

# MIND & BODY

SRDJANPAV/GETTY IMAGES

## Living in Season Is Key to Health

As the seasons change, so should our diet and habits

EMMA SUTTIE

An old Chinese proverb has it that “He that takes medicine and neglects his diet wastes the skills of his physician.” Hippocrates also said, “Let food be thy medicine,” in the 5th century B.C. These two bits of wisdom from different parts of the globe tell us what was well-understood hundreds of years ago: What we eat is an important factor in maintaining health as well as recovering from disease. And even today with our advances in medicine and technology, food is still the best medicine and the easiest and most impactful way to stay healthy and disease-free.

*Continued on Page 3*

Attuning ourselves to the season helps us prevent illness and enjoy nature's variety.

Humans and nature have always had a symbiotic relationship: The earth nourished us with its bounty, and we tended and nurtured the planet in a continuous cycle of loving interaction.

## Melatonin Affects Thrombosis, Sepsis, and COVID Mortality Rate

Melatonin can reduce the rate of severe COVID outcomes, help regulate sleep, promote genomic stability, and protect against neurodegeneration

JOSEPH MERCOLA

Two key studies have identified the role that melatonin plays in reducing the risk of a positive test for COVID-19 and lowering the incidence of severe symptoms.

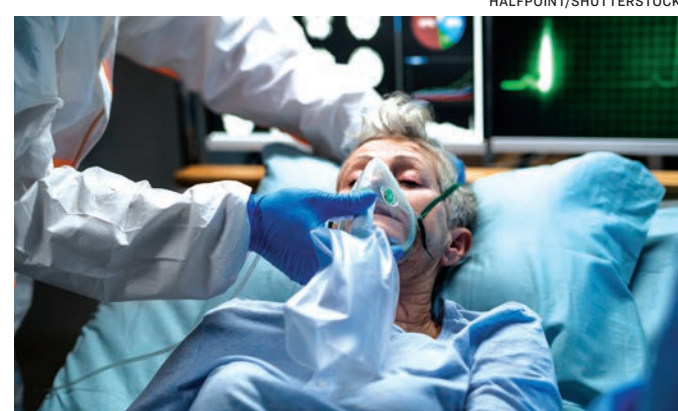
That new finding adds to a list of benefits linked to melatonin since it was first discovered in 1958 by Dr. Aaron Lerner, a dermatologist who was able to isolate it from the pineal gland in a cow.

Scientists began studying melatonin in the 1980s and by the 1990s, it received more attention. Research data showed that melatonin influences a number of bodily

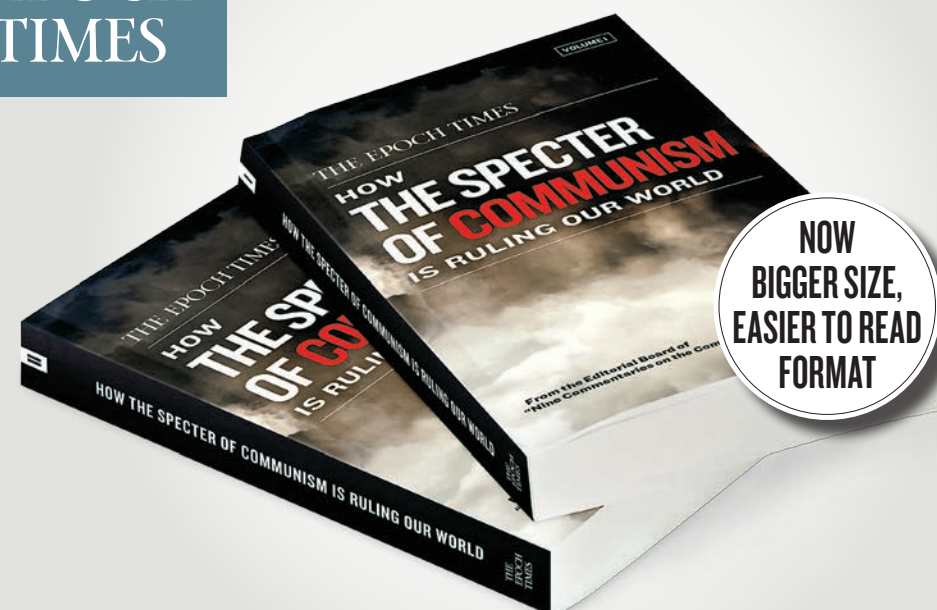
processes, including calcium-dependent metabolism, immune modulation, and tumor growth—which it can restrain.

Although melatonin is produced in a variety of tissues, the major source is the pineal gland, a tiny endocrine gland found in the center of the brain. One of melatonin's initial functions is likely as a free radical scavenger. Interestingly, melatonin also functions in plants to reduce oxidative stress and promote seed germination and growth. The necessary precursor in plants and animals is tryptophan.

*Continued on Page 4*



COVID patients treated with melatonin had a 1.2 percent mortality rate compared to 17.1 percent in the control group.

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## Staying Hydrated Is About More Than Drinking Water

How much you drink depends on several factors, including where you live

LISA ROTH COLLINS

The age-old advice about drinking eight 8-ounce glasses of water daily just doesn't hold water for everyone, although it can be a reasonable starting point. According to the US National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, men need about 15.5 cups of fluid daily while women need 11.5 cups.

But what if the man weighs 150 pounds and a woman weighs the same? In that case, their fluid needs should be about the same. Therefore, body weight can be a more helpful determining factor for the amount of water needed.

The weight-based recommendation is one-half to one ounce of water for every pound of body weight. For that 150-pound person, that would be 75 to 150 ounces a day, depending on the dryness of the climate they live in and level of physical activity.

Regardless of which approach you use, factors such as age, activity, health status, and fluids from foods should also be considered.

**Body weight can be a helpful determining factor for the amount of water needed.**

### Why Does Your Body Need Water?

Your body depends on water for many different processes and functions, some of which you probably don't even realize until something goes wrong. Here are a few examples.

- Saliva production. Water is a primary component of saliva, which is essential for oral health and breaking down food. Saliva is involved at the very beginning of your digestive process and helps your body know which digestive enzymes to send.
- Endurance. Being adequately hydrated has an impact on physical endurance and strength. This is especially important for anyone who is very physically active, such as athletes, construction workers, road crews, and other laborers.
- Body temperature. Your body is constantly losing water through urination, sweating, and respiration. When you sweat, the moisture cools your body, but you need to replenish that lost water to keep your body temperature stable. If you become dehydrated, you can overheat, resulting in a higher than normal body temperature.
- Lubrication. Your joints, tissues, and spinal cord need water to stay lubricated and provide protection against stress.
- Intestinal health. Water is necessary to keep your intestinal tract healthy and to avoid constipation.
- Kidney function. Drinking enough

water is necessary to help your kidneys perform their essential function of filtering toxins and other waste via urination.

- Electrolyte balance. Your body needs to keep fluid levels relatively stable in your blood, the space around your cells, and the space within your cells. Electrolytes help maintain water and acid-base balance in your blood and are also critical for muscle and nerve function. Thus, consuming enough water is essential for electrolyte balance and overall health. Drinking too much water can flush out electrolytes, so the right balance is key.
- Weight loss. Drinking more water while you exercise and choosing nutrient-dense foods, especially those with high water content such as fruit and veggies, may help you lose extra pounds. Consuming water before a meal can reduce your calorie intake as well.
- Nutrient absorption. Vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients require water to help them dissolve and thus get them ready for use by your body.
- Better circulation. Water is the vehicle that carries oxygen and nutrients throughout your entire body. In one study, when participants drank 16 ounces of water, their metabolic rate increased by 30 percent, which can help with weight loss. This increase lasts for about 60 minutes.
- Better brain. If you skimp on water intake, it can have a negative impact on your ability to focus, remember, and stay alert, and may even give you a headache. Research indicates that being just 2 percent dehydrated can cause problems with cognitive functioning.
- Helps skin. Drinking enough water will help hydrate your skin and may even promote the production of collagen. Water is an important part of the recipe to keep your skin looking younger and being more elastic.

### Can You Drink Too Much Water?

Yes, you can. Generally, if you consume 1 liter or more of water within a few hours for several hours, you can experience water intoxication (aka, water poisoning). This condition is characterized by muscle weakness, head pain, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, and cramping. The kidneys in healthy adults can eliminate only about 1 liter of water per hour. Among older adults and children, this elimination amount is lower.

### Bottom Line

Staying hydrated is about more than drinking enough water. Because water and fluids play such a critical role in so many bodily functions and activities, you need to pay attention to your water intake as well as your physical activity, the heat in your environment, and your age.

*Lisa Roth Collins is a registered holistic nutritionist and also the marketing manager at NaturallySavvy.com, which first published this article.*



Your joints, tissues, and spinal cord need water to stay lubricated and provide protection against stress.

## Living in Season Is Key to Health

As the seasons change, so should our diet and habits

Continued from Page 1

### Food as Medicine

Nutrition is one of the foundational elements of Eastern medicine. The ancient Chinese understood very well that the best medicine isn't the herbal remedy given when you have a cold or the salve when you scrape your knee, but the food we ingest every day. It helps to build our immune systems, fortify us against disease, cool excess heat, drain dampness, move stagnation, and warm us when we are deficient.

Our ancestors were intrinsically connected to nature, and this connection was necessary for survival. They paid attention to the seasons, but more specifically, changes in the weather, the cycles of crops, migration of animals, and the changing positions of the sun and moon. They were attuned to the natural rhythms of the planet and were able to adjust their behaviors to maintain a sort of equilibrium with their surroundings.

This mindset led people to focus on prevention. Certain patterns and times of year were more associated with illness, and this insight was passed on. This type of wisdom is also found in the foundation of Eastern medicine as it was practiced then as well as today. One of the keys to living preventatively is to become attuned to our bodies and our surroundings. We must become still enough to hear what our bodies are telling us so we can give them what they need.

That awareness is something many of us have lost amid the pace of our modern world. But this listening, this attunement, is something that Eastern medicine teaches. Your body is always communicating with you, you only have to listen.

### Thermal Nature of Foods, People

So how can we use food as medicine? Eastern medicine has a pretty elegant system for understanding how to use food as medicine and fortify ourselves against disease in every season. Foods have a thermal nature and so do people. It's a delicate balance of yin and yang energies: Some foods are cooling (yin) and some are heating (yang).

People also have a thermal nature, which occurs naturally when they are in a healthy state; knowing this is very helpful as you move forward. Some people are naturally more yin while others are more yang. There are other factors at play as well, the weather and surroundings have a thermal nature too, and this also has an effect on us. Health is seen as a dynamic balance of all these forces.

Granted, this can all get a little complex, and you can get pretty deep into it (especially if you're a nerd practitioner like me), but there are some basics that can help you get started.

Think about the seasons as a continuously fluctuating cycle of yin (cold) and yang (hot) energies. Summer is the height of yang or heat energies and winter is the peak of yin or cold energies. Summer gradually cools off and moves into fall, which cools further in transition into winter. Winter comes to an end, and the yin energies are gradually infused with yang in spring, which further heats up as it moves into summer.

So as a general rule, you want to balance the temperature of the season you're in with foods that are its opposite. Cooling foods in summer, and warming foods in winter, and gradually adding warming foods in fall and cooling foods in spring. You can also affect the thermal nature of the foods you eat through different cooking methods, which is why those also change according to the season.

This is very general, but it gives you an idea and a place to start. As you practice and become aware of the seasons and the thermal nature of the foods you're eating, it actually becomes this really beautifully nourishing and healing way to eat, and one your body will love.

### The Seasons

Eastern medicine was developed over thousands of years from observations of nature. Humans and nature have always had a symbiotic relationship: The earth nourished us with its bounty, and we tended and nurtured the planet in a continuous cycle of loving interaction. Humans followed the natural cycles of the planet and lived in harmony with the changing seasons.



Winter is the season for healing and restoring, by going to bed early and sleeping in late.

### The Summer Season

Summer is the season associated with the heart, the color red, and the emotion of joy. In the hot summer months, people rose early and went to bed later to capitalize on the yang energy represented by outward expression and activity. They ate foods that grew in abundance, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, eating salads and lighter fare, many of which are considered cooling to balance the external heat. People also took time to get together with family and friends, connecting and feeding their heart energy, as the heart is the organ associated with summer and, with it, the emotion of joy.

Everything we do in summer should be an attempt to cultivate joy in our lives. Summer is the season to feed heart energy. In terms of foods, many red foods are good for the heart. Cooking methods should be lighter and of shorter duration to preserve all the freshness and nutrients the food has been soaking up from the summer sun. Eating should be lighter and in smaller portions and working to keep yin fluids plentiful to counteract the intense heat of the season.

### The Fall Season

Fall is the season associated with the lungs, the color white, and the emotion of grief. As the summer season winds down and the weather begins to cool, our behaviors go from the outward expressions of summer to the more inward and reflective activities of fall, which will inevitably prepare us for winter. We eat foods that grow in abundance in this season (which varies greatly depending on where you are on the planet), but in North America, we see many foods with beautiful fall colors: squashes, gourds, sweet potatoes, carrots, and pumpkins. Many of these foods grow in the ground and have more yang properties for nourishing our inner heat as we prepare our bodies and spirits for the coming cold.

Fall is a time to clear out the old and make space for the new. The energy of the lungs is "letting go," so that's the focus at this time of year. Cleaning, reorganizing, and donating are good practices in the fall and make space for all we will cultivate over the winter. Emotionally, making sure that we have let go of any emotional hurts that have lingered strengthens the lungs both physically and psychologically.

Many white foods are beneficial to the lungs and are good to add to the diet in the fall season. Organizing life and becoming more introspective before winter is what fall is all about; checking in to make sure we are emotionally healthy and not hanging on to things that no longer serve us.

### The Winter Season

Winter is the season associated with the kidneys, the color black, and the emotion of fear. Winter is the height of yin energies, and even though it seems like a time of death, decay, and inactivity, it's a season that's very active—just deep, deep beneath the surface in preparation for the regenerative activities of spring.

Winter is a season of consolidation, gathering energies and pulling them inward. Winter is the time of year to go to bed early and sleep later, profiting from the healing, restorative energies sleep offers us. In winter, we eat fewer fresh

foods as they are no longer available and eat more preserved foods we have prepared during the summer and fall. Eating warming foods, especially hearty soups and stews, will help build our yang and counteract the cold.

Our energies could turn inward in winter. In Eastern medicine, the kidneys are the source of our fundamental energy. We should spend quiet time reading, writing, or meditating to strengthen our bodies and spirits. Keeping warm, especially our lower backs where our kidneys reside, is especially important, as they are the source of all our qi. Many black foods strengthen the kidneys and should be added to the diet in the winter months.

**If we can become aware of our surroundings and make slight adjustments to our behaviors and diet depending on the season, we will see a huge benefit physically, emotionally, and spiritually.**

### The Spring Season

Spring is associated with the liver, the color green, and the emotion of anger. Spring represents the upward and outward energies of newly growing plants, flowers, and trees. The energy in spring is expansive, so it's a good time to shake off the sleepiness of the winter months and slowly start moving our bodies with gentle stretching, going for long walks outdoors, and taking in the revitalizing green of new plants through our eyes, which are the sense organs associated with the liver.

Spring is the best time to detox from everything we have accumulated over the winter. We can detox physically as well as emotionally. Acknowledging and processing any feelings of anger, resentment, or frustration will keep our liver energy moving freely. Many green foods benefit the liver, and cooking methods should be lighter and of shorter duration compared to the slow cooking of winter. As things begin to thaw, we are able to introduce more fresh foods into our diet. Awakening and cleansing our bodies and spirits are what we need in spring as well as gentle exercises such as tai chi or qigong, which, especially when done outside in nature, nourish the body, mind, and spirit.

If we can become aware of our surroundings and make slight adjustments to our behaviors and diet depending on the season, we will see a huge benefit physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

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



Foods have different properties that will either fuel or cool our inner heat.

Each season offers unique pleasures to those who look.







MINDSET MATTERS

# Maybe Mindfulness Can Help Quell the Outrage

Our divided society needs a new capacity for awareness and acceptance

IGOR GROSSMANN & ELLEN CHOI

There is no shortage of divisive social issues today, all competing for our attention in an increasingly crowded outrage marketplace.

With algorithms curating increasingly hateful content under the guise of “everyday news,” the ability to be curious and open to others’ perspectives has never been more critical.

As famed philosopher Michel Foucault once argued, only through tolerating dissent and understanding resistance can society change and evolve. But if tolerance rather than outrage is the metric, it feels like we’re growing weaker.

**What Does Mindfulness Really Mean?**

Mindfulness has two components: Present-moment oriented awareness of what’s happening within and around us; and acceptance of what’s happening in our awareness. Experts believe that mindfulness offers a solution to intolerance because it promotes acceptance and subverts our knee-jerk reactions to defend our ingrained beliefs.

The increasing popularity of mindfulness has been driven by expectations that it will reduce stress. Yet, beyond quelling nerves, mindfulness equips us with the ability to embrace the distress and resentment required to examine ideas we have become comfortable dismissing—a process that requires engaging with discomfort.

Over the course of the pandemic, many of us have dipped a toe into mindfulness practices, perhaps guided by apps, self-help books, or even brainwave-sensing vibrating pillows. But do most people understand that mindfulness is about engaging with uncomfortable experiences? Or is it seen as just another fad that once again puts the self at the center of self-discovery and self-help, as some critics have suggested?

**How Do People Understand and Practice Mindfulness?**

As researchers of mindfulness and wisdom, we decided to look into this issue to examine whether the popular understanding of mindfulness may support the dismantling of intolerance.

In a new report published in Clinical Psychology Review, we first determined common terms associated with mindfulness across some of the largest English language databases available today and found that public understanding of mindfulness in books, spoken and written text, and websites and blogs focuses on engagement and acceptance rather than mere stress relief. We found that most people appear to understand what mindfulness means. Next, we examined whether they apply these insights in practice.

To address this question, we performed a meta-analysis, combining results from 150 studies, including more than 40,000 subjects, that investigated how people report experiencing mindfulness. Additionally, we conducted novel



In practice, most people conflate acceptance with passivity or avoidance.

**Beyond quelling nerves, mindfulness equips us with the ability to embrace the distress and resentment required to examine ideas we have become comfortable dismissing.**

empirical research to test how reported mindfulness is associated with markers of engaged thought.

In theory, both the awareness and acceptance elements of mindfulness would be used together to help a person work through his or her challenges and daily experiences by engaging with challenging experiences in their mind. Surprisingly, that’s not what we found.

While experts claim we use both awareness and acceptance together, our meta-analysis showed that occasional mindfulness users treat awareness and acceptance as independent processes or even as opposites: people who reported greater awareness reported lower acceptance and vice versa.

And that’s not all. In a series of empirical studies we conducted, participants reporting greater acceptance were in fact reporting less engagement with their difficult issues. Instead of engaging with challenging topics by wisely reflecting on them—considering limits of their knowledge, others’ perspectives, and the context of their experience—these people were either avoiding or suppressing difficult experiences.

Study after study, we saw that people scoring higher on established mindfulness measures reported lower engagement

We shouldn’t avoid challenging situations. They provide us with opportunities to develop our mindfulness skills by becoming more self-aware and accepting of others.



with their experiences. In practice, most people conflate acceptance with passivity or avoidance.

**The Unfulfilled Promise of Mindfulness**

This is a problem. When mindfulness is understood in word but not in practice, it ceases to pave a path to wise judgment, cooperation, or compassion.

Just as the ability to choose where we place our attention and how long we focus improves through awareness training, the ability to be accepting of dissenting opinions requires practice in order to create understanding instead of further marginalizing those we disagree with.

Acceptance doesn’t mean that we have to passively accept whatever cards we are dealt. It means confronting our discomfort long enough to explore what needs to be changed and being malleable enough to consider vantage points we typically ignore. Reducing stress by avoiding difficult conversations is a short-term solution that only further polarizes perspectives.

**The Purpose of Mindfulness**

Mindfulness might not provide an easy answer to the divisiveness that surrounds us, but an accurate understanding that includes the practice of acceptance may help encourage sincere discussion, generous compassion, and authentic connection.

To strengthen our ability to see the present moment through multiple interpretations and from many perspectives, we may have to discover how to practice mindfulness—by applying awareness and acceptance together.

Are we willing to endure the pains of growing together, or will outrage remain the more desirable status quo?

ALL IMAGES BY SHUTTERSTOCK

Igor Grossmann is an associate professor of psychology at the University of Waterloo in Canada, and Ellen Choi is the assistant professor of HR management & organizational behavior at Ryerson University in Canada. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.

PROSTOCK-STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK



Ultra-processed foods have an addictive quality that healthy, nutritious foods do not.

# Addictive and Unhealthy

Foods high in added fats and refined carbs have a lot in common with cigarettes

ASHLEY GEARHARDT

Every year, millions of Americans try to cut down on ultra-processed foods—industrial formulations that are typically high in added fat, refined carbohydrates, and pizza.

For many, the desire to change what they eat is triggered by concerns about potentially life-threatening health conditions like diabetes and heart disease. The impact of diet on health is not a small problem, according to a study commissioned by the Lancet. The multidisciplinary commission of 37 leading scientists from around the globe identified unhealthy diets as a greater risk to human health than unsafe sex, alcohol, drug, and tobacco use combined.

Many people know that most ultra-processed foods are not healthy. But the goal of

**The addictive nature of these ultra-processed foods undermines consumers’ free will and health in the service of profits.**



cutting down on them can be so challenging that the majority of these attempts fail. Why?

In the Food and Addiction Science and Treatment Lab at the University of Michigan, my colleagues and I are investigating one largely overlooked factor: These ultra-processed foods may be addictive, sharing more in common with tobacco products than with whole foods like apples or beans.

**Addicted to Ultra-Processed Foods**

I’m a clinical psychologist who studies addiction science, obesity, and disordered eating. During my training at Yale University, it became clear to me that many people were showing classic signs of addiction in their relationship with ultra-processed foods—symptoms such as loss of control over consumption, intense cravings, and an inability to cut down in the face of negative consequences.

So my colleagues and I created the Yale

Food Addiction Scale. It’s a measure that applies the American Psychiatric Association criteria used to diagnose other addictive disorders to identify people who may be addicted to ultra-processed foods.

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LIGHTSPRING/SHUTTERSTOCK



15 percent of Americans meet the threshold for food addiction, which is associated with diet-related disease, obesity, and poorer quality of life.

# Treating Long-Haul Syndrome

COVID-19 can leave a lasting effect that’s best avoided by acting early

JOSEPH MERCOLA

Long COVID, also known as long-haul COVID, chronic COVID, or long-haul syndrome, refers to symptoms that persist for four or more weeks after an initial COVID-19 infection. Board-certified internist and cardiologist Dr. Peter McCullough discusses potential treatments for long-haul COVID in an interview with Dr. Al Johnson posted on YouTube, including which tests may be necessary and when to seek

emergency medical care.

Many of the symptoms can also mirror those caused by COVID-19 vaccinations, and McCullough details the four categories of COVID-19 vaccine-injury syndromes that he has seen in his practice. While anyone can experience long COVID, those who are sick enough to be hospitalized in the intensive care unit are more likely to be affected.

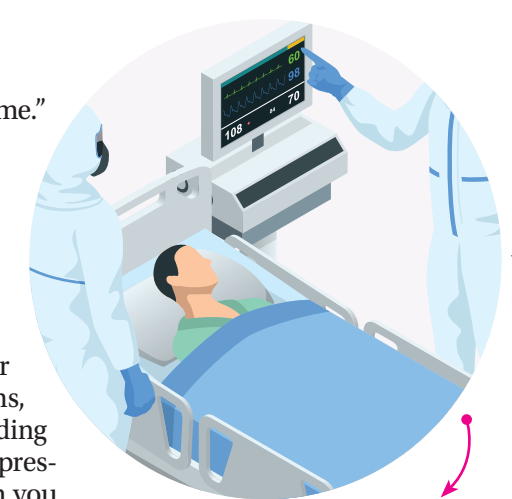
According to McCullough, 50 percent of this group will have manifestations of long COVID syndrome.

“So the sicker someone is and the longer the duration of COVID, the more likely they are to have long COVID syndrome,” he said. “That’s the reason why we like early treatment. We shorten the duration of symptoms and there’s

less of a chance for long COVID syndrome.”

**Common Symptoms of Long COVID** Signs and symptoms of long COVID, which persist for four weeks or more after you’ve been diagnosed with COVID-19, include fatigue, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, coughing, joint pain, chest pain, memory or concentration problems, sleep problems, muscle pain or headache, a fast or pounding heartbeat, the loss of smell or taste, depression or anxiety, fever, dizziness when you stand, or worsened symptoms after physical or mental activities.

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While anyone can experience long COVID, those who are sick enough to be hospitalized in the ICU are more likely to be affected.

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Apples are moistening, especially to your lungs, which is perfect as the air dries out during the fall and winter months.

### TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

## Fall Foods for Good Health

Chinese medicine holds that these 9 foods will help prepare you for winter

LYNN JAFFEE

I grew up on a bluff overlooking the Connecticut River. Looking out our front window gave us a view over the entire river valley, which on a clear day allowed us to see all the way to the Berkshires of Massachusetts. Behind our house was a large orchard that rose even higher on our hill. It was planted mostly in apple trees, but also had peach and pear trees, and even pumpkins in the fall. For us kids, the orchard was a place to hike and hide; and in the winter, we skied by being pulled behind my sister's good-natured quarter horse.

### Your seasonal task is to build up your energy reserves to survive and thrive during the coming winter.

The orchard was also a place for us to mark the seasons. The scented apple blossoms of spring always gave way to ripening fruit in the fall. Many of the apples ended up a half-mile down the road at the local cider mill, where they were quickly converted into fresh, tart cider. As an adult, when summer starts to wind down and fall is in the air, my mind always goes back to apples and cider and the uphill walk to the top of the orchard.

Fall also takes on another meaning for me as a practitioner of Chinese medicine, which is what we should be eating now and why. The foods that are part of the fall harvest are heartier than the vegetables of summer, because our seasonal task is to build up our energy for the coming winter. So what should we eat? Here's a list of some of the best choices from the fall harvest:

**1) Apples!** From the Macintosh of my childhood to the Honey Crisps of my adopted home, apples are considered to be sweet and cooling in Chinese medicine. In addition, they are moistening, especially to your lungs, which is perfect as the air dries out during the fall and winter months.



**2) Pumpkins and winter squash** are sweet, warm in nature, and build up your qi. They lend a heartiness to fall and winter meals that you don't get from summer squashes such as cucumber and zucchini. If you have a hard time dis-

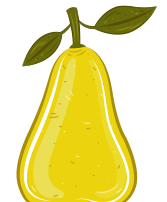
cerning which is which, remember that winter squash varieties tend to have a very thick outer rind, while it's easy to peel a summer squash.



**3) Carrots** are sweet and slightly warm. They boost your spleen qi and are good for your digestion.



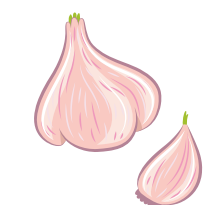
**4) Grapes**, like pears, are sweet and sour. They build qi, nourish the blood, and strengthen ligaments, tendons, and bones.



**5) Pears.** Considered to be sweet and sour and energetically cooling, pears moisten dryness like apples. They also clear heat and transform phlegm—so think about adding some pears to your diet if you have a fall cold.



**6) Onions** are considered to be pungent (kind of like spicy) and warm. They warm your core, move qi, and are good for common colds.



**7) Garlic** is hot and pungent. Its concentrated flavor makes it a delicious and warming addition to stews, soups, and stir-fried dishes.



**8) Potatoes, sweet potatoes, and yams** are all considered to be neutral in temperature and sweet. Their heartiness is good for building up qi and nourishing yin.



**9) Swiss chard** is a green leafy vegetable that is sweet and grows throughout the fall until the first hard frost. Like most greens, Swiss chard is considered to be good for nourishing your blood. Use it in salads, soups, and sautéed dishes.

Remember that your seasonal task is to build up your energy reserves to survive and thrive during the coming winter. Check out your local farmer's market or farm stand. The hearty foods that are part of the fall harvest are Mother Nature's way of helping you do that.

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

# The Urgent Need to Address Ageism

'COVID hit us over the head with a two-by-four,' advocate on aging says

JUDITH GRAHAM

Earlier this year, the World Health Organization announced a global campaign to combat ageism—discrimination against older adults that's pervasive and harmful but often unrecognized.

"We must change the narrative around age and aging" ... "adopt strategies to counter" [ageist attitudes and behaviors], WHO concluded in a major report accompanying the campaign.

Several strategies the WHO endorsed—educating people about ageism, fostering intergenerational contacts, and changing policies and laws to promote age equity—are being tried in the United States. But a greater sense of urgency is needed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic's shocking death toll, including more than 500,000 older Americans, experts suggest.

"COVID hit us over the head with a two-by-four, [showing that] you can't keep doing the same thing over and over again and expect different results" for seniors, Jess Maurer, executive director of the Maine Council on Aging, said in an October webinar on ageism in health care sponsored by KHN and the John A. Hartford Foundation. "You have to address the root cause—and the root cause here is ageism."

Some experts believe there's a unique opportunity to confront this concern because of what the country has been through. Here are some examples of what's being done, particularly in health care settings.

### Distiguishing Old Age From Disease

In October, a group of experts from the United States, Canada, India, Portugal, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom called for old age to be removed as one of the causes and symptoms of disease in the 11th revision of the International Classification of Diseases, a global resource used to standardize health data worldwide.

Aging is a normal process, and equating old age with disease "is potentially detrimental," the experts wrote in *The Lancet*. Doing so could result in inadequate clinical evaluation and care and an increase in "societal marginalization and discrimination" against older adults, they warn.

### Identifying Ageist Beliefs and Language

Groundbreaking research published in 2015 by the FrameWorks Institute, an organization that studies social issues, showed that many people associate aging with deterioration, dependency, and decline—a stereotype that almost surely contributed to policies that harmed older adults during the pandemic. By contrast, experts understand that older adults vary widely in their abilities and that a significant number are healthy, independent, and capable of contributing to society.

Using this and subsequent research, the Reframing Aging Initiative, an effort to advance cultural change, has been working to shift how people think and talk about aging, training organizations across the country. Instead of expressing fatalism about aging ("a silver tsunami that will swamp society"), it emphasizes ingenuity, as in "we can solve any problem if we resolve to do so," said Patricia D'Antonio, project director and vice president of policy and professional affairs at the Gerontological Society of America.

Also, the initiative promotes justice as a value, as in "we should treat older adults as equals."

Since it began, the American Medical Association, the American Psychological Association, and The Associated Press have adopted bias-free language around aging, and communities in Colorado, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and Texas have signed on as partners.

### Tackling Ageism at Grassroots Level

In the past three years in Colorado, Changing the Narrative, a strategic aware-



If there's a silver lining to the pandemic, it's that medical professionals observed firsthand the problems that ensued and realized that older adults needed special consideration.

**“We must change the narrative around age and aging” ... “adopt strategies to counter” [ageist attitudes and behaviors].**

World Health Organization

Seniors are often stereotyped as infirm, but many are sharp and full of vitality.



ness campaign, has hosted more than 300 workshops educating the public about ageist language, beliefs, and practices. Now, it's launching a campaign calling attention to ageism in health care.

"Our goal is to teach people about the connections between ageism and poor health outcomes and to mobilize both older people and [health] professionals to advocate for better medical care," said Janine Vandenberg, director of Changing the Narrative.

Faced with the pandemic's horrific impact, the Maine Council on Aging earlier this year launched the Power in Aging Project, which is sponsoring a series of community conversations around ageism and asking organizations to take an "anti-ageism pledge."

The goal is to educate people about their own "age bias"—largely unconscious assumptions about aging—and help them understand "how age bias impacts everything around them," said Maurer. For those interested in assessing their own age bias, a test from Harvard University's Project Implicit is often recommended. (Sign in and choose the "ageIAT" on the next page.)

### Changing Education for Health Professionals

Two years ago, Harvard Medical School began integrating education in geriatrics and palliative care throughout its curriculum, recognizing that it hadn't been doing enough to prepare future physicians to care for seniors. Despite the rapid growth of the older population, only 55 percent of U.S. medical schools required education in geriatrics in 2020, according to the latest data from the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Dr. Andrea Schwartz, an assistant professor of medicine, directs Harvard's effort, which teaches students about everything from the sites where older adults receive care (nursing homes, assisted living, home-based programs, community-based settings) to how to manage common geriatric syndromes such as falls and delirium. Also, students learn how to talk with older patients about what's most important to them and what they most want from their care.

Schwartz also chaired a committee of the academic programs in geriatrics that recently published updated minimum competencies in geriatrics that any medical school graduate should have.

### Altering Professional Requirements

Dr. Sharon Inouye, also a professor of medicine at Harvard, suggests additional approaches that could push better care for older adults forward. When a physician seeks board certification in a specialty or doctors, nurses, or pharmacists renew their licenses, they should be required to demonstrate training or competency in "the basics of geriatrics," she said. And far more clinical trials should include a representative range of older adults to build a better evidence base for their care.

Inouye, a geriatrician, was particularly horrified during the pandemic when doctors and nurses failed to recognize that seniors with COVID-19 were presenting in hospital

emergency rooms with "atypical" symptoms such as loss of appetite and delirium. Such "atypical" presentations are common in older adults, but instead of receiving COVID tests or treatment, these older adults were sent back to nursing homes or community settings where they helped spread infections, she said.

### Bringing in Geriatrics Expertise

If there's a silver lining to the pandemic, it's that medical professionals and health system leaders observed firsthand the problems that ensued and realized that older adults needed special consideration.

"Everything that we as geriatricians have been trying to tell our colleagues suddenly came into sharp focus," said Dr. Rosanne Leipzig, a professor of geriatrics at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City.

Now, more Mount Sinai surgeons are asking geriatricians to help them manage older surgical patients, and orthopedic specialists are discussing establishing a similar program.

"I think the value of geriatrics has gone up as institutions see how we care for complicated older adults and how that care improves outcomes," Leipzig said.

### Building Age-Friendly Health Systems

"I believe we are at an inflection point," said Terry Fulmer, president of the John A. Hartford Foundation, which is supporting the development of age-friendly health systems with the American Hospital Association, the Catholic Health Association of the United States, and the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. (The John A. Hartford Foundation is a funder of KHN.)

More than 2,500 health systems, hospitals, medical clinics, and other health care providers have joined this movement, which sets four priorities ("the 4Ms") in caring for older adults: attending to their mobility, medications, mentation (cognition and mental health), and what matters most to them—the foundation for person-centered care.

Creating a standardized framework for improving care for seniors has helped health care providers and systems know how to proceed, even amid the enormous uncertainty of the past couple of years. "We thought [the pandemic] would slow us down, but what we found in most cases was the opposite—people could cling to the 4Ms to have a sense of mastery and accomplishment during a time of such chaos," Fulmer said.

*We're eager to hear from readers about questions you'd like answered, problems you've been having with your care, and advice you need in dealing with the health care system. Visit [khn.org/columnists](http://khn.org/columnists) to submit your requests or tips.*

Judith Graham is a contributing columnist for *Kaiser Health News*, which originally published this article. KHN's coverage of these topics is supported by The John A. Hartford Foundation, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, and The SCAN Foundation.

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# Give Experiences for Christmas

If there was ever a year to gift differently, this is it

JOSHUA BECKER

Inflation. Supply chain issues. Delayed mail.

If there was ever a year to start giving experiences for Christmas rather than physical possessions, this is the year.

A few years ago, my friend and his family of six started a new holiday tradition.

"Rather than spending money on a bunch of stuff we don't need, we started a new Christmas tradition. Every day of the week after Christmas until New Year's, we did something fun as a family," he said. "Sometimes, it was simple: pizza and a movie. Other days, it was more extravagant: horseback riding. But we took the money that would have been spent on physical gifts and spread it out over the week making sure everyone got to do something they'd really love."

After the holiday season, I asked him how it went.

"Best decision we ever made. A new family tradition has been born. We're already looking forward to next year," he said with a smile on his face.

When we found minimalism 12 years ago, we also decided to change how we celebrated the holiday season by limiting our children's gifts to three: one thing they need, one thing they want, and one experience to share with the family.

To celebrate holidays differently, you need to make the decision to do so. And if there was ever a year to try out a change, this is the one.

News reports are already surfacing that this holiday season may be filled with increased challenges and frustrations with it being more difficult than ever to find specific items. Meanwhile, what you do find is going to be more expensive, with inflation reaching levels we haven't seen

in decades.

Those challenges are even greater for the millions of people who have just lost pandemic-era unemployment benefits.

And amid all of that, COVID-19 cases continue to increase in many places around the world.

An important phenomenon took place in 2020. People began spending more on goods and less on services. As a percentage of personal spending, non-consumable goods increased by 6 percent in 2020, while services fell by 7 percent, with some sectors, such as recreation, food, and travel, falling by 20 to 30 percent.

In 2020, most Americans spent the year purchasing more and more physical possessions and fewer and fewer services. If our homes weren't full enough in 2019, they're even more full in 2021. Again, if there was ever a year to start giving experiences for Christmas rather than physical possessions, this is the year.

Most of your family and friends desire that anyway.

Every year, I post a list of 52 clutter-free gift ideas on Facebook. This year, I decided to post it a bit earlier than normal. As of today, the list has been viewed and shared by more than 12 million people! Anecdotal evidence, I know, but when a clutter-free gift list is more than twice as popular this year than any previous year, something unique is happening.

Try it out. You'll be surprised by how much more you'll enjoy the holiday season.

**In your own family**, set expectations early (now). Get buy-in from your spouse, tell your kids that you're trying something new this year, and set healthy expectations. Focusing more on experiences doesn't mean you have to cut out all physical gifts—just shift some of your focus. As I mentioned earlier, my kids still receive one thing that

We're all hungry for a greater connection with each other after 18 months of sacrificing just that.



IVAN STANKOV/SHUTTERSTOCK

**In 2020, most Americans spent the year purchasing more and more physical possessions and fewer and fewer services.**

they need (usually a clothing item) and one thing that they want.

**For your extended family**, bring up the conversation now. Get on the phone with your parents or siblings, and see if they think trying something new would be fun this year. In many cases, people will be relieved that they don't have to shop for yet another Christmas gift. Formulate a plan and try it out.

Honestly, I don't think I've ever talked to someone who has moved toward an experience-based holiday season and regretted the decision.

Experiences last longer than physical possessions. And we're all hungry for a greater connection with each other after 18 months of sacrificing just that.

Maybe you'll hate it and change back next year, but I doubt it.

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

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