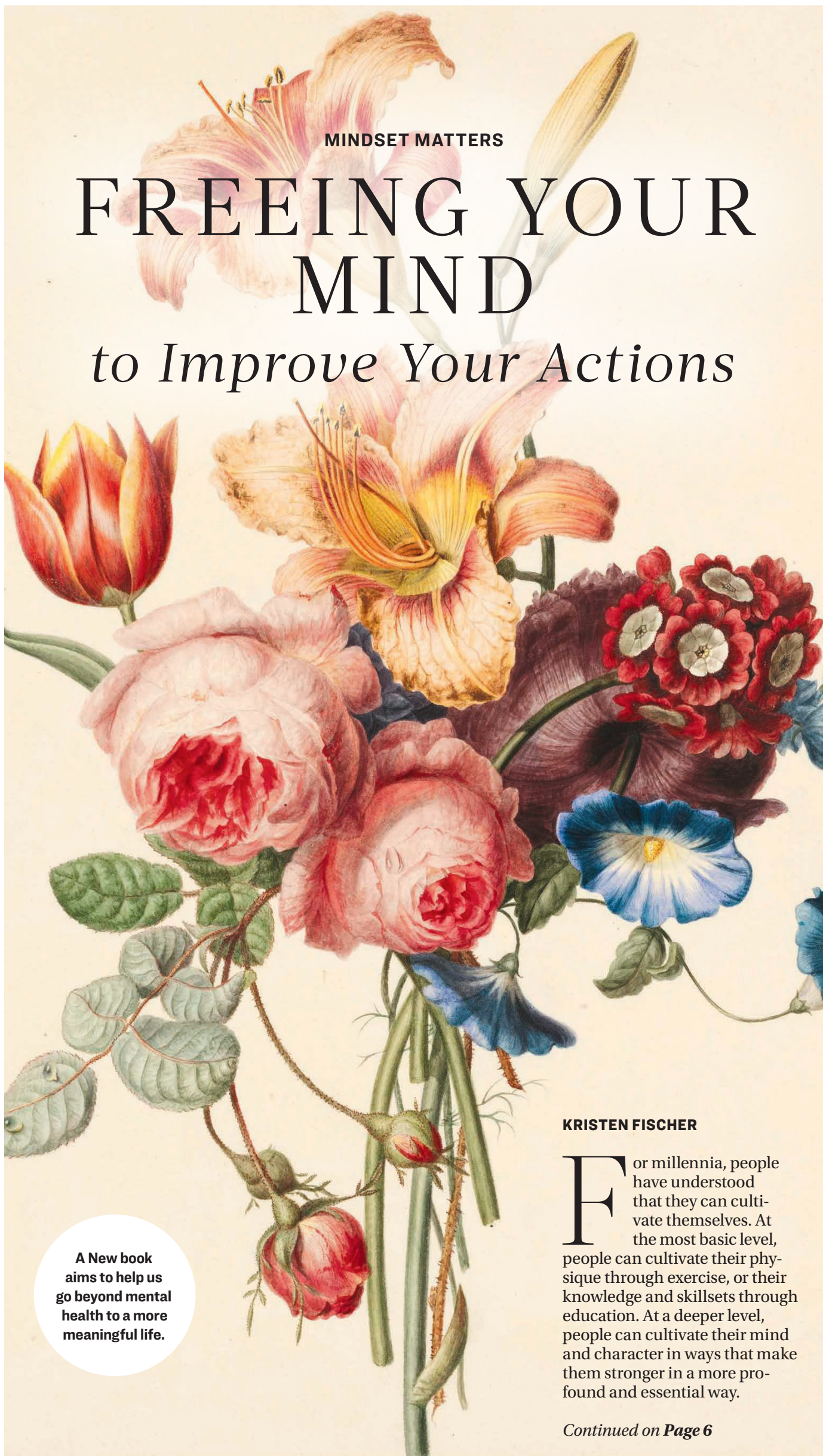


MIND & BODY

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THE EPOCH TIMES



MINDSET MATTERS

FREEING YOUR MIND

to Improve Your Actions

A New book aims to help us go beyond mental health to a more meaningful life.

KRISTEN FISCHER

For millennia, people have understood that they can cultivate themselves. At the most basic level, people can cultivate their physique through exercise, or their knowledge and skillsets through education. At a deeper level, people can cultivate their mind and character in ways that make them stronger in a more profound and essential way.

Continued on Page 6



The music of Shen Yun emphasizes spirituality, which is the side of our health spectrum that we often neglect.

Improving Wellness by Bolstering the Spirit

A holistic doctor says Shen Yun tunes mind and body with its healing qualities

CATHERINE YANG

Dr. Jason Liu, who is a medical doctor, professor, and founder of the Mind-Body Institute in California, understands why people have again become afraid to venture out to large gatherings as news about COVID-19 seems to be around every corner. But while we so closely try to safeguard our physical health in fear, we end up forgetting about our mental and spiritual health, he says.

As a doctor of holistic medicine, Liu looks at the whole person when it comes to health. Right now, people's immune systems are being attacked by the virus on three fronts.

"Right now, people have fear: That's the key," he said.

This fear is an assault on our psychological state, our spirits, and our physical bodies.

It's been widely reported that the pandemic has led to plummeting mental health and that rates of depression and anxiety have risen sharply. We've also long been aware that mental health affects physical health and immunity, as experts have reminded us of that fact since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns.

At the most basic level, fear triggers our fight-or-flight response and the cascade of hormones and physiological changes that come with it. While this state is good for reacting to an immediate threat, it takes a significant toll on our well-being.

Continued on Page 7

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A reconstruction of Dr. Christiaan Barnard's first human heart transplantation in December 1967, in this file photo

MEDICALLY CORRECT

The Promise of Organ Transplants

Advances in organ transplantation have come a long way since 1967

PETER WEISS

On Dec. 3, 1967, Dr. Christiaan Barnard performed the world's first successful human-to-human heart transplant in Groote Schuur Hospital, Capetown, South Africa. The patient, Louis Washkansky, was terminally ill from heart failure. This was a last-ditch effort to save his life.

The new heart, tragically, came from a 25-year-old woman, Denise Darvall, who was fatally injured in a car accident.

The surgery was a remarkably complex team effort led by Barnard. He became the face of this breakthrough, earning him a place on the cover of Time magazine and several TV and print interviews.

Washkansky only survived for 18 days.

He died from double pneumonia because the drugs used to suppress his immune system and keep his body from rejecting the new heart also reduced his ability to fight infections.

Even though Washkansky only lived for 18 days, the surgery was a success. Four of Barnard's first 10 heart transplant patients lived for more than one year, including two who lived for 13 and 23 years, respectively. Barnard had to give up performing surgery in 1983 due to rheumatoid arthritis; he died at the age of 78 after suffering a fatal asthma attack at a small beach resort on Cyprus.

But decades before the procedure was tried on humans, it was practiced on animals. The first non-human transplant was performed in a dog-to-dog surgery in 1905 by Alexis Carrel and Charles Guthrie at the University of Chicago. I am a pure dog lover and it pains me thinking of that surgery.

There were nearly 3,552 heart transplants performed in the United States in 2019. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, survival rates were just under 75 percent at five years, based on data collected in 2017.

Remember, these surgeries are done for terminally ill cardiac disease patients.

According to the National Institutes of Health, the most commonly transplanted organ currently is the kidney, with almost 20,000 procedures performed each year.

Meanwhile, there are currently about 3,500 people waiting for a heart transplant, with many waiting more than six months for the right match. The other tragic part is that in order to find a match, someone else would have just died, many of them quite young.

We have come a long way since Barnard's first heart transplant surgery, but

we still have a lot further to go.

Stem cell therapy is a relatively new advent in the fight against debilitating heart disease.

There are numerous stem cell lines other than embryonic that can potentially lead to new cardiac cell growth and repair the damaged heart. But the core issues in cardiac regeneration are still a mystery. Only time will tell where it leads.

The first successful human-to-human organ transplant was done by Dr. Joseph Murray on Dec. 23, 1954, on identical twins, transplanting a kidney from one into the other. He later transplanted a kidney from a non-identical twin into the other twin. He was awarded a Nobel prize in physiology in 1990.

The first surgery was done on Richard Herrick and his identical twin, Ronald. Richard survived the surgery, got married, and had two children. He died eight years later of heart failure. Ronald lived for an additional 50 years. In 1961, Murray did the first successful kidney transplant between unrelated individuals using early immunosuppressive therapies.

Where do we go from here? Organ transplantation is a last-resort measure. Stem cell therapy, while promising, is still a generation away. We seem to learn more about what we don't know for every step that we learn something new.

Can we manufacture human organs for transplantation or replacement for non-functioning organs?

There are mechanical organs or body parts we already use, such as an artificial hip or knee. These devices have revolutionized and improved the quality of life for tens of thousands of people. We can replace arteries, stimulate new blood vessels, and even grow new muscle cells. We can develop 3D printing of organs and stimulate cell growth to form a new organ, such as a bladder. The BBC reported in 2018 that Luke Massella, 10, received a replacement bladder that was grown using his own cells.

He was born with spina bifida, a congenital defect in his spine. His bladder had failed as had his kidneys. Dr. Anthony Atala at Boston Children's Hospital took a small piece of Luke's bladder and grew a new one in the lab over two months. Since the new organ came from Luke's own cells, there was no tissue rejection. He's now 27 years old and hasn't had any issues with his bladder. He was even a wrestling coach in the Connecticut school system.

The future is very bright, and it all started with the determination of those pioneers and determined patients who took those first steps together. We still have a way to go for more complicated organs to be grown but we are closer each year.

These organ manufacturing technologies may greatly improve the quality of health and average lifespan of human beings. Our children have the chance to benefit from the advances we are seeing today. Kidney, bladder, heart, cornea, liver, lung, and now, even face transplants are more common each day. Each generation will be the beneficiaries of those who walked before them.

In the words of Denis Waitley, "The Greatest achievements are those that benefit others."

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.



Kidney donor cards from England, 1971-1981. The cards were made to be carried by donors as evidence that they were willing to donate their kidneys when they passed away.

Not All Calories Are Equal

Dietitian explains how different types of foods affect health and weight gain

TEREZIE TOLAR-PETERSON

A calorie is a calorie is a calorie, at least from a thermodynamic standpoint. It's defined as the amount of energy needed to raise the temperature of 1 kilogram of water by 1 degree Celsius (2.2 pounds by 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit).

But when it comes to health and your body's energy balance, not all calories are equal.

For example, some studies have reported that diets that are high-protein, low-carbohydrate, or a combination of the two, yield greater weight loss than diets with other levels of fat, protein, and carbs.

If every calorie in food were the same, you wouldn't expect to see weight-loss differences among people who eat the same number of calories that are doled out in different types of food.

Dietitians like me know there are many factors that influence what a calorie means for your body. Here's what we understand about calories and nutrition so far.

Energy Actually Available to Your Body

In the late 1800s, chemist W.O. Atwater and his colleagues devised a system to figure out how much energy—that is, how many calories—various foods contain. Basically, he burned up food samples and recorded how much energy they released in the form of heat.

Not every bit of energy in food that can combust in the lab is actually available to your body, though. What scientists call metabolizable energy is the difference between the total energy of the food consumed and the energy that passes out of your body, undigested, in feces and urine. For each of the three macronutrients—proteins, carbohydrates, and fats—Atwater devised a percentage of the calories they contained that would actually be metabolizable. Per gram, protein has the least available energy at 92 percent, fat is in the middle at 95 percent, and carbohydrates, which convert to blood sugar, have the most at 97 percent.

According to the Atwater system, one gram of each macronutrient is estimated to provide a certain number of calories. The U.S. Department of Agriculture still uses these calculations today to come up with an official calorie number for every food.

How Much Energy You Use

What you eat can affect what scientists call your body's energy expenditure. That's how much energy it takes to keep you alive—the energy you use breathing, digesting, keeping your blood flowing, and so on—along with what you exert moving your body. You might have heard this referred to as metabolism, though metabolism is actually a somewhat broader concept.

Diet quality can alter the body's energy expenditure, which is also called the thermic effect of food. For example, in one study, people eating the same number of calories per day but on either a low-carbohydrate

diet or a low-fat diet had differences in total energy expenditure of about 300 calories per day. Those eating very low-carb diets used the most energy, while those eating low-fat diets used the least.

In another study, high-fat diets led to lower total energy expenditure—how many calories you burn—than high-carb diets did. Other researchers reported that although substituting carbs for fat didn't alter energy expenditure, people who increased their protein intake to 30 percent to 35 percent of their diet used more energy.

In general, diets high in carbohydrates, fat, or both produce a 4 to 8 percent increase in energy expenditure (calories burned), while meals high in protein cause an 11 to 14 percent increase above the resting metabolic rate. Protein has a higher thermic effect because it's harder for the body to break down. Although these variations aren't huge, they could contribute to the obesity epidemic by encouraging a subtle average weight gain.

Quality of the Calories You Eat

Dietitians pay attention to a food's glycemic index and glycemic load—that is, how quickly and how much it will increase your blood glucose levels. A rise in blood glucose triggers the release of insulin, which, in turn, influences energy metabolism and storage of excess energy as fat.

Foods such as cakes, cookies, and chips are all high on the glycemic index/load. Green vegetables, raw peppers, mushrooms, and legumes are all low on the glycemic index/load. There is some evidence to suggest that foods lower on the glycemic index/load may be better for keeping blood sugar levels regulated—regardless of the calories they contain.

Reward centers in the brain light up when people eat high glycemic index/load foods, highlighting the pleasurable and addictive effect of foods such as candy or white breads.

The fiber content of food is another thing to consider. Your body can't digest fiber—found in plant foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and beans—for energy. So foods high in fiber tend to have less metabolizable energy and can help you feel full on fewer calories.

Empty calories—those from foods with minimal or no nutritional value—are another factor to consider. Things such as white sugar, soft drinks, and many ultra-processed snacks don't provide much, if any, benefit in the form of protein, vitamins, or minerals despite having high calorie counts. The opposite would be nutrient-dense foods that are high in nutrients or fiber, while still being relatively low in calories. Examples are spinach, apples, and beans.

And don't think of empty calories as neutral. Nutritionists consider them harmful calories because they can have a negative effect on health. Some of the biggest contributors to weight gain are potato chips and sugar-sweetened beverages. On the other hand, foods that are inversely associated with weight gain are vegetables, whole grains, fruits, nuts, and yogurt.



▲ If you want to stay healthy and lose weight, it's not just the quantity of calories that matters, but the quality of those calories.

In areas where people live the longest—close to 100 years on average—they eat a primarily plant-based diet.

Cutting down on simple carbs like soft drinks, refined flour bakery items, pasta, and sweets will definitely have a positive impact on health.

Some of the biggest contributors to weight gain are potato chips and sugar-sweetened beverages.

More to Health Than Calories and Weight

It's indisputable that for weight loss, the difference between the number of calories consumed and the number of calories exerted through exercise is the most important factor. But don't fool yourself. While weight plays a role in health and longevity, weight loss alone doesn't equate to health.

Yes, some high-protein diets seem to promote weight loss at least in the short term. But epidemiologists know that in areas where people live the longest—close to 100 years on average—they eat a primarily plant-based diet, with less animal-based protein and less mono- and polyunsaturated fats.

I often hear friends or clients say things like, "It's those carbs that are making me fat" or "I need to go on a low-carb diet." But these complaints drive dietitians like me, well, nuts. Carbohydrates include foods like Coca-Cola and candy canes, but also apples and spinach. Cutting down on simple carbs like soft drinks, refined-flour bakery items, pasta, and sweets will definitely have a positive impact on health. But eliminating carbohydrates like vegetables and fruit will have the opposite effect.

A diet high in plant-based protein and carbohydrates mostly from vegetables, fruit, nuts, and legumes is the healthiest diet researchers know of for longevity and prevention of chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, hypertension, and many other conditions.

The modern Western diet suffers from an increase in the quantity of calories consumed with a concurrent decrease in the quality of calories consumed. And researchers now know that calories from different foods have different effects on fullness, insulin response, the process of turning carbs to body fat, and metabolic energy expenditure.

Where your health is concerned, count more on the quality of the calories you consume than the calorie count.

Terezia Tolar-Peterson is an associate professor of nutrition at Mississippi State University. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.





Practices like meditation, writing, and yoga nurture our spirits and strengthen our kidney energies.

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

Winter and Kidney Health

This is the season to nurture your kidneys for better health throughout the year

EMMA SUTTIE

Each of us is blessed with two kidneys located in the upper abdomen; they sit against the back muscles on either side of the spine and are about the size of a closed fist. Some of their responsibilities include:

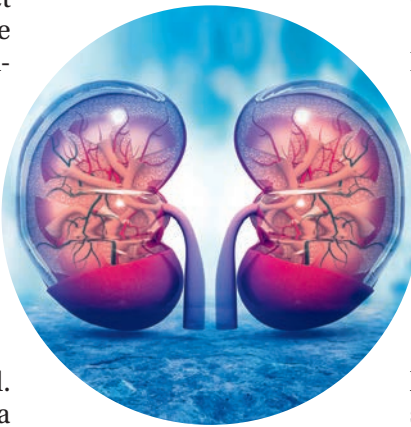
- removing waste products from the body
- balancing fluid levels
- releasing hormones
- controlling the production of red blood cells

However, in Eastern medicine, the kidneys' responsibilities go far beyond the physical. The kidneys are associated with winter, the emotion of fear, the color black, and they govern birth, growth, reproduction, and development. Considered the "root of life," the strength of the kidneys comes from the relative strength of each parent at the moment of conception. Pretty cool.

You may be wondering how these two organs could have so much to do with so many seemingly disparate things? That's the beauty of a holistic system. Eastern medicine differs from Western medicine in some pretty fundamental ways. Western medicine tends to be a reductionist system that likes to break the body into smaller and smaller parts in an attempt to "fix" what it sees as "broken." If there's a problem with the kidneys, Western medicine narrows its focus to figure out what's up. Eastern medicine, however, is a holistic system and takes the opposite approach. Instead of looking at the body in terms of the micro, it zooms out and looks at the macro, taking the big-picture view. This view is not limited to the physical body, but it looks at the human being and the entirety of its experience. This experience includes the physical, emotional, spiritual, environment, culture, beliefs, and the planet we all share. All aspects of human beings and their environment are essential to health and healing.



Considered the "root of life," the strength of the kidneys comes from the relative strength of each parent at the moment of conception.



Winter is when kidney energies are at their peak, and it's therefore the best time to nourish and strengthen them.

Warming soups and bone broths are excellent tonics to fortify kidney essence.

Winter and the Kidneys in Eastern Medicine

Winter in Eastern medicine is the most yin part of the year. Yin represents cold, slow, dark, and inward energies. Winter is a time to slow down and conserve energy for the long, cold months ahead. Animals hibernate in winter because they're intrinsically attuned to the planet and its natural rhythms. The kidneys are associated with winter and are the basis of our most fundamental energy. Winter is when kidney energies are at their peak, and it's therefore the best time to nourish and strengthen them. In Eastern medicine philosophy, harmonizing the diet and behaviors to the seasons enhances the body and fortifies against diseases. The kidneys open into the ears; therefore, our ability to hear directly reflects kidney energy, and our ability to listen is intensified in the cold, silent months.

Winter Activities

Winter is a time to slow down and feed ourselves physically and spiritually. Activities should reflect the season by slowing down and turning our focus inward. Practices like meditation, writing, and yoga nurture our spirits and strengthen our kidney energies. Getting adequate rest, going to bed earlier and rising later, follow the sun's natural rhythms. Winter is a time to eat rich, nourishing foods to build strength in preparation for spring. Adding warming foods to the diet such as herbs, meats, and healthy fats is beneficial in the winter months. These rich foods are more easily absorbed at this time of year, helping us put on a little extra weight to stay warm and fend off the frigid temperatures.

Winter Foods for Strong Kidneys

Cooking methods should be longer duration, on low heat, and with less water at this time of year. Salt is the flavor associated with the kidneys, so some unrefined salt is beneficial, but as in all things, moderation is key.

Warming soups and bone broths are excellent tonics and fortify kidney essence. The color associated with the kidneys is black, so eating black, blue, and purple foods is particularly valuable to supporting kidney energy. Dark-colored foods are high in antioxidants and protect our bodies from the damaging effects of free radicals, which accelerate aging.

Here are some examples of foods best eaten in winter for their beneficial effect on the kidneys:

- black beans
- kidney beans
- bone broths (the kidneys are also associated with the bones, so bone broths are particularly good for building kidney energy)
- lamb
- chicken
- walnuts
- black rice
- chestnuts
- black garlic
- black sesame seeds
- whole grains
- dark leafy greens
- blackberries
- eggplant
- plums
- prunes
- purple grapes

In Eastern medicine, the kidneys are the foundation of all of the yin and yang energies in the body, which are the dualistic forces that, when balanced, equal a healthy body, calm spirit, and harmonious state of mind. As we age, our kidneys energies are in a state of decline, but we can always bolster the kidneys by eating kidney-enriching foods, taking tonic herbs, getting adequate rest, and having a rich, inner life. Because the kidneys are the root of our strength and vitality, keeping them healthy is crucial to living a long life, free of physical ailments.

Kidney Symptoms

If you have problems in any of the following areas, your kidneys might need some attention. Now that you know a little more about what the kidneys are responsible for (and it's a lot!), use the activities and foods above to help give your kidneys some love. If that's not enough, seek out a qualified acupuncturist or practitioner of Chinese medicine who can help get them back to their former glory.

Some of the symptoms associated with the kidneys in Eastern medicine are:

- Bone problems, especially any relating to the knees, lower back, and teeth
- Head hair—issues like hair loss, premature graying, or balding
- Ear problems, including hearing loss, ringing in the ears, ear infections
- Any urinary, sexual, or reproductive issues
- Poor growth and development, mentally or physically
- Premature aging
- Excess fears or insecurities

I suspect some of you are surprised at the sheer scope of the kidneys and their responsibilities for mind and body. The Eastern approach looks at the body, mind, and spirit synergistically, each element being a vital part of the whole. Hopefully this winter you'll take the time to slow down and ponder the incredible powerhouse sitting on either side of your spine that helps you reach the full potential of the human experience.

Emma Suttie is an acupuncturist 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.

Turning the Tide on Addiction

Part 3:
There are ways to treat addiction, but even better ways to prevent it

PAUL SPANJAR

The consuming nature of addiction means that by its very definition, it's an isolating chronic disease. It manifests in various forms that permeate the fabric of society, destroying lives, families, and communities. As explored in previous articles in this series, the rates of addiction are running rampant in countries around the world and the misconception that some addictions are worse than others has left the door open for an explosion of seemingly "innocent" addictions.

Society has viewed an addict as the person strung out on heroin or meth, in a back alley, selling their soul for the next fix. But research has shown that an addict is any person that is unable to stop using a substance such as alcohol, prescription meds, and illicit drugs, or engaging in a behavior, even though it has harmful effects on their daily lives. These behaviors can range from gambling, eating disorders, and sexual gratification to social media and gaming. Even work can become an addiction. Addiction is addiction. It devours more than it returns, leaving us depleted and vulnerable, fueling a downward trajectory that ruins countless lives.

Misunderstandings and myths around addiction are part of the problem: A person addicted to gambling, for example, may be better able to maintain a job or appear healthy, but they remain 15 times more likely to commit suicide than their non-addicted peers.

The rise of social media and the very technologies that underpin it are addictive. Between social media, work, or even pornography—this fast and stimulating world we now live in is miles apart from the world we inhabited for centuries. Marketers and politicians promise we can have it all. We expect constant stimulation and pleasure, leaving us vulnerable to a hundred toxic indulgences. This has left many of us hooked on our phones.

Ironically, social media that was "sold" on the promise to bring us closer and provide connections in an ever-expanding world has left us more isolated and divided. The ease and addictive excitement of our social media feeds have stolen the time we need for face-to-face interactions. We are left with a mild depression that erodes our will to get out in the world.

Adding insult to that injury, healthy social contact is the most essential aspect to a successful recovery from addiction.

So how do we turn back the clock and re-connect with ourselves and others in a very disconnected world?

A Foundation for Recovery

Founded by Bill Wilson in the 1930s, the 12-step program known globally as Alcoholics Anonymous, or AA, remains central to the lives of many in addiction recovery.

As an addiction counselor and recovering addict myself, I have seen first-hand how the 12 steps, and the spiritual transformation that often accompanies them, looks in my own life and the many lives I have helped over the years.

The 12 Steps

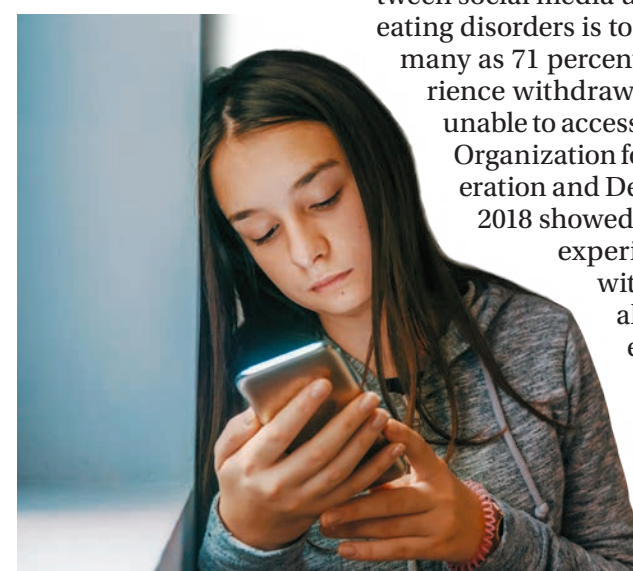
1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Decided to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We are entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.



How do we turn back the clock and re-connect with ourselves and others in a very disconnected world?

It's important to remember that addiction stems from emotional pain and detachment. It is a manifestation of deep-rooted pain and disconnect, a toxic coping mechanism for life.

In tragic irony, the ease and addictive excitement of our social media feeds have stolen the time we need for face-to-face interactions.



12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to other alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Wilson's work reminds us of the need for spiritual wakefulness in a time of great suffering and pain. While heavily influenced by Christian teachings, the 12 Steps can be applied to individuals of other faiths and non-believers alike. These steps carry a message that can be universally applied to any problem and addiction.

The collapse of faith in our society, and the explosion of new addictive forces—from hyper-palatable junk foods to social media feeds driven by artificial intelligence—have left us ever more vulnerable to addiction.

Prevention Is Greater Than The Cure

Change must be actively encouraged in all areas of society; research clearly shows that the earlier the intervention, the better the outcome.

For parents, that might be limiting their child's screen time or discussing the dangers of addiction.

But even for those already caught by addiction and dependence, real change is possible with the right support networks and attitudes.

It's important to acknowledge that the greatest factor in addiction is pain. People find relief from suffering in the addictive behavior, even though it increases their suffering afterward. For people who have suffered trauma, the urge to escape their suffering can be overwhelming.

There are many areas in society—from the home to the legal system—where we can take steps to better prevent future generations from developing drug addiction.

The Home Life

Where addiction is prevalent in the family home, or where trauma has been identified, children at high risk should have access to intervention as early as possible.

The National Institutes of Health makes it clear that the first eight years of a child's life are critical in the prevention of substance abuse. Guardians, social workers, and family doctors have a collective duty of care to ensure high-risk children are screened.

Unfortunately due to several factors, fewer than half of pediatricians report screening children and adolescents for the use of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs.

The Education System

For many children, the biggest risk of addiction isn't substance abuse, but social media dependence. The correlation between social media usage and the rise in eating disorders is too hard to ignore. As many as 71 percent of teenagers experience withdrawal symptoms when unable to access the internet and an Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development study in 2018 showed that teenagers who experience the strongest withdrawal symptoms also reported the lowest life satisfaction.

The best way to deal with this issue is to educate children on the importance of self-preservation, balance, and de-

layed gratification. This will help them deal with the endless temptations to come. Teachers and parents alike must unite and voice their concerns to protect future generations from serious harm.

The Legal System

The war on drugs has failed to protect individuals from the harms of substance abuse. Possession charges that punish individuals for their deep psychological pain do little to help the addict or protect society.

More importance needs to be placed on rehabilitation when substance abuse and alcoholism have been identified. This approach will save lives, cut costs, and reduce crime in the long term.

Until we as a society connect and treat people for the problems that have led them to addiction, we will continue to see this issue harm our communities.

The Workplace

To further reduce the stigma around addiction, and to encourage open discussions around mental health in the workplace, business leaders should introduce several changes to protect staff in times of crisis.

Addiction awareness workshops, team-building activities, and compassionate policies will allow individuals to open up about their battles without fear of consequences. More importantly, giving staff better grievance policies so they have the time to heal properly will give more people the space to recover.

Communities

Local events, fundraisers, and clubs are the backbones of local communities. No Facebook group or virtual meeting can ever replace the real physical connection of the local community spirit.

In the TED talk "Everything you think you know about addiction is wrong" by Johann Hari, he made the point that "the opposite of addiction is connection." It's important to remember that addiction stems from emotional pain and detachment. It's a manifestation of deep-rooted pain and disconnect, a toxic coping mechanism for life.

In Ourselves

To you, the individual, be kind to your inner, wounded child. Take time for yourself and your individual needs to ease the pain that may push you towards addictive escapes.

Being a boss, colleague, parent, partner, caregiver, and community member can be tough. Being so many things to so many people while neglecting your own needs will undoubtedly affect the other relationships you hold dear.

Having self-awareness and self-compassion is vital to breaking the generational trauma cycle so that you don't pass it on to your children.

Be mindful of what you eat—not just in terms of food—but the information and quality of information you consume. If something doesn't feel right, or it takes the form of escapism, trust your ability to discern what is healthy and what is not.

Paul Spanjar, the CEO of The Providence Projects UK, is a leading addiction specialist. In recovery himself for over 20 years, Spanjar and the team help others transform their lives through the rehabilitation programs offered at Providence Projects treatment centers.

MINDSET MATTERS

FREEING YOUR MIND

to Improve Your Actions



Build your habits around your values instead of your fears or your ego



New book aims to help us go beyond mental health to a more meaningful life

Continued from Page 1

In modern times, this idea of self-cultivation has largely been lost, but you do find reflections of the idea in some corners, including psychology, especially those areas of psychology that go beyond mental illness and look at cultivating mental wellness. That's the realm of Steven Hayes's new book, "A Liberated Mind: How to Pivot Toward What Matters." The University of Nevada psychology professor penned the book before the pandemic hit. While it hasn't taken off solely due to the pandemic, our society's focus on mental health as a result of the prolonged crisis probably hasn't hurt his sales.

"It was well-timed in a sense that a lot of people have benefited who are struggling," Hayes told The Epoch Times.

Our society tends to focus mental health around a condition. For instance, you may hear from psychologists only when depression is on the rise. But people need to have sound mental health in all areas of their life and behave in a way that reflects that, Hayes said.

That's why this is a book that anyone can use, as it doesn't just focus on mental illness. It's really about building a life of purpose and having the cognitive flexibility and resilience to deal with anything that comes your way—even if that means dealing with your past.

Adding to Your Mental Toolbox

The book centers on acceptance and commitment therapy, an influential and widely practiced psychological intervention that Hayes developed. It differs from the widely known psychotherapy known as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which centers on learning how to better control thoughts and feelings. Acceptance and commitment therapy, on



“Thoughts are important, but how you relate to them is more important.”

Steven Hayes, author and psychologist

An important part of our life's work is to develop our mental strength and flexibility.



the other hand, helps patients notice, accept, and embrace thoughts and feelings—including those they may not want to experience. "Thoughts are important, but how you relate to them is more important," Hayes explained.

Acceptance and commitment therapy works by adding to your existing ways of thinking—not just disputing your existing thoughts. In other words, it uses cognitive flexibility instead of thought replacement.

One of the easiest ways to understand acceptance and commitment therapy is by its well-known acronym, ACT, which can also be understood to stand for a three-step process to put it into action:

- Accept your thoughts and emotions
- Choose a valued direction
- Take action

Accept Your Thoughts and Emotions
ACT falls into the realm of mindfulness with its directive to accept thoughts and emotions.

To get positive results with ACT, you need to be able to feel without wallowing in your feelings, clinging to them, or avoiding them. Not exactly in touch with your emotions? You'll have to be open to examining them at the least.

This involves being open to your feelings and then having some intention about which thoughts you're going to put your behavior behind. You have to then allocate your attention in a way that's flexible, fluid, and voluntary.

If you're someone who struggles with anxiety, for example, ACT may teach you how to purposefully decline your mind's invitation to worry.

Acceptance can also mean resolving yourself to what has already passed. We all know the mental tension that builds when we grind on what someone else did to us or lament our own mistakes. Recognizing that these events are unchanged by our current mental anguish helps us realize they are best dealt with through acceptance.

The acceptance part of ACT is primarily about becoming aware of yourself and ac-

cepting your thoughts and feelings as they are. This attunement is a prerequisite to making meaningful change. Acceptance lifts a huge mental burden.

Choose a Valued Direction

It's one thing to free up your mind, so to say, but Hayes takes it a step further by inviting readers to pivot toward what matters.

Values, not just goals, are important for those who have had positive results with ACT. Think about the kind of person you want to be and build your habits around those values instead of your fears or your ego.

A sense of self that's mindful in general is a huge help, Hayes said.

But if you're more rigid, wrapped up in your ego, and not into your values, your life may not be as positive. In Hayes's words, "expect a train wreck."

Not everyone is aware of what matters to them most when they begin therapy. Hayes suggests a few ways to help you identify what's important to you—then you can design a life surrounding what counts.

One way to recognize what matters is to take the things that hurt you most and see if they suggest what you care about most. If you are depressed and fearful of your feelings, for example, you probably have a yearning to feel, he said. Hayes knows this firsthand, having dealt with his own social anxiety. Despite having anxiety around others, it was a reflection of how important people were to him, he said.

Values are linked to areas of your life that are important. Another tip to find what matters: Let your mind focus on a vital, engaged moment. Unpacking a memory can lead you to find what matters.

So can assessing who you look up to. If you slow down to pinpoint what the person stands, or stood, for, you may find values that you'd like to better emulate.

Finally, think of yourself as writing the story of your own life. You may not be able to choose what will happen, but you can set the scene and look at what story you're writing with how you live, Hayes said. Own your authorship and the authority you have to live your life. Once you get a

sense of your journey, it can drive you to identify what matters.

Take Action

"ACT is not just about mental health, it's about behavioral health," Hayes explained. The therapy involves our behavior and how we respond to everything in our lives, from our relationships and the choices we make, to our jobs and how we solve problems.

Using the skills of ACT has produced measurable positive outcomes in people's lives, he said, citing extensive research.

When you have a clearer mind and a clear set of values, you are primed to take action to improve your lot in life by changing your actual behavior.

Getting Into the ACT

All of these things mean that people can use ACT to make positive changes in their lives and roll with whatever comes up. That's why Hayes doesn't like to define ACT as only helping with mental health conditions—it helps you live a more meaningful life in general. Ultimately, his book isn't just about mental health—it's about living better.

Mental wellness is a 24/7 thing—that's why it needs our attention, Hayes said.

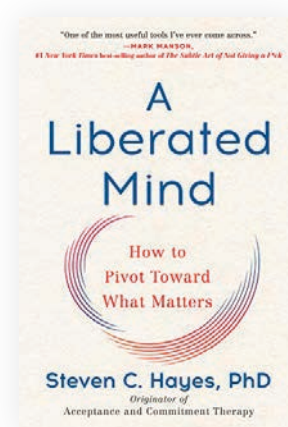
Mental strength and flexibility is "our life agenda" to learn and acquire. Those are relevant to all areas of our lives—not just when we're in crisis, he emphasizes.

"I wish people would think about psychology in a broader way," Hayes said. "I wish the culture would wake up to the idea that behavioral science should be in these conversations about all kinds of problems."

That's not because psychologists have all the answers, but because the psychological aspect of our lives is relevant to all aspects of our lives—not just when we're going through a difficult time or dealing with a mental health diagnosis.

Using ACT can be about overcoming negative thoughts and feelings, and transforming your pain into purpose. Ultimately, though, it's about building a meaningful life—however that looks for you.

Kristen Fischer is a writer living in New Jersey.



"A Liberated Mind: How to Pivot Toward What Matters" by Steven C. Hayes PhD.

The therapy involves our behavior and how we respond to everything in our lives, from our relationships and the choices we make, to our jobs and how we solve problems.



Shen Yun Performing Arts is the world's premier classical Chinese dance company and performs with a unique symphony orchestra.

Improving Wellness by Bolstering the Spirit

Continued from Page 1

A holistic doctor says Shen Yun tunes mind and body with its healing qualities

"Meaningful spiritual entertainment is able to empower your mind, body, spirit—your whole being—to be able to protect yourself," Liu said. "Through the arts, through performance, we help people overcome fear and depression and anxiety."

When an experience changes our mental state, especially if it does so in a profound and significant way, the results are physiological. This is held as truth in medical science, in positive psychology, and in the wisdom of the ancients. It's a principle humans have understood since before the Greeks built the Epidaurus Theatre in 400 B.C. as a place to honor Asclepius, the god of medicine—and as a place for the weary to cleanse their souls with therapeutic waters and theater.

But what's special about Shen Yun Performing Arts in particular?

"They're bringing hope to the world, to the people, to every individual," Liu said.

Many years ago, Liu saw a performance by the New York-based classical Chinese dance company, and he has been recommending it to his clients ever since.

Musical That Moves the Soul

Beyond the healing power of the arts in general, Liu pointed out that Shen Yun's music blends ancient Chinese musical principles with the sound of the full classical orchestra that audiences are most familiar with.

"I found the music of the Shen Yun performance to be very special. Because I am a music therapy doctor myself, I feel that although most of Shen Yun's ensemble is Western instruments, the style of composition is actually in line with yin and yang and the five elements: It is music that expresses the harmony between heaven and earth," he said.

The ancient Chinese also believed that music had the power to heal. The Chinese character for "music" is actually the root of the Chinese character for "medicine." This music system is pentatonic, based on five tones, which are attuned to the body's five main internal organs and the five elements of the exterior world.

The first note, "gong," is connected to the earth element and the digestive system, and music based on this note puts the listener in a state of serenity. The "jue" note is vigorous and connected to the wood element and liver health. "Shang" is connected to metal, the lungs, and sorrow. "Yu" is melodious and quiet, transparent like water, and connected to the kidneys. "Zhi" is joyous, connected to fire, and the heart.

Liu's explanation matches that of Shen Yun's closely, as this was common knowledge in traditional Chinese culture before communism destroyed traditional culture in China.

For 5,000 years, Chinese culture was believed to be divinely inspired, and the deep spiritual civilization was centered around the idea of harmony between heaven, earth, and humankind. In 1949 the Communist Party, atheist and anti-China in nature, took power and undertook systematic and often gruesome campaigns to change the character of the nation.

However, Shen Yun celebrates the beauty and wisdom of traditional Chinese culture. Liu said that gives it a unique energy.

"This energy really activates your whole mind, body, spirit," he said. "Our body needs energy. When you don't have good energy, you don't sleep well, you worry, and then you make mistakes, because your mind is not clear. This is very common. People lose their spiritual strength, their mental clarity, and then they make mistakes. And they then so easily get sick, because they become weak."

"Body, mind, and spirit—don't forget this. This is how our whole being came from the universe, from God."

And Shen Yun, a performance filled with spirit, with ancient wisdom, and with the healing power of art, jumpstarts that for the audience.

When an experience changes our mental state, especially if it does so in a profound and significant way, the results are physiological.

Have Faith

Of the three, our busy modern mankind most easily forgets the importance of the spirit, and Liu expressed his wish to administer a reminder.

"We need to go back to our spiritual roots. Deeply connect with divine power, connect with God and the universe," he said. "Shen Yun uses historical stories and the power of music and dance to connect everyone with the original life source. People are ready for this."

"No matter what kind of religion you have, Christian or Buddhist, or qigong meditator, or yoga practitioners, there's a lot of spiritual practices still; those people understand it."

Faith is every individual's own choice, Liu said. He noted that he wouldn't recommend someone who's still holding on to fear to go out and watch a show with their minds clouded with negativity. The three aspects of the body, the mind, and the spirit all need to be in balance.

"These are the three points that I want to make, these three aspects of the physical, the mind, and the spirit," he said.

As for physical health, the Shen Yun performers are human, too, Liu said, and they're healthy not only because they're athletes who tend to their physical states, but because they're meditators and people of faith, taking care of their mental and spiritual states as well.

And a testament to their motivation is the fact that they're sharing their source of health—their fearless passion for art and faith—with the world, according to Liu.

"Audiences, all people, are protecting their life. Shen Yun is doing the same thing as everyone wants," he said. "They are meditators and cultivators, they are dancers and musicians, so they bring this to the world, to help the world, help everyone."

Liu still remembers the feeling he had when he first saw a performance many years ago.

"Gosh, this show, I feel so connected, I really feel connected. This whole show, two hours, I'm in heaven. I feel all of life surrounding me, I feel that my whole body is so warm, great energy circulating inside my body, a hundred meridians are open," he said. "When I came out of the theater, you know, my face, I feel changed. I feel young, like I've gone back to my 20s! You have to experience that."

WISE HABITS

A Quick Guide to Planning Your Year

Plans and goals inevitably fall apart, but setting the intention matters

LEO BABAUTA

The beginning of the year offers such a beautiful blank slate. We can start anew and reinvent our lives.

If you're feeling like you're in a bit of a rut, this is the perfect time to make the most of this year's blank slate.

In this article, I'll talk about why planning your year is important, how to deal with burnout you might be feeling, and the process I use for planning my year.

Why Planning Your Year Is Important

The first thing to acknowledge is that our year never goes according to plan. If you look back at my plans for the past handful of years, you'll see that I often miss at least half of my targets, and what I actually did during the year couldn't be predicted at the beginning, because you never know what will unfold during the year. The most recent couple of years has really driven that point home.

That said, the planning I've done at the beginning of the year has mattered—a lot.

Setting a direction at the beginning of the year is an important act of reflection, imagination, and decision about what's important to you. It's about choosing where you'd like to go, and creating new possibilities for yourself and others.

And as you navigate in that direction during the year, getting off course is part of the journey—you can look at what's throwing you off course and use that as a place of learning and practice. You can also reassess what's important during the year as an act of continual renewal and course correction.

Not ending up where we planned is expected. But the planning itself is an act that changes us.



How to Deal With Your Burnout

So a lot of you are probably feeling burned out from this pandemic. Planning projects probably doesn't sound exciting right now, from the place of being burned out. I get it.

So plan for recovery and rest. Planning your year doesn't have to be planning a bunch of work—it can be planning time off, planning self-care and healing, planning things that feel rejuvenating and regenerative.

Before you start this planning process, I encourage you to take a few moments of silence, and check in with yourself—how much energy do you have? What do you need? What would help you get your mind in a clearer place?

Take a breath, and enjoy the space of planning as a contemplative place of spaciousness.

How I Plan My Year

Every year, I take a few days and give myself some reflective space.

Here's what I do, in brief:

Reflect on the past. I reflect on the year that just passed—what did I do, accomplish, fail at? What can I learn from all of this? What

From all of the possibilities, I ask what would be amazing? What would light me up?

Not ending up where we planned is expected. But the planning itself is an act that changes us.

Planning your year doesn't have to be planning a bunch of work—it can be planning time off, planning self-care and healing.

do I want to celebrate and be grateful for?

Clear things out. This part is optional, but I like to clear out my inbox, clean my house, get small tasks done, clear out my reading list of articles I haven't read, and clear out my emotional space. What do I need to go into the next year clear of burdens? What do I need to let go of? If you have the time, this is a really nice thing to do—clear yourself out.

Imagine what I want. With the blank slate of a year in front of me, I like to imagine what could be possible. I could write a book, start a podcast, hold workshops, launch a new product, start a community, go on a retreat, build something, learn something, meet new people, travel, deepen relationships. From all of these possibilities, I ask, "What would be amazing? What would light me up? What would make my heart sing?" I listen to this, and speak it to someone, and listen some more.

Start to choose. From my possibilities, I start to make a shortlist—what do I actually want to focus on, what do I actually want to create? This can be difficult, because sometimes I want to do so many things. I curate, and put the others on the back burner. I look at the shortlist, and I ask myself, "At the end of the year, will I be thrilled if I have accomplished these things?"

Create structure. Once I have a shortlist, then it's a matter of creating the structure I'll need to actually make the shortlist happen. Again, even if I don't accomplish all of the goals, just creating and experimenting with the structure is important. Some examples of structure that work well for me include monthly reviews, weekly reviews, a focus for each month, a morning routine, themed days of the week (writing day, meetings day, admin day, etc). These reviews allow me to adjust my course along the way.

The key to all of this is to spend a little time reflecting and choosing. Set up some structure, and have the structure allow you to review and adjust throughout the year. That way, your plan becomes more suited to the reality that actually unfolds.

Leo Babauta is the author of six books and the writer of Zen Habits, a blog with over 2 million subscribers. Visit ZenHabits.net

The Right Way to Cut Carbs and Sugar

A doctor explains why you should keep fruit on the menu—even if you're diabetic

JENNIFER ROOKE

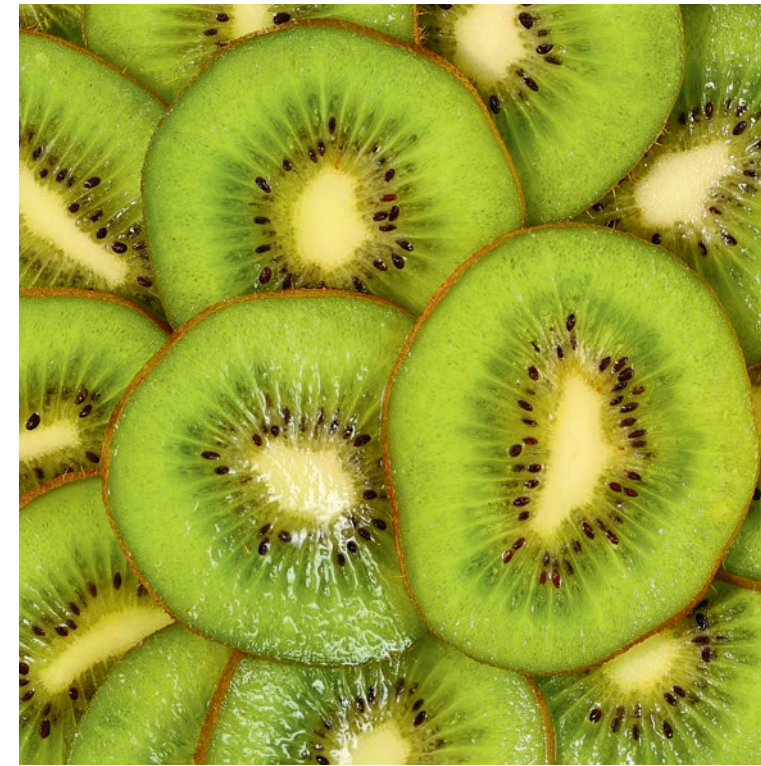
One of my patients—who had been struggling with obesity, uncontrolled diabetes, and the cost of her medications—agreed in June 2019 to adopt a more whole-food, plant-based diet.

Excited by the challenge, she did a remarkable job. She increased her fresh fruit and vegetable intake; stopped eating candy, cookies, and cakes; and cut down on foods from animal sources. Over six months, she lost 19 pounds and her HbA1c—a measure of average blood sugar—dropped from 11.5 percent to 7.6 percent.

She was doing so well, I expected that her HbA1c would continue to drop, and she would be one of our plant-based successes who had reversed diabetes.

Her three-month follow-up visit in March 2020 was canceled because of the COVID-19 lockdowns. When I eventually saw her again in May 2021, she had regained some of the weight and her HbA1c had climbed to 10.4 percent. She said her diabetes doctor and a diabetes nurse educator had told her that she was eating too much "sugar" on the plant-based diet.

Continued on Page 13



Gum Disease Increases Risk of Mental Health Problems by 37%

JOSEPH MERCOLA

A collaborative study led by researchers at the University of Birmingham looked at 64,379 people's medical records and discovered that patients with periodontal disease have a 37 percent higher risk of developing mental health illness. The study, published in BMJ Open, also found that 60,995 had gingivitis and 3,384 had periodontitis. The data from these individuals were compared against 251,161 healthy individuals without any record of gum disease.

The researchers accounted for confounding factors, such as smoking habits, ethnicity, and body mass index. In addition to establishing the number of people with and without gum disease who also had mental health disease, they analyzed the data to determine the number in the same groups who developed cardiovascular disease, cardiometabolic disorders, or autoimmune conditions.

Gum disease has an impact on your overall physical health. Current data now link it to an increased risk of mental health problems.



The risk of mental health illness increased by

37 PERCENT, autoimmune disease by

33 PERCENT, and cardiovascular disease by

18 PERCENT.

Gum Disease Raises the Risk of Mental Health Disorders

They discovered patients with a history of gum disease at the beginning of the study were more likely to be diagnosed with one of the health conditions in the following three years when compared against the healthy controls. The risk of mental health illness increased by 37 percent, autoimmune disease by 33 percent, and cardiovascular disease by 18 percent.

Continued on Page 12



A Book That Has Inspired The World



"I have indeed experienced all the miracles. No matter what your experience or what background you have or what country you are born in, you will benefit from Falun Dafa."

Martin Rubenis
OLYMPIC ATHLETE

Zhuangzi is the main text of Falun Gong (also called Falun Dafa). The book expounds upon profound principles of Truthfulness, Compassion and Tolerance. It addresses the long-forgotten term "cultivation," the origins of illnesses, karma, the role of moral character on a path to spiritual perfection, and more.

The book was a national bestseller in China in the 1990s, and has been translated into over 40 languages. Find out why it has captured the hearts and minds of tens of millions of people in over 100 countries worldwide!

"What made Falun Gong stand out from other qigong exercises and meditation practices was a moral system—compassion, truthfulness, and forbearance—unmistakably Buddhist in origin."

Arthur Waldron
LAUDER PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

"Falun Gong has taught me how to be considerate of others and how to improve my relationships by handling conflicts constructively. [...] It has given me incredible relaxation, mental clarity, and freedom from stress."

Shiyu Zhou
PH.D., USA

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What Our Readers Say (#31, part 1)



I subscribed to The Epoch Times from an ad I had seen on YouTube. In the ad I saw the slogan "Truth and Tradition." That really caught my eye as those two elements are often missing from the mainstream news media.

Truth - A journalist's opinion is often considered the truth nowadays and that should never be the case. There are those journalists who believe that they do not need to mention the source from where they get their information. While reading The Epoch Times I notice that their journalists extensively list references throughout their articles. This is helpful as I can go to their direct source to verify the information and receive even more insight on the article.

Tradition - I am proud to be an American and, on a daily basis, I am grateful for the opportunities this country provides to me. I am very traditional. I am NOT progressive. Our founding fathers fought for independence through the signing of the Declaration of Independence. The American Revolution established that every American then, now and in the future have

three unalienable rights: the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Progressives believe that they need to radically change our Constitution. I don't. The words written in our Constitution are just as strong today as they were when originally written. I enjoy reading The Epoch Times because this paper understands American tradition and the value of every American. I especially enjoy reading the Life & Tradition section as it provides great biographical and many other informative articles that are helpful to me.

I am very pleased with The Epoch Times' no holds barred coverage on the CCP. I am now better informed on the CCP's communist influence here in America and around the world. I enjoy reading all the very well done infographics. Some of my favorites include: The CCP's Virus Propaganda War, The CCP's Influence Over International Groups and China's Secret War Against America. **The Epoch Times has made me a much better informed American. I am very pleased with my subscription.**

JAMIE MANUELS

Learn more at EpochSubscription.com

THE EPOCH TIMES
TRUTH AND TRADITION



We all know we need to drink more water, but that is especially hard if you're just not thirsty, a problem that increases as you age.

Not Thirsty? 8 Ways to Drink More Water

Most people are mildly dehydrated and paying a price in terms of health and well-being

LYNN JAFFEE

A few weeks ago, I woke up in the middle of the night with a really dry mouth. My dentist recommended a dry mouth spray for such occurrences, so I reached out in the dark and took a couple of blasts of the spray, only to realize that what I had used was lavender air freshener instead. Gross! Luckily I was able to go right back to sleep, maybe because lavender is known for its relaxing properties.

The point is that water is an issue for me, and it's too important of a nutrient not to be getting enough of it. In fact, it's considered to be an essential nutrient because your body needs more water than it can ever produce on its own. Think about it: You lose water every day through evaporation, elimination, respiration, and perspiration. You can live for quite a long time without food, but only for about three days without water. Here are a few of the things that water does for you:

- It helps regulate your body temperature.
- Water supports your digestion and keeps the process moving.
- Water in the form of synovial fluid in your joints acts as a shock absorber and slows down wear and tear.
- It's crucial in controlling your blood pressure.
- Water helps your immunity by flushing toxins from your body.
- It helps balance your body's electrolytes, which regulate nerve and muscle function and maintain the acid balance (pH) in your body.

Experts vary widely in their recommendations of how much water you actually need to drink each day. Some recommend between four and eight cups (32 ounces to 64 ounces) daily, while others say you need as much as 96 ounces, which translates to 12 cups per day. What you actually need is specific to you, depending on your age, exercise levels, the medications you're taking, and your overall health. In addition, you need more water when it's hot out, if you're running a fever, or if you've had an illness that causes diarrhea or vomiting.

While your brain tells you when you're dehydrated and when you need water by making you feel thirsty, your thirst isn't a reliable gauge for when to drink. Thirst signals actually decrease as you get older, which means you need to make sure you're getting enough water, even if you aren't you're thirsty.

This is my problem. I'm just not thirsty unless I've worked out for a long time on a hot day. And getting dehydrated isn't a good thing. It can cause headaches, muscle cramps, and even sprains and muscle strains, as dehydrated tissues are more prone to injuries. For me, being dehydrated makes my mouth dry, and it's a powerful trigger for migraine headaches.

The question is how can you get enough fluids if you're just not thirsty? Here are a few tips that may help if you also struggle to get enough water each day:

Set a goal for how much water you want to drink throughout the day. Make it realistic and achievable, then track how you're doing. Try to drink the largest portion

of water early in the day. Playing catch-up late in the day is a recipe for a lot of bathroom trips at night.

Carry a water bottle with you and sip it constantly. This accomplishes a couple of things: It tells you how much you're actually drinking, it can help you reach your daily goal, and it serves as a reminder to drink. Without the guidance of thirst, your water bottle serves as a good reminder.

For some people, plain water gets boring, especially when you're not thirsty in the first place. Try adding a little flavor, such as a wedge of lemon, lime, or orange. You can also try bits of strawberry, raspberry, or cucumber or add a small amount of juice to your water.

You can live for quite a long time without food, but only for about three days without water.

If your water tastes outright bad, try a water filter. You can get one that attaches to your tap or a pitcher that filters the water before you drink it, or a countertop system that leaves you with plenty of water ready to drink or cook with. A good filter removes chlorine and contaminants from your water, including lead.

Eat hydrating foods. This includes soup and water-dense fruits and vegetables, such as melons, lettuce, cucumbers, strawberries, peaches, and citrus fruits.

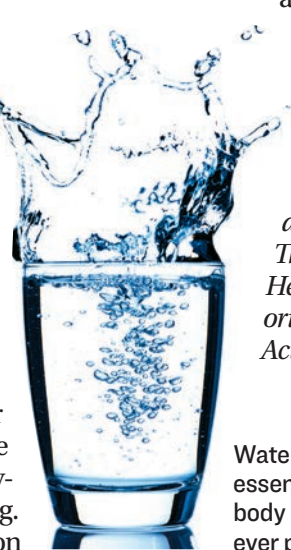
Build drinking water into your routine. Just like you brush your teeth when you get up in the morning (you do this, right?), you can make it a habit to drink during or after certain activities. For example, drinking water when you first get up is a great way to get your body going and drinking a little before each meal can aid in weight loss. That's because many people mistake hunger for thirst and eat more than they need. You can also plan to hydrate after a walk or workout and while you're making dinner. You know your routine, so schedule what works best for you.

A couple of things to avoid are alcohol and sugary drinks. Alcohol is actually dehydrating and sugary drinks are among the most unhealthy substances that you can put into your body.

The bottom line is that being dehydrated isn't good for you. It can lead to kidney problems, urinary tract infections, kidney stones, low blood volume, fatigue, and dizziness. Even mild dehydration is linked to a reduced ability to focus. I'm one of those people who have to work at drinking enough and you may be, too. Without the signal of thirst, it's helpful to have work-arounds and reminders. In the time it took me to write this, I drank a 12 oz. glass of water. Baby steps!

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

Water is considered to be an essential nutrient because your body needs more water than it can ever produce on its own.



The Benefits of N-Acetyl-Cysteine

Could this often ignored but essential amino acid change your life?

N-A-C (N-Acetyl-Cysteine) is a building block to one of the most important compounds your body produces.

ZOLTAN RONA

One of the most underestimated and under-utilized natural food supplements I have recommended to my patients over the past 35 years is an amino acid derivative known as N-A-C (N-Acetyl-Cysteine).

Why underestimated? Well, even naturopaths seldom recommend it and most people who take natural food supplements have never even heard of it.

What Is N-Acetyl-Cysteine?

N-A-C is a form of the essential amino acid cysteine, something used by the body to make glutathione (GSH), one of the body's most important antioxidants. In fact, all the benefits of N-A-C are due to the fact that it boosts the blood levels of GSH. The major impact of N-A-C is on the immune system, liver protection, detoxification, and cardiovascular health. We all badly need its anti-inflammatory protection.

How It Works

N-A-C modulates the expression of genes that affect the inflammatory process. It inhibits the expression of pro-inflammatory cytokines, suppresses NF-kappa B, and regulates the gene for COX-2 thereby preventing inflammation and pain. These chemicals are involved in hundreds of inflammatory conditions and diseases. In other words, N-A-C is anti-inflammatory and can either blunt or reverse chronic inflammatory conditions.

Benefits of N-Acetyl-Cysteine:

1. N-A-C Cardiovascular System Benefits
N-A-C prevents LDL-cholesterol from being oxidized and causing inflammatory damage to the blood vessels. N-A-C lowers the levels of homocysteine, which prevents the buildup of plaque in the arteries. The lower the homocysteine, the less likelihood of arterial blockage.

N-A-C is also effective at lowering the blood levels of lipoprotein (Lp(a)), thought by many scientists to be a more accurate predictor of cardiovascular disease than blood levels of cholesterol. Diet changes and drugs don't lower Lp(a) anywhere as well as N-A-C.

N-A-C also improves insulin resistance and will improve metabolic syndrome, diabetes, and hypoglycemia.

2. Neurological Benefits of N-A-C

Since GSH has been documented to help numerous neurological conditions such as Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's, hearing damage, ataxia, and ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), it stands to reason that N-A-C would be helpful because supplementation of it raises the blood levels of GSH.

3. Immune System Benefits

Because N-A-C boosts the body's levels of GSH, it can help to fight viruses. GSH is vital for optimal T and B-lymphocyte function.

One would think it might be a good idea to supplement the body with GSH, but the major problem here is that GSH isn't absorbed intact from the gastrointestinal tract. Oral GSH supplementation is destroyed and inactivated by stomach acid. N-A-C isn't.

Supplementation of N-A-C is, therefore, more desirable because the body will make much more GSH than if supplementing GSH orally in any form.

Aside from viruses, N-A-C protects the body from numerous pollutants, drugs, microbes, and toxic heavy metals like mercury. N-A-C is mucolytic, which means that it breaks up heavy and sticky mucus that can build up in conditions such as sinusitis, asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia, and cystic fibrosis. N-A-C is therefore indispensable in any condition that involves excessive mucus.

Evidence exists that N-A-C blocks the progression of most cancers and could be taken with chemotherapy to improve treatment outcomes.

4. Detoxification Benefits of N-A-C

N-A-C protects the body from many different toxins because of its content of sulfhydryl groups that can bind and inactivate herbicides, mercury, cadmium, lead, other toxic heavy metals, drugs like acetaminophen, environmental pollutants, microbes like E. Coli, carbon tetrachloride, and aflatoxin. Although not a drug, N-A-C has government approval as a drug to prevent liver damage from acetaminophen (Tylenol) poisoning.

A very common condition that plagues more than 50 million people in North America is a condition known as non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (NAFLD). In this condition, the liver stores excessive amounts of fat, mostly due to insulin resistance, metabolic syndrome, or diabetes. Liver function tests are usually elevated indicating damage to liver cells and the liver appears grossly fatty on an ultrasound. This condition is benefitted by the strict restriction of simple carbohydrates as well as a vigorous exercise program. Studies also show a significant improvement in liver function tests in those suffering from NAFLD with supplementation of N-A-C. Not only does it protect liver cells but it also helps heal a damaged liver.

5. Respiratory Tract Benefits

N-A-C is mucolytic (dissolves mucus). Many lung and bronchial issues can benefit from high N-A-C supplementation. N-A-C helps reduce the viscosity of mucus so that the body can more easily cough it up. A number of studies also conclude that N-A-C can help to prevent influenza, possibly through this mucolytic mechanism.

N-A-C reduces both the frequency and duration of COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) attacks and may blunt the ravaging clinical course of pulmonary fibrosis, a usually lethal lung disease.

In my practice, I have had a great deal of success using an N-A-C nasal spray to treat chronic sinus pain and congestion. Combining the spray with high-dose oral N-A-C and vitamin C is often more effective than prescription antibiotics for chronic or recurrent sinusitis.

6. Stomach and Other Gut Benefits

The bacteria known as H. Pylori has been acknowledged to be the cause of ulcers, gastritis, reflux disorder discomforts, and even different types of gastrointestinal cancer. N-A-C supplementation is capable of inactivating H. Pylori and is something worth adding to any resistant-to-antibiotics H. Pylori infections.

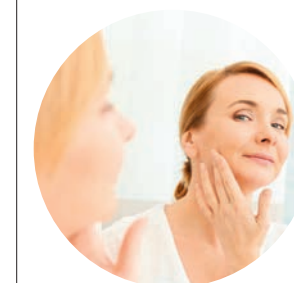
7. Kidney Disease Benefits

Kidney disease is greatly helped by N-A-C supplementation. Even dialysis patients can

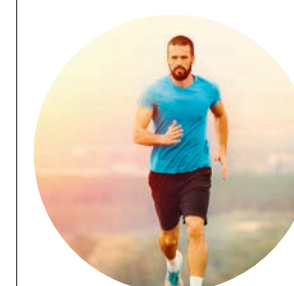
Evidence exists that N-A-C blocks the progression of most cancers and could be taken with chemotherapy to improve treatment outcomes.



Because N-A-C boosts the body's levels of glutathione, it can help to fight viruses.



N-A-C boosts glutathione blood levels, a very important antioxidant which could provide anti-aging benefits.



N-A-C improves athletic performance by reducing muscle fatigue and enhancing endurance.

be helped by as little as 600 mg N-A-C daily to reduce inflammation occurring in chronic kidney disease.

8. Compulsive Hair Pulling/Psychiatric Illness Improvement

Trichotillomania is a bizarre obsessive-compulsive disorder in which victims pull out their hair for inexplicable reasons causing noticeable hair loss. The usual treatment is anti-depressant drugs or tranquilizers. Studies indicate that N-A-C significantly reduces compulsive hair pulling.

Schizophrenia, autism, bipolar illness, and other obsessive-compulsive disorders may also be improved with N-A-C.

9. Athletic Benefits

Due to its antioxidant effects and benefits to the respiratory system, N-A-C improves athletic performance. Specifically, N-A-C reduces muscle fatigue and, as proven in double-blind studies, enhances athletic endurance.

10. Anti-Aging Benefits

If you can effectively scavenge harmful free radicals, as N-A-C created GSH does, it stands to reason that you can prevent premature aging. This phenomenon has indeed been proven in numerous scientific studies.

11. Drug Addiction Benefits

Studies also indicate that N-A-C may diminish the craving for highly addictive drugs. As such, it may be a useful adjunct in any drug detoxification program.

Ideal Dosages of N-Acetyl-Cysteine

There are no accepted ideal dosages for N-A-C. My advice is to start at 600 mg daily and gradually build up to a maximum of 3000 mg daily. Ideally, take with an equivalent amount of vitamin C for maximum free radical scavenging effects.

Side Effects

Despite more than 40 years of clinical use by naturopaths, holistic medical doctors, and nutritionists of virtually every stripe, N-A-C has a well-established safety record even at very high dosages over long periods of time (you can take it virtually without worry for months and probably years).

Some people experience nausea when taking N-A-C on an empty stomach but the majority don't experience any side effects if they take it with food.

Bottom Line

N-Acetyl-Cysteine is an important amino acid I have made a part of my practice. Consider discussing it with your health care professional.

Dr. Zoltan P. Rona is a graduate of McGill University Medical School (1977) and holds a Master's Degree in Biochemistry and Clinical Nutrition from the University of Bridgeport in Connecticut (1984). He is past president of the Holistic Medical Association (1987-88) and is the author of three Canadian bestsellers: "The Joy of Health" (1991), "Return to the Joy of Health" (1995) and "Childhood Illness and the Allergy Connection" (1997). He can be found at www.highlevelwellness.ca. This article was originally published on NaturallySavvy.com



The best way to prevent gingivitis is to brush and floss regularly. Oil pulling with coconut oil can also help reduce plaque, bad breath, and gingivitis.

Gum Disease Increases Risk of Mental Health Problems by 37%

Gum disease has an impact on your overall physical health. Current data now link it to an increased risk of mental health problems.

Continued from Page 9

The health condition with the lowest risk was cardiometabolic disorder, but even it increased by 7 percent in people with a history of gum disease. The risk association was higher for people who developed Type 2 diabetes: 26 percent. One of the researchers, Dr. Joht Singh Chandan from the University of Birmingham, commented on the results of the study and the importance of the information in a press release, saying:

“Poor oral health is extremely common, both here in the UK and globally. When oral ill-health progresses, it can lead to a substantially reduced quality of life. However, until now, not much has been known about the association of poor oral health and many chronic diseases, particularly mental ill-health.

“We conducted one of the largest epidemiological studies of its kind to date, using UK primary care data to explore the association between periodontal disease and several chronic conditions. We found evidence that periodontal disease appears to be associated with an increased risk of developing these associated chronic diseases. As periodontal diseases are very common, an increased risk of other chronic diseases may represent a substantial public health burden.”

One of the researchers also noted that the findings suggest effective communication between dental professionals and primary care providers could help improve treatment plans that target oral health and a patient’s overall health.

Common Types of Gum Disease

Since 2009, data on the prevalence of periodontal (gum) disease in the United States has shown that between 30 percent and 47 percent of the U.S. population has some degree of periodontal disease, which has been called a growing epidemic.

In their study, the Birmingham researchers enrolled patients who had either gingivitis or periodontal disease, two of the largest diagnoses of gum disease. The data revealed an association with health conditions that are linked to an inflammatory response. A review published in *Nature Reviews: Immunology*, looked at several previous studies and found this mechanism is also linked to neurodegenerative diseases and some cancers, which can be the result of a chronic inflammatory response in the body.

Gingivitis is a mild form of periodontal disease in which the gums become red and swollen. They also bleed easily when brushed or flossed. Left untreated, it can advance to periodontitis. In this condition, plaque spreads below the gum line. The bacteria produce toxins that irritate the gum tissue and trigger an inflammatory response.

As the disease progresses, the gums separate from the teeth. Bacterial growth in these pockets helps destroy more gum tissue and bone that supports the teeth. Eventually, your teeth can loosen and fall out.

Data Also Link Gum Disease to Increasing Chronic Illnesses

Caroline Aylott from *Versus Arthritis* com-

mented on the importance of the Birmingham study results as they relate to patients with arthritis, especially autoimmune conditions. “Some of the biggest challenges of arthritis, especially auto-immune conditions like rheumatoid arthritis (RA) which affects 400,000 people in the UK, is being able to know who is more at risk of developing it, and finding ways to prevent it. Previous studies have shown that people with RA were four times more likely to have gum disease than their RA-free counterparts and it tended to be more severe,” she said in the press release.

“This research provides further clear evidence why healthcare professionals need to be vigilant for early signs of gum disease and how it can have wide-reaching implications for a person’s health, reinforcing the importance of taking a holistic approach when treating people.”

Past studies have supported the evidence from the featured study. For example, one study published in 2001 with 1,412 participants found 62.5 percent of patients with rheumatoid arthritis had advanced forms of periodontal disease. They concluded that moderate to severe gum disease increases the risk of rheumatoid arthritis and vice versa.

A later study in 2010 discussed the specific oral bacterial infections that appeared to be linked to RA. The data linking periodontal disease and heart disease isn’t as consistent. The featured study found a strong link, as have other studies and literature reviews. However, other papers haven’t found a positive association.

Gingivitis is a mild form of periodontal disease.

Several mechanisms have been postulated to explain a relationship between periodontitis and cardiovascular disease. These include infection of atherosclerotic plaques by pathogens in the gums, systemic dissemination of pro-inflammatory compounds from gum disease, the effect periodontitis has on the lipid profile, or the contribution it makes to the development of Type 2 diabetes.

The featured study also found a link between gum disease and cardiometabolic disease. This is a group of health conditions that increases your risk of heart attack, stroke, and high blood pressure. These are consequences of metabolic syndrome, which is a constellation of symptoms that include belly fat, high blood pressure, impaired glucose tolerance, high triglycerides, and low high-density lipoproteins (HDL).

One study evaluated the medical records of 572 industrial workers who had medical and dental records from 2003 to 2012. The evaluation of the records in 2003 showed normal cardiometabolic values.

The researchers then compared the duration of periodontal pockets, which are a symptom of gum disease, against the progression of cardiometabolic risk factors over nine years. They found that chronic gum disease was significantly associated with these risk fac-

tors and suggested cardiometabolic disease may increase in patients who aren’t treated for periodontitis, though correlation doesn’t mean causation.

Steps to Protect Your Gums and Your Brain

Dr. Steven Lin is a dentist who uses holistic approaches to care for oral health as well as overall health. In a short video he posted on his YouTube channel, he encourages you to think of your mouth as a “gatekeeper” to your gut health and as a reminder to keep your gut microbiome balanced and healthy.

Your gums don’t take care of themselves. Eating processed and high carbohydrate foods increases bacterial growth in your mouth and the risk of gum disease. The first step to consider is optimizing your diet for your oral health and mitochondrial function by reducing your intake of hyper-processed carbohydrates.

The American Dental Association recommends you brush twice a day with a soft bristle brush and replace that brush every three to four months. You should also regularly floss between your teeth to remove plaque. While these are basic steps for oral care, there are several more steps you can take to help reduce the growth of bad bacteria and protect your overall health.

Additional Steps for Oral Health

Monitor your vitamin D, K2, magnesium, and calcium levels. These nutrients work synergistically to help protect your gums, teeth, and bones. The best way to get calcium is to eat it in foods such as almonds, oranges, dried figs, low-fat dairy, and leafy green vegetables like kale and spinach. Vitamin K2 directs calcium into the bone and prevents it from being deposited along blood vessel walls. Foods high in K2 include dairy products and certain meats. Vitamin K2 also helps mediate gut inflammation in two ways, according to Lin. The first is by decreasing fibroblasts that fuel gum disease and activating matrix GLA protein that prevents calcification of the periodontal ligament and around the body.

Vitamin D deficiency increases the risk of inflammatory diseases and is associated with a higher risk of periodontal disease. You can maintain optimal levels through sensible sun exposure. If you can’t keep your serum levels between 40 ng/mL and 60 ng/mL you may consider supplementation.

Monitor your vitamin C status. One study from the University of Washington found that if your gums are bleeding, you may be deficient in vitamin C. They reviewed data from 15 trials in six countries and found when baseline levels of ascorbic acid (vitamin C) were less than 28 µmol/L, supplementation helped reduce gum bleeding. They concluded:

“Consistent evidence from controlled clinical trials indicates that setting human AA requirements based on scurvy prevention leads to AA plasma levels that may be too low to prevent an increased gingival bleeding tendency.

Gingival bleeding tendency and retinal hemorrhaging coincide with low AA plasma

Other Types of Periodontal Disease

Aggressive periodontitis: This is a destructive disease that involves multiple teeth, fast progression, early onset and the absence of systemic disease.

Pregnancy gingivitis: This appears during pregnancy and is related to the hormonal changes associated with pregnancy. Changes in what you eat while pregnant and the amount of saliva produced can also increase the risk of gingivitis.

Pericoronitis: This condition is common in 17- to 24-year-old adults. It appears where the wisdom teeth normally come through the gums and is triggered by infection over or around a partially erupted tooth. This leaves a flap of tissue that can collect food particles and result in an infection. The best preventive strategy is to brush and floss regularly.

Desquamative gingivitis: This is a rare and painful type of periodontal disease that affects the outer layers of the gum. The tissue appears red, glazed and easily torn, causing bleeding. It can be caused by mucous membrane pemphigoid (MMP), oral lichen planus and pemphigus vulgaris. Endocrine disturbances, such as those during menopause, can also trigger the condition.

levels and thus may be reflective of a systemic microvascular pathology that is reversible with an increased daily AA intake.”

Stop using fluoridated products: It’s important to optimize your oral microbiome. Antibacterial and fluoridated products, such as toothpaste, mouthwash, floss, and fluoridated water, negatively affect your oral microbiome.

In the mouth, you don’t want to have a “scorched earth policy,” nuking all bacteria and hoping the good microbes come back, says biological dentist Dr. Gerry Curatola, founder of Rejuvenation Dentistry. Good microbes basically have a harder chance of setting up a healthy-balanced microbiome when you disturb them, denature them, or dehydrate them with alcohol- and chemical-based products.

Consider oil pulling. A gentle and simple way to help reduce plaque, gingivitis, and bad breath is oil pulling using coconut oil. According to Ayurvedic tradition, oil pulling may improve more than 30 systemic diseases including reduced inflammation and bleeding.

Coconut oil is antibacterial and antiviral and contains 92 percent saturated fats, 49 percent of which is the anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial medium-chain saturated fat lauric acid. Scientific study has also suggested that oil pulling with coconut oil reduces plaque formation and reduces the risk of gingivitis.

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.

Chiropractic Maintenance

Take care of your body so it doesn’t develop problems

RICHARD SCHOONMAKER

Talks about prevention within a chiropractic office don’t get as much screen time as the normative low back and neck pain talks typically will. Many times, patients will come to a chiropractor’s office with what is called a “chief complaint,” something that has suddenly happened (or has been bugging them for some time) that has made life much more difficult than necessary.

What about the patients who don’t necessarily have a major complaint? What about a patient who doesn’t have low back pain or headaches that ruin their day, or bursitis that prevents them from raising their arm above their head? These are the patients who really don’t feel awful, but still believe that there is some room for improvement in their overall well-being—what many chiropractors will refer to as wellness-based patients.

Wellness-based patients or wellness-based care is structured chiropractic care revolving around improving, facilitating, and optimizing the health of an individual so that they can live life without a chief complaint. It’s about prioritizing the highest state of health so that when life throws a curve ball, your own nervous system and immune system are able to say, “Hey, I got this.” Don’t get me wrong, life will eventually have its moments where injuries and illness are bound to happen, but in that same breath we must also acknowledge the importance of doing everything in our power to prevent these things from ever happening in the first place.

Enter chiropractic philosophy and the effort to achieve the most optimal state of human health and wellness without the need for surgeries or medications. It’s an approach that prioritizes what your body needs so it can excel at life. While many patients do come in with conditions that require attention, ensuring that just as much attention is given to establishing the homeostasis (or balance) of our system in the absence of any perceived problem is also necessary.

I say “perceived” because we may not readily feel a problem but that does not



Enter chiropractic philosophy and the effort to achieve the most optimal state of human health and wellness without the need for surgeries or medications.

necessarily mean that there is not a problem either presently occurring or in the process of developing. This is not to say that you have a problem, but it’s also not saying there’s nothing that could be done to improve your health in some way.

For example, maybe you don’t have low back pain. Interestingly enough, low back pain and common conditions seen within our office, like disc bulges, herniations, and degenerative disc disease, commonly begin without any symptoms. This means many people have these conditions, but may not be experiencing any perceived problem. Many times, it’s simply the metaphorical straw that broke the camels back (pun intended) that brings patients in. They bent over to pick up their laundry, coughed really hard, did a slightly more strenuous workout, or twisted one way too many times and suddenly the underlying problem surfaced.

Another common complaint we see is headaches and/or migraines. Many, many, many people experience headaches and migraines frequently throughout their lives. Maybe you had a headache two weeks ago, but now you have one again today. Then you have a third one tomorrow, and afterwards you sud-

denly have a headache every day. This whole time, there was underlying stress that caused your upper back and neck to tighten and strain your cervical spine. Or perhaps you haven’t been drinking enough water and the weather has been much dryer lately. Maybe you had previous concussions and now the untreated consequences from head trauma are finally significant enough for you to consciously perceive.

The main point is that if we maintain our health, we are less likely to experience problems. One way to do that is to see your chiropractor routinely to make sure things are functioning optimally. Wellness-based care is important to maintain and improve our overall well-being, create an abundance of health, and prevent any injuries or illnesses from every happening in the first place.

Dr. Richard Schoonmaker is a board-eligible chiropractic neurologist practicing at Restorative Wellness Center in Exton, Pa. He’s currently earning his post-doctorate master’s degree in clinical neurology and has an interest in neurophysiology and its relationship to the autonomic nervous system.

▲ Like most people, you likely have stress or spend too much time looking at screens. This can lead to issues that are better treated before they become bigger problems.



◀ A misunderstanding about diabetes, carbs, and sugar has some people dropping fruit from their diet—and that’s a big mistake.

duced only by plants. Phytonutrients such as ellagic acid in strawberries have cancer-fighting properties and promote heart health.

Refined sugars, on the other hand, are highly processed and stripped of all nutrients except calories. They’re a concentrated form of carbohydrates. The food industry produces refined sugars in many forms. The most common are sucrose crystals, which you would recognize as table sugar, and high-fructose corn syrup, which is found in many processed foods and sweetened beverages.

If you continually satisfy your craving for sweetness with foods that contain refined sugar, rather than the nutrient-rich fruits your body was designed for, you’re unlikely to get all the nutrients you need. Over time, this deficit can create a vicious cycle of overeating that leads to obesity and obesity-related health problems. Women who eat the most fruit tend to have lower rates of obesity.

Sugar Toxicity

Refined sugars aren’t directly toxic to cells, but they can combine with proteins and fats in food and in the bloodstream to produce toxic substances such as advanced glycation end products. High blood glucose levels may produce glycated low-density lipoproteins. High levels of these and other glucose-related toxic substances are associated with an increased risk of a wide range of chronic health problems, including cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

The disease most commonly associated with sugar is Type 2 diabetes. A surprising number of people, including health professionals, incorrectly believe that eating sugar causes Type 2 diabetes. This myth leads to a focus on lowering blood sugar and “counting carbs” while ignoring the real cause: progressive loss of pancreatic beta cell function. At diagnosis, a patient may have lost between 40 percent and 60 percent of their beta cells, which are responsible for producing insulin.

Insulin is a hormone that controls how much glucose is in the bloodstream by

blocking glucose production in the liver and driving it into fat and muscle cells. Loss of beta cell function means that not enough insulin gets produced, resulting in the high blood glucose levels characteristic of Type 2 diabetes.

Beta cells have low levels of antioxidants and are susceptible to attack by metabolic and dietary oxidized free radicals and AGEs. Antioxidants in fruit can protect beta cells. Researchers have found that eating whole fruit decreases the risk of Type 2 diabetes, with those who eat the most fruit having the lowest risk.

Detoxing From Sugar

People interested in losing weight and improving health often ask if they should do a “sugar detox.” In my opinion, this is a waste of time, because it isn’t possible to eliminate sugar from the body. For instance, if you ate only baked chicken breasts, your liver would convert protein to glucose in a process called gluconeogenesis.

Low-carb diets may lead to weight loss, but at the expense of health. Diets that significantly reduce carbohydrates are associated with nutrient deficiencies and a higher risk of death from any cause. Extended periods on low-carbohydrate ketogenic diets can cause the body to break down muscle and turn muscle protein into glucose. The lack of fiber can also cause constipation.

Eliminating foods sweetened with refined sugar is a worthy goal. But don’t think of it as a “detox”—it should be a permanent lifestyle change. The safest way to go on a refined sugar “detox” is to increase your intake of nutrient-dense fruits and vegetables. Once you’ve eliminated refined sugar, you’ll likely find that your taste buds have become more sensitive to—and appreciative of—the natural sweetness of fruit.

Jennifer Rooke is an assistant professor of community health and preventive medicine at the Morehouse School of Medicine. This article was first published on The Conversation.

Is Stress Making You Withdraw From People?

A new study finds stressful days may lead us to pull away from others even when we need them more

JILL SUTTIE

Having close relationships is important to our well-being, helping us to be healthier and more resilient. According to the research, even superficial encounters with people in our everyday lives can make us happier and bring a sense of belonging within a community.

If that's the case, then why would we avoid social contact? A new paper published in *Emotion* aimed to find out.

Researchers studied the everyday lives of 88 college students making use of a cell phone app called StudentLife. The app gathered information about activity in real-time without the participants needing to input data themselves. Over one month, the app recorded the number of face-to-face conversations the students had each day and how long those conversations lasted, providing an overall social contact score. It also measured sleep patterns, activity levels, and time spent at home—all things that could potentially affect social contact. At random times each day, participants were prompted to rate how stressed they were on a scale of 1–16.

At the end of the month, researchers analyzed the data. The result? Stress levels turned out to be a crucial predictor of social contact: People who felt higher levels of stress one day had less social contact the next, regardless of how much time they slept, moved about, or stayed home. Gender and personality also didn't play as much of a role as we might think they would.

According to coauthor Meghan Meyer, this finding confirms something that has been seen in animal studies, but not with people.

"Psychologists have thought for a while that something like this might happen to people under stress. But it's been really hard to measure how much people are actually interacting with other people in their everyday lives," she says. "Capitalizing on people's cell phones to naturalistically and organically measure their actual social interactions was really helpful to uncovering this pattern."

Why might this be? Meyer says it makes intuitive sense. We may feel an instinct to withdraw under stress, perhaps because conversations with others take energy or we may just want to rest.

It's a bit worrying, she says, because pulling away from our social networks could actually worsen the stress, creating a vicious cycle.

"Being socially integrated is protective of one's well-being," she says. "We need to interact with our social network members for good mental health. But if when we're stressed we're withdrawing from them, that could backfire."

Who Pulls Away?

Interestingly, participants socialized less after feeling stressed no matter how generally social they were to begin with. This means extroverts and introverts withdrew equally (compared to themselves), implying that other factors besides personality may be at play.

Pulling away from our social networks could actually worsen the stress, creating a vicious cycle.

Being socially integrated is protective of one's well-being.

Meghan Meyer, study coauthor

Meyer and her colleagues also didn't find a gender difference—women and men both restricted social contact the day after feeling stressed. That was more surprising, as some past research suggests women tend to seek solace from stress in the company of others more than men.

"These individual differences didn't matter. We were taking them into account and still seeing this," she says. "That's pretty compelling."

However, Meyer doesn't guarantee these findings are solid, as the study didn't measure personality traits directly and may have had too few participants to capture gender differences effectively. On the other hand, she says, past studies showing gender differences around stress often had even fewer participants than their study, didn't use the same technology to capture actual behavior, and focused more on middle-aged participants—any of which could have produced different results.

Still, researchers may be looking at the wrong things when it comes to understanding how people respond to stress, she says. College students are in an environment with lots of opportunity for regular social contact, and they experience stressors in their lives (like midterms and finals) where withdrawal could be beneficial (for studying purposes, for example).

In other words, patterns around respond-

ing to stress may be more situational than anything else.

"As psychologists, we tend to focus on individual differences, like, if you're introverted or extroverted, neurotic or not," she says. "I think another way to think about this is to consider the features of your social network and how that might actually modulate behavior."

How to Deal With Stress

Does that mean that these findings aren't relevant for the rest of us, like me, a middle-aged woman?

Meyer doesn't know. But she suspects someone like me would be even more likely to withdraw socially when stressed. After all, it's much easier to withdraw from others when you aren't surrounded by your peers in everyday life, and most of us live more isolated lives than college students. To parse that out, we need more research.

Still, this study does add some interesting nuance to the research on stress and social relationships. While many of us may believe we seek out others when stressed, these findings suggest that may not be the case. Instead, we may be overestimating our tendency to reach out to others, potentially missing out on opportunities for social support.

Meyer also believes there are potential applications for the StudentLife app that could benefit students. If they used the app regularly, they could become more aware of their socializing patterns and recognize signs of stress, like social withdrawal or disrupted sleep. Alternatively, colleges themselves might use the app to identify people who've suddenly withdrawn from social contact and may need attention.

"Stress is often a precursor to more serious mental health conditions, like depression and anxiety disorders, and we know that these often emerge in college students," says Meyer. "If cell phones could detect things on the fly—like, someone withdrawing from their social network—students could be pinged and asked if they're feeling OK or be reminded of mental health resources on campus," said Meyer.

Encouraging people to reach out to close friends or confidants when stressed might also be a good strategy, says Meyer. Though her study didn't really look at whom students interacted with, nor did it find that socializing more one day reduced stress the next day, it's likely that having warm interactions with fewer, more intimate friends could reduce a person's stress more than participating in a lot of superficial conversations.

"Anecdotally, it makes sense that when you're seeking support around stress, you won't be going to an eight-hour party," she says. "Instead of having one of your more socially active days, you may just need a really targeted conversation to get the help you need."

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

When we feel stress, we need supportive friends to help us relax and be at our best. Unfortunately, we are more likely to seek solitude than social contact.



Having Kids at Home May Ease Adults' Covid-19 Depression

JARED WADLEY

Attending school on Zoom and quarantining from family and friends has children struggling through the COVID-19 pandemic, but, surprisingly, having kids at home may help adults feel less distressed, researchers report.

Adults in households with children have fewer mental health problems than adults living without kids, a new study shows. Child care—beyond the effect of larger household size—may actually reduce depression during pandemic social isolation.

"In other words, parents/caregivers may be struggling, but not more so than everyone else," said lead author Shawna Lee, associate professor at the University of Michigan School of Social Work and

director of the Parenting in Context Research Lab.

Lee and colleagues say they believe it's possible that caring for children may provide increased social connections or an increased sense of purpose, both of which may contribute to improved mental health. These questions, while not specifically addressed in the current study, may need to be explored in future research.

The study, published in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, used data from mid-2020 that included answers to health questions about the respondents' anxiety and depression. Adults aged 18 to 64 were included in the sample of nearly 600,000 respondents.

During the 12-week study, about 35 percent of the respondents reported having

anxiety, while 24 percent felt depressed. These rates were much higher than pre-pandemic levels. While women were more likely to feel anxious than men, the household-with-children status had no effect on anxiety.

Male caregivers may be vulnerable to pandemic worries such as employment loss, which health care professionals should monitor, the researchers say. The researchers also found that adults who were not married and had low household income were more at risk for anxiety and depression.

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Researchers have found that having children at home is linked to improved mental health for their parents amid COVID-19 pandemic measures.

What Focusing on the Breath Does to Your Brain

Different breathing patterns activate our neural networks related to mood, attention, and body awareness, a new study suggests.

B GRACE BULLOCK

Slow down and pay attention to your breath. It's not merely commonsense advice. It also reflects what meditation, yoga, and other stress-reducing therapies teach: that focusing on the timing and pace of our breath can have positive effects on our body and mind. A recent study in the *Journal of Neurophysiology* may support this, revealing that several brain regions linked to emotion, attention, and body awareness are activated when we pay attention to our breath.

Paced breathing involves consciously inhaling and exhaling according to a set rhythm. For example, you might inhale for four counts, exhale for six, and repeat. Prior research shows that paced breathing exercises can both focus attention and regulate the nervous system. To date, however, we have known little about how this affects brain function in humans.

These findings represent a breakthrough because for years we've considered the brain stem to be responsible for the process of breathing. This study found that paced breathing also uses neural networks beyond the brain stem that are tied to emotion, attention, and body awareness. By tapping into these networks using the breath, we gain access to a powerful tool for regulating our responses to stress.

Your Brain on Paced Breathing

In this study, researchers at the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research wanted to better understand how the brain responds to different breathing exercises. They recruited six adults already undergoing intracranial EEG monitoring for epilepsy. (EEG monitoring involves placing electrodes directly onto the brain to record electrical activity and see where seizures originate.) These adults were asked to take part in three breathing exercises while their brains were being monitored.

In the first exercise, participants rested with their eyes open for about eight minutes while breathing normally. They then sped up their breath to a rapid rate

for just over two minutes, while breathing through the nose, then slowed back down to regular breathing. They repeated this cycle eight times.

In the next exercise, participants counted how many times they inhaled and exhaled for two-minute intervals, and reported how many breaths they'd taken. Researchers monitored how many breaths participants took during each interval, noting when responses were correct or incorrect.

Last, participants completed an attention task while wearing a device that monitored their breathing cycle. In it, they viewed a video screen containing black circles in different fixed locations. They were asked to press one of four keyboard keys as quickly as possible when they saw one of the circles change from black to white.

At the end of the study, researchers looked to see how participants' breathing rates varied across different tasks and noted whether their brain activity changed depending on which task they were doing. They found that breathing affects brain regions including the cortex and midbrain more widely than previously thought.

Managing Stress: Is It All in the Breath?

When participants breathed rapidly, what the researchers found was increased activity across a network of brain structures, including the amygdala. Activity in the amygdala suggests that quick breathing rates may trigger feelings such as anxiety, anger, or fear. Other studies have shown that we tend to be more attuned to fear when we're breathing quickly. Conversely, it may be possible to reduce fear and anxiety by slowing down our breath.

The present study also identified a strong connection between participants' intentional (that is, paced) breathing and activation in the insula. The insula regulates the autonomic nervous system and is linked to body awareness. Prior studies have linked intentional breathing to posterior insular activation, suggesting that paying particular attention to the breath

A new study found that paced breathing uses neural networks beyond the brain stem.



NATA BENG/SHUTTERSTOCK

Activity in the amygdala suggests that quick breathing rates may trigger feelings like anxiety, anger, or fear.

may increase awareness of one's bodily states—a key skill learned in practices such as yoga and meditation.

Finally, researchers noted that when participants accurately tracked their breath, both the insula and the anterior cingulate cortex, a region of the brain involved in moment-to-moment awareness, were active.

All told, the results of this study support a link between types of breathing (rapid, intentional, and attentional) and activation in brain structures involved in thinking, feeling, and behavior. This raises the possibility that particular breathing strategies may be used as a tool to help people to manage their thoughts, moods, and experiences.

Dr. B Grace Bullock is a professional consultant, psychologist, research scientist, educator, speaker, science journalist, and author of the acclaimed book "Mindful Relationships: 7 Skills for Success - Integrating the Science of Mind, Body & Brain" (Handspring Publishing).

Psychological Reasons Everyone Is Loving Wordle

A social psychologist reveals 6 reasons why he—and many others—keep playing this word game

ALISSON CLARK

Why have so many people become fans of Wordle? Social psychologist Matt Baldwin has some answers.

Wordle, the free, once-a-day word game, has gained millions of fans since its public launch in October. Unlike most players, though, Baldwin understands why our brains crave it.

Baldwin, a professor at University of Florida, points to several psychological concepts that may explain our infatuation with the simple but sharable game.

1. It Delivers an 'Aha' Moment (Even if You Lose)

The moment at the end of the puzzle when the answer is revealed delivers what psychologists call a sudden influx of fluency—something we're hard-wired to pursue, Baldwin said.

"Even when you don't get it, and the answer is revealed, finding that solution feels good," he said. "That feeling of fluency is something that we seek out not only in games, but also when we're trying to solve a problem in our work or in our relationships."

2. It Suits Our Pandemic-Added Minds

We are now entering year three of the pandemic, and that has consequences. "We're overwhelmed. Things can't hold our attention because we're so bombarded with COVID stuff," Baldwin said.

Wordle can be an ideal way to create flow, the pleasurable immersion we feel when tackling an activity with the right combination of meaning and challenge.

"It's not too easy or too hard, and it doesn't demand too much attention. It's also sort of purposeful: It feels like you're training your

brain, not just stacking blocks or launching a bird," he said. "It captures meaning and attention at that optimal level."

3. It's Shared

Have you ever liked a band that no one seems to know about, then got excited when you met someone who loves them too? That's the essence of shared reality theory—our subjective preferences feel validated when someone else shares them. With its built-in sharing function, Wordle provides just such an experience, Baldwin said.

"We like to tune our internal states to the internal states of others. I may think Wordle is fun, but when I see that everyone else on Twitter thinks it's fun, then it's like it becomes an objective fact," he said.

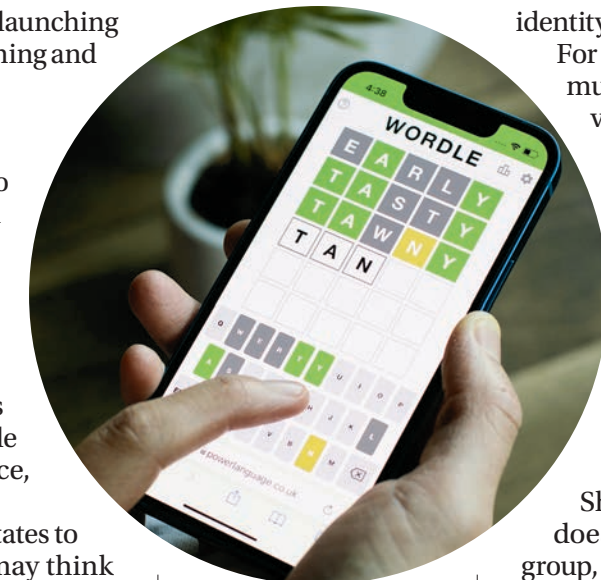
4. It's Bingeproof

Because Wordle is only offered once a day, "it's possible that it keeps the feeling from becoming too basic or too familiar," Baldwin said. "The scarcity of this insightful moment may be something that keeps it interesting."

5. It Satisfies Our Urge to Fit in With Peers

If your Twitter network is into Wordle, you've likely seen someone tweet that they've "given in" and started playing. That's peer pressure, but peer pressure isn't inherently bad, Baldwin said. The concept of in-group identity can help us bond with others.

"Norms give us the ability to tune our attitudes, beliefs, and identities to that of other people in our group. It gives us something to coalesce around and helps form a collective



Since its public launch in October, Wordle has gained millions of fans and become a growing phenomenon. TADA IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK

If your Twitter network is into Wordle, you've likely seen someone tweet that they've 'given in' and started playing.

identity," he said.

For Baldwin, that's a distributed community of scholars who happen to be very into Wordle right now. If you opt out, you feel less connected to the group.

"If I don't play Wordle at this point, what kind of academic am I?" he joked. "Sharing it on Twitter is a way of saying like, 'Look at me, I'm also doing Wordle just like everyone else.' That makes me a good group member."

6. It Shows How We Stack Up

Sharing your daily Wordle score doesn't just signify you're part of the group, it shows how you performed, which offers an opportunity for social comparison. For better or worse, Baldwin said, we love social comparison.

"Comparison can be detrimental to self-esteem if you're always comparing upward to people who are unattainable. But I can learn something about myself by the way I stack up against others, and it doesn't always have to be a negative feeling. Maybe people just like the information they get from looking at what other people are doing and getting a sense of where they stand."

Stack these concepts on top of each other, and Wordle's exponential growth begins to make sense. It's about more than guessing a five-letter word.

"Shared experiences give a lot of meaning to life," Baldwin said. "They help us orient toward what's good, what's meaningful, and what's worthwhile."

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WISE HABITS

How to Make the Most of Your 24 Hours

A day is a precious chance to start over and make something worthwhile out of the hours that you have

LEO BABAUTA

So many of us feel a scarcity of time: We feel rushed, like there's not enough time to do everything. We always think we're behind and never feel like we're doing enough.

This problem is called "time scarcity," and it's one of the most common stresses in our society.

So how do we deal with this? Unfortunately, there's no easy answer, but there are a few things I've found to be really powerful.

Let's talk about the problem before we talk about the solution.

The Problem of Time Scarcity

Most of us feel some kind of time stress. We tell ourselves things like, "I'm not making the most of my time," or "There's not enough time to get everything done, it's slipping away too fast," or "I'm overwhelmed by it all."

The feeling is that there's not enough time. With a feeling of scarcity about time, we stress that we won't get everything done. We feel behind.

Here's the first thing to realize: There's always a fresh supply of time. We get the same amount of time no matter who we are, and we get a fresh batch of 24 hours every day, no matter how terribly we spent the previous 24 hours. It's a fresh start, over and over, a chance to try something new.

Here's the next thing to realize: It doesn't matter how much you get done, doing more doesn't solve the problem of not enough time. I have had fantastically productive days, where I'll get 20 to 30 tasks done with zero procrastination or distractions—and I still feel like I need to do more, and wish I had more time.

And here's the fourth thing to realize: These hours really are precious. They're a gift. We take them for granted. We go through our days doing routine things, not really paying attention, and because of that, the hours slip through our fingers. Then we wonder where it all went.

So with these things in mind, I'll share



Many of us feel some kind of time stress. But we can change that while still getting important work done.

the three most important ways to make the most of our 24 hours.

These work for me. Your mileage might vary widely, but I hope you'll try them out.

1 First: Be intentional at the start of each day. With a fresh 24 hours before us, it's easy to just get started in our usual way. But to make the most of this new batch of hours, I've found it important to take a few moments at the start of the day to reflect on what I want to do with my waking hours. I might not end up doing things exactly as I plan, but I'm much more likely to spend the hours wisely if I set intentions at the start. I make a list of what I would like for the day.

2 Second: Don't shoot for doing more, do what matters. As I said, even doing 30 things in a day won't get rid of the time scarcity. In fact, striving to get more things done often

makes the stress even worse. Having a list of 30 things to do each day also gives you a feeling of stress and scarcity. So what if you had a list of 3 important things? You've probably heard this advice before, but do you follow it? If you could only put 3 things on the list, you'd choose carefully. By the way, after you do those 3 things, you can still do others, but don't expect yourself to do all the other things. As you do each of the 3 things on your list, do each thing as if it were the only thing that mattered.

3 Third: Create moments of transcendence. Rushing through tasks and chores like we need to get to the next thing only creates an experience of life that blends together in a dull soup. But what if we could elevate the moments of our lives to something special, sacred, and alive?

What if cooking soup for dinner became a transcendent experience? A moment of

transcendence is something each of us has experienced: when we feel incredibly connected to the world around us, when we lose our sense of separate self and feel a part of something bigger. It's that moment when you're at the top of a mountain looking with awe on everything around you, or looking up at the stars, or floating in the ocean, or having your breath taken away by a sunset or field of flowers.

With a feeling of scarcity about time, we stress that we won't get everything done. We feel behind.

We can intentionally create these moments, with practice, in our everyday lives. As you're doing everything on your list, as you're washing the dishes or having a conversation, driving home or eating kale and beans, you can elevate that moment into one of transcendence. Try it. Tune into everything around and consider the full weight of that moment. And if you can create multiple moments like this throughout your day, time will feel less scarce, and incredibly abundant. This is by far the most important thing on this list.

4 Fourth: Reflect with gratitude. At the end of each day, take a few moments to reflect back on your day and think about what you're grateful for. Such common advice, I know, but combined with the other things on this list, it's ridiculously powerful. Try it.

So those are the four ways. Together, they are a way of being in our lives that is radically different than most of us experience our days.

Leo Babauta is the author of six books and the writer of Zen Habits, a blog with over 2 million subscribers. Visit ZenHabits.net



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