnesota found that, compared to the control group, infants exposed to antibiotics after birth had both hearing and memory issues at 1 month of age.

The antibiotic-exposed pups had notably decreased numbers of the beneficial bacteria.

"We also know that the gut flora that's developed in the first thousand days of life has a profound impact on the child's chances of having chronic illness later in life," Mumper said. "In general, the more diverse gut flora, the less the child is likely to have chronic illness later on, and antibiotics have the effect of killing off some of that good gut flora, therefore leading to less diversity."

My friend and colleague, Zoey O'Toole, a health advocate with an undergraduate degree in physics who has worked as an electrical engineer and a computer programmer, has long suspected that over-exposure to antibiotics played a role in her children's speech and neurological issues.

"I had two children who were exposed to substantial amounts of antibiotic near birth—I got two rounds before my daughter Kalea was born and at least one round after she was born and possibly two, to treat mastitis," said O'Toole, who lives in upstate New York. "I also had antibiotics in labor with my son, and then Beckett himself had two rounds at 5 months and 15 months. Both my children have ADHD, speech issues, dyslexic tendencies, and high anxiety."

Better Outcomes

In a research study published in 2013 in the *North American Journal of Medicine and Science*, Mumper herself found a clear association between antibiotic use and autism.

In the study, she identified the best practices that lead to a cohort of 294 children in which there were zero autism diagnoses

(when at least six would be expected, based on CDC autism rates at the time).

These best practices included minimizing exposure to environmental toxins (pesticides and herbicides), maximizing breastfeeding, using probiotics in infancy, nutritional counseling, limiting the use of antibiotics, avoiding acetaminophen (the main ingredient in infant Tylenol), and vaccinating children on an evidence-based, but less aggressive vaccine schedule.

Changing Clinical Practice

According to the New York University research, prior to 1945, no children were exposed to antibiotics during childhood. Today, the average U.S. child receives nearly three rounds of antibiotics before the age of 2. If early antibiotic exposure is indeed causing altered brain function in a high percentage of U.S. children, we must find ways to mitigate those effects. "Our present findings should trigger re-examining widespread antibiotic prescriptions when their use is not directly indicated," the study authors wrote.

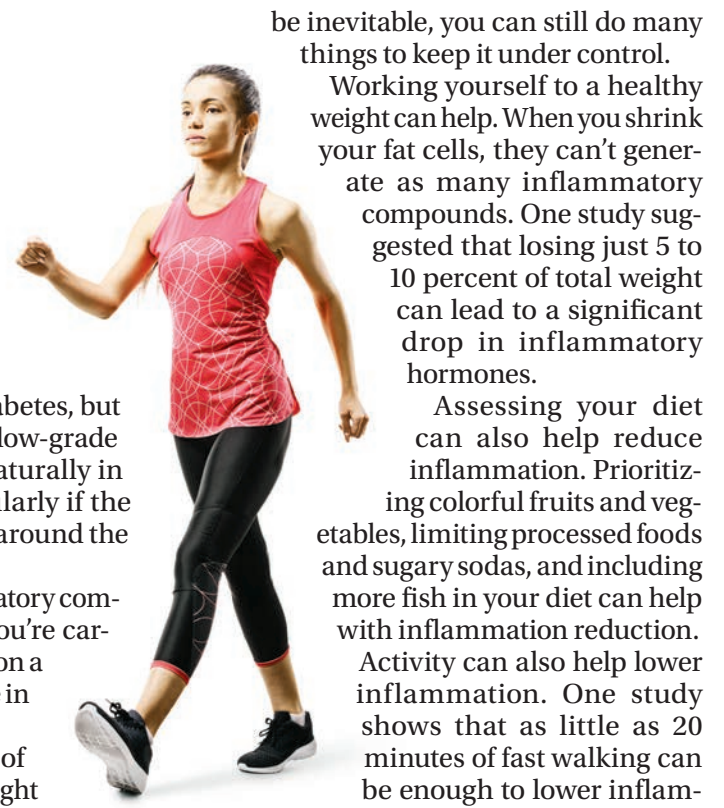
How? Some clinicians recommend that we do a better job of screening mothers for Group B strep risk factors, so that thousands of babies aren't needlessly exposed to antibiotics to prevent just one or two cases of illness.

Others say reducing the number of unnecessary Cesarean births will also help reduce antibiotic over-use. The WHO recommends that Cesarean births be limited to the 10 to 15 percent of births that are truly high risk, yet at some U.S. hospitals, the C-section rate is as high as 70 percent, according to a study from the University of Minnesota. These excess surgeries can cause many health complications for both the mother and the baby, in addition to problems resulting from antibiotic exposure to the infants.

And pediatricians recommend that we find effective interventions to treat the guts of those babies who truly need early antibiotics. In Mumper's practice, new moms are given support and encouragement to help them exclusively breastfeed which helps establish beneficial bacteria in their babies' guts, she said. Mumper also recommended to antibiotics played a role in her children's speech and neurological issues.

But, perhaps the most important tactic is a combination of prevention and nutrition. "It's really important not to over-medicate kids in the first thousand days of life," Mumper said. "And also to really work on their nutrition, so [that] when you first start to feed them, they become used to bitter tastes and fermented foods. Sugar is an enemy of healthy gut flora, so it's important to help your baby develop a palate that won't just prefer sweet foods."

Jennifer Margulis, Ph.D., is a science journalist and the author of "Your Baby, Your Way: Taking Charge of Your Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Parenting Decisions for a Happier, Healthier Family" (Scribner, 2015). Learn more about her work and sign up for her free weekly email at [JenniferMargulis.net](https://www.jennifermargulis.net)



matory markers in the body. Virtually any type of movement will work, and doing it for at least 30 minutes a day, five days per week is even better.

Stress management and good sleep can keep inflammation under control as well. Stress and inconsistent sleep are both associated with higher levels of inflammatory hormones, so getting a handle on those can help.

Techniques to manage stress include mindfulness, meditation, exercise, yoga, or hobbies such as knitting, gardening, and crafting. Gratitude is a great antidote to stress, so it's worth reflecting on what's right in your life to counter stress-inducing thoughts about problems. You can work on sleep by setting consistent sleep and wake times, avoiding eating too close to bedtime, limiting evening alcohol, and making your bedroom a relaxing place.

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



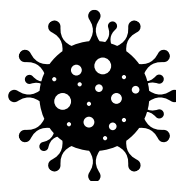
Differing feelings and beliefs about the vaccine have made it impossible for many couples to resume their pre-COVID life.

MINDSET MATTERS

When COVID Threatens Your Relationship

How to stay together when feelings about the virus are radically different

NANCY COLIER



Remember that whatever situation is happening right now, it will pass. Your relationship existed before COVID, and it can and will exist after it's through.

VECTORES DE LIA/SHUTTERSTOCK

The pandemic has massively disrupted normal life, creating conflict and suffering in innumerable ways. This much we know. But what I didn't know, or expect, was how much disruption and the particular kind of conflict the pandemic would create in marriages and long-term relationships.

For the first year of the pandemic, couples actually managed well. The physical and emotional consequences of the virus, being cooped up in the house together, the losses endured, fear, anxiety, financial instability, all of it was handled, by and large, with compassion and patience. Many couples, in fact, grew closer and more appreciative of each other over the first year of pandemic isolation. And yet, something has definitely shifted.

Perhaps it's the fallout from all the time spent together, or all that required compassion, but what's showing up in my office now is a whole lot of impatience—and conflict. Particularly, that is, when it comes to what's safe, how to reenter life, and at what pace.

Couples Who Disagree About COVID

Chloe and Zach are struggling. Both are vaccinated, but for Chloe, being vaccinated means she has the green light to get back to normal life; COVID is in her rearview mirror. It means she can go out to restaurants and events without fear. She still wears a mask when she goes to indoor events, but for the most part, she is living a post-COVID life. Her husband Zach, on the other hand, doesn't trust the vaccine like his wife does. He's still anxious about breakthrough infections and avoids all indoor events, even masked.

After Chloe attends in-person events, which she has started to do (alone), Zach spends a period of days quarantining in their small studio apartment, so as not to be potentially exposed to the virus. His anxiety about getting sick from COVID was only mildly eased by the vaccine, and he is definitely not ready to join his wife in regular life, and not ready to take advantage of all the possibilities that are opening up.

In another example, Steve received the vaccine as soon as it came out; he never gave it a second thought. He understood that it might not be foolproof, but felt the benefits far outweighed the risks. Steve trusted what the scientists and health organizations were saying and was ready to roll up his sleeve, and move on with life. He was particularly excited about being able to travel again with his wife, as this had been one of their favorite activities as a couple.

Lynn, however, who had grown up in an authoritarian country, felt differently. The idea of having to take a vaccine and

show papers in order to be able to participate in daily life made her distrustful and afraid. In addition, she followed a rigorously healthy diet and what she described as a toxin-free lifestyle. She simply didn't want the vaccine in her body.

All this to say, Steve was vaccinated and Lynn was not.

Learning to Hold Different Truths

I'm not here to discuss the rightness or wrongness of any of these choices regarding COVID. For each of these individuals, the virus and vaccine elicited very different experiences and feelings, all of which were real and true for the person experiencing them. Each of these well-educated and well-informed individuals had heard the science and arguments in every direction. They already knew everything I could tell them in terms of stats and studies.

The problem that needed immediate attention was the fact that their differing feelings and beliefs about the vaccine made it impossible for them to resume their pre-COVID life as a couple. They could no longer go out to restaurants, attend events, travel, or do any of the things they used to enjoy together. They couldn't live as a couple in the world, either because of not having been vaccinated or not feeling safe to do so.

As a result, the partner who is ready to reenter life generally feels resentment, judgment, and anger toward their partner for depriving them of the chance to enjoy life again, and for feelings that they deem as crazy or overly anxious. Their partner's experience is something that needs to be fixed (hopefully, by me). At the same time, they feel fear and sadness over potentially losing their partner, and the person they want accompanying them in normal life.

Simultaneously, the partner who chooses not to be vaccinated, or is still anxious even with the vaccine, feels judged, pathologized, and blamed. They feel that their experience isn't heard or allowed; they feel rejected. My intention in this situation, which is appearing more and more frequently these days, is not to persuade anyone out of their truth or convince them of any other truth than the one they hold. Rather, it's to help the couple find a way to be together with their differing truths—to reinvent who and how they will be a couple in their new post-COVID incarnation, if that's possible.

If you are in this situation, regarding COVID or any other highly impactful life choice, the first thing to remember is that you are not the keeper of The Truth. It's not up to you to decide what your partner's experience is or should be. What's true for you is true and what's true for your partner is also true—even when the two truths are radically different.

The beginning of a new relationship is joining these two differing truths with an and not a but. Until you can meet your partner's truth with curiosity and some degree of friendliness, real progress will be stymied. So, step one is to meet your partner's truth, to try to understand their experience, not judge, pathologize, or blame it. And not blame them for holding you (both) back from life, assuming that if they chose to, they could have a different truth than the one they have. This truth that you are rejecting, no matter what you think of it, belongs to someone you love, and therefore is a truth you must be able to allow.

The second step is to talk about how you want to be together or if there is a way to be together with your differing truths. Are there other ways to enjoy each other as a couple, to feel enjoyment and intimacy? These are hard conversations but conversations that need to happen. If your partner is not willing, for now, to join you back in the world, or welcome your experience as it is, what will this new reality mean for you as a couple? Furthermore, what are the losses that will come with this new reality? These losses need to be recognized and honored, without blame.

At the same time, remember that whatever situation is happening right now, it will pass. Your relationship existed before COVID, and it can and will exist after it's through. That is, if you have the courage to allow your reality, your partner's reality, and your new reality as a couple, to allow all of them to exist right now, as they are.

Nancy Colier is a psychotherapist, interfaith minister, public speaker, workshop leader, and author of "Can't Stop Thinking: How to Let Go of Anxiety and Free Yourself from Obsessive Rumination" and "The Power of Off: The Mindful Way to Stay Sane in a Virtual World." For more information, visit NancyColier.com



Vaccination status has begun to sharply limit what some couples can do together.

TIMOTHY A. CLARY/APP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Are there other ways to enjoy each other as a couple, to feel enjoyment and intimacy?

My Favorite Pieces of Life Advice

Simple wisdom is easy to overlook, difficult to practice, and profound in effect

MIKE DONGHIA

One of my goals for sharing my writing is to keep myself accountable. It fills the role of a coach who keeps telling me to stick to the fundamentals and do the little things right.

I'm absolutely convinced that the best advice for living well is simple. Go ahead and scroll through the archives of our blog, the topics can appear almost silly in their simplicity, at first glance.

How could anyone possibly need advice on some of these topics? Who's Googling things such as "how to live simply" or "how to be kind to your kids"? Do they really not know?

Of course they do! We type these simple phrases into Google, but we aren't looking for an instruction manual. We're hoping to catch a vision of what life could be like if we actually started living out these simple truths. Because let's be honest, in the daily grind of life, we sometimes lose our way. We default to the path of least resistance. We give in to immediate gratification instead of living in a better way of being.

So What?

My wife and I aren't special. If you met us, I think you would like us, but what we hope to offer the world is something simple. It's not the advice of experts who have seen it all and done it all—it's a vision. A vision of a simpler life lived more intentionally and relationally. That's it.

And as we live it out, we share our journey publicly on a blog. Sometimes, we'll write about things we hope to do better, and sometimes, we write about what's worked for us and what hasn't.

Our strength is that we take the simple-sounding advice a little more seriously than the average person. We try not to laugh it off as obvious or elementary—not until we've mastered it.

Now What?

Alright, so by now you're ready for the advice promised in the title. But let me warn you, nothing on this list is going to sound earth-shattering. The power isn't in the advice, it's in the doing. It's in taking hold of these simple ideas and taking them seriously. Treat them with the utmost seriousness, and I can assure you—from personal experience—that your life will be changed in time.

25 Pieces of Life Advice:

- Take simple ideas seriously.
- Keep all of your endeavors as simple as possible. No extra happiness is awarded in life for taking the most creative route to your destination.
- Set hard limits on most pleasures. Don't let yourself be destroyed by your desires.
- Relationships are the only pleasure that grows with exposure. Friendship is the only wealth that matters.
- Do the real thing. Stop planning, reading, and learning about it. Get started before you feel ready.
- Find a way to clear your mind and sleep. Even the best plans are derailed by a lack of rest.
- One of the most practical ways to love others in your daily life is by being reliable and responsive.
- Build new habits by starting so small that failure isn't possible (such as doing one push-up per day for 14 days).
- Do the hardest things first. The little stuff will usually take care of itself.
- It's not rocket science, it's consistency. Keep showing up and doing the work, especially when you can't see the results. If results were instant or certain, everyone would be doing it.



Enjoy the journey. Don't be in such a hurry to be a day older.

- Be decisive. Not deciding now almost always means a more complicated or painful decision later.
- Spend less than you earn. Overspending is an avoidable source of misery.
- Get really good at something. You'll be useful to others, and this is good for both you and them.
- Don't wait until you feel like it. You tell yourself you'll do something tomorrow, but you won't. Don't underestimate your ability to fool yourself with the same trick for years on end.

Life's greatest pleasures are free. Would you rather be a billionaire without friends or living paycheck-to-paycheck with three of the best friends a person could have? That should tell you all you need to know about the value of friendship.

- Enjoy the journey. Don't be in such a hurry to be a day older.
- More is never enough. If you can't find contentment with what you have now, more will only make it worse.
- Exercise every day. If the benefits of exercise came in a pill, it would be the greatest scientific breakthrough in medical history.
- Spend each day trying to be a little wiser than when you woke up.
- Be patient. No matter your competence



The joy of a rich and meaningful life is often found in the simplest ways.

In the daily grind of life we sometimes lose our way. We default to the path of least resistance.

or the intensity of your effort, some things take time.

- Focus on the things you can control. Focus on what you can do today. Your life will be filled with far less anxiety.
- If you're a parent, you'll never regret the moments that you say "yes" to playing with your kids when they ask. That stage can be exhausting, but it's short and precious.
- Work on one thing at a time. There's a big cost to switching tasks that we often fail to account for.
- Decluttering your home is a choice that will send positive ripple effects throughout your entire life.
- Be curious about the world around you right now and how it works. Master this skill, and you'll banish boredom forever.

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

would've been horrible. I'm safe. My car wasn't damaged. I'm still here. I'm good. The other person is also good and without damage to their car. No extra money had to be shelled out for anything. No exchanging of insurance information. We walked away unscathed.

It easily could've been a different story. Yet I was so focused on what almost happened that I overlooked what actually happened.

How often do we do that? How often do we go through life hyper-focused on what almost happened versus what actually happened? How often do we replay all the negative things versus seeing and celebrating the moments and experiences that were good, worthy, and pivotal to our journey?

I can speak for myself and say that I do it often. I did it last week. It's easy to give our attention to the negative or "almost" moments. It's easy to ruminate over those experiences. What I learned and am learning is that that's no way to live. When we keep our attention on the negative, we can lose sight of what actually matters. We can lose sight of the good unfolding in our lives in the current moment. We miss out on leaning into gratitude.

I'm not suggesting you ignore or stuff anything down. We have full permission to sit with and feel what needs to be felt in a given moment. I did that. I allowed myself to be frustrated, annoyed, angry even. But, I also let myself become consumed by what almost happened, and that clouded my vision. That fogged up my ability to see the full picture. The full picture being "yes—I almost got into an accident, but I

didn't. I walked away."

It's the same with many experiences. Life is full of twists. I say that often because it's true. It's full of ups, downs, and standstill moments. The full picture isn't one side of that. The full picture isn't just the twist or turn, it's also the coming around to the other side of the bend.

The full picture isn't just the twist or turn, it's also the coming around to the other side of the bend.

We have the opportunity to look at life through more than one lens. We have permission to see the picture in full; what could've happened and what didn't. We have permission to see who we are on the other side of it. Life is layered and multifaceted. Our view of it can be too.

As this week unfolds, I invite myself and others to shift our lens so we may see the full, vibrant picture that is life fully lived. May we give ourselves permission to see our lives and who we are in them in fullness.

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

BSO/SHUTTERSTOCK



COVID VACCINE

Couples are being divided by their understanding of the safety, efficacy, and necessity of mandatory vaccination.

MINDSET MATTERS

Finding Beauty in Chaos

The pandemic upended our lives and gave us important lessons and new opportunities



ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

DONNA MARTELLI

Doom, gloom, and misery are everywhere. COVID-19 has rocked our world and many people remain afraid of the virus. In innocence, ignorance, or even knowingly, many have allowed fear to become the idol that they serve.

But there may be an overlooked silver lining here. Rebel that I am, I decided to survey people about their positive outcomes from this craziness. As you read these comments, please think of the gains you experienced during the pandemic and are perhaps still experiencing. Think about the blessings in disguise that you have encountered and let them uplift and encourage you.

Julie, a dancer and dance teacher, said: "The precious gift is this: being faced with change and how it has affected my art. I am happy to say that I am going forward with joy. I have needed to strip away the frills and delve into a deeper place; studying on my own, working on my art, and enjoying nature and life brings me clarity. I will now teach, coach, and create with limited groups and intimate performances. Ahhh, and to think, I thought last year was the end, but it's only the beginning."

Sheryl, an office worker, said: "Working from home is the best byproduct of the pandemic. Because of it, I'm healthier and enjoy more time with my family."

Suetta loved it, and she says, "My marriage is stronger since I'm working from home, and my new lunch buddy is my husband."

Brandy, a very diligent young lady, said: "I took up several new crafting hobbies and decided to open an online crafting business called 'Not Your Normal Knick Knacks.' I also enrolled in college to get my associate of applied science degree with a double major in human services and psychology."

Kari, who worked in an office, said: "I was blessed to work the entire time. I met some of the most sincere people along the way." So, let's see. So far, we see these benefits:

- Getting rid of frills
- Studying
- Having time to think

Some incredibly significant gains are represented here, but they don't fit the fear-inducing beat the mainstream media drums 24/7.

- Working from home
- Enjoying more time with family
- Embracing a healthier lifestyle
- Experiencing a better marriage
- Developing new hobbies
- Starting a new online business
- Enrolling in college
- Meeting new friends

Some incredibly significant gains are represented here, but they don't fit the fear-inducing beat that the mainstream media drums 24/7. Why is that? Could that be because these media have an interest in peddling fear? That old newspaper saying about how to position tragic news—if it bleeds, it leads—likely applies. But there's always beauty in chaos. It may seem elusive at first, but as we search for it, we will find we emerge from such experiences stronger and with renewed clarity.

Every time I spoke with someone, I learned of more benefits that people gained during this stressful time.

Shannon, who worked in a hardware store chain, said: "People were rude during the pandemic. I got cussed out at work all the time. So, instead of being mean back or walking away, I decided to pour out kindness, an exceedingly small piece of my heart, one day. It helped me more than it helped them."

"They still were angry, but I chose to be better. God helped me through that and gave me a new job at a beautiful place with positive people. It pays less, but my peace of mind is more valuable than any amount of money."

Not only was her new job more enjoyable, but she also found peace of mind.

Marianna, a fitness instructor, said: "Staying home seemed like a vacation to me. It was early spring, so I learned about landscaping and gardening and began my new outdoor adventure. I had to be creative where I was, and I was at home."

"Pulling weeds, clearing my yard of sticks, arranging stones, and adding mulch and borders became my new occupation. I found some new grocery items and learned some creative cooking because my old standbys were not available. One night, we had a dinner that was indeed creative and somewhat novel: leftover chicken, pickled beets, and sliced water chestnuts plus an onion that was in my fridge all combined to make a stir-fry."

Additional benefits realized during 2020:

- Finding peace of mind
- Learning gardening and landscaping
- Discovering new food products and recipes
- Expressing creativity by thinking outside the proverbial box

It's almost always possible to gain from any loss, as long as we remember to grow through the process. Remember the positive things that you have discovered during this strange time and be thankful for them. Write them down. Refer to them often, and they will be in your memory when you face complex challenges in the future.

You can make it through any challenge if you decide to find the beauty in chaos.

COVID-19 has upended our lives, but look beyond that and you'll find opportunity amid the hardship.



Remember the positive things that you have discovered during this strange time and be thankful for them.

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JOSEPH MERCOLA

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, good doctors have done what good doctors do and have given their patients safe and effective therapeutics to treat COVID-19. While public health officials said nothing could be done, many doctors applied lessons learned from previous viral infections and helped their patients support their immune systems with safe measures that have a known history. Common measures suggested by those doctors have included the use of vitamin D and antioxidants. As the pandemic wears on, mounting evidence points to the efficacy of many of these treatments, including quercetin. Quercetin is a plant flavonol, a potent antioxidant found in many fruits, vegetables, seeds, and leaves. It's safe, inexpensive, easy to obtain, and can help zinc get inside your cells, where it can work to stop viral replication.

Statistical Improvement in Clinical Outcomes

Two recent studies highlight the potential this safe plant-derived antioxidant has to treat COVID-19. In the first study, published in the International Journal of General Medicine, 42 COVID-19 outpatients were divided into two groups. One group of 21 patients received standard medical therapy consisting of painkillers (acetaminophen) and an antibiotic for three consecutive days. The other 21 patients received standard therapy, plus the equivalent of 600 mg of quercetin per day (divided into three doses) for seven days, followed by another seven-day course of 400 mg of quercetin per day (divided into two doses). The quercetin was used with sunflower lecithin, which has been demonstrated to increase absorption in the gut by as much as 20 times, compared to pure quercetin formulations. The main outcomes being evaluated were virus clearance and symptoms. After one week of treatment, 16 of the 21 patients in the quercetin group tested negative for SARS-CoV-2 and 12 reported that all of their symptoms had diminished. In the standard care group, only two patients tested negative and four reported partially improved symptoms. By the end of week two, the five remaining patients in the quercetin group tested negative. In the standard care group, 17 of the 19 remaining patients tested negative and one had died. "These results are impressive, and hopefully additional studies will be conducted on hospitalized patients to see how quercetin might be helpful in more severe cases," Dr. Michael Murray wrote in an Aug. 21 newsletter.

Continued on Page 12

New Studies Test Quercetin and COVID-19 Outcomes

Studies suggest this antiviral, anti-blood clotting, anti-inflammatory is an effective therapeutic

How to Distinguish Yourself

Standing out from the crowd—in a good way—is a goal worth pursuing

JOSHUA BECKER

Years ago, my friend received a promotion at work. When his promotion was announced, the CEO explained it like this, "He has distinguished himself among his peers, we are promoting him to a new position." It was a sentence I have never forgotten. "He has distinguished himself."

To me, it sounded like one of the greatest compliments anyone could receive: to distinguish yourself among your peers. Distinguished is a word of respect that we tend to use when speaking in positive terms: a distinguished gentleman, a distinguished career, a distinguished painter. For many, it conjures up images of a

You can distinguish yourself by being faithful with all that you've been given or earned.

sharply dressed, handsome gentleman. But that is not the definition of the word—nor is that how I defined the compliment.

The definition is much broader: respectable, perceived as a difference in, marked by excellence, set apart.

To stand out as different, in a good way, from everyone else—that is the definition of distinguished.

And that is a description I am drawn to. I hope when people look at my life and how I lived, they will say: "He lived differently than the world around him. He distinguished himself by the way he lived each day."

Continued on Page 16

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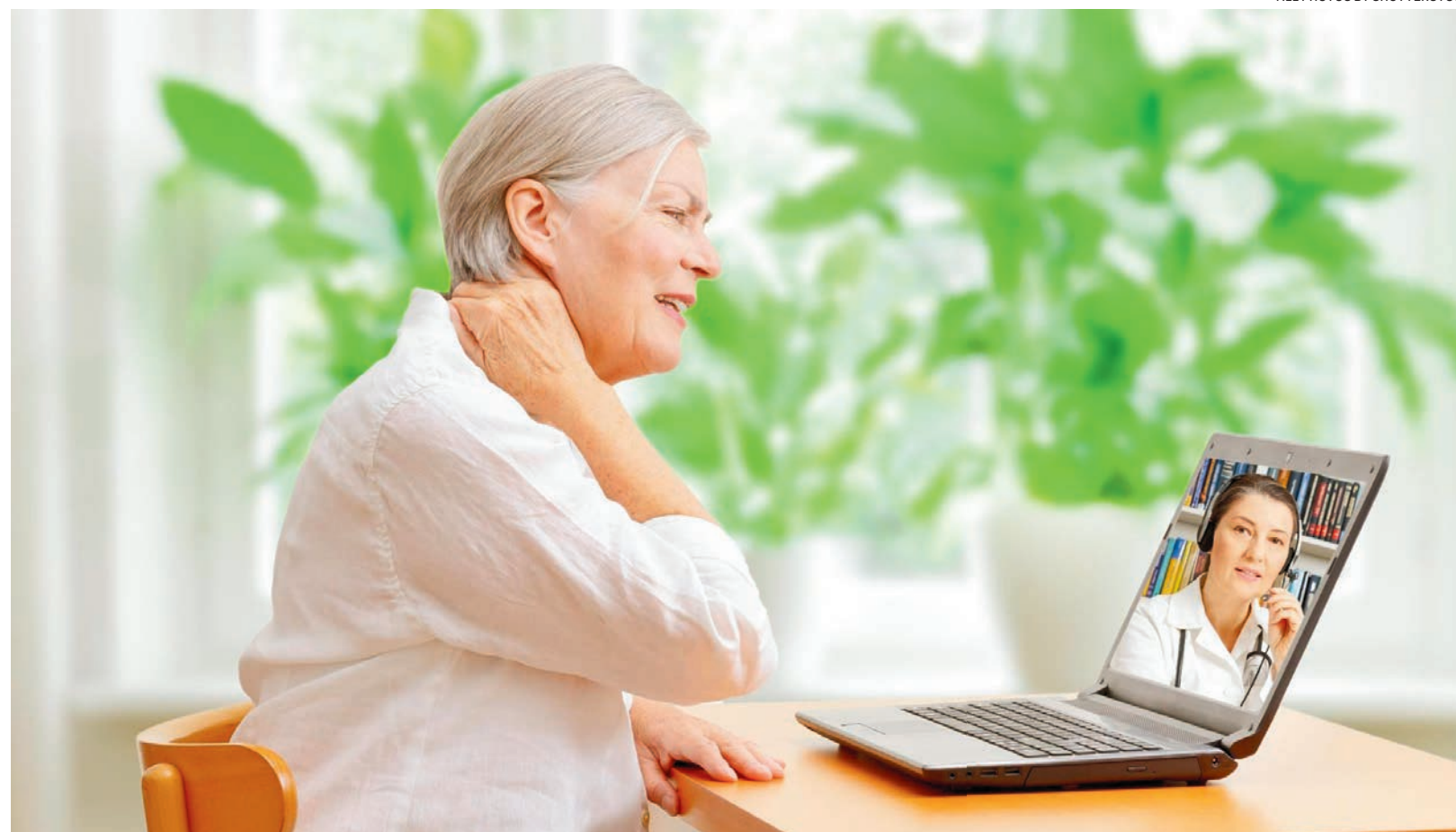
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Health insurers are offering lower-cost plans that offer patients virtual visits with a doctor but often charge copays for in-person visits.

Insurance Focused on Virtual Visits?

The pros and cons of a new twist in health plans

JULIE APPLEBY

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, people often relied on telemedicine for doctor visits. Now insurers are betting that some patients liked it enough to embrace new types of health coverage that encourage video visits—or that outright insist on them.

Priority Health in Michigan, for example, offers coverage requiring online visits first for nonemergency primary care. Harvard Pilgrim Health Care, selling to employers in Connecticut, Maine, and New Hampshire, has a similar plan.

"I would describe them as virtual-first, a true telehealth primary care physician replacement product," said Carrie Kincaid, vice president of in-

dividual markets at Priority Health, which launched its plans in January as an addition to more traditional Affordable Care Act (ACA) offerings.

The often lower-premium offerings capitalize on the new familiarity and convenience of online routine care. But skeptics see a downside: the risk of overlooking something important.

"There's a gestalt of seeing a patient and knowing something is not right, such as maybe picking up early on that they have Parkinson's," or listening to their heart and discovering a murmur, said Dr. David Anderson, a cardiologist affiliated with Stanford Health Care in Oakland, California. He said online medicine is a great tool for follow-up visits with established patients but isn't optimal for an initial exam.

When enrolling in one of the new plans, patients are encouraged to se-

lect an online doctor, who then serves as the patient's first point of contact for most primary care services and can make referrals for in-person care with an in-network physician, if needed. It's possible that patients may never meet their online doctor in person.

Many insurers offering virtual-first plans hire outside firms to provide medical staff. The physicians may hold licenses in several states and not be located nearby. Insurers say participating online doctors can access patients' medical information and test results through the insurers' electronic medical records (EMR) system or those of the third-party online staffing firm. What might prove tricky, experts warn, is transferring information from physicians, clinics, or hospitals outside of an insurer's network. Sharing patient information via EMRs is challenging even for doctors operating under traditional insurance plans with in-person visits—especially moving data between different health systems or specialty practices.

The virtual-first concept was so new that Priority Health called those enrolling this year to ensure they understood how it worked.

"If people were more comfortable with brick-and-mortar, they should choose other options," Kincaid said, adding that the plans have drawn 5,000 enrollees since January, a number she hopes will double next year.

Other versions of telehealth plans are available, offered by big names such as Humana, Kaiser Permanente, Oscar, and UnitedHealthcare. Some emphasize but don't require that primary care starts online. Some are aimed directly at consumers. Others are sold to employers.

Oscar Virtual Care health plans, sold in several states including Texas, Florida, and New York, allow patients to choose between online or in-person services.

"These are not virtual-only plans," said Marianna Spanos, an Oscar vice president and the general manager of its virtual care division. "You can always opt to see a more traditional provider."

Although Kaiser Permanente uses its own in-house medical staff, most insurers rely on contracted physicians, mental health therapists, and other staff members, often provided by San Francisco-based Doctor on Demand.

Doctor on Demand launched in 2013, aimed at individual consumers. Starting with a Humana contract in 2019, it has since expanded to offer staffing for several other insurers. The company, which has its own electronic medical records system, hires a range of primary care, mental health, and other medical providers. Physicians must be board-certified. Pay is partly based on how many patients they see, and there is no upper limit. Some want to work part-time, for example, and many work from home.

In general, virtual-first health plans may carry lower premiums or provide such financial incentives as no copays for online visits. All boast that members can get appointments quickly, sometimes within minutes. Patients with serious problems are assisted in arranging emergency help. If online physicians determine that patients need a blood test, immunization, or a visit with a specialist, they refer them to a local practice, clinic, or specialist within the insurer's network.

As a strategy to contain costs, think HMO 2.0. "There's more control over the patient interaction and where they get referred," said Sabrina Corlette, a research professor and co-director of the Center on Health Insurance Reforms at Georgetown University.

Still, patients should be aware that some of these plans may allow a brick-and-mortar visit only if their virtual doctor, who may have never examined them in person, deems it necessary. Skeptics note that many circumstances demand in-person care. One recent study estimated about 66 percent of primary care visits required it. For example, it's impossible to check reflexes and difficult to examine tonsils for infection virtually.

Patients in some programs, including Harvard Pilgrim, are sent kits that can include devices such as blood pressure cuffs and thermometers—although at-home medical measuring devices are often not as accurate as those used in offices. Online physicians may also ask a patient to feel for swollen lymph nodes, shine a light into their throat while on camera or

What might prove tricky, experts warn, is transferring information from physicians, clinics, or hospitals outside of an insurer's network.

New virtual-visit-based health plans are lower-cost and convenient, but skeptics see a risk of overlooking something important.



Patients are encouraged to select an online doctor, who then serves as the patient's first point of contact for most primary care services.

take other actions to help the physician diagnose a problem.

Kincaid, at Priority Health, noted that Doctor on Demand also sets protocols on children's wellness visits, which it says must be done in person.

"It's important for children's wellness visits to get accurate height and weight measures and immunizations," Kincaid said.

When considering virtual-first plans, advocates say, patients should look closely not just at premiums but also at deductibles and copayments, which may be set at levels that discourage in-person care. Rules are varied and dizzying.

The VirtualBronze plan offered through the federal ACA marketplace in parts of Texas by Community Choice Health, for example, requires hefty patient contributions for many types of in-person visits.

Patients incur no copay for using online Doctor on Demand physicians for primary care visits or for accessing in-person preventive services as defined by the ACA, such as immunizations or cancer screenings. But for other in-person services, Community Choice's virtual plan will cost patients out-of-pocket because they pay the cost of the care until they meet an annual \$8,530 deductible.

Kaiser Permanente's Virtual Complete plan offered to large employers carries no copay for online care. Patients can opt to see an in-person doctor three times a year for primary care if they're willing to pay a copay. After those three visits, any additional in-person visits are subject to a deductible.

Plans sold through federal or state marketplaces and those offered by employers must meet the ACA's requirements. That includes a range of services, from doctor visits to hospital care.

Corlette, at Georgetown, said consumers should be wary of plans that aren't ACA-compliant.

She fears the advent of plans that give patients "access to online providers, but nothing else." And that, she said, "would not be considered major medical insurance."

KHN (Kaiser Health News) is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues. Together with Policy Analysis and Polling, KHN is one of the three major operating programs at KFF (Kaiser Family Foundation). KFF is an endowed nonprofit organization providing information on health issues to the nation.

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

Excessive Bladder Pressure—Causes and Solutions

This uncomfortable condition can lead to serious embarrassment and inconvenience

IAN KANE

Most people urinate during the normal intervals that they're used to, rarely feeling too much pressure on their bladders, and usually only in unusual circumstances. But some people suffer from inordinate bladder pressure, a condition that can cause embarrassing situations and overall discomfort.

There are several possible causes of excessive bladder pressure, as well as ways that you can deal with it. If you begin experiencing symptoms, it's best to deal with them as soon as possible.

Nerve Damage

Most people have bladders that fill with waste fluids (urine) until they become full. At that point, their brains fire neurotransmitters down to the lower body's sphincter muscles to relax and let their bladder walls squeeze the urine out through their urethras

(the long tube that expels urine out of your body).

If a person's nerves are damaged in those areas, the muscles that surround the urethra may not be able to contract properly. This can result in their urethras being too weak to resist urinating, which, in turn, may lead to incontinence—a loss in bladder control that can range from leakage to the need to urinate frequently and/or suddenly.

Common causes of nerve damage include diabetes, herniated disc, radiation exposure, and Parkinson's disease.

Aging

Excessive bladder pressure occurs with both men and women—young and old. But while you can have an overactive bladder at any point in your life, this unfortunate condition particularly affects the elderly. Indeed, while it may affect 10 percent of those who are less than 50

years old, for people who are over the age of 60, that percentage increases to 20 to 30 percent.

That's because as bladder muscles age, they don't have the same capacity to store urine as they once had. In addition, involuntary bladder contractions can also increase in frequency as people get older.

Enlarged Prostate

The prostate is located behind the bladder, above the rectum. This all-important gland is what produces the fluid that is crucial to combining with sperm in order to manufacture sperm.

The prostate grows gradually during male puberty. But as men get older, the prostate increases in size closer to where the urethra is located. As a result of this growth, the urethra can become overtaxed in its efforts to empty the bladder of urine. When this happens, overflow urinary incontinence can occur.

Urinary Tract Infection

As the American Urological Association points out, similar to when your throat becomes irritated due to coming down with the flu or a cold, so too can your bladder and urethra become inflamed if you have a urinary tract infection, or UTI.

A UTI can occur whenever this region becomes infected by an excessive amount of bacteria. Those afflicted may feel they constantly need to urinate but typically find it increasingly hard to do so. This condition can put excessive pressure on the bladder.

Dealing With Excessive Bladder Pressure

Antibiotic Prescription

If you exhibit symptoms of excessive bladder pressure, you can seek help in the form of medical treatment. If you are diagnosed with either a simple or complicated UTI, or any other type of infection, a physician can prescribe an antibiotic prescription to treat it, and hopefully, make the problem go away permanently.

Drink a Proper Amount of Water

No, this doesn't mean drinking too much or too little water throughout the day. You may assume that it's a good idea to drink as little water as possible in order to alleviate excessive pressure on your bladder. However, a lack of water in your system can actually make it unable to flush waste and toxins out of your body. On the other hand, guzzling down water in excessive amounts at one time can overtax your bladder.

Therefore, it is suggested that you drink smaller portions of water frequently over the course of the day.

Monitor Dietary Triggers

Certain types of food and drink can increase your propensity for experiencing excessive bladder pressure. These include artificial sweeteners, sodas, and similar carbonated drinks, sugar (and sugary foods), caffeinated drinks, and alcohol. Alcohol, caffeine, and certain types of tea in particular, as well as diuretic med-

A weak pelvic floor could be the main culprit behind excessive bladder pressure issues, and pelvic exercises can help to vanquish them.



ications, can be the primary contributors to acute bladder pressure and therefore, may cause serious incontinence.

Kegel Exercises

A weak pelvic floor could also be the main culprit behind excessive bladder pressure issues, and pelvic exercises can help to vanquish them. These can be performed by both men and women, and are convenient in that they can be performed anywhere at any time—without anyone noticing that you're doing them.

Kegels simply involve contracting and then releasing the muscle that surrounds your urethra's opening—such as what you naturally do when you urinate into a toilet or urinal. You can practice learning what Kegels feel like by beginning your urine stream and then suddenly cutting it off. Practicing this exercise multiple times every time you urinate can greatly strengthen those muscles over time.

SHILOVSKI/SHUTTERSTOCK

There can be several causes of excessive bladder pressure and figuring out what may be causing it can give you a route to deal with it.

Ian Kane is a 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

New Studies Test Quercetin and COVID-19 Outcomes

Studies suggest this antiviral, anti-blood clotting, anti-inflammatory is an effective therapeutic

Continued from Page 9

Can Quercetin Reduce Hospitalizations and Deaths?

The second study—a prospective, randomized, and controlled open-label trial—gave 152 COVID-19 outpatients a daily dose of 1,000 mg of quercetin for 30 days to evaluate its adjunct effects in the treatment of early COVID-19 symptoms and the prevention of severe infection.

“The results revealed a reduction in frequency and length of hospitalization, in need of non-invasive oxygen therapy, in progression to intensive care units and in a number of deaths,” the study authors wrote.

“The results also confirmed the very high safety profile of quercetin and suggested possible anti-fatigue and pro-appetite properties.”

They described the branded form of quercetin being tested (Quercetin Phytosome) as “a safe agent and in combination with standard care, when used in early stage of viral infection,” saying that it could improve early symptoms and prevent severe COVID-19.



Several pre-pandemic studies highlighted quercetin's ability to prevent and treat the common cold.

cells. Quercetin has also been shown to directly neutralize viral proteins that are critical in the replication of SARS-CoV-2.”

In some studies, quercetin has also been shown to inhibit the release of inflammatory cytokines, signaling molecules that summon immune cells to fight off invaders. Unfortunately, in COVID-19, too many cytokines send up a signal and the immune response turns deadly. Dampening the cytokine signal could help alleviate infection-related symptoms and suppress excessive inflammatory responses from occurring. Quercetin's antioxidant effects may also help prevent tissue damage caused by scavenging free radicals, thereby aiding in the recovery process of viral infections.

Quercetin's Antiviral Properties

Quercetin's antiviral properties have been attributed to three main mechanisms of action: inhibiting the virus' ability to infect cells; inhibiting replication of already infected cells; and reducing infected cells' resistance to treatment with antiviral medication.

Research on mice funded by the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency and published in 2008 found that quercetin lowers your risk of viral illnesses such as influenza and boosts mental performance following extreme physical stress, which might otherwise undermine your immune function and render you more susceptible to infections.

Another study looked at cyclists who received a daily dose of 1,000 mg of quercetin in combination with vitamin C (which enhances plasma quercetin levels) and the B vitamin niacin (to improve absorption) for five weeks. Those in the treatment group were significantly less likely to contract a viral illness after bicycling three hours per

day for three consecutive days, compared to untreated controls. While 45 percent of the placebo group eventually got sick, that number was at just 5 percent of the treatment group.

Quercetin Works Against Many Common Viruses

Before the COVID-19 pandemic struck, several studies had highlighted quercetin's ability to prevent and treat the common cold (which is often caused by a coronavirus) and seasonal influenza. By attenuating oxidative damage, quercetin also lowers your risk of secondary bacterial infections, which is actually the primary cause of influenza-related deaths.

Importantly, quercetin increases the growth in size and number of mitochondria (the powerhouse of a cell) in skeletal muscle, which suggests part of its antiviral effects are due to enhanced mitochondrial antiviral signaling. Quercetin has also been found to work against other viruses as well. A 1985 study found that quercetin inhibits the infectivity and replication of herpes simplex virus type 1, polio-virus type 1, parainfluenza virus type 3, and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV).

A 2016 animal study found that quercetin inhibited mouse dengue virus and the hepatitis virus.

Other studies have confirmed quercetin's power to inhibit both hepatitis B and hepatitis C infections.

A March 2020 study found that quercetin provides “comprehensive protection” against *Streptococcus pneumoniae* infection. As reported by the authors of this study: “Our results indicated that quercetin may be a novel potential drug candidate for the treatment of clinical pneumococcal infections.”

How Quercetin Combats Inflammation and Boosts Immunity

Aside from its antiviral activity, quercetin is also known for boosting immunity and combating inflammation. A 2016 study in the journal *Nutrients* describes the mechanisms of action, which included inhibiting a cytokine involved in systemic inflammation, dampening the production of inflammation-producing enzymes, and curbing other inflammatory agents.

According to the study, quercetin also stabilizes mast cells, has cytoprotective activity in the gastrointestinal tract, and has “a direct regulatory effect on basic functional properties of immune cells,” which allows it to inhibit “many inflammatory pathways and functions.”

Bioavailability

While quercetin does have potent antiviral effects, in order for it to work effectively, you need sufficiently high dosages to raise the level of quercetin in your body's tissues. The relatively low absorption rate of quercetin is why a sunflower lecithin formulation was used.

Research published in the July–December issue of the *Journal of Natural Health Products Research*, found that a quercetin matrix has the same total absorption rate as quercetin phytosome—and higher peak blood levels.

“Since both of these forms of quercetin produce similar blood levels, they should produce the same effects at equal dosages based upon quercetin content,” Murray wrote in his newsletter.

“My dosage recommendation as part of a nutritional supplement program to support immune function is 250 mg twice daily.

“And in patients with active infection, my recommendation is... six capsules twice a day providing a total of 3,000 mg of quercetin. This high dosage should be taken for at least 10 days and then reduced to a maintenance dosage of 250 mg twice daily.

“[This] high dosage may not be necessary. But my dosage calculations are based upon likely tissue concentrations needed to exert the strongest antiviral effects. And given the safety of quercetin, there is no harm at this level.”

Protocol Using Quercetin

One doctor who brought quercetin into the limelight early was Dr. Vladimir Zelenko. As hydroxychloroquine became difficult to obtain, Zelenko switched to recommending quercetin instead, as it's readily available as an over-the-counter supplement. For a downloadable “cheat sheet” of Zelenko's protocol for COVID-19, visit VladimirZelenkoMD.com

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

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

Top Natural Remedies for Kidney Stones

Some foods and vitamins prove particularly effective at dealing with kidney stones, research finds

Kidney stones are a familiar condition involving crystals forming within the kidneys, affecting some 12 percent of the global population. They have affected humans since at least 4,000 B.C., surfacing as the most common disease of the urinary tract.

Recurring stone formation has been linked to a number of chronic diseases, including end-stage renal failure, heart disease, diabetes, and high blood pressure. Kidney stones have even been considered a systemic condition linked to metabolic syndrome.

Stone formation is rather common, with an estimated five-year recurrence rate of up to 50 percent. Its prevalence has been on the rise in the past half-century, in part due to dietary and lifestyle changes.

If you're at risk for or have had kidney stones, you may be interested in exploring natural remedies. Here are some that are worth trying.

1. Water

Studies have previously suggested that daily water intake that produces at least 2.5 liters of urine every day can protect against kidney stones.

A meta-analysis took this further and confirmed that water consumption was associated with a reduced risk of kidney stones. The researchers noted, “By increasing urine volume, increased water intake can dilute urine concentration, reduce CaOx [calcium oxalate] super saturation, decrease uric acid, and remove salt.”

2. Lemon Juice

Lemonade therapy appears to help dissolve kidney stones, assisting patients with hypocalcemic nephrolithiasis. In one study, four men and seven women were treated with lemonade therapy for an average of 44.4 months, while a control group with four men and seven women were treated with potassium citrate for an average of 42.5 months.

Of the 11 patients treated with lemonade, 10 showed increased urinary citrate levels. The therapy, therefore, appears as a reasonable alternative for patients who can't tolerate first-line therapy, the researchers noted.

Citrate, a salt present in citric acid, binds to calcium and helps block stone formation. Citrus fruits and juices are known sources of dietary citrate, with lemon juice appearing to have the highest concentration of it. In a separate study, administering lemon juice to animal models inhibited increased kidney calcium levels and showed protective action against urolithiasis (kidney stones).

3. Omega-3 Fats

To test the benefits of omega-3 fatty acid supplementation in certain stone formers, researchers evaluated the effects of supplementing with two types of omega-3s—eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA)—on urinary risk factors for forming calcium oxalate stones.

The team studied 15 healthy subjects who consumed a standardized diet for five days and collected daily 24-hour urine samples. During specific intervention phases, subjects received 900 milligrams (mg) of EPA and 600 mg of DHA every day.

The results revealed that 30-day omega-3 supplementation effectively reduced the excretion of urinary oxalates and the risk of calcium oxalate crystals, serving as a potential long-term intervention.

4. Orange Juice

Orange juice may hold therapeutic effects on stone-forming risk. In a study, 13 volunteers, made up of nine healthy individuals and four stone formers, received distilled water, orange juice, or lemonade while on a metabolic diet. The researchers collected 24-hour urine samples.

Findings showed that orange juice and lemonade had comparable citrate content. The former, however, was associated with lower calculated calcium oxalates and uric acid.

“This short-term study suggests that orange juice consumption could result in biochemical modification of stone risk factors; however, additional studies are needed to evaluate its role in long-term prevention of recurrent nephrolithiasis,” the team wrote.

5. Horse Gram

Horse gram, known as Kulaththa in the ancient Indian wellness system of Ayurveda, emerged as superior to potassium in treating kidney calcification disease. This herb has been used since ancient times for kidney stones, cough, asthma, and piles, to name a few ailments.

A study assessed 47 patients diagnosed with calcium oxalate stones, 24 of which received horse gram and 23 given potassium citrate for six months. The outcomes showed that horse gram can reduce the recurrence of calcium oxalate stones, yielding better results than using conventional potassium citrate.

6. Vitamin E

In a 2004 study, vitamin E ameliorated oxidative stress associated with kidney stone formation among tuberculosis patients. The use of the nutrient reduced the risk of stone formation in the patients, who were treated with a routine antituberculosis drug regimen.

In the first study to demonstrate the benefit in a live organism, rats in this case, vitamin E therapy prevented the deposits of calcium

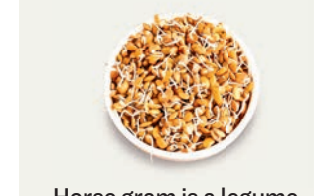


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A Few Treatments for Kidney Stones



Nigella sativa, more commonly known as black seed, may help treat or reduce the size of kidney stones.



Horse gram is a legume that is widely consumed in India. It can be cooked in a variety of ways, or sprouted for an extra nutritional punch.



Orange juice may hold therapeutic effects on stone-forming risk.

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

oxalate crystals in the kidneys by improving antioxidant status in renal tissues.

7. Evening Primrose Oil

Research in 1994 assessed various oils and their effect on the kidney stones of male animal subjects: fat-free oil, coconut oil, fish oil, and evening primrose oil.

The results suggested that the renal urokinase activity in infection-induced kidney stones may be restored through diets rich in evening primrose oil, making it a relevant aid in prevention and treatment.

8. Black Seed

Nigella sativa, more commonly known as black seed, may help treat or reduce the size of kidney stones. In a study on 60 patients with renal stones, the patients were treated with 500 mg of black seed capsules or a placebo twice a day for 10 weeks.

In the black seed group, 44.4 percent of patients excreted their stones completely, with the size of the stones remaining unchanged. In the placebo group, 15.3 percent did the same. Compared with placebo, black seed demonstrated a significantly greater positive effect in dissolving or reducing the size of the painful stones.

You can learn more about the latest breakthroughs in kidney stone research on the GreenMedInfo.com database.

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Lemonade therapy appears to help dissolve kidney stones.

Is the Fountain of Youth Living in Your Gut?

MAT LECOMPTÉ

The bacterial population in your gut—called the microbiome—gets a lot of attention. It's linked with overall health, mood, digestion, inflammation, and more. And now it's being linked with longevity.

New research published in *Cell Reports* suggests that advancing age changes the makeup of the microbiome in the intestine. It infers that if we can potentially zero in on certain bacteria, longevity may be increased.

It's extremely important to note that this new research suggests an association between the microbiome and longevity and doesn't prove cause and effect. A ton of research still needs to be done to see if, and how, these associations might be manipulated.

To arrive at their conclusion, researchers looked at microbial changes that occurred in the small intestine with

chronological age, medication use, and disease in people aged 18 to 80.

They found that when people got older, the type of bacteria in their small intestines changed. Researchers noted that normal aging causes a shift from microbes that prefer oxygen to those that can survive with less oxygen. They also noted an increase in a type of bacteria called “coliform” in older folks.

Coliform bacteria, which were much more present in older demographics, may be the driver of some of the negative effects of aging. If they become too abundant, they may have a detrimental effect on the rest of the microbial population. As one researcher put it, “they are like weeds in a garden.”

It's too soon to say if taking probiotic supplements can make a difference. It's also way too early to suggest a potential treat-

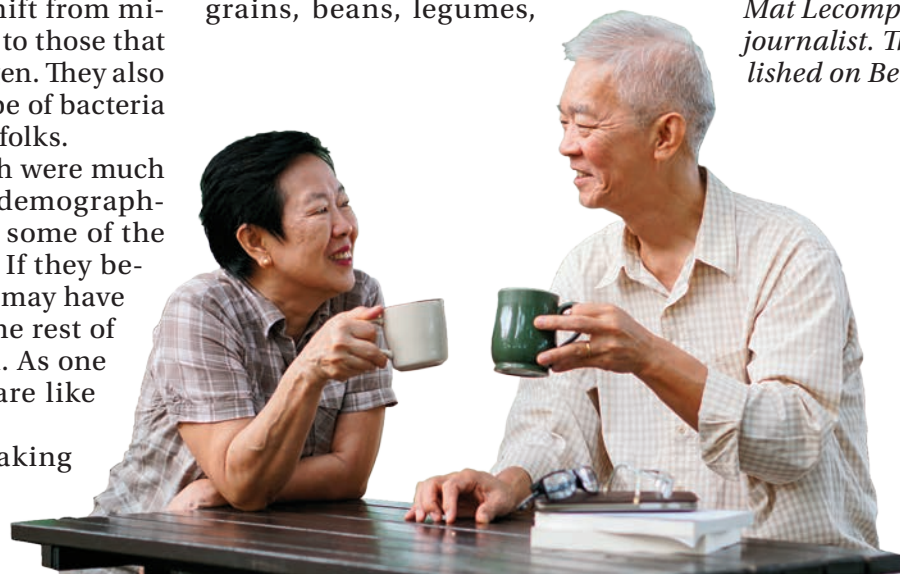
ment, or if this is even avoidable.

That said, there is current information available on how to optimize gut health. It generally involves eating a diverse diet rich in fruit, vegetables, whole grains, beans, legumes,

nuts, some dairy, and fresh meat.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, such a diet is also linked with less disease and greater longevity.

Mat Lecompte is a health and wellness journalist. This article was first published on BelMarraHealth.com



GLOWORCONCEPT/SHUTTERSTOCK

◀ New research suggests that advancing age changes the makeup of the microbiome and that by zeroing in on certain bacteria, longevity might be increased.

The Amazing Story of Malaysian Palm Oil

Malaysia's small family farmers are helping to nourish the world with sustainable practices

RANDY BOYER

Most of us are familiar with the small farmers who sell their wholesome fruits, vegetables, honey, and other natural products at neighborhood farmers' markets. They typically farm only a few acres of land, and many practice sustainable farming to keep their crops and soil healthy.

Now consider life for small farmers in Malaysia, which is the world's second-largest exporter of palm oil. A large percentage of the country's oil palm farms are just 5 to 20 acres, owned and managed by family farmers. And as with many of America's family farmers, Malaysian oil palm farmers have used sustainable agricultural practices for more than 100 years.

But can you imagine buying tomatoes or squash from a community farmer whose crops are considered vital to global food security? The small oil palm farmers in Malaysia are doing just that. Their practices enable you and me to source certified sustainable products outside of our local communities.

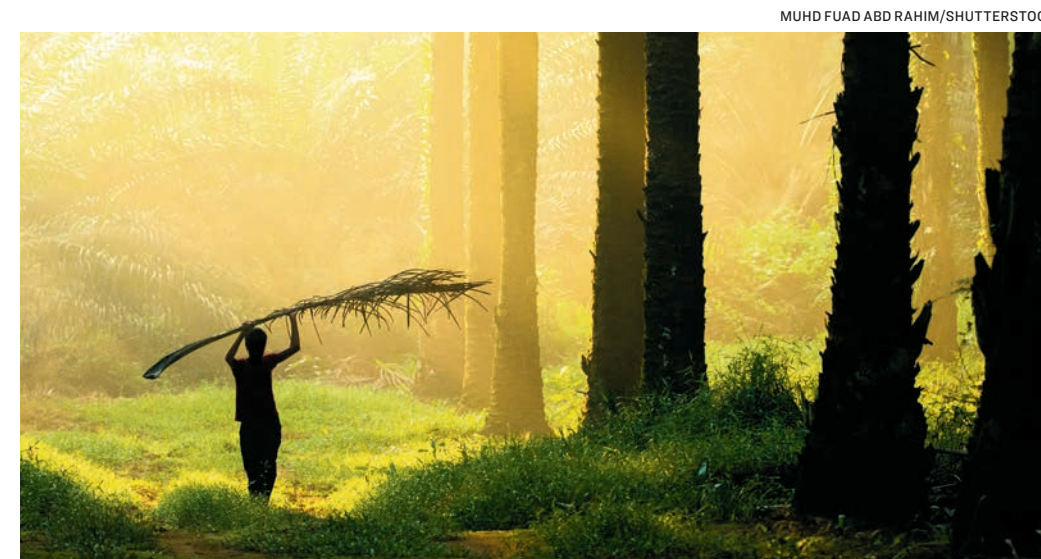
Of the major oil crops, oil palm occupies the least land but produces the most oil. A single acre of oil palm produces 11 times more oil than soybeans and 10 times more than sunflower. And oil palm trees keep producing fruit for 25 to 35 years!

In Malaysia, there are strict laws against clearing forests to create more farmlands. Farmers can't just buy bigger fields to increase their income. So, they must focus on making their crops and land as healthy and efficient as possible. They follow Good Agricultural Practices (GAP). This means optimum use of natural resources and following eco-friendly practices and strict food- and worker-safety standards.

Here are more interesting facts about how Malaysian oil palm farmers avoid putting stress on our planet:

- All palm oil is non-GMO.
- Barn owls act as eco-friendly rodent control.
- Farmers use Integrated Pest Management (IPM) to minimize the use of pesticides, by depending more on biological control of weeds and pests.
- Once the old palms stop producing fruit, they are pushed over, shredded, and left to decompose in the warm sun so their nutrients are returned to the soil. This also reduces the need for inorganic fertilizers. Some wood is recycled as furniture.
- It's illegal to hunt wildlife in Malaysia whereas wildlife hunting is permitted in neighboring countries such as Indonesia.
- Nearly all Malaysian oil palm farmers have achieved MSPO certification, confirming that their farming practices adhere to nationally mandated sustainability standards.

Many animal species also use the oil palm plantations as stopping points, often



MUND FUAD ABD RAHIM/SHUTTERSTOCK

In Malaysia, there are strict laws against clearing forests to create more farmlands.

in corridors created by the farmers to help them move easily between forest patches. This is something they might not be able to do if the land was planted with annual crops or grasslands.

You can feel good knowing that much of the palm oil imported into the United States is produced sustainably in Malaysia. Not only is palm oil nutritious but now you know that Malaysian farmers take their stewardship of our planet very seriously.

You can buy Sustainable Malaysian Palm Oil on Amazon, at Walmart, or your local Asian grocery store.

Randy Boyer is the co-founder of NaturallySavvy.com and TheHealthyShopper.com. She has been working in the natural health industry for over 20 years. She is very passionate about healthy living by choosing natural and organic as much as possible, has a personal love of cooking and sharing healthy recipes and is a fitness enthusiast. This article was originally published on NaturallySavvy.com.

You can feel good knowing that much of the palm oil imported into the United States is produced sustainably in Malaysia. One less thing to worry about.

The Unspoken Truth Behind Miscarriages and Infertility

For women trying to have a baby, a miscarriage brings a painful new possibility to each future pregnancy

MEGAN RORABECK

As a pelvic health physical therapist, I have a deep passion for helping women. I've dedicated my career to bettering my knowledge and understanding of women's pelvic health through becoming a board-certified women's health clinical specialist and authoring "Between the Hips: A Practical Guide for Women." I felt well-equipped to provide my patients with compassionate, exceptional care.

However, on July 24, 2020, my life was changed forever. It was our first OB appointment. I was 10 weeks pregnant. The appointment went nothing like we had imagined. There was no heartbeat, our baby wasn't growing, and I was likely going to miscarry. I had two more ultrasounds spaced out over two weeks, both confirming no growth and no heartbeat. On Aug. 7, I needed a D and C (dilation and curettage), and I left the hospital without my baby, completely alone in my body.

A miscarriage. It's something you hear about, but never actually imagine happening to you. My doctor told me that one in four pregnancies results in a miscarriage, but this value is likely underreported due

to women miscarrying and not even knowing, just assuming they're having a late period. Despite knowing how often this happens, I still felt alone and hopeless. I immediately thought back to my past patients who had shared their miscarriage and infertility struggles with me. I now truly understood their pain, and felt terrible for not inquiring more about their mental health. I wish I had done a better job offering referrals to resources such as counselors or support groups.

When one suffers a loss or struggles with infertility, the pain may never truly go away, but it can be worked through.

My recovery took about six weeks. It was painful—both physically and emotionally. I felt moments of gratitude, thankful to have been pregnant. I felt moments of lows, angry and confused as to why this had happened. I debated starting counsel-

ing, but with my stubborn nature, I decided I would push through and be fine.

On Nov. 16, I experienced my second miscarriage, at six weeks. There are no words for how devastated I was. My doctor told me this could be "bad luck," and nothing could be done until I'd had three miscarriages. I couldn't imagine going through this again, so I switched doctors, underwent genetic testing, and began counseling for my mental health. I also looked back on my menstrual cycle tracking records, something I learned from the book "Taking Charge of Your Fertility" by Toni Weschler. I highly recommend this book to anyone looking to better understand their body and menstrual cycle.

Thankfully, my genetic testing came back normal. However, upon reviewing my menstrual cycle charts, I realized my luteal phase, which is the second phase of the menstrual cycle occurring after ovulation, was too short. This can be an indicator of low progesterone. I discussed this with my new doctor, who agreed but also wanted to rule out uterine cysts and fibroids, which would be done shortly after my next menstrual cycle.

To my disbelief, I never got my next menstrual cycle because I was pregnant again,

and I was terrified. I immediately started progesterone suppositories in the hopes that this would help sustain my pregnancy. On Dec. 29, for the first time, I saw my baby's heartbeat. I was overjoyed and grateful beyond measure. Our sweet baby boy, William, was born on Aug. 27, 2021. He is such a fighter, truly a miracle, and he is my greatest blessing.

I look back on my pregnancy and feel immense gratitude but cannot ignore the deep-rooted fear and anxiety that those nine months brought me. I was constantly worrying if my baby would make it. When one suffers a loss or struggles with infertility, the pain may never truly go away, but it can be worked through. I wanted a baby so badly that when that was taken from me after my miscarriages, I felt a type of pain and emptiness that I hadn't imagined possible. I know I'm not alone in this feeling.

I hope other women facing fertility issues know they're not alone. October is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month, but we need more than this one month to feel supported. Similar to all pelvic health topics (bladder issues, bowel issues, pelvic pain), infertility is something we tend to avoid talking about. Maybe it's because we don't know what to say to someone who is going through these issues. Maybe we feel uncomfortable sharing our infertility struggles because we don't want to burden anyone with our pain or make anyone else feel uncomfortable. What I've realized, however, is that being able to talk about my experience takes some of the power from the ache it still leaves in my heart.

I hope you can open the door to talk about these issues—whether you are the one going through this or know someone who is. I also hope and pray that all the women out there who want to become a mother, that one day you will be, whether it's through carrying your child through pregnancy yourself, surrogacy, fostering, or adoption. Together, as women, we can support and lift each other up in very powerful ways. I am grateful for my family, friends, doctor, nurses, and counselor who helped me through some of the darkest days of my life. I leave you with a quote that helped me through these times: "After every storm, there is a rainbow ... no matter how long it takes to appear."

Dr. Megan Rorabeck, author and board-certified women's health clinical specialist physical therapist, founded Between the Hips, LLC, to provide education on women's health topics via writing, coaching, and speaking platforms. She is a full-time clinician and adjunct professor for Carroll University's PT program. Learn more or contact Megan at [BetweenTheHips.com](https://www.betweenthehips.com)



No woman imagines she will miscarry, and after it happens, a dark new fear accompanies every future pregnancy. Seeking support can be difficult.

FIZKES/SHUTTERSTOCK

WISE HABITS

Stillness and Curiosity

These powerful abilities turn hardship into exploration

LEO BABAUTA

Much of our lives is lived on autopilot.

We jump from one task to another, one message to another, one meeting to another, one browser tab to another. We react in habitual ways to other people, to situations. And we justify this as the way it should be.

Nothing wrong with that—but what would it be like to explore other possibilities?

What would it be like to pause and find stillness in a moment when we would normally be on autopilot?

Here's what I've been exploring: Every obstacle that we normally think of as a problem to be fixed—every "flaw" in ourselves or others that we judge as something to be fixed—what if we can pause and get curious instead of trying to fix it?

For example, someone is acting in a way that feels rude or wrong—perhaps my autopilot response is to judge them, complain about them internally or externally, and either try to fix the problem or avoid the person. But I've been exploring getting still, and bringing curiosity to my reaction—what does it feel like, why do I get triggered in this way? Then curiosity

toward the other person—how might what they're doing make sense to them?

If I've been procrastinating on something, my autopilot response might be to judge myself and feel inadequate, or maybe to avoid even thinking about it. What if I get still and bring curiosity to how it feels to procrastinate on this, and what fear might be leading to the procrastination? Could I bring curiosity to why this task is even important to me?

What would it be like to pause and find stillness in a moment when we would normally be on autopilot?

If I'm complaining about something or feeling burdened by something, my autopilot response is to just get through it, feeling put upon and a bit powerless. Could I get



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still and bring curiosity to my feeling of complaint, burden, powerlessness? Could there be anything to explore in what I really want in this situation, and why I'm avoiding speaking up for that?

In this way, every difficulty becomes a place to explore with curiosity, and there is growth and learning and delight to be found in everything.

This process, for me, starts with stillness. And then deepens with curiosity.

What might it be like for you?

▲ If someone is acting rudely, you might judge them. But what if there was a way to become curious as to why they're doing makes sense to them?

We've made our lives so full—of things, commitments, and choices. We rush from one thing to the next.



When we try to accomplish too many tasks at once, we're more likely to become distracted, overwhelmed, or inefficient.



If you keep adding without discarding, your home will be filled beyond what you can keep up with.



When our kids have fewer options of what to play with, they're able to stay focused for longer periods of time and become more creative with their play.

The 4 Pillars of Too Much

When our blessings become a burden, it's time to take stock

MOLLIE DONGHIA

Most places we look, our culture is promoting a model of "more." Many of us live in a flourishing society, where financial growth, professional achievement, and material possessions are highly regarded—for obvious reasons.

We seek more spending to satisfy our constantly growing desire, more information so our minds are always stimulated, more novelty so we're never bored, and more speed to maximize productivity and minimize downtime.

Since entering the "adult world" upon graduating from college and getting married, I realized how easy the desire for more had become. Our first year of marriage was characterized by a very limited budget from all our college debt. That forced us to walk to the library to get free wi-fi every day, eat out at restaurants only for very special occasions, and shop at discount grocery stores to keep our food spending low.

This year of limited spending felt so good. However, once college debt was paid off and we purchased our first home, I remember feeling the pull of wanting more—even if our annual incomes and new mortgage payments didn't support that kind of spending.

I think many can relate to this feeling of wanting to "keep up with the Joneses." It is a main culprit of why we desire more in the first place.

When More Becomes Too Much

For the last month, I've been immersed in a wonderful book by Kim John Payne, called "Simplicity Parenting." It's taught me valuable ways to nourish children's souls, simplify their home environment, and create healthy rhythms and schedules.

I've taken countless notes and already thought about ways to implement Payne's teaching in our parenting habits. I've also realized that what holds true for children can be true about our lives as adults as well.

Payne says, "Our world is characterized by the 4 pillars of too much."

The 4 Pillars of Too Much

1. Too much stuff
2. Too many choices
3. Too much information
4. Too much speed

We've made our lives so full—of things, commitments, choices, and rushing from one thing to the next.

I believe that to avoid the modern-day trap of having too much, we need to learn how the power of less can truly simplify our physical and mental spaces. It's also important to know our weaknesses when it comes

to the four pillars.

For me, this is having far fewer clothing choices in my closet. It's also leaving more margin in my monthly schedule to devote to homeschooling my daughter, writing for our blog, and spending quality time with my family. It can even mean choosing to shop at a grocery store where there are limited choices of each item, which allows me to make quicker decisions and limit my impulse buying.

I realize that having too much is a dilemma that people in some countries would find unfathomable. I don't take this matter lightly. How privileged we are to have such needs met, comforts satisfied, and the ability to declutter an entire home and still have enough.

But when we can recognize the areas where we've gained "too much" and learn to simplify our habits, spending, and consumption, what we gain is not only more money in our pockets but also more freedom from the overwhelm of clutter and busyness.

So how can we find ways to avoid the problems that come with too much?

How to Avoid Too Much Stuff

Apply the 48-hour rule. 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 you were able to manage just fine without it.

Pare down your wardrobe. Take a deep look at your closet. Aim to keep only what you actually wear and love. Discard anything that has holes/stains/needs mending or you haven't worn in the past year.

One in, One out. If you keep adding without discarding, your home will be filled beyond what you can keep up with. When a new item enters your home (a piece of clothing, a new toy, a book), consider choosing an item that you can donate or discard to make room for the new one.

Too Many Choices

Stick to a meal schedule. Thanks to Pinterest, we have more than enough options of what to make for dinner each night. But why do so many people (including myself) struggle to make dinner planning easier? There are too many choices, which actually overwhelms our decision-making process. Try making a list of your family's favorite 8 or 10 meals. Stick to making only those meals for a season. It's more decisive and less costly since you'll use the same ingredients more often.



Choose a few habits or routines and take those simple ideas seriously.

Rotate your children's toys. When our kids have fewer options of what to play with, they're able to stay focused for longer periods of time and become more creative with their play. We use large plastic tubs to store toys in for a few weeks or months at a time. When the kids need a change, we grab those bins and cycle them in while putting other toys away for a duration of time.

Keep simple routines. Don't try to add dozens of new routines to your day in hopes that it'll magically transform your life. Instead, choose a few habits or routines and take those simple ideas seriously. Once those are mastered, feel free to move on to a new routine. The real task is staying focused on just one idea and taking it seriously until you've learned it well.

Too Much Information

Fast from social media. During seasons that I need a break or feel more overwhelmed, one of the first things I do is take an intentional fast from social media. It's refreshing not to feel pressured to keep up with others' lives so that I can be more present with those around me during that time.

Limit your news consumption. Staying up-to-date with local and world news is important, but our culture has turned to so many sources of news that it often becomes a source of unneeded stress.

Instead of using 3 to 4 different news sources (TV, newspaper, online, social media, and so on), stick to one reputable source. My husband, Mike, reads the newspaper every day. He finds a less dramatic portrayal of events and a finite number of stories to grab his attention this way.

Too Much Speed

Leave more margin. Are your evenings so full that it's hard to find time for a family meal or an after-dinner walk? If possible, aim to leave a few evenings free from obligations and activities. Limit the number of extracurricular activities the kids are involved in. Make designated time to enjoy life's free pleasures, like visiting friends and relaxing in nature.

Stop trying to multitask. When we try to accomplish too many tasks at once, we're more likely to become distracted, overwhelmed, or inefficient. I've found so much success in creating a 3-item to-do list. I'll do one task at a time, stay focused until it's completed, then move on to the next one on my list. Life isn't solely about productivity, but also enjoying the journey.

Having a lot of something isn't always a bad thing, but when having too much becomes a source of stress, or we lose contentment for what we have, or it causes us to keep desiring more and more, then we will find more benefit in taking steps toward slowing down, reducing, and limiting what we have.

Mollie (and her husband, Mike) blog at [This Evergreen Home](https://www.thisevergreenhome.com) 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](https://www.thisevergreenhome.com).

How to Distinguish Yourself

Standing out from the crowd—in a good way—is a goal worth pursuing

Continued from Page 9

This is a description I think we all should strive for.

But how can it be true of yourself?

You certainly don't need money, a fancy suit, a powerful position, or a role in the public eye to be considered distinguished. My friend didn't have any of those things. No matter where you are or what you do, you can set yourself apart.

8 Ways to Distinguish Yourself

1. Be faithful with what you've been given.

With whatever you have been given, be faithful and disciplined with it. With your money, your body, your talents, your education, your upbringing, your opportunity, or your position, be faithful and disciplined to make the most of everything at your disposal.

Those who routinely extend grace, patience, and kindness to others distinguish themselves.

Not everyone is faithful with the gifts they have been given. Some squander them, still others spend their lives wishing for a different lot. You can distinguish yourself by being faithful with all that you've been given or earned.

2. Choose to live differently.

Indeed, to live set apart is in the very definition of the word distinguished. But this will never become a reality in your life until you choose to live a life different than society.

Following the crowd is what everyone else is doing. And I'm not sure it's leading to as much joy and fulfillment as people believe. It's certainly not going to result in a life that stands out from the crowd.

3. Remain focused.

This world is full of distractions that pull us from the things that matter. These distractions are not just advertisements, social media, and 24-hour news channels. Many of the pursuits most common to mankind (money, power, fame, possessions) are only distractions from the pursuits in life that are most important.

To distinguish yourself from the crowd, remove trivial distractions today. Keep your attention and life focused on things that matter. And then, do it all again tomorrow.

4. Live humbly.

You can waste a lot of words and energy trying to convince people you are someone important. Instead, put your head down, do good work, and run the race set in front of you. Not only will you accomplish more along the way, but your humility will also distinguish you from the crowd. It always does.

5. Include others in your growth.

The quickest way to succeed in life is to help someone else succeed in theirs. Unfortunately, most of the world does not live this way. They seek personal success for themselves and often see the world as a competition to get to the top first.

To stand out from the crowd, include others in your growth and success. Share your

gifts, talents, and accomplishments. Mentor others. Compete less, encourage more.

6. Show grace to others.

Those who routinely extend grace, patience, and kindness to others distinguish themselves. No doubt those who have shown grace and kindness to you stick out in your mind.

To accomplish this, remind yourself often that this world is largely unfair, that people come from a variety of backgrounds, and that nobody is truly self-made—even you. This approach to life encourages humility, grace, and love.

7. Appreciate different opinions.

While there is nothing wrong with being dogmatic in your beliefs, a healthy appreciation of how others came to their different beliefs is an under-appreciated quality these days.

By appreciating different opinions, we grow in our understanding of the world and the people around us. And seeking to learn from others, rather than trying to convince them of your opinion, will make you stand out from the crowd today more than ever.

The more you see each day as opportunity, the greater your outlook will be.

8. Bring optimism into every day.

Greet each day and each person with a smile. Remind yourself each morning that every new day is an opportunity to be your best and make a difference in the life of another. The more you see each day as opportunity, the greater your outlook will be.

And the more optimism you bring into each day, the more that optimism will spill out into the lives of others. Smile more, scowl less. Be noticed for your joy and excitement for life.

Live a life that is respectable, different, excellent, and set apart from the world around you. Be distinguished.

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

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