

# MIND & BODY

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## MENTAL HEALTH

# Overcoming the Decision- Making Fatigue of COVID-19



The uncertainty created by the pandemic has made looking toward the future a difficult prospect.

A psychological side effect of the pandemic is exhausting one of our critical thinking skills

CONAN MILNER

**A**re you having trouble thinking clearly lately? Have you recently struggled with making up your mind? Are you constantly anxious about what fate the future holds? If so, you're not alone.

A new poll from the American Psychological Association (APA) shows that the

**We're so burned out by all the considerations we're constantly forced to make in this new normal, we don't have the mental energy to do much more.**

COVID-19 pandemic has affected our ability to make decisions large and small.

More than one-third of Americans (36 percent) said they sometimes get so stressed out by the coronavirus pandemic that they seem unable to make basic choices, like what to wear and what to eat. Another third (35 percent) say COVID-related stress has impacted their ability to make major life decisions.

These recent widespread cases of decision-making difficulty appear to hit younger adults more than older generations, and are shown to be particularly hard on parents. Almost half of parents (47 percent) reported more stress with both day-to-day decisions and major life decisions compared to pre-pandemic stress levels.

Fear of the future was a common theme. The survey found that nearly

two-thirds of adults (63 percent) were stressed over what might happen in the next few months. Around half of respondents (49 percent) felt even more impaired by decision-making fatigue. They said the pandemic makes planning for their future feel impossible.

APA researchers say it's the overwhelming uncertainty of recent times that has resulted in "decision-making fatigue." We're so burned out by all the considerations we're constantly forced to make in this new normal, we don't have the mental energy to do much more.

"For many, the pandemic has imposed the need for constant risk assessment, with routines upended and once trivial tasks recast in light of the pandemic.

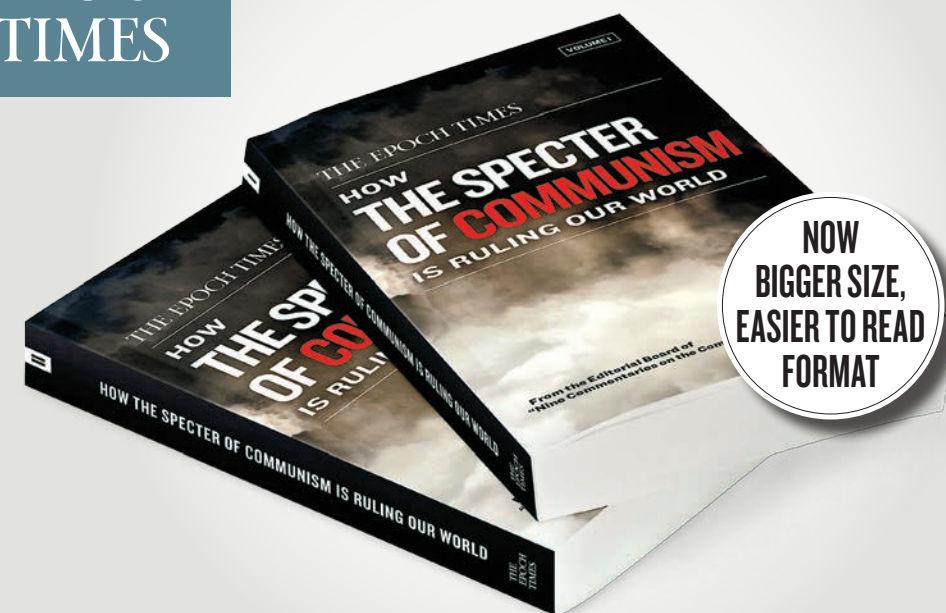
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**49%** of adults said the pandemic makes planning for their future feel impossible.

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## HOW THE SPECTER OF COMMUNISM IS RULING OUR WORLD

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“Light Snow” (Nov. 22 through Dec. 6) is the second solar term of winter, and it is unlike any other, according to traditional Chinese wisdom.

CHINESE WISDOM FOR SEASONAL LIVING

## Slow Down and Sleep Long for Winter Health

Solar Term: ‘Light Snow’ (Nov. 22–Dec. 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.

Solar Term: “Light Snow”

2021 Date: Nov. 22–Dec. 6

“Light Snow” (Nov. 22 through Dec. 6) is the second solar term of winter, and it’s unlike any other, according to traditional Chinese wisdom. During this time, the yang energy from the sun moves toward the heavens, and the yin energy retreats deep into the earth.

At this time, a unique phenomenon unfolds in nature as yin and yang’s extreme separation creates a gap and energy circulation stops. Symbolically, winter represents death.

Winter deepens as the fine snow starts to fall like powdered sugar sprinkling onto cookies and cakes. This snow is often wet or mixed with rain. It’s light and melts easily. Some may find this type of snow very poetic; a scene that presents an atmosphere of serenity and purity.

In ancient China, during the time of Light Snow, if there was no snow, farmers would lay off some of their permanent staff or send them away for a long break. This came from previous experience.

Because if the weather was still warm around this time, it was expected that insects would proliferate the following year, and the harvest would be affected.

Effects on People

Those who already suffer from depression may find that it gets worse during this period of time.

Traditional Chinese medicine believes in moderation and suggests that we avoid the seven extreme emotions, as they affect one’s mood and harm health. These emotions are joy, anger, worry, thinking, grief, fear, and shock.

Dr. Shang Wu, from the Qing Dynasty, recommends that we appreciate beautiful flowers if we’re stuck in emotions. Music can also help dissolve one’s worries.

5 Tips to Living in Harmony With ‘Light Snow’

1. Sit on a chair. Lift your feet off the ground and knock your feet together 12 times.
2. Soak your feet in warm water before going to bed.
3. Go to bed early and get up late to preserve yang energy.
4. Wear a turtleneck or scarf to protect the neck area.
5. Cover your waist and lower back with clothing made with natural fibers, such as cashmere, wool, silk, or a cotton blend.

Seasonal Foods

This is the perfect time to make preserved meat and vegetables. A traditional recipe is to make a spice rub from ground pepper-

corns, anise, fennel, clove, cinnamon, and sea salt. Cover the meat with the spices and store it inside a clay pot for 15 days in the fridge to avoid bacteria growth. Next, hang the preserved meat in a cold and airy area for 3 to 7 days. Finally, use peanut shells or cypress branches to smoke the meat until it’s nicely dried and well preserved.

Warm milk tea is excellent to repel the winter chill. Enjoy it with nuts or a ginger cookie. Warm fruit wines are also great. It’s wonderful if you add in goji berries or preserved fruits before heating. Just a little bit is enough, and be careful not to drink too much. Some may find it pleasant to add cinnamon and honey to sweeten the heart.

Traditional Chinese medicine believes in moderation, and suggests that we avoid the seven extreme emotions, as they affect one’s mood and harm health.

Bean soups, such as kidney beans, red beans, white beans, soybeans, or peanuts with ginger root, are delicious and help one to feel joyful during cold days.

Slow cookers or clay pots are the best tools for slow winter cooking. Ginger is also excellent. The warming powers of ginger and cinnamon are especially helpful to push excess humidity out from inside our bodies. Those who don’t enjoy ginger can use coconut milk and cinnamon instead.

Helpful foods for this time include banana, carrot, citrus, pumpkin, shiitake mushrooms, truffles, black beans, cashew nuts, black sesame seeds, tomatoes, celery, and walnuts.

Seasonal Essential Oils

Adding seasonal oils to bathwater, warm foot baths, or in oil burners can help to create balance during this season. Essential oils of bergamot, orange, mandarin, lemon, ginger, cinnamon, rose, lemon balm, verbena, and galanga are all good.

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

Warm milk tea is excellent to repel the winter chill. Enjoy it with nuts or a ginger biscuit.



MEDICALLY CORRECT

# 24 hours in the Trenches

This is the story of one day in the life of a hospitalist

PETER WEISS

I usually bring my own food with me for my 24-hour shifts in the hospital. You would think hospitals would have good, healthy food, but you would be wrong.

This day was going to end up being one of those crazy story days when I would wish I was sitting on a beach in Hawaii.

It’s 7 a.m. and I walk in to take over from my now-exhausted associate who had just had an all-nighter (which is nothing like the ones we enjoyed when we were younger). She leaves me with three people to round on and one soon to be going to the operating room (OR) for an ectopic pregnancy. Ectopic means “occurring in an abnormal position or in an unusual manner or form.” In an ectopic pregnancy, the fertilized egg doesn’t develop in the womb, where it is supposed to, and most often develops in one of the fallopian tubes. The labor board shows we are fully booked, and the emergency room is also busy.

I go down to the OR to introduce myself to this unfortunate young woman who has an ectopic pregnancy. I get her mother’s cell number to call after I finish.

The laparoscopy (sticking several tubes into the belly to see what’s happening) starts off well enough. The problem is, once I get all the tubes in place, I don’t see the ectopic fertilized egg, which would look like a swollen, squishy, large red grape. The fallopian tubes, which connect to the womb and are where a fertilized embryo starts to develop, look normal. I finally find the ectopic deep in the pelvis stuck to her descending colon (bowel).

This is a very dangerous place for an ectopic. If I try to remove it surgically, I could easily tear into her colon and cause some serious damage. Sometimes the hardest thing a surgeon can do is stop, and that’s what I did. I would treat this woman with something called methotrexate (a chemotherapy) which should kill off the ectopic and save her colon. Long story short, it worked (took a couple of days) and she still has her colon.

As soon as I got out of the OR, I was called the labor and delivery department. A doctor was having some problem with a patient who just delivered vaginally. She was profusely bleeding. I really wanted a cup of coffee, but that would have to wait.

My job is that of a laborist or hospitalist. I also spend half my time in my own clinic seeing regular patients, unless I am here in the hospital. Think of me like a fireman. We are there just in case of an emergency. Some days are quiet and I can read, write, or just have my cup of coffee. Some days are like today, with crisis after crisis fueling an adrenaline rush. We are experienced (hopefully) to handle the most serious medical emergencies that can happen and with God’s grace help someone truly in need. Our hospital handles a lot of indigent patients and we are all they have.

This patient in particular was really



bleeding and her doctor was a little overwhelmed, but he knew enough to ask for help. The patient’s pulse was starting to race, her bleeding looked watery as her blood pressure started to fall. I asked the doctor if I now had control of the case, since it was still his patient. When he gave control over to me, I called for a massive hemorrhage protocol. This sets off alarm bells for a call to action.

The problem with post-delivery bleeding is it can be life-threatening if not recognized and handled quickly. This patient was going into DIC (disseminated intravascular coagulation) which is where a patient uses up all their own blood clotting material and has nothing left to stop her own bleeding.

A code was called. We started transfusions of packed red cells, plasma, platelets, and other necessary blood products. We gave her a number of medications to “clamp” up her uterus to help stop the bleeding. She ended up losing about 3 liters of blood which is a little over half her blood volume. The blood pressure finally started improving and her color came back to her. This woman survived because of the quick action the nurses and other doctors took. My job was just to direct the action.

Now I really wanted my coffee. My shift was still only just beginning. It starts at 7 a.m. and runs through until the next day at 7 a.m. This day was a strange one, but I did get a few hours of no calls. Did I say I wanted coffee? There was a new call down to the emergency department to see a 40-year-old woman with very heavy periods.

She was anemic (low blood count) but nothing too terrible. She had no insurance and my job was to make sure there was nothing life-threatening. This was an easy one. I wrote her a birth control prescription to control her periods and told her to eat food high in iron as well as iron supplements plus a few more for good measure.

We are experienced (hopefully) to handle the most serious medical emergencies that can happen and with God’s grace help someone truly in need.

I’ll never know if she actually filled them or not.

A laborist’s role is to handle emergencies, we aren’t there for routine medical management. We get several referrals a day to see patients in the hospital who need just that, routine medical care, such as ordering a mammogram, or discussing how to manage fibroids. Our health care system needs a lot of work, but my role is very specific. I have no way of following up on any routine requests.

The rest of the day was relatively calm until an active COVID patient needed a C-section at 34 weeks gestation. Her pulse oxygenation was deteriorating as was the fetal monitor strip. We had to act pretty quickly. I had to put on the monkey suit, full headgear with a power backpack for ventilation. It’s not the easiest operating in a spacesuit. I felt like Matt Damon in the Martian.

Mom and baby did well. The rest of the shift entailed several routine emergency room calls and visits and two regular vaginal deliveries.

All in all, a busy shift with about four hours of total sleep until I handed the baton over to my relief.

Another day in the trenches.

John Bunyan, an English writer from the 17 century, said it nicely, “You have not lived today until you have done something for someone who can never repay you.”

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

Hospitals rely on a team of physicians ready to respond to whatever crisis or medical emergency arises.

## Air Pollution Is a Risk Factor for Rheumatoid Arthritis

SARAH COWNLEY

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a growing concern among older adults. Many known risk factors are associated with RA, but a new study published in the journal Rheumatology suggests a link between air pollution and the condition.

For this study, researchers from the University of Verona, Italy, collected longitudinal data of patients affected by rheumatoid arthritis and daily concentrations of air pollutants in the area. A case-crossover study used this data to examine the correlation between rheumatoid arthritis flares and air pollution. Exposure to pollutants was compared in 30- and 60-day periods preceding an arthritic flare.

A total of 888 rheumatoid arthritis patients were the focus of the study, along with their 3,396 follow-up visits. Researchers were able to identify an exposure-response relationship between air pollution concentration and the risk of having abnormal C-reactive protein (CRP) levels.

These CRP levels were increased in patients who were exposed to higher concentrations of air pollut-

ants. It was found that in the 60 days preceding a flare-up, concentrations of carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, nitric oxide, oxides of nitrogen, and ozone were much higher.

“The excessive risk was seen even at very low levels of exposure, even below the proposed threshold for the protection of human health,” the authors



There are many illnesses and diseases that have been linked to air quality, including bone density loss, cancer, and cardiovascular disease.

concluded. “Our study has important and direct consequences. To reduce the burden of RA, public and environmental health policymakers should aim to diminish gaseous and particulate matter emissions to a larger extent than currently recommended.”

RA Symptoms

It’s unclear whether those with the condition suffer from more symptoms where air pollution is excessive. More research is needed to understand the link between the condition and pollution.

There are many illnesses and diseases that have been linked to air quality, including bone density loss, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. As these conditions continue to rise, it is vital to connect the environmental causes to help reduce the risk.

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

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# A Way to Use the Internet Mindfully

The internet offers unique opportunities—and temptations



Just like the first piece of dessert delivers joy that quickly falls with overindulgence, the same is true for my use of the internet.



If we could each use the internet only in the ways that serve us, what a world we could live in.

## MIKE DONGHIA

Here's a question worth pondering: Has the internet had an overall positive or negative impact on your life?

As you read and hopefully enjoy this article, take a minute to reflect on all that you appreciate about the internet and its benefits in your life.

- Do you have any favorite blogs that you follow?
- Does the internet help you to keep in touch with distant friends or family?
- How has the internet helped you to save time or money?
- Have you watched any good movies or TV shows lately?

Now, take another minute to think about times when your relationship with the internet has been less than ideal.

- Do you ever find yourself compulsively checking for emails or news updates?
- Have you ever spent way more time than you expected scrolling on social media or watching videos?
- Has the internet ever fed into any addictions by making them easier to access?

I think many would agree that the internet is an amazing and powerful creation—capable of delivering great benefits. They would also agree the internet can trigger behaviors that are difficult to tame.

## Digital Versus Physical

As someone who is curious and loves learning, I completely resonate with the appeal of the internet as a source of knowledge. That part of my personality is the reason I feel a wave of happiness when I walk into a big, beautiful library.

But something is fundamentally different about my relationship to the physical world of books and magazines than the digital world of blog posts and videos. And I think that difference is a key to unlocking a healthier, more mindful approach to using the internet.

So, what are some of these fundamental differences between the digital medium of the internet and the physical medium of a library or bookstore? I can think of three:

The digital world is limitless, the physical world has limits.

The digital world has hyperlinks, the physical world does not.

The digital world is anywhere, the physical world is somewhere.

I know from experience that the internet will take and take and take—unless I draw a line.

Before you go on the internet, plan what you intend to do with your time online and set a timer to limit your digital excursion.

## Too Much Consumption

One theory on the rise of obesity is that we are being powerfully re-shaped by our physical environments. Delicious, convenient, and affordable junk food combined with significantly less need for physical activity has led to the global health challenge that we now face.

But what if something similar happens when you give humans limitless access to the internet? The content we consume from social media to videos to news is enjoyable, accessible, and virtually free. An hour of social media might not be “bad for you” in the same way that excess sugar consumption might be, but the struggle to control it is similar. Even those of us who wish we would spend less time “consuming” on the internet struggle to do so because the pull of the internet is just so strong. Just as those larger factors led to the deterioration of our bodies, might the internet be something similar to our minds and spirits?

## The Internet, Mindfully

My approach to this modern challenge has been to create a set of “rules of engagement” that allow me to enjoy the internet, but mindfully.

I do enjoy the internet, after all. Without it, the blog I keep wouldn't exist (nor this article). My job also wouldn't exist and I wouldn't have discovered nearly so many cool places on Google Maps.

But I know from experience that the internet will take and take and take—unless I draw a line. The temptation of easy, instant pleasure too often overrides the delayed

gratification of meaningful work and long-term goals.

That is why I need rules.

My personal rules operate with one simple principle: to decide in advance how I want to approach the internet so I don't have to rely on willpower alone to know when enough is enough.

Of course, you still need self-discipline to stick with your self-imposed rules. But I've found that somehow the rules make it easier, as if I am listening to a wiser, more mature version of myself offering timely advice. It's easier to stick to a commitment that you already made than to battle the compelling logic of “just a few more minutes” in real time.

## My 6 Simple Rules

Below are the rules that help me to use the internet more mindfully. Take them and make them your own. Review them daily until they become habits and maybe they can offer you the support they have offered me. And it might be obvious, but these rules generally apply to my personal, recreational use of the internet. For work, my only rule is to stay focused on one thing at a time.

**Have a plan with every click.** One of my most important personal rules is not to “surf” the internet. Around 90 percent of the time, I decide in advance to read or watch just the thing I'm looking for, and not allow myself to click on other interesting links.

**Set a timer.** For the 10 percent of the time that I'm browsing the internet more leisurely—perhaps checking Twitter, I will set a timer and stop when it rings. By now, my internal clock has gotten much better, but setting a timer is a wonderful way to start out.

**Create self-imposed limits.** I have other rules, too. For example, I set my phone to notify me when certain people in my inner circle email me. Other than that, I try to only check my personal email only about once a day. I have written down other simple rules that are now second nature to me.

**Be convinced that less is more.** Like a little child, I used to act as if more and more of my favorite things would bring me greater pleasure. Of course, I was wrong about that. Just like the first piece of dessert delivers joy that quickly falls with overindulgence, the same is true for my use of the internet. I found that by leaving myself wanting just a bit more, I am able to savor the fewer bites that I do take. Truly, I am happier for it.

**Take your leisure offline.** You might be thinking that I am anti-leisure by these rules. Not at all. I think rest, curiosity, and entertainment are part of a good, balanced life. But the internet, unlike other offline forms of leisure, is just too easy. Think of it as the difference between eating a candy bar and baking a gourmet cake. The cake is an experience and it slows you down to enjoy more. I find the same to be true for offline leisure such as books, magazines, and even going to the movies.

**Create more and consume less.** If all you are using the internet for is to consume, you are missing out. Creating a blog with my wife has become one of our favorite shared hobbies. Sure, the pleasure of creating involves more effort than consuming, but once you've created a daily habit like we have, the momentum helps to push you in the right direction. One of the internet's great gifts is that so many of us can now create in so many new ways.

*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.*



DAISY DAISY/SHUTTERSTOCK

## MENTAL HEALTH

# Overcoming the Decision-Making Fatigue of COVID-19

A psychological side effect of the pandemic is exhausting one of our critical thinking skills

*Continued from Page 1*

Many people ask, “What is the community transmission in my area today and how will this affect my choices? What is the vaccination rate? Is there a mask mandate here?” When the factors influencing a person's decisions are constantly changing, no decision is routine. And this is proving to be exhausting,” the APA report states.

## Contributing Factors

Living under the looming threat of a highly contagious and potentially fatal disease has people primarily worried about their physical health, but the pandemic has also taken a significant mental toll. The disease, and the official response to it, has left an undeniable wake of tragically poor decision-making, as demonstrated by rises in suicides, drug abuse, and domestic violence.

The pandemic has contributed to the overwhelming state of decision-making fatigue through ongoing social restrictions, constantly fluctuating mask rules, and fear of losing employment due to vaccine mandates.

In October, researchers concluded that one factor in particular drove our worry and angst: the rise in disease. An article in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's journal, MMWR, found that mental disturbance scores directly reflected changes in COVID-19 cases.

“The relative increases and decreases in frequency of reported symptoms of anxiety and depression at both the national and state levels mirrored the national weekly number of new COVID-19 cases during the same period,” researchers said.

After nearly two years under a state of alert, there are several signs of life returning to normal. But the stress level for many still remains high. According to Dr. Nina Cerfolio, a board-certified psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and assistant clinical professor at Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, even after the rollout of the vaccine, the severity of scores for both anxiety and depression remain higher than pre-pandemic levels.

“Similarly, the pandemic has increased my existing psychiatric patients' symptoms of anxiety and depression and has greatly increased the number of psychiatric referrals that I receive for impaired functioning,” Cerfolio said. “Symptoms to look out for are difficulty coping, irritability, impaired concentration and feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and worthlessness.”

Children also have shown to have suffered mentally and emotionally from the pandemic. Cerfolio points to a 46-country study by Save the Children that found that more than 8 in 10 kids have experienced increased negative feelings, and one-third of families have experienced violence at home.

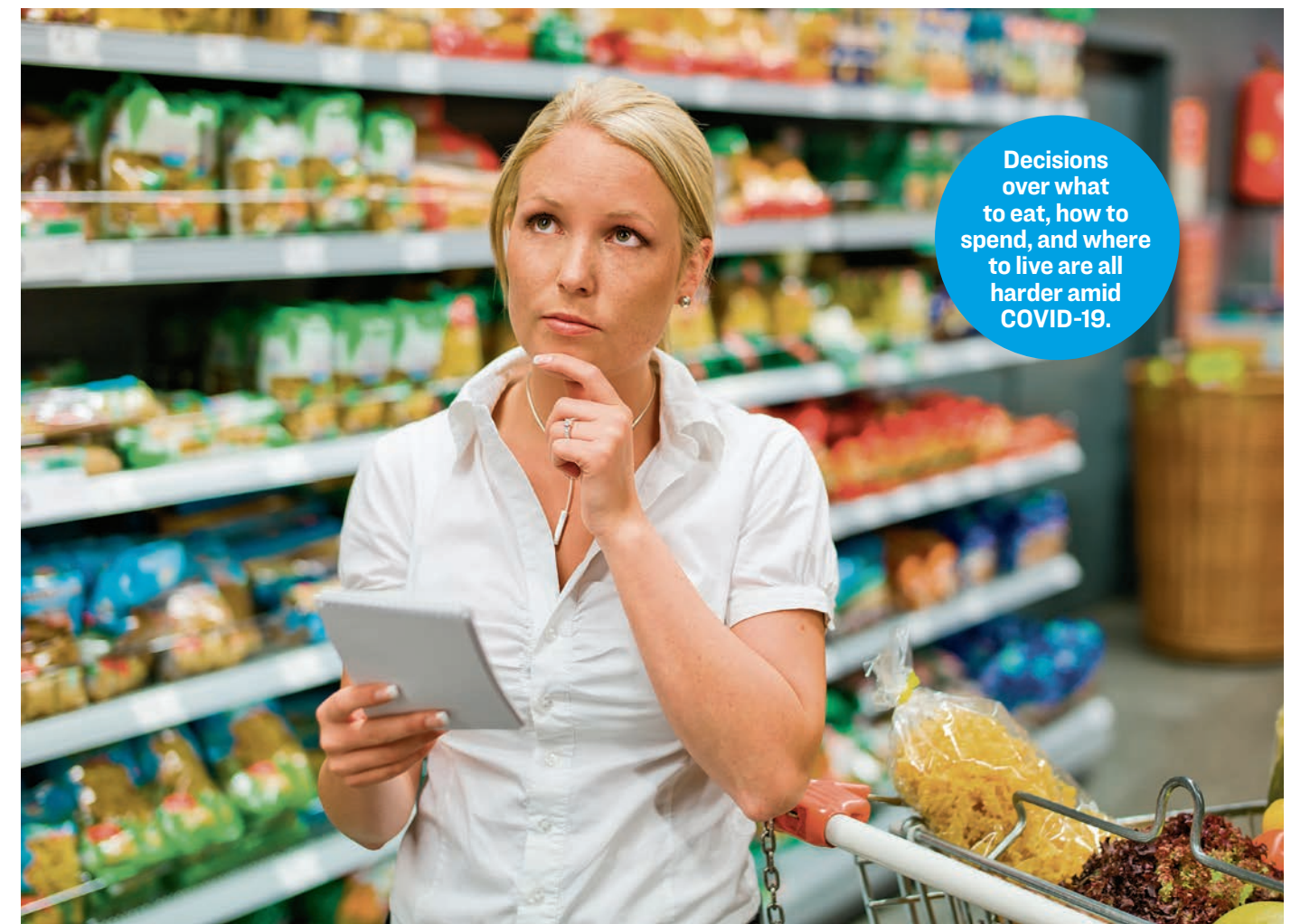
“As a result of remote learning, children have experienced disruptions in their education, suffer from a lack of developing crucial social learning skills, have higher school dropout rates, and experience feeling alienated,” Cerfolio said.

## Fear of the Future/Finding Focus

To cope with all the COVID-related stress and to model better behavior for the children who might be looking to you for guidance, Cerfolio recommends the same time-tested measures that have always been used to promote calm and focus, such as meditation and deep breathing. She also endorses the basic building blocks for creating a healthy mind and body.

“Daily exercise, eating a healthy diet to maintain your physical health, and doing those things that bring joy are vital,” she said. “Reaching out to help others more in need can decrease our sense of isolation and create feelings of being better interconnected.”

But some nagging thoughts may seem



LISA-S/SHUTTERSTOCK

Decisions over what to eat, how to spend, and where to live are all harder amid COVID-19.

too loud to tune out. What if we face a more deadly variant? What if cases rise and health officials impose more lockdowns? What if the pandemic lasts another two years—or longer?

Even if you don't personally suffer from COVID-induced decision fatigue, just knowing that it exists can help you have compassion for those who do. And if merely hearing about the spread of a disease can tax the mind, consider the stress of those who confront an infection head on.

Charlie Mitchell sits in a hospital room while her 4-year old son sleeps on the bed next to her. The boy has been diagnosed with COVID-19, and Mitchell says he's become the first child to be treated for the disease in her city's hospital. Children don't typically suffer from COVID, but Mitchell's son has added complications: Down Syndrome, leukemia, and the symptoms of an additional infection.

“To say this is a test of my resilience and mental well-being is an understatement,” Mitchell said. “We successfully self-isolated during 2020 with the support of family and friends. We have done everything we could to avoid getting to this place. However, an outbreak of COVID at my son's school saw two-thirds of the class absent and it felt like a matter of time. Here we are.”

Mitchell says her son is stable and making progress, but she can't help but worry and feel her mind start to run away.

“My thoughts were going to some pretty dark places, and I could feel the panic rising in my body,” she said.

Thankfully, Mitchell understands that fear doesn't help support her son. She has worked as a professional coach for 20 years and now finds herself relying on the same techniques she's used with her clients.

“I'm grateful that I know the warning signs in my mind and in my body: my thoughts go into the future and usually worst-case scenarios, my heart rate increases, my breath gets short, sharp, and shallow, my mouth gets dry,” Mitchell said.

So how do you get a handle on a worried mind intent on predicting an ugly future? Mitchell starts with calming her body.

“I lower my shoulders and put them back a little. I sit a bit straighter and make sure my feet are flat on the floor. This helps my lungs to expand naturally, so I can breathe more deeply and reassure my body that there is not an emergency right now,” she said.

Next, she shakes off all the what-ifs and worst-case scenarios and focuses on the now.

“What can I see? What can I hear? What can I touch, smell, and taste?” Mitchell said. “I see my son is stable. He is calm and peaceful. He is safe and warm. He is well-fed, and sometimes healing just takes a little time.”

According to Mitchell, being in the future gets her mind lost in tragic thoughts, the vast majority of which will never

happen. As a consequence, she misses what's really going on in the present.

“I am exhausting my mind and my body. I make silly mistakes. I forget simple things, like drinking water to keep myself hydrated and taking a few minutes to sit in silence. I also don't notice what is actually going on right now with my son,” she said.

Once she's in the present, Mitchell has the mental capacity to acknowledge her blessings and the real things that can be done to improve the situation in the moment.

“I miss this when I am lost in my own world of future imagined disasters. I miss the gifts that are here in the present,” she said.

## A Change in Perspective

How else can we find comfort and stability in an increasingly uncertain world? Dr. Debanjan Banerjee, a consultant geriatric psychiatrist at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, says it's crucial that we address the fear and decision-making breakdown that characterizes COVID fatigue. He offers a few strategies to protect and preserve your mental health.

First, shift your perspective.

“How you frame things makes a huge difference in your mood,” Banerjee said. “It's only natural that most people tend to focus on the negative aspects, but you should try to steer your mindset in a different direction. So instead of saying to yourself, ‘I can't go on anymore,’ try shifting it to something like ‘This won't last forever and things will get better eventually,’” Banerjee said.

Next, let your worries work to your advantage.

“Worrying is a normal thing to feel, but dwelling on it too much can cause stress and anxiety. Why not let your worries motivate you into making some positive changes in your day-to-day life? If you're worried about losing your job during the pandemic, you can counter that by updating your resume and checking out job listings. In case the worst happens, you are more prepared and more equipped to handle the situation,” he said.

Banerjee also echoes Mitchell's advice: Fight the temptation to entertain all the worst what-ifs of the future, and hold your mind firmly in the present.

“It's understandably hard not to let your mind wander until you worry yourself to exhaustion, but try to stay where you are right now and focus on that,” Banerjee said. “Remind yourself that nobody knows what the future holds and all that worrying will not change things. Instead of worrying about what will happen in the next few months or a year from now, try to focus on what you can do this week.”

*Conan Milner is a health reporter for the Epoch Times. He graduated from Wayne State University with a Bachelor of Fine Arts and is a member of the American Herbalist Guild.*

# Insights on Friendship from Iris Murdoch

We can learn about broader forms of friendship from this writer and philosopher

CATHY MASON

Making friends might come easier to some people than others, but in general, we all use the same criteria for forming relationships. We are drawn to people who share our interests, or who we simply like and admire.

Once we make friends, we tend to hold them in high esteem. We speak positively about our friends, sometimes ignoring or downplaying their negative qualities. For many people, this positive outlook is the core of friendship—being a “good” friend is a matter of thinking and feeling positively about them as well as acting in caring ways toward them.

This type of friendship is what I’ll call “knowledge-free.” It involves no requirement to really know or understand the other person. On the flip side, this view of friendship suggests that having negative beliefs about your friends (even if those beliefs are warranted) makes you a worse friend.

As an ethicist who has researched friendship and virtue, this view of friendship just doesn’t seem right to me. It doesn’t capture all of what we want from friendship. I’ve studied the work of British Irish novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch, and I believe that her writings provide us with a fuller view of friendship.

Murdoch occupied a rare niche in 20th-century philosophy: a woman working in a fairly male-dominated field. She was also a Platonist interested in the reality of “the Good” in an era when such metaphysical theorizing was deeply unpopular. A highly successful novelist, Murdoch’s many books explore the trials and tribulations of intimate relationships.

## Love Is Knowledge

Much of Murdoch’s philosophical work examines the moral significance of love (which I take to be part of friendship). She regarded love as a central part of our moral life that had been unjustly ignored in the moral philosophy of her



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We may think being a good friend means ignoring our friend’s faults, but that will deny us the potential to know them more deeply.

**If friendship involves true knowledge of another person, it can’t require us to have untrue beliefs about them.**

era in favor of an endless focus on the function of moral language.

Unlike the view of friendship I described earlier, Murdoch’s conception of love is not “knowledge-free.” Instead, she suggests that understanding the other person is an integral part of love (and therefore of friendship, which plausibly involves love).

“Love is the perception of individuals. ... Love ... is the discovery of reality,” she wrote in “The Sublime and The Good” in 1959.

“Love is knowledge of the individual,” she added in “The Sovereignty of Good” in 1970.

You can see in these quotes Murdoch’s view that love is knowledge of the other person, or seeing them as they really are. Love involves understanding them as a person, both their positive and negative qualities.

Notably, Murdoch thinks that really knowing or understanding another person is a difficult task: “It is a task to come to see the world as it is.” According to the Freudian psychology Murdoch subscribes to in “The Sovereignty of Good,” humans are prone to “fantasy”—refusing to face the truth because it can damage our fragile egos.

So while we may have a natural, selfish tendency to believe reassuring fantasies about the goodness of other people (especially our friends), true friendship requires us to be patient, kind, and accepting of their negative qualities, too.

## Loving Attention

Being a good friend to others thus involves what Murdoch calls “loving attention”: regarding them in a

patient, caring way, and always trying to do justice to who they really are.

In a Murdochian view of friendship, being a good friend involves knowing or understanding our friends more fully. Think about the way a friendship develops: One might initially know a few facts about a friend’s interests, such as that they enjoy classical music. Over time, a good friend wouldn’t simply know that their friend enjoys classical music, but exactly what kind of music they like, what it is that they like about it, and the importance that it has in their life. This deepening understanding of the other person naturally leads to a more fulfilling friendship.

Murdochian friendship, therefore, rules out the idea that being a good friend requires having positive—but false—beliefs about one’s friends. If friendship involves true knowledge of another person, it can’t require us to have untrue beliefs about them.

How might this relate to the other things we usually expect of friends, such as that they treat us well and help us when we need it? Once we truly, lovingly see and understand another person, the right way to behave toward them will follow naturally. We won’t have to ask ourselves things like, “Should I bother helping my friend who is in need?” because seeing their need will itself compel us to act rightly.

Think about Iris Murdoch the next time a friend of yours does or says something you disagree with. Instead of ignoring their flaw or mistake, try to accept it as part of their whole—it may even strengthen your friendship.

*Cathy Mason is a Leverhulme early career fellow in philosophy at the University of Cambridge in the UK. This article was first published on The Conversation.*



Getting to know your friend’s faults, and vice versa, could bring you closer rather than drive you apart.



Science is researching an idea ancient people held as key—how to use our mind

# Metacognition Can Improve the ‘Cognition Crisis’

Thinking about thinking gives us the ability to develop a tool kit for our mind

BRENDAN CONWAY-SMITH

In these times of virtual meet-ups, negative news overload, and widespread uncertainty, it’s fair to say that it has been a tough time for our brains. If you’ve been feeling mentally subpar, you may be floating around the edges or caught in the middle of the “cognition crisis.” And don’t worry, you’re not alone.

Our world is facing a global mental health crisis, one that’s unique to modern times. Neuroscientist and neurologist Adam Gazzaley has called this a problem of “ancient brains in a high-tech world.”

Our brains have adapted for a very different environment, and our biological instincts are struggling to keep pace with

**One handy metaphor is to think of the brain as having both software and hardware.**



a sea of information, artificial stimulation, and smartphone pings. This has contributed to a worldwide surge in anxiety, depression, addiction, and other cognitive issues.

As is often the case, technology comes first and society adapts second. We’re learning that surviving and thriving in the modern world requires a better understanding of our mind. This need for “cognition about cognition” brings us to the science of metacognition.

## What Is Metacognition?

Metacognition is a fancy word for what we all know and do hundreds of times each day. Have you ever tried to focus your attention, attempted to regulate an emotion, or felt distracted and made the decision to

put away your phone? Each is an example of recognizing a mental state and trying to control it.

Metacognition involves the scientific study of how the mind can be aware of and control its own activity. Understanding how the mind works gives us insight into how we can use it better—an instructional how-to guide tailored to our personal psyches.

In a similar sense, the science of metacognition offers a more profound knowledge of how the mind can understand and control its own processes. It’s through this growing body of research that we hope to develop the tools to overcome our present mental health crisis.

Continued on Page 16

# Black Seed Oil Evaluated for Chronic Inflammation

Current and past research reveals how black seed oil may treat COVID-19

JOSEPH MERCOLA

Black seed oil has been used for its therapeutic benefits for thousands of years. Since the pandemic began, researchers have been evaluating the effect it may have on COVID-19.

The seeds come from the *Nigella sativa* (*N. sativa*) plant that grows in Southern Europe, Southwest Asia, and the Middle East. Traditional medicine healers have used the seeds in different forms.

Black seed is coal-black with a dull surface and shaped like tiny Brazil nuts. The

bioactive components include thymoquinone, alpha-hederin, alkaloids, and omega-6 fatty acids.

Black seed oil has also been used for dermatological applications. For example, a review of the literature in the *Journal of Dermatology & Dermatologic Surgery* found black seed oil could promote wound healing in farm animals and reduce the effects of vitiligo in lizards.

In one clinical study in humans, lotion infused with 10 percent of *N. sativa* oil reduced acne vulgaris after two months, with 67 percent of the patients fully satisfied and 28 percent partially satisfied with the results.

In the current research, scientists believe the oil may have promising benefits

in the treatment and prevention of COVID-19. However, while short-term use for treatment may be advantageous, it’s wise to avoid long-term use for prevention.

**Black Seed Oil May Be Promising Option for COVID-19**  
Historically, black seed oil has been used to help balance the inflammatory response in the body as well as reduce oxidative stress, inflammation, and ischemia (a restriction in blood supply to some parts of the body). Using recent computational findings, one research group found the active ingredients in *N. sativa* were “strongly suggestive” of a capability to combat COVID-19.

Continued on Page 12



Black seed oil is racking up an impressive list of researched health benefits, including potential therapeutic effects on COVID-19.

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## Beauty Secrets of Tea

Tea has active compounds that can have multiple helpful effects

Nature has provided us with an amazing plant that provides not only delicious, nutritious beverages but beauty and health aids as well.

LISA ROTH COLLINS

The next time you brew yourself a pot of tea, you may want to set some aside for beauty's sake. Perhaps you are familiar with the beauty tip that involves placing cooled brewed tea bags on your eyes to fight dark circles and puffy eyes. It turns out tea is a great candidate for other beauty secrets as well.

These can typically be attained using black, green, or oolong teas, although occasionally another type is recommended. So get ready to learn about some new beauty tips using teas.

### Beauty Secrets of Tea

Tea is rich in antioxidants, especially catechins and polyphenols, which are partly responsible for the beauty benefits it provides. Whether you drink it, apply it to your body, or even take it as a supplement, tea can give your skin, hair, and nails a real beauty boost.

**Stop dryness.** A cooled cup of green tea poured into a spritzer and applied to your skin can help with dryness while also removing toxins. Green tea on your skin also gives it a glow. No spritzer? You can apply the tea with cotton balls or a soft cloth as well.

**Use one to two cups of black or green tea as a hair rinse to bring out the luster in your hair.**

**Beat the bites.** Mosquitos and other biting bugs can leave your skin with little unsightly bumps. Place used, cooled chamomile tea bags on those bumps to bring them down and fight the itch.

**Love your locks.** Use one to two cups of black or green tea as a hair rinse to bring out the luster in your hair. Steep one to two tea bags in 8 or 16 ounces of water and let it cool. Pour the cooled tea over freshly washed hair and let it stay on your hair for 10 minutes. Then, shampoo and condition your hair.

**Save your shave.** Who likes to shave their legs, especially when what's left behind is irritated, red, itchy skin? Manage these irritations with cooled black tea bags held on your skin. Tannins in tea are the "secret" here.

**Save yourself from sunburn.** A refreshing and pain-relieving remedy from sunburn involves applying cooled, used tea bags on your skin. Steep 6 to 8 black tea bags in 8 ounces of water and let it cool. You can place the tea bags on your sunburned skin or, if the area is

large, soak a soft cloth in the tea (it will be stained afterward, so use something you don't need) and lay it on your sunburn. Leave the bags or cloth on your sunburn until the moisture is absorbed. Reapply as needed until you feel relief. Black tea can also reduce redness.

**Promote collagen production.** Collagen is essential for healthy skin, and hibiscus tea is a great source of vitamin C, which is necessary for the production of collagen. When you enjoy hibiscus tea, you will also be treating your skin to the antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals in this delicious beverage.

**Eliminate foot odor.** The "beauty" of this tip is you say goodbye to smelly feet. Soak your feet in a cooled concentration of black or green tea. The tannic acid can stop smelly, sweaty feet because it has antifungal and antibacterial properties.

**Have grateful gums.** If you lose a tooth or have one pulled, you will likely have painful or bleeding gums. Soothe those gums with a cooled black or green tea bag. You can also treat your gums by rinsing your mouth with a cup of warm peppermint tea mixed with a pinch of salt.

**Combat acne and oil.** Jasmine tea contains beneficial oils and has antimicrobial qualities that can help with oily or acne-prone skin. Brew some jasmine tea, let it cool, and apply it to your face.

**Scrub your face.** Don't throw your used tea bags away. Dry them out, open them up, and use the leaves as a facial scrub. Rinse your face and then moisturize for a smooth, glowing face.

**Boost hair color.** Would you like to enhance your hair color naturally and skip a chemical approach? Then grab three to four black tea bags, steep them in 8 ounces of boiling water, and allow the brew to cool. Spray or pour the black tea on your hair. Leave it in your hair for 30 to 60 minutes, then rinse.

**Get rid of rashes.** Poison ivy and other rashes can respond well to tea. Steep 6 tea bags in 8 ounces of boiling water. Allow the tea to cool and then apply to a skin rash. Reapply the tea as needed or until the itching has subsided.

### Tea Treatment

Nature has provided us with an amazing plant that provides not only delicious, nutritious beverages but beauty and health aids as well. Treat yourself and your body to the healing and beauty bonuses of tea today.

Lisa Roth Collins is a registered holistic nutritionist and also the marketing manager at [NaturallySavvy.com](http://NaturallySavvy.com), which first published this article.



Most people throw out their used tea without realizing these leaves have several other uses.

# Hair Today, Hair Tomorrow

Simple strategies to stop hair loss and restore your locks

ANN LOUISE GITTLEMAN

Want more good hair days? Don't we all. For many of us, those luxurious locks we so proudly wore with confidence and grace when we were younger have gotten thinner and duller with age. But if you're like me, you aren't giving in to aging easily. That means holding on to every strand of hair we have by applying daily lifestyle habits that will help us continue to be our radiant, shining selves.

Now—let's talk about the factors that cause thinning, dull hair, and strategies we can apply to reverse this curse:

### The Power of Protein

Did you know that your hair is a whopping 98 percent protein? So, simply put, if you aren't getting enough dietary protein, or aren't able to properly assimilate the protein you eat, your hair isn't going to be able to get the proper nourishment it needs to be healthy and lustrous. Protein is absolutely critical for strengthening and sustaining hair growth.

Are you getting enough high-quality protein in your diet? Are you eating enough eggs, lean meat, fish, and poultry? And more importantly, are you adequately digesting it? If you are among the more than 90 percent of people who are slow digesters, you most likely are low in the critical stomach acid necessary to properly break down the protein you are eating. It's common for undigested protein to pass through your body without being absorbed and utilized in the areas we need it most—including your hair.

### The Importance of Stomach Acid for Good Hair

Hydrochloric acid, which is the acid in your stomach, is one of the strongest acids known to man. It activates pepsin, which is an important enzyme needed for protein digestion, and signals the production and release of pancreatic enzymes for further digestion and absorption.

Stomach acid deficiency makes it impossible to adequately break down proteins into energy and their amino acids, which are important for DNA and healthy cell formation. This leads to the inability to form collagen, and ultimately, hair loss. And without adequate stomach acid, we can't absorb minerals like iron, calcium, zinc, magnesium, and selenium, or B vitamins like thiamine, folate, and vitamin B12, which are all important nutrients we need for hair health.

Fortunately, the stomach is very responsive to changes in its environment, so even small changes can have a long-lasting effect. Start by taking a teaspoon of unpasteurized apple cider vinegar every morning before breakfast. This wakes up your digestion and lowers the pH of the stomach.

In addition, if you have noticed recent hair loss or other major changes in your hair, it could very possibly be due to high stress or trauma you experienced over the past several months from things like hormonal fluctuations, medications, toxins, nutritional deficiencies, illness, and other factors like the pandemic. This alone can explain thinning hair.

### Nutritional Treatments for Hair Loss

While there are many products marketed to treat hair loss, you may want to consider tending to the nutritional factors involved.



Hair health is the result of many biochemical and metabolic actions going on inside your body.

### B Vitamins

Biotin (vitamin B7) promotes growth and helps rebuild damaged hair. Women are especially at risk for biotin deficiency during pregnancy and lactation and during menopause. Pantothenic acid (vitamin B5) stimulates hair growth by supporting your adrenal glands, thereby improving your body's management of stress.

### Zinc

Zinc deficiency is a common culprit for hair loss in both men and women. Zinc acts directly on hair follicles, and stress alone can triple zinc loss. Zinc helps metabolize testosterone, which in excess can cause hair loss. Make sure you are getting at least 15 mg of supplemental zinc daily.

### Essential Fatty Acids

Oils rich in omega-3 fatty acids such as fish oil have long been known to benefit skin and hair. Omega-3s promote thicker hair and reduce inflammation, which increases hair loss. Several studies show that omega-3 fats plus omega-6 and antioxidants decrease hair loss and increase hair thickness and density.

### Hormones and Thyroid

Any hormonal change can affect your hair, especially a sudden drop in hormone levels. This is why many women experience hair loss a few months after childbirth (postpartum alopecia), as well as during menopause.

A cause of thinning hair in women of all ages is estrogen dominance, which means your estrogen to progesterone ratio is too high. Estrogen-like chemicals in the environment, stress, menstrual changes, and even insufficient dietary fiber (binds to excess estrogen) can cause hormone havoc.

Your thyroid may be another factor in hair loss. Hair loss is one of the first symptoms of low thyroid function, and one-third of those with hypothyroidism experience hair loss.

### Tips for Restoring Your Luxurious Locks

Beyond tending to the issues above, if you're not the Rapunzel you'd like to be, there are other steps you can take to restore your luxurious locks.

**If you have noticed recent hair loss or other major changes in your hair, it could very possibly be due to high stress or trauma you experienced over the past several months**



To stimulate hair follicles, apply a few drops of rosemary oil to a natural bristle brush, then brush your hair 100 strokes just before bed, or try massaging your scalp with your fingertips moistened with a couple drops of essential oil in one tablespoon of jojoba.

### Horsetail Extract

Horsetail extract is rich in minerals for hair. It contains ample amounts of the mineral silica, which strengthens hair strands. It's also highly regarded for healthy skin and bones. Horsetail tea is an easy and enjoyable way to get more silica in your daily diet. I am also a huge fan of FIJI Water, which contains an impressive amount of naturally occurring silica.

### Sulfur

Sulfur can be abundantly found in beef, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, garlic and onions, fruits, and vegetables. It can also be taken as a supplement in a high-quality purified MSM (methylsulfonylethane) product. I add 2 to 3 scoops of MSM powder to my morning smoothies to support keratin production, which is a structural constituent of hair and nails.

### Rosemary Essential Oil

As you will find in my book "Radical Longevity," I love rosemary essential oil for lustrous, thick hair. To stimulate hair follicles, apply a few drops of rosemary oil to a natural bristle brush, then brush your hair 100 strokes just before bed. This is also wonderfully relaxing to the muscles beneath the scalp. Alternatively, massage your scalp with your fingertips moistened with a couple drops of essential oil in one tablespoon of jojoba.

Other oils that increase scalp circulation include lavender, cedarwood, sage, and peppermint. Little known spikenard oil (Himalayan plant, *nardostachys jatamansi*, related to Valerian) has also been shown effective.

By implementing these simple strategies, you can help reverse hair loss or damage and restore the health of your hair as you continue your graceful journey.

Ann Louise Gittleman holds a master's in nutrition education from Columbia University, and is certified as a nutrition specialist by the American College of Nutrition. She also has a doctorate in holistic nutrition and has served as the chief nutritionist of the Pediatric Clinic at Bellevue Hospital and is the former director of nutrition at the Pritikin Longevity Center in Santa Monica, Calif. This article was originally published on [AnnLouise.com](http://AnnLouise.com)

## Warm Up Before Working Out, Stretch After

MAT LECOMPTÉ

If your joints start hurting while you're working out, it's best to stop and take another approach.

Joint pain is never good during exercise, and it can signify two things: potential injury or the fact that your body isn't quite ready for the strain. This may be of particular interest as temperatures begin to drop.

Warming up prior to exercise can help prevent joint pain and reduce the risk of an injury. It allows the synovial fluid to work its way into the joints so they are lubricated and move freely.

What would a warm-up look like? It really depends on what you're doing. If you're heading outdoors for a walk, jog, or bike ride, it can involve simply starting out at a slower pace. Take 10 to 15 minutes to ease into it before really hitting your stride.

For resistance training, a walk can help. It's also a good idea to focus on the joints you'll be using, so performing the movements without any weight, or low weight, is a great habit to get into. Once you're warm, you should be good to go.

**Although you want to be loose and warm prior to a workout, you want to save the stretching for the end.**

Sometimes it can involve things like shoulder circles or lunges—anything that gets blood to the area.

Warming up before exercise is a good way to avoid injury. Stretching afterward

can help, too.

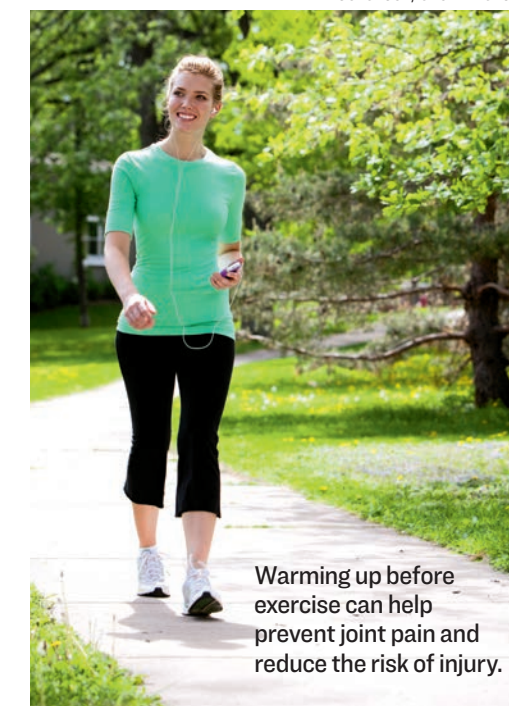
Stretching before a workout can be dangerous. It may trick the body into expanding its range of motion, potentially putting it in compromising situations that can lead to injury. So although you want to be loose and warm prior to a workout, you want to save the stretching for the end.

Stretching after a workout can aid in recovery and prevent soreness that may occur. It will also help to improve your next day's workout.

Remember to warm up before and stretch after. It can help protect your joints and prevent injury.

If you do feel joint pain during exercise, stop immediately. Reduce your intensity or find alternative exercises.

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



Warming up before exercise can help prevent joint pain and reduce the risk of injury.

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# Black Seed Oil Evaluated for Chronic Inflammation

Current and past research reveals how black seed oil may treat COVID-19



Continued from Page 9

The review paper, which looked at several previous studies of *N. sativa*, suggests that the active ingredients, especially thymoquinone, alpha-hederin, and nigellidine may be an alternative herbal treatment in the fight against COVID-19. The paper reviews several biochemical pathways that the active ingredients in black seed oil may use to protect health.

For example, the researchers reviewed past studies that demonstrated the actions the active ingredients in black seed oil have on the immune system that may help reduce the severity of COVID-19. The active compounds have a significant antihistamine effect in animal studies and thymoquinone downregulates interferon regulatory factor 3 activation, which plays a critical role in innate immune responses.

Autophagy is a mechanism that clears out damaged cells in the body. Data has shown that COVID-19 suppresses autophagy and pharmacological agents used to induce the process may therefore have an antiviral effect. One study published in 2018 indicated thymoquinone promotes autophagy in the heart muscle. The researchers suggested that further study should be undertaken to determine if thymoquinone has a similar effect with COVID-19.

Severe COVID-19 is characterized by cytokine storms that may require intensive care. Animal studies have demonstrated that the bioactive compound alpha-hederin has anti-inflammatory activity and can decrease histamine levels which can in turn lower cytokine levels.

The researchers reported one study had found thymoquinone helped inhibit two enzymes that produce inflammatory leukotriene and prostaglandins. Researchers suggest that these actions may potentially make the active compounds in *N. sativa* useful in the treatment and prevention of SARS-CoV-2 viral infections.

Finally, in their review of comorbid conditions associated with COVID-19, the researchers found that *N. sativa* may have a positive effect against diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, autoimmune and autoinflammatory diseases, and bacterial infections associated with COVID-19.

After a review of the evidence, the researchers suggest that further experiments with the active compounds found in black seed oil are required to determine if they have preventive potential or may provide a new treatment modality.

## Zinc Combinations Help Treat COVID-19

Research into medications that may influence COVID-19 has included antivirals. One such antiviral being studied is favipiravir. Data show the drug was approved and has been used for flu infections in Japan. In late 2020, a study published in PNAS revealed that when given in high doses to hamsters, favipiravir had promising antiviral activity against SARS-CoV-2.

However, a computer-model molecular docking study published in Biologi-

▲ The bioactive compounds nigellidine and alpha-hederin found in black seed oil were able to inhibit SARS-CoV-2 with a greater potential than favipiravir, chloroquine, and hydroxychloroquine.

**If you are interested in using black seed oil, consider the extracts of the bioactive ingredients and not the whole oil.**



Black seed oil has been used for its therapeutic benefits for thousands of years. The seeds come from the *Nigella sativa* (*N. sativa*) plant that grows in Southern Europe, Southwest Asia and the Middle East.

*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 origi-*

dine and alpha-hederin found in black seed oil were able to inhibit SARS-CoV-2 with greater potential than favipiravir, chloroquine, and hydroxychloroquine.

Evidence from a second paper that reviewed the biological effects of the active compounds in black seed oil suggested that thymoquinone may block ACE2 receptors, which is where the SARS-CoV-2 binds to the cell and releases the viral RNA into the cytoplasm.

Contrary to what the PNAS hamster study found, these researchers hypothesized that chloroquine, and potentially the derivative hydroxychloroquine, may also interfere with the virus's ability to bind with the ACE2 receptors.

This is one pathway the researchers suggest that black seed oil may use in the treatment of COVID-19. Another pathway is as a zinc ionophore. The body uses zinc in several pathways to support the immune system, including:

- Proliferation and activation of natural killer cells, macrophages, neutrophils, and T and B cells
- Mediating protection against reactive oxygen species produced during an inflammatory response
- Stopping recombinant RNA dependent RNA polymerase activity needed to replicate SARS-CoV-2
- Inhibiting replicase processing

Therefore, moving zinc into the cytoplasm is crucial to help prevent the replication of the SARS-CoV-2 virus and thus effectively stop infected cells from infecting other cells.

Oral supplementation of zinc alone is not sufficiently effective since zinc cannot move easily across the cell wall. It needs another compound to provide transportation. The second compound is called a zinc ionophore. The application of zinc with an ionophore has demonstrated improved outcomes in patients hospitalized with COVID.

Research has identified several zinc ionophores, including chloroquine, hydroxychloroquine, quercetin, and EGCG. Scientists have suggested that several of the terpenes in black seed oil, such as nigellimine, are similar in structure to chloroquine. They hypothesize that this may mean they can function in a similar manner as a zinc ionophore.

Thus, recent data has shown that the active ingredients found in black seed oil may act as a zinc ionophore and may help block the ACE2 receptors the virus uses to infect cells.

## Black Seed Oil

The immune-modulating activities of black seed oil help to regulate the immune system and maybe another pathway in the treatment for COVID-19. In addition to the studies using black seed oil, researchers have separated the bioactive ingredients in black seed oil and evaluated their potential benefit against SARS-CoV-2.

A data review on thymoquinone was published in February 2021, in which the researchers reviewed the bioactivity of the compound as revealed in past research. They wrote that thymoquinone

phocytes, and cytokines suppressors.

Additionally, they cite past research that showed thymoquinone had antiviral potential against other viruses, including human immunodeficiency virus, other coronaviruses, Epstein-Barr virus, cytomegalovirus, and hepatitis C. In addition, they reviewed an Egyptian study in which thymoquinone demonstrated antiviral activity in a strain of SARS-CoV-2 isolated in patients and the inhibitory effect it has on the viral protease, which may reduce viral replication.

One study from Saudi Arabia evaluated the effectiveness of black seed oil as a supplement in patients with mild COVID-19 who were between the ages of 18 and 65. The intervention group received 500 mg of soft gel capsules twice daily for 10 days in addition to their standard treatment.

Initial results were published on Clinical Trials. The primary outcome measured was the percentage of participants who showed clinical recovery within 14 days after treatment began. The team reported 62.1 percent of those receiving the black seed oil demonstrated recovery from mild COVID-19 while 36 percent of the control group recovered within 14 days.

## Consider Oil for Short-Term Use

The Front Line COVID-19 Critical Care Alliance (FLCCC) lists black seed oil as an alternative for the prevention and treatment of COVID-19. They stress there is no "magic bullet" for COVID-19, yet:

"A number of therapeutic agents have shown great promise for both the prevention and treatment of this disease including Ivermectin, Vitamin D, quercetin, melatonin, fluvoxamin, corticosteroids, curcumin (turmeric), *Nigella sativa*, and antiandrogen therapy."

The team recommends taking *N. sativa* with honey as they both have antimicrobial, antiviral, immunomodulatory, and anti-inflammatory effects with proven safety profiles. They list *N. sativa* and EGCG. Scientists have suggested that several of the terpenes in black seed oil, such as nigellimine, are similar in structure to chloroquine. They hypothesize that this may mean they can function in a similar manner as a zinc ionophore.

While short-term use of black seed oil may be efficacious in the treatment of COVID-19, long-term use for prevention may have other unwanted effects. One study of the chemical composition of black seed oil shows that the majority of fatty acids are from linoleic acid, an omega-6 polyunsaturated fat. A wide range of research suggests linoleic acid is likely the leading contributing cause of virtually all chronic diseases we have encountered in the past century.

If you are interested in using black seed oil, consider the extracts of the bioactive ingredients and not the whole oil.

If you are seeking an alternative for prevention and treatment, consider a combination of quercetin and zinc. Quercetin also has antiviral properties and is a zinc ionophore. While safe to take for about two weeks when you're ill, it is important you are careful with zinc supplements as you may offset your

# Shiitake Mushrooms Proven to Benefit Dozens of Diseases

The delicious fungi add a savory flavor to any dish and bestow a long list of welcome side effects

If you're looking for a superfood to support your immune system health and act as an overall health tonic, shiitake mushrooms are a top choice. As a bonus, they impart a savory umami flavor to virtually any meal they touch.

Shiitake mushrooms (*Lentinus edodes*) have been prized for their anticancer and immunomodulating properties since ancient times and are a mainstay of traditional Chinese medicine. Historically, shiitake mushrooms were harvested from mountainous regions in Asia, but today they're the second most widely cultivated mushroom variety in the world—second only to the common button mushroom.

Shiitake mushrooms are also a popular culinary-medicinal mushroom in Japan, and the word shiitake comes from the Japanese words shii, or "from a hardwood tree," and "take," or "mushroom."

Their rich, earthy, almost buttery flavor is packed with umami, the fifth taste that's hard to put into words but is often described as meaty and savory. This makes them an ideal meat substitute in vegetarian dishes and a worthy addition to soups, stews, seafood, and poultry dishes. Looking for even more good reasons to add shiitake mushrooms to your meals? They're linked to notable benefits to your health.

## A Shiitake a Day ...

Shiitake mushrooms are a rich source of protein, fiber, minerals, and vitamins, including B1, B2, B12, C, D, and niacin, as well as antioxidants and beta-glucans. They contain the most vitamin D of any plant food.

A form of beta-glucans in shiitake mushrooms, known as lentinans, are believed to play a role in mushroom's immunomodulatory effects, while other beta-glucans have documented stimulatory effects on the immune system that are strong enough to ward off influenza in animal studies.

Lentinan extracts have also been found to produce immunomodulatory and pulmonary cytoprotective effects that can reduce oxidative stress, activate beneficial macrophages that are part of your innate immune system, and even ameliorate the inflammatory cytokine storm that causes potentially fatal acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS).

Even eating a reasonable amount—4 ounces—of dried shiitake mushrooms daily can have a significant impact on your immune function. When researchers gave a daily four-ounce serving of dried shiitake mushrooms to healthy adults between the ages of 21 and 41 for four weeks, improved immunity resulted, including increased cell proliferation and reduced C-reactive protein, a measure of inflammation.

The immunomodulatory effects of lentinans are so strong that they also reduced infection by antibiotic-resistant *Klebsiella pneumoniae* bacteria that had led to pulmonary sepsis in rodents. Bacterial infection is a leading cause of ARDS, which in turn is often lethal in critically ill patients. Administering lentinan to bolster the immune system may be a promising solution.

## Prized for Anticancer Effects

By boosting your immune system, shiitake mushrooms have notable anticancer effects. Some research also suggests they may have antitumor activity that works on cells directly, even without immune system involvement.

When taken orally, lentinan extract from shiitake mushrooms led to significant regression in tumor formation in mice with colon cancer. It also led to "remarkable" antitumor effects in mice "not only by enhancing the immunity but also by directly killing the tumor and the induction of tumor cell apoptosis," wrote researchers in a 2013 study published in the *Journal of Agricultural and Food Chemistry*.

Even in the case of advanced pancreatic cancer, lentinan increased patients' survival time and improved quality of



Shiitake mushrooms have been a part of many medical traditions for centuries. Now researchers are uncovering why.

life. What's more, beta-glucans from shiitake mushrooms are capable of selectively inducing cell death of breast cancer cells while leaving healthy cells untouched, while mycelia extract from the mushroom reduced the incidence of adverse effects from chemotherapy when taken by patients with advanced cancer.

Active hexose correlated compound (AHCC), a supplement that's made from shiitake mushroom mycelia, is made up of a powerful mixture of amino acids, minerals, and polysaccharides. It acts as an immune system enhancer against tumor cells and pathogens and is the second most popular complementary and alternative medicine used by cancer patients in Japan.

Lentinan has also been singled out as a promising therapy for a number of human cancers, including lung, gastric, colorectal, ovarian, cervical, and non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

## Shiitakes as a Health Tonic

Like many whole foods, the synergistic effects of the nutrients and polysaccharides in shiitake mushrooms provide nourishing support for your whole body. Shiitake mushroom bars were described as a "nutritious food and a functional health food alternative" in the *International Journal of Medicinal Mushrooms*, in part because they lowered triglyceride levels by 10 percent after 66 days of consumption.

Studies have found shiitake extracts to be:

- Antiviral
- Liver protective
- Antihypercholelemic
- Antiproliferative
- Antimutagenic
- Anticavity
- Therapeutic against ulcerative colitis

In addition, beta-glucans in mushrooms like shiitakes increase intestinal viscosity, which reduces cholesterol absorption and promotes its excretion. Therefore, they're useful for optimizing cholesterol levels and have also been shown to have a favorable effect on other conditions including high blood pressure, diabetes, and infectious diseases.

At GreenMedInfo.com, you can browse through



The word shiitake comes from the Japanese words shii, or "from a hardwood tree," and "take," or "mushroom."

nearly 50 diseases and conditions that shiitake mushrooms may support. Among them:

- Cancer
- Inflammation
- Elevated triglycerides
- High cholesterol
- HIV infection
- Acetaminophen toxicity
- Aging
- Arthritis
- Arteriosclerosis
- Hepatitis C
- Type 1 diabetes
- Osteoporosis
- Sepsis
- Influenza
- Atherosclerosis
- Ulcerative colitis
- Bacterial infections
- Low immune function
- Fungal infection
- DNA damage

## How to Enjoy Shiitake Mushrooms

Fresh shiitake mushrooms work well sliced thickly, especially when used for their meaty flavor and texture. Look for shiitakes with thick, domed caps; it's the cap that you'll be eating, since the stems are quite tough. After rinsing the mushrooms gently or wiping them off with a damp cloth, trim off the stems, which you can save to add flavor to soup, pasta sauce, or stew.

Fresh shiitake mushroom caps can be quickly sautéed or stir-fried. If you choose to use the stems, add them first since they take longer to cook. Dried shiitake mushrooms are also popular, but you'll need to rehydrate them in hot water for about 20 minutes before cooking. The liquid from re-hydrated dried mushrooms can also be used as a base for vegetable broth and is an important part of dashi, a Japanese soup stock.

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◀ Fresh shiitake mushrooms work well sliced thickly, especially when used for their meaty flavor and texture.



If we want to make the world a better place and see thriving future generations, we need to stop stereotyping and pitting generations against each other.

## Don't Be So Quick to Stereotype Generations

A new book shows how wrong-headed our assumptions are about different generations and promotes understanding and connection

JILL SUTTIE

We've all heard the stereotypes before. The greatest generation is "responsible and hard-working"; baby boomers are "selfish"; Gen Xers are "cynical and disaffected"; millennials are "entitled and lazy"; Gen Zers are "civic-minded." Even though these stereotypes are frequently called into question, they linger in the mind, fed by media, politicians, and business experts.

But while characterizing generations is a common practice, it's often counterproductive, says Bobby Duffy, director of the Policy Institute at King's College London and author of a new book, "The Generation Myth: Why When You're Born Matters Less Than You Think"

“These blunt characterizations reflect a tendency to pick on younger generations for traits that are created by context.”

Bobby Duffy, director of the Policy Institute at King's College London and author of a new book, "The Generation Myth: Why When You're Born Matters Less Than You Think"

Why When You're Born Matters Less Than You Think," Duffy argues that assigning cohorts of people particular traits misses the importance of outside factors affecting their attitudes and actions. Plus, it takes us down a fruitless path of pitting one generation against another, creating division.

"The generation we were born into is merely one important part of the story, alongside the extraordinary influence of individual life cycles and the impact of historical events," writes Duffy. "Although it is possible to learn something invaluable about ourselves by studying generational dynamics, we will not learn these lessons from a mixture of manufactured conflicts and tiresome clichés."

As a course corrective, Duffy provides longitudinal data on a multitude of issues—from obesity to views on pre-marital sex to car ownership and much more—showing how generations respond to different social, health, and economic trends. In this way, he separates truly generational effects from changes that affect all ages at a particular historical moment or changes that affect everyone once they hit a certain age. This makes for fascinating reading, much of it counterintuitive—and instructive.

### How We Get Generational Stereotypes Wrong

Part of what drives generational stereotyping is uncertainty of the future and worry that our children will not do as well as we did in life, says Duffy. We look for simplistic explanations rather than exploring complex reasons for a generation's struggle to succeed, missing out on opportunities to work together to ameliorate present problems or prepare for future disaster.

A persistent myth—that Gen Xers and millennials are lazier, more materialistic, and less willing to act responsibly than other generations—obscures more important changes that are happening in society. When you look through the data, it becomes clear these stereotypes are ignoring long-term trends in rising wealth inequality, income stagnation, the need for more (and more expensive) education to compete in today's economy, and devastating market crashes. What some people call "delayed adulthood" has less to do with personality than external realities, like exorbitant housing costs or limited wealth accumulation. To solve the problem, Duffy argues, we need to get away from blaming the victims and prioritize affordable housing and rent control for vulnerable young people.

Sadly, those solutions are harder to enact than sticking to unflattering stereotypes. Older generations often ignore how much the world has changed since they were

young adults, failing to recognize that opportunities they enjoyed no longer exist. It's easier to rely on our cognitive biases and form shorthand stereotypes of the young, where we "overemphasize personality-based explanations for behavior that we observe in others, while underemphasizing situational explanations," writes Duffy.

"These blunt characterizations reflect a tendency to pick on younger generations for traits that are created by context," he adds.

Take the current media frenzy over social media's impacts on Gen Z. This follows a well-worn pattern: Each successive generation has found some kind of new media or technology to blame for the woes of youth, including books, radio, comics, TV, and now social media. While it's true that social media use is higher in younger generations than past generations—and that could be tied to problems in youth, including mental health declines—evidence for that is inconsistent.

"It's vital that we resist the lure of these simple answers, as they are likely to distract us from taking necessary action," writes Duffy.

### Acknowledging Real Generational Effects, Not Stereotypes

Though stereotyping is wrong, Duffy does find actual generational differences in attitudes and behavior that might be instructive. For example, older generations attend religious services more regularly than younger generations, with each generation attending less often than the previous one. With every successive generation, drinking alcohol has decreased, too—one of the most consistent cohort effects discussed in the book. And Gen Zers are reporting more mental health problems compared to prior generations—a trend that may only get worse during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Knowing these generational trends exist could help us understand how to tackle issues that affect generations differently, perhaps tailoring supports to their particular challenges. For example, if younger generations don't find social support by attending religious services, perhaps communities need to provide other spaces for them to connect with others around a shared sense of purpose and meaning.

Still, it's possible that even these clearer generational differences may lessen when you consider extenuating circumstances—like available alternatives to alcohol for younger generations (such as legalized marijuana) or their willingness to report mental health problems more readily. We need to look closely at the data, as Duffy does in his book, to pinpoint real differences rather than imagined ones. Granted, this may be less eye-catching and click-worthy than media hype, but it could help us identify where the real problems are.

Unfortunately, our work is cut out for us. Stereotypes abound when we don't have direct contact between different groups of people. And, Duffy argues, the United States has become one of the most age-segregated societies in the world, with young and old barely interacting (outside of their families, that is). This is problematic, as intergenerational connection is tied to well-being, and its opposite feeds misunderstanding.

"It's not intergenerational warfare we should be most worried about, but a drifting apart of age groups," says Duffy. "This powers the stereotypes that exaggerate the division between generations and leads us to miss out on a host of positive benefits from generational connections."

All in all, if we want to make the world a better place and see thriving future generations, we need to get away from stereotyping and stop pitting generations against each other, which serves no one. Instead, we must find more ways to be together and connect, sharing the necessary work of making the world a better place for current and future generations.

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

# When Every Item Has a Home

Creating a peaceful, restorative space starts with decreasing clutter

MOLLIE DONGHIA

When was the last time you searched your home to find a misplaced item? Maybe it was your car keys, wallet, pair of shoes, or a favorite toy of your child's? Whatever that item was, chances are you looked between 1 and 10 minutes, which is the average time we spend looking for something we've lost.

Under 10 minutes doesn't sound too bad. But if we zoom out over the course of a normal lifespan, we spend more than 6 1/2 months of our lives, equivalent to almost 5,000 hours, looking for things in our homes.

That's a significant amount of time spent doing an activity that could be avoided. The solution? A home for everything.

A home for everything means each item in your home has a designated place to return to. Each item's home is consistent, convenient, and attainable.

When our possessions are in their homes, this means much less time spent searching for a misplaced item and—equally as significant—a decrease in the amount of clutter on your surfaces.

### The Problem of Not Having a Home for Everything

The main culprit of clutter is when items either don't have a home or they fail to make it back to their designated home.

Decluttering guru, Marie Kondo says, "The reason every item must have a designated place is because the existence of an item without a home multiplies the chances that your space will become cluttered again."

Once an item remains on a flat surface that's not its home, it's an invitation for others to follow. Clutter breeds more clutter and when several items are out of their places, it psychologically allows us to make exceptions for more clutter.

So if the solution is to have a home for every item, why is it that we struggle to keep up with this rule? After taking a serious look at some of my habits over the past few years, I've found that there are four reasons why items never make it back to their homes.

#### 1. The home is unspecified.

We all have our personal belongings and probably know where those particular items go. But what about the shared items that everyone uses? When items don't have a clear home that everyone knows, chances are they'll either get placed in the wrong location or end up sitting on a flat surface, waiting for someone else to put them back where they belong.

#### 2. There are multiple homes for the same item.

When there are multiple homes for the same item (like books, important papers, toys, shoes), this usually results in two issues: searching multiple locations for that

item, or creating more and more homes because there's not just one set place to store them.

#### 3. The home is unrealistic and inconvenient.

I've had many occasions when the reason an item didn't make its way back into its home was because it was too inconvenient to put it away. I didn't want to take the time and effort to go into the basement or find the correct box, so that item usually sat on the kitchen counter until I had the energy to put it away.

I've since learned to avoid this by making each item's home convenient and also by following the two-minute rule. If you can accomplish something in two minutes or less (like putting something away), do it without hesitation.

#### 4. The item doesn't fit into a home.

The last reason why I believe items don't make their way back to their homes is when the item is "random." By this I mean a magazine, a return you need to make, loose cash, a toy that needs repaired, a collection of rocks from a nature walk, kids' schoolwork or art projects, and so on. There's no obvious home (probably because it's a random item and there aren't others like it) so the most likely scenario is that it ends up on a countertop for a while until we decide what to do with it.

The solution to finding a good home for our belongings is not more and more storage or a better organization system. The solution is less stuff to find homes for and return back at the end of the day. Reducing the amount of things we have in our home has been a significant way that we've eliminated most of the clutter, which is a key starting point to making sure every item has a home.

#### Making It a Habit

Keeping a clutter-free home is not a simple task, especially with loveable, but less-than-tidy children running around all day. But there are habits you can commit to that encourage everyone in your family to see the benefits of returning items back to their homes.

#### Find a home for everything.

Commit to finding a home for every item in your home. Start with your common "dumping zones" (where items usually end up creating clutter). Find a logical, easy to remember home for those items. If you can't find one, ask yourself if the reason for this is because it's a "random" item that's causing unneeded clutter. If so, donate, sell, or discard it and move onto the next item.

#### Teach your kids to return items.

Teaching our kids that every item has a home and encouraging them to clean up after themselves is a simple way that reduces a lot of clutter from toys, dirty clothes, and shoes. Of course our kids are not little



ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

When everything we own has a place where it belongs, not only do we gain a clearer space and peace of mind, we earn back time.

Once an item remains on a flat surface that's not its home, it's an invitation for others to follow.

robots, so we have to set realistic expectations but also limit the amount of toys that they have access to.

#### Be diligent every day.

When I commit to clearing off my flat surfaces every evening, this eliminates a build-up of clutter that goes on for days. Taking a few minutes after we put the kids to bed to tidy up and return items back to their homes makes for a much more peaceful morning and teaches us to be mindful about what we keep (such as mail or kids' artwork).

#### Store items in convenient places.

When an item's home is inconvenient or too challenging to get to, I'm likely to make an excuse and toss it into the common dumping zone (aka my kitchen counter). You want to make each item's home simple enough to access so that it's too easy not to return it.

#### Decrease when needed.

If the convenient home has reached its capacity of storage, this is a good reason to decrease so you're not overwhelmed and overloaded. I store my kids' outgrown clothes in large bins in our attic. I've set a rule that I can only have one bin per size. When that bin is full, I don't grab another one and begin filling it up. I take a look at the items and see which ones I can get rid of to make room for the ones I want to keep.

Our goal in living a more simplified life is not to have a spotless home at all moments of the day, but to learn simple habits that produce mindful behaviors and leave more time and energy for the things we value most.

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

Help kids help out by teaching them that every item has a home and encouraging them to clean up after themselves.



MADE TO MOVE

## Sitting More Linked to Depression, Anxiety

A new study found a side-effect of pandemic countermeasures has left some people sedentary and depressed

SARAH COWNLEY

Almost everyone has heard the saying "sitting is the new smoking," but a new study shows it has an impact on depression and anxiety as well. With so many people self-isolating during the early months of the COVID-19 outbreak, more people found themselves sitting for longer periods than ever before.

Zoom meetings erased time spent walking to meeting rooms, and Netflix took over time that was previously dedicated to the gym. People suddenly became more sedentary during an already highly sedentary society.

To get a snapshot of just how prevalent

Researchers recommend people take breaks when sitting for long periods of time.



Pandemic lockdowns and self-isolation measures were meant to slow infection rates. A side effect, however, continues to come into sharper focus.

these changes were, a team of researchers studied 3,000 participants from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Participants were required to self-report how much time they spent doing activities such as sitting, looking at screens, and exercising for the study. They also had to record how their behaviors compared to pre-pandemic times.

All participants were required to indicate changes to their mental well-being using standard clinical scales. They were to focus on anxiety, depression, stress, and loneliness.

Researchers learned that participants who were meeting U.S. physical activity guidelines (2.5 to 5 hours of moderate to

vigorous physical activity each week) before the pandemic had shown a decline in their physical activity by 32 percent on average shortly after COVID-19 restrictions went into effect. These same participants reported more feelings of depression, loneliness, and anxiety.

A second study was conducted as a follow-up to check whether participants' behavior and mental health had changed over time. Researchers found that, on average, people saw their mental health improve.

However, for people whose sitting times stayed high, their depressive symptoms, on average, didn't recover in the same

way as everyone else. The participants who continued to spend large amounts of time sitting experienced lower rates of mental health improvements.

#### More Investigations

Researchers believe these findings are worthy of more investigation. Lead author of the study, Jacob Meyer said, "I think being aware of some of the subtle changes we've made during the pandemic and how they might be beneficial or detrimental is really important as we look to the other side of pandemic life."

Researchers recommend people take breaks when sitting for long periods of time.

People working from home must get up and move throughout the day. Researchers suggest walking around the block before and after the workday to mimic their pre-pandemic commute. This is believed to benefit people physically and mentally and help add structure to their day.

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



# Metacognition Can Improve the ‘Cognition Crisis’

Thinking about thinking gives us the ability to develop a tool kit for our mind

Continued from Page 9

## The Quiet Growth of Metacognitive Research

A unique side effect of modern technology is that apps, games, social media, and online content can hijack the learning pathways of the human brain. As a result, we're increasingly captive to compulsive behaviors, attention issues, and emotional problems.

The pandemic has poured gasoline on this crisis. It has forced many people into social isolation and contributed to an even greater reliance on devices for social interaction and entertainment.

This has added to the global tsunami of debilitating mental health issues, affecting more than 500 million people, with a financial toll in the trillions.

But there's good news: the quiet growth of metacognitive research.

Decades of empirical studies have shown that metacognition is effective at decreasing addictive behaviors and improving emotional well-being. Metacognitive training has demonstrated significant benefits in therapy, education, and even business. Particularly effective are the tools for helping people engage with their own thoughts and emotions in cognitive behavioral therapy.

Metacognition is a fuzzy concept. One handy metaphor is to think of the brain as having both software and hardware. The software includes our thoughts, feelings, and conversations with others, while the hardware includes the neurons and connections between them. We're only beginning to understand how that software and hardware interact. So, when something goes wrong in our brain, we're uncertain of how to fix it. Fortunately, progress has been made at clarifying this subject using computation.



GAUDILAB/SHUTTERSTOCK

A unique side effect of modern technology is that apps, games, social media, and online content can hijack the learning pathways of the human brain.

**Metacognitive training has demonstrated significant benefits in therapy.**



## The Successes of Metacognitive Therapy

Computer simulations of cognition are a large focus of the Cognitive Modeling Lab at Carleton University, where I work as a researcher while pursuing a doctoral degree in cognitive science. The theme of my research is the use of computational modeling to clarify metacognition. Metacognitive strategies can be thought of as a kind of mental software that can help to improve our cognitive functioning.

From my experience, it's worth looking at the successes of metacognitive therapy. It's unique in the sense that it involves the development of beneficial metacognitive beliefs. In many cases, it has shown to be more effective than cognitive behavioral therapy, another dominant approach taken by therapists.

It can be helpful for someone to believe that "I can direct my thoughts and emotions, and it's beneficial for me." Believing in this possibility is a necessary precursor to action. Metacognitive therapy focuses on building this foundation, and it's from

this firm grounding that people can reach for the specific tools of metacognition.

We're already aware of many of these tools. And yet, our practical minds require evidence before committing to them. The improving of attention through mental training or meditation practice works. Likewise, the strategies offered by cognitive behavioral therapy are among the most effective for learning emotional regulation. Particularly useful is the practice of "detached mindfulness" for treating depression and anxiety. Memory strategies have also been shown to be productive, including the famous mind palace technique.

## It's Time We Take Care of Our Minds

Overcoming the cognition crisis partly depends on getting around our mind's automatic pleasure-seeking. Internally, we can avoid falling into the trap of instant gratification by being mindful of the information and entertainment that we consume. Externally, we can craft a physical environment that improves our efficiency and mental welfare. Distraction blocking software offers just one example of how to do this.

We exercise, control what we eat, and buy ergonomic desk chairs to take care of our bodies—it's long past time we similarly take the same care of our minds. There are so many evidence-based actions we can take to design a personalized toolkit of mental habits and strategies. Doing so will allow us to be more deliberate with our thoughts, attention, and emotions, which can then improve every aspect of our lives.

Just as human health depends on mastering our own physical systems, the future of cognition depends on understanding and controlling our own psychological states. Solving the cognition crisis requires that we get smart about our own minds, and there's never been a more vital time to do that.

*Brendan Conway-Smith is a doctoral candidate and cognitive science contract instructor at Carleton University in Canada. This article was first published on The Conversation.*

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