

# MIND & BODY

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## Practicing Your Humanity

The innate goodness we can bring to others can wither if we don't use it

Without a sense of humanity, we only think of ourselves and everyone suffers as a result.



CONAN MILNER

**W**hat does it mean to be human? There are many features that differentiate our species. We build skyscrapers, pray, make art, read books, and drive cars, just to name a few.

Then there are the more complex features of the human experience, such as our exceptionally high level of self-awareness, our ability to imagine our lives at various points in the future, and our capacity to ponder our eventual death.

Humanity is a word that describes the human collective, but it also signifies something greater. Humans wear pants

“**Virtues are very much relevant to being a good human.**”

*Pelin Kesebir, scientist, University of Wisconsin-Madison*

and carry keys, but humanity encompasses grand virtues such as compassion, kindness, and morality. It's the quality of being humane, and having a generous disposition toward other people and living beings.

Pelin Kesebir, a scientist at the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, says humanity is about being a good human. And it's measured in how well we treat others.

“Virtues are very much relevant to being a good human. Especially virtues of care and concern, thoughtfulness, generosity, helpfulness, compassion, and empathy,” Kesebir said.

Without a sense of humanity, we

think only of ourselves, and everyone suffers as a result. The most severe damage comes from extreme examples of selfishness—think corruption or rape. But Kesebir says even those who simply spend too much time ruminating about themselves can end up hurting themselves.

“We have a lot of data that a lot of self-focus is associated with poor mental health,” she said, noting that many psychological disorders, including depression, can be described as self-absorbed states.

*Continued on Page 4*

## We're Literally Seeing the Past

New brain research shows we don't see in the present

JENNIFER MARGULIS

The human body is a marvel on a level that can be hard to grasp with our limited human brains.

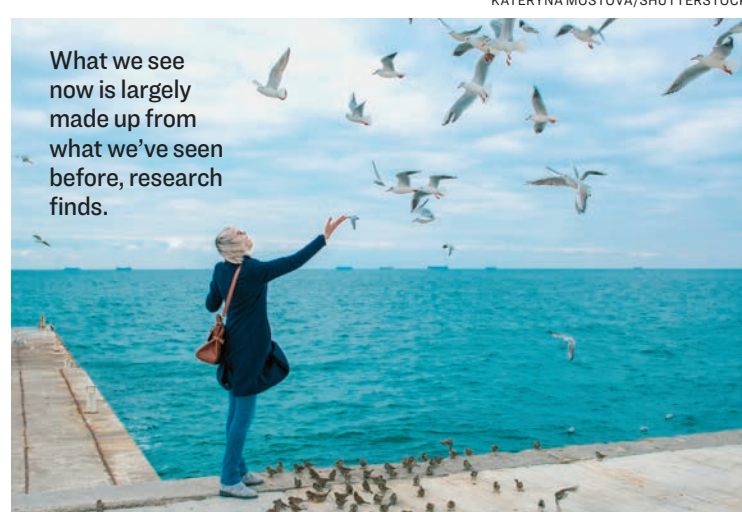
With all that we know now about human anatomy, there are still many enduring mysteries about the way our bodies work, especially our brains. One of the most enduring of these mysteries is exactly how, with all of the visual input constantly bombarding our eyes, we humans manage to

have a stable view of the world.

This question is of keen interest to Mauro Manassi and David Whitney. Manassi, who has a doctoral degree in neuroscience, is a lecturer in the School of Psychology at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland. Whitney, whose doctoral degree is from Harvard University and whose primary research interest is also cognitive neuroscience, is a professor of psychology at the University of California-Berkeley. The two teamed up to perform a simple, but ingenious series of experiments that may change the way we think about visual perception.

*Continued on Page 6*

KATERYNA MOSTOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK



What we see now is largely made up from what we've seen before, research finds.

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During Rain Water, all living beings are waking up from the winter and need water for nourishment.

### CHINESE WISDOM FOR SEASONAL LIVING

## Eat Plenty of Spring Greens to Control Your Weight

Solar Term: 'Rain Water' (Feb. 19 to March 4)

#### MOREEN LIAO

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

Solar Term: 'Rain Water'

2022 Dates: Feb. 19 to March 4

As the sun draws nearer and warms the earth, snows recede and rain increases. But this rainwater is very gentle, so as not to harm the fragile sprouts that signal spring's emergence.

The current solar term is Rain Water, a time when nature provides the necessary conditions for growth.

According to Chinese theory, everything on Earth is composed of just five elements or phases of matter: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. The element for spring is wood, the only element among the five that's a living organism. This reflects the fact that all living creatures are very prosperous and come alive during the spring season.

During Rain Water, all living beings, including the bushes and trees—which are made of wood—are waking up from the winter and need water for nourishment. This also follows the theory in the five-element system that "water enhances wood."

The rains are typically very mild—even misty—during this time. One can see this as heaven's tender love gently awakening the plants with sprinkles of rain, rather than downpours, as large drops would surely crush the delicate sprouts.

#### Living in Harmony With 'Rain Water'

Not surprisingly, there's a lot of humidity in the air, and that's good for the skin, but bad for the bones and organs. In the theory of five elements, the organ associated with the element of wood is the liver, so spring is the best season to adjust any imbalances associated with the liver.

It's better for the elderly to avoid direct contact with cold water and to not eat too much food that's overly sweetened, smoked, deep-fried, or processed.

To promote healthy liver function, avoid alcohol and heavy or oily foods. It's also important to keep a calm mind, as the Chinese believe anger damages one's liver.

Baths and foot baths are very helpful to promote circulation and tone your stiff muscles after the cold winter. For those suffering from poor blood circulation, weak muscles, numb nerves, or simple age, regular warm foot baths help to awaken your senses and strengthen your muscles.

Gentle but regular exercise is strongly recommended for anyone in any age group. It kickstarts a good routine and corresponds perfectly with the hormonal and mood changes happening inside our bodies. Exercising three to five times per week for 20 minutes each time is ideal. For those not exercising, this should show noticeable results in just a couple of weeks.

#### The Best Time for Weight Loss

At this time of year, hormones and enzymes are very active, and with minimal effort, we can get rid of retained fluids inside our bodies and extra fat stored over the winter. You may be surprised by how quickly your body can shape up if you exercise regularly and sleep and wake early.

Spring weight-loss resolutions are very common. In fact, this is the best time of year to achieve these results.

To take the most advantage of this season, eat plenty of freshly sprouted spring greens. New sprouts are filled with enzymes and minerals to help our bodies recharge, refresh, and energize in accordance with spring powers.

**You may be surprised by how quickly your body can shape up if you exercise regularly and sleep and wake early.**

#### Seasonal Eating

Eat plenty of root vegetables, such as carrots, yams, radish, colorful beans and their sprouts, goji berries, strawberries, spinach, asparagus, seaweed, and any deep green vegetables.

In addition to anything that's local and freshly sprouted, try herbal teas made with dandelion, lemon balm, rosemary, fennel seed, and orange peels. Season your food with coriander, thyme, basil, ginger, and garlic.

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



New sprouts are filled with enzymes and minerals to help our bodies recharge, refresh, and energize in accordance with spring powers.

### MEDICALLY CORRECT

## The Electrifying Journey of the EKG

Measuring our heart's electrical pulse used to require three buckets and a 600-pound machine

#### PETER WEISS

It was well over four weeks since I had gotten COVID-19. Other than a sometimes lingering cough and a little fatigue, I felt better. The only issue was a nagging chest tightness. It first started as an occasional quick but mild discomfort. It steadily became constant, but never "painful."

Trying not to be a physician but a patient, I dutifully went in for a simple blood test and an electrocardiogram. An electrocardiogram, or ECG, is commonly known as an EKG, which is the German derivative. I haven't had an EKG in a long time. It's such a simple machine, yet it gives so much information. Luckily for me, all was good; I just had some mild post-COVID effects.

The first real EKG machine was developed by British physiologist Augustus Desiré Waller in 1887. He would place electrodes on a patient's chest and back, and the heart's electrical pulses would then cause the mercury in several tubes to move. This image was projected onto a photographic plate (a flat sheet of metal), and a static image was recorded. This may call to mind images of a Dr. Frankenstein, but remember that the science was in its infancy. The Waller device was obviously not very accurate. He didn't even recognize the clinical importance of his invention, according to the article "AD Waller and the Electrocardiogram, 1887," published in the British Medical Journal.

While Waller missed the significance of his invention, others did not. His work was taken further by Willem Einthoven, a physiology professor at Leiden University in the Netherlands. Einthoven used a string galvanometer to conduct the first recording of the human electrocardiogram in 1905. A galvanometer is a device used for detecting and measuring small currents of voltage.

Einthoven's machine weighed 600 pounds. Patients in the hospital were con-

nected to his machine using a telephone wire from the laboratory to the patient, a distance of almost a mile. Patients had to place each hand in a saline-filled bucket, and their left leg in a solution-filled bucket. These buckets acted as electrodes to conduct the current. Einthoven coined the term electrocardiogram and won the Nobel Prize for physiology and medicine in 1924.

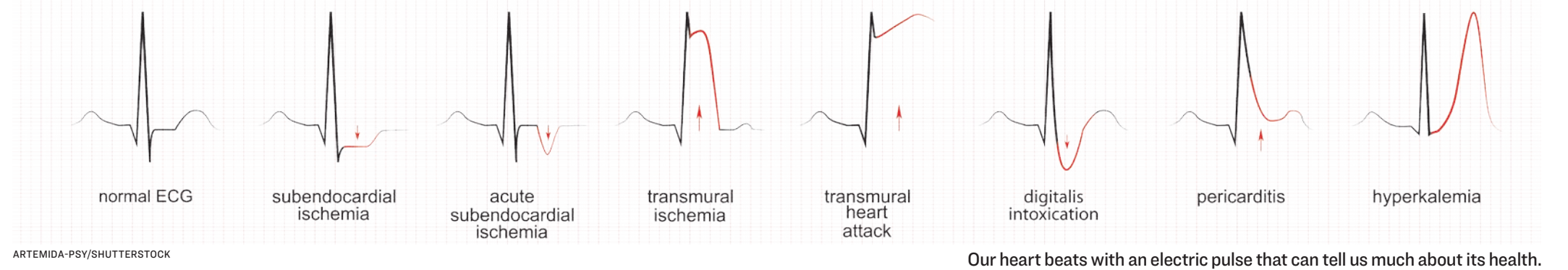
It was Sir Thomas Lewis of University College Hospital in London who recorded the first clinically irregular heartbeat. It soon became the "modern" modality to help differentiate a heart attack from simple chest pain.

What a difference a century makes. Today, we have what is commonly known as the 12-lead EKG. The 12 leads refer to the 12 vectors of electricity that are measured by a full EKG.

### Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women.

Today, Apple and Kardia have simple handheld devices that can give a validated rhythm strip. This means they can detect a cardiac arrhythmia such as atrial fibrillation (A-fib). The Kardia mobile device weighs 18 grams, which is 0.04 pounds. Compare that to the 600-pound original machine. Afib has a strong link to sudden cardiac death and can lead to blood clots, stroke, and heart failure as well. Patients with Afib have a 3.7-fold increased risk of all-cause death compared with the general population, according to a 2018 article in PLoS One.

A heart attack, medically known as a myocardial infarction (MI), happens when the heart muscle doesn't get enough blood (oxygen), which is called ischemia, and the



Our heart beats with an electric pulse that can tell us much about its health.

## Fertility Enhancing Tea

These herbs may help those struggling to conceive

#### ASHLEY TURNER

For generations, men and women of child-bearing age have turned to various medicinal herbs to promote their fertility. There are several factors that affect fertility, including hormone imbalances, environmental toxin exposure, immune dysregulation, nutrient-poor and inflammatory diets, and stress. With infertility affecting roughly 15 to 30 percent of couples, we would be wise to turn to these natural remedies to promote optimal fertility.

I would like to share some of my favorite herbs to foster fertility in women, and how to use them in a tea preparation when looking toward conception. Incorporating a fertility-enhancing tea can help women pursue pregnancy with more confidence knowing they're aiding their body in a positive way.

#### The Herbs

##### Red Raspberry Leaf

The dried leaves of the raspberry plant (*Rubus idaeus*) have been used to tone the uterus and regulate menstrual cycles. Fragrine, one of the constituents in red raspberry leaf, is an alkaloid that tones the muscles in the pelvic area, especially the uterus. Red raspberry leaf also has important minerals such as calcium, magnesium, and iron.

##### Stinging Nettle

Stinging nettle, also known as *Urtica dioica*, is a nutrient-dense herb that's particularly rich in iron, calcium, and vitamins A, C, D, and K. It has also been thought of as a uterine tonic. It also has cleansing properties to gently detoxify the body.

##### Lady's Mantle

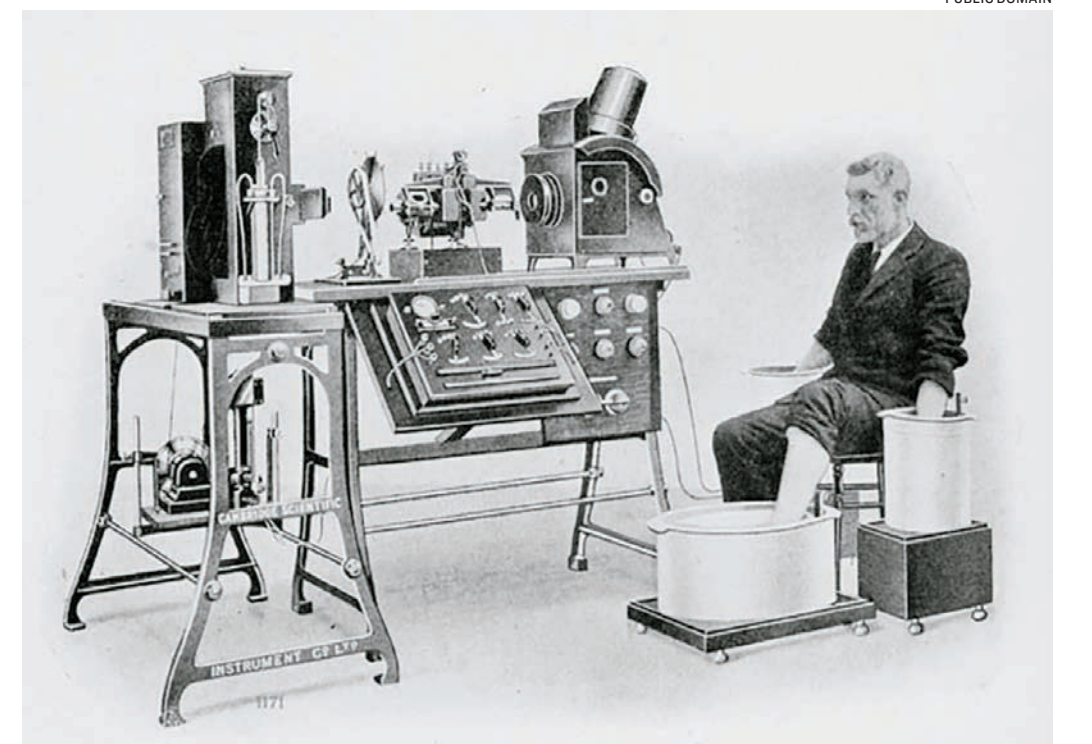
*Alchemilla mollis*, or lady's mantle, has been used in Ayurvedic medicine for a long time to regulate menstrual cycles and promote fertility. Due to its ability to promote progesterone levels, tone the uterus, and stimulate ovulation, it's a favorite among herbalists for women seeking preconception health.

##### Peppermint

I've added peppermint because it provides valuable antioxidants to this formulation along with a lovely flavor. Peppermint is also helpful for digestion and assimilating nutrients. If you have known high androgen levels or experienced polycystic ovary syndrome, use spearmint. It has been shown to decrease free testosterone and increase luteinizing hormone, follicle-stimulating hormone, and estradiol.

##### Green Tea

Green tea is famous for its significant levels of polyphenols. These polyphenols increase antioxidant levels within the body and reduce oxidative stress.



Patients had to place each hand in a saline-filled bucket, and their left leg in a solution-filled bucket.

muscle of the heart starts to die. An EKG is a quick simple method to help diagnose such an event. Coronary artery disease is the main underlying cause of an MI. The symptoms can vary but usually consist of:

- Chest pain or discomfort
- Feeling weak, lightheaded, or faint
- Pain in the jaw, neck, or even back
- Pain in one or both shoulders or arms
- Shortness of breath

Some people actually present with stomach pains. This sometimes throws off the ER doctor. Women may also have a different presentation for a heart attack. They often don't have "chest pain" per se, but can have stomach, jaw, or neck pain and feel fatigued. While many still do have the typical presentation, many don't, and this can lead to a delay in seeking medical attention.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for both men and women. Roughly 659,000 people die each year from heart disease, which is about 1 in 4 deaths, according to a report from the American Heart Association.

The National Center for Health Statistics reports that about 805,000 people in the United States suffer from a heart attack each year, with about 1 in 5 being a "silent heart attack," with no symptoms.

What most people don't realize is that heart disease, not breast cancer, is the leading cause of death among women, with almost 300,000 deaths in 2017. That's



An electrocardiograph, 1930, used by Sir Thomas Lewis at University College Hospital, London, in this file photo.

1 in 5 deaths, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

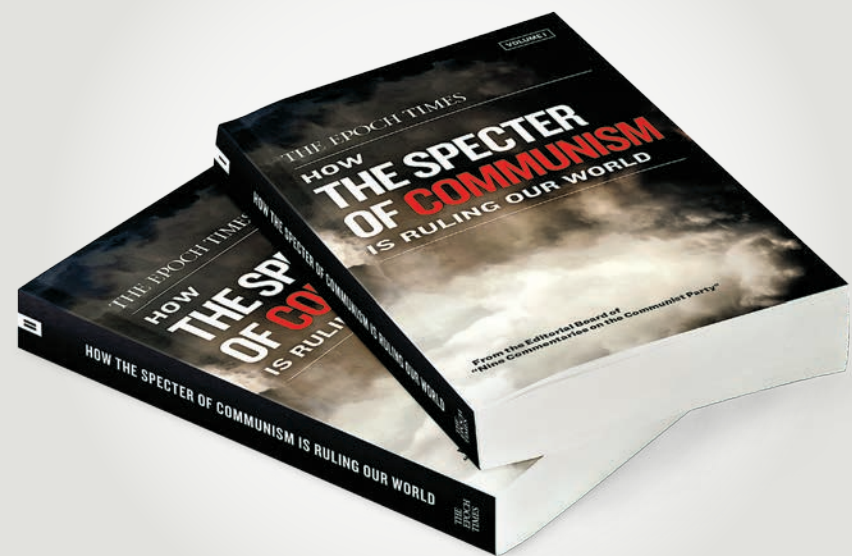
While cardiovascular disease is still our No. 1 killer, one thing that has changed significantly is what we know about the heart's rhythm and what it means. And it's all thanks to a 600-pound machine that can now fit in a wristwatch. Now if we could only learn to eat healthy foods and exercise more.

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.

### THE EPOCH TIMES

"An eye-opening and sobering read on where we find ourselves today and how we arrived here."  
— B. Miller

## UNDERSTAND THE ROOT CAUSE OF THE ISSUES WE FACE TODAY



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Herbal teas can offer a gentle and nutritious way to increase your chances of conception.

### THE TEA



- INGREDIENTS
- 2 cups red raspberry
  - 1 cup dried stinging nettle
  - 1 cup peppermint
  - 1/2 to 1 cup green tea
  - 1/2 cup lady's mantle

Combine all of the herbs in a large mixing bowl. Transfer to a large jar with a tightly fitting lid and store in a cool dry place.

To prepare, steep 2 to 3 tablespoons of loose tea in 8 ounces of boiling water. Strain after 5 minutes and enjoy daily.

Keep in mind, everyone's physiology is different. Please check with your obstetrician or midwife before pursuing this therapy. Some of these herbs are not recommended for use during pregnancy, discontinuing if you find you are expecting.

RIDOFRAZ/GETTY IMAGES



Our experience of pain enables us to feel compassion for the suffering of others.

# Practicing Your Humanity

The innate goodness we can bring to others can wither if we don't use it

Continued from Page 1

"I'm not saying that to blame depressed people. But what we see is [that] an incredibly narrow self-focus and self-absorption are associated with very poor psychological outcomes."

"To be human is to suffer, and throughout mankind's history, humanity has been a reliable means to alleviate much of the agony we must endure. Think about how much it means when someone offers a smile or a kind word on a bad day.

Some envision a time when we can finally do away with human suffering. A concept known as transhumanism supposes that with enough technological upgrades and genetic alterations made to our bodies, humans may no longer suffer disease, pain, old age, and perhaps transcend death. In this transhumanist wonderworld, our organs and limbs can be easily replaced and improved. Or you can simply upload your consciousness into a better body.

But Kesebir doesn't see transhumanism advancing the human condition. She says our ability to feel pain and frailty is linked to our human capacity for compassion.

"Obviously, we want to make the world a place where we prevent unnecessary suffering. But just by the nature of life being what it is, there will always be some suffering," she said. "One of the things that makes us human is pain. It's almost impossible to imagine being human without feeling pain."

Another feature of the human spirit is our deep hunger for meaning. A traumatic experience can spur us to spend years trying to figure out why it happened. While this effort may not deliver ultimate understanding, it can bring us insight. Meaning can also come from moments of joy, and from the people who touch our lives along the way.

It's the people who mean the most to us who often have the greatest potential to make us suffer. These are the people whose futures you worry about, and people who can really get on your nerves.

According to existentialist author Jean-Paul Sartre, "Hell is other people," but Kesebir says research actually shows the opposite. We need others, and we yearn to be needed.

"Think about the happiest people you know. I mean genuinely happy. I'm not talking Instagram happy. The people I know who are genuinely happy are also kind people, loving people. They have warm, trusting relationships," Kesebir said. "Give people a happiness questionnaire, and you'll find everyone in the top 10 percent have



**It's almost impossible to imagine being human without feeling pain.**

Pelin Kesebir, scientist, University of Wisconsin-Madison

People who spend more time thinking about themselves aren't as happy as people who spend more time thinking about serving others.



THE GOOD BRIGADE/GETTY IMAGES

great relationships with their families and friends."

## Losing Our Humanity

You remain human throughout your life. But your hold on humanity, that kind and giving nature, is much more fragile. You have to maintain it—or it disappears.

For those who treasure humanity, its absence can be felt. Annette Feravich, social psychologist and special lecturer at Oakland University in Michigan, sees a lack of humanity among her students, and observes the hopelessness and despair that takes its place.

"I see my students defining themselves by their depression, anxiety, anger, and impulsiveness. They're feeling lost and having no answers. Who would they be if they didn't have those emotional triggers and problems? You've got to have a belief system that 'I am something more,'" Feravich said.

Social critics have noted a dwindling of humanity in society for generations, and have proposed a variety of causes behind it. One common reason is that people don't see a worthy subject to give their humanity to. For whatever reason, we see the complicated, suffering person before us as less than human.

Feravich says a lot of this mentality stems from the arena of science. She applauds the scientific method (one of the courses she teaches is study design), but she's disgusted with researchers who dehumanize their subjects. The Tuskegee Experiment is a classic example, as well as the studies Nazis conducted on Jewish prisoners.

"They would break their bones. See how long they would take to heal, and then break them again in the same spot. They deformed people purposefully to see what would happen," Feravich said.

According to Feravich, the opposite of humanity is depravity, and she sees it especially exemplified in the work of zoologist turned sexologist Dr. Alfred Kinsey. The influence of Kinsey's work exploring and shaping human sexuality in the 1940s and '50s is still felt strongly today. But for those willing to dig into the sordid and criminal details of his methodology, it's hard to understand why Kinsey is so celebrated.

"Kinsey was saying, 'There is nothing wrong with our sexual impulses, because we are at heart animals.' He said, 'If you want to have sex with children, they will not experience trauma afterward. They'll forget about it. The only reason why they do experience trauma is because we as adults put that on them,'" Feravich said.

"This is a perfect example of the reason psychologists have bad names. We have

in many instances completely ignored humanity."

## Preserving Humanity

In the past, the church ensured a culture of virtue. But this institution no longer has such an influence. Today, it all depends on our collective daily efforts to sustain humanity.

According to Feravich, belief in a higher power is the best way to preserve our humanity. It lends a sense of perspective beyond the mere mortal plane of existence, connecting us to a larger source of compassion. However, simply by putting our efforts into helping others, we can rise above.

"We think our solution is to be self-absorbed. But it has to be a conscious effort, a moral choice, to go outside of ourselves for somebody else. And that, really, psychologically speaking, that's where you get meaning and purpose," Feravich said.

Feravich mentions the work of social psychologist Lara Aknin, who looks at children and the power of giving. In one of her studies, Aknin and her research team give treats to children and then have them meet a puppet. The children watch the researcher give a treat to the puppet, and the children find treats that they can then give to their puppet friend, if they so desire. The greatest levels of happiness are found among those who shared their treats.

"Giving is better than receiving. This has been demonstrated time and time again. But we think, 'Oh, I'm anxious and depressed, I need more me time,'" Feravich said. "Then why are we so stinking bored? Why are we so lost, and searching, searching, searching?"

For Kesebir, a spirit of gratitude helps preserve humanity, while being entitled erodes it. She mentions several studies and papers that show that being entitled disposes you to be unhappy in a variety of ways because you're constantly setting yourself up for disappointment. You're conditioned to always expect more from people than is reasonable, so you have poor relationships, and you create antagonism.

"In gratitude, you are incredibly thankful for what you have, and with entitlement, you're always looking for what you don't have," Kesebir said. "The grateful person has a sense of abundance and always feels that what they have is sufficient to make them happy. For the entitled person, it's never enough. There never comes a point where the selfish, entitled person says, 'Now I have all that I need, and from now on I'm going to be happy.' No, it's constant dissatisfaction. Constant restlessness inside."

# The Unexpected Reasons Younger Generations Are Gaining Weight

While the usual suspects, diet and exercise, are major contributors, obesity is also linked to toxic chemicals and prescription drugs

MARTHA ROSENBERG

While obesity is growing around the world, it is especially evident in younger generations, who used to be thinner than their thick-around-the-middle elders. According to a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, almost 1 in every 3 college-age Americans is now obese—the "freshman 15" has morphed into the "freshman 30."

Children are also becoming obese, and the COVID-19 pandemic has made things worse. The *BMJ* reported: "Among a cohort of 432,302 people aged 2-19 years, the rate of body mass index (BMI) increase roughly doubled during the pandemic compared with the period preceding it. The greatest increases were seen in children aged 6-11 and in those already overweight before the pandemic."

According to Kaiser Permanente, a health care provider serving 12.5 million members, children between the ages of 5 and 11 gained 5.07 pounds more during the COVID-19 pandemic than during the same time period before COVID-19.

While "fat acceptance" movements reject shaming of bodies that don't conform to ideals, the issue is not just aesthetics and acceptance but health. Many diseases are associated with obesity, including cancers such as colorectal, uterine corpus, gallbladder, kidney, pancreatic, and multiple myeloma. The cancers are increasingly seen in younger people, according to the American Cancer Society and research published in the *Lancet* in 2019.

The concept of "fit but fat" may boost morale, but it is as scientifically valid as "fit but smoker." For example, a study by University of Glasgow researchers found that obese people who were considered "metabolically healthy" still had a 76 percent greater risk of heart failure and an 18 percent greater risk of stroke than metabolically healthy people of normal weights and were 4.3 times more likely to have Type 2 diabetes. They were also at greater risk of respiratory diseases and all-cause mortality, said Dr. Frederick Ho, an author of the study.

Even though the obese but metabolically healthy were younger, exercised more, and ate better than the metabolically unhealthy in the study, their greater risk of obesity-related diseases compared with that of normal-weight people persisted, the researchers said.

Here are some reasons the younger generations are packing on pounds. While some are expected and obvious, others are all but ignored.

## Processed Food and Lack of Exercise

Even before the pandemic, the indoor, screen-based lifestyle of so many young people has been indicted as an important obesity factor. Screen time, whether social media apps or video games, usually means less outdoor time and exercise. But that's only half the problem, researchers say.

"Current evidence suggests that screen media exposure leads to obesity in children and adolescents through increased eating while viewing," according to a study published in *Pediatrics* in 2017.

Moreover, food commercials for high-calorie, low-nutrient foods and beverages increase "automatic eating" in young people and even alter "young children's actual taste perceptions" the researchers wrote.

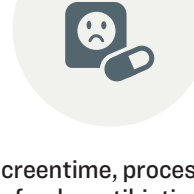
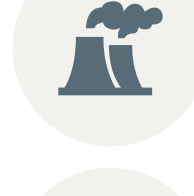
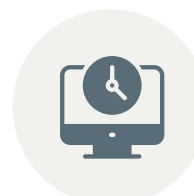
Ultra-processed food is especially risky for those who are genetically predisposed to storing it as fat, says Dr. Caroline Apovian, co-director of the Center for Weight Management and Wellness at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston. Someone "predisposed to being lean might burn those same foods" as opposed to those who store it, she says. Such "thrifty genes," as they are sometimes called, are believed to have developed in humans to survive periods of famine by storing excess energy safely as fat, say researchers writing in *Frontiers in Nutrition*.

## Exposure to Chemicals and Toxins

But it isn't only our food that's problematic. In an article titled "Endocrine Disruptors and the Obesity Epidemic," published in the *Journal of Toxicological Sciences*, Jerrold J. Heindel writes that "the level of chemicals in the environment is purported to coincide

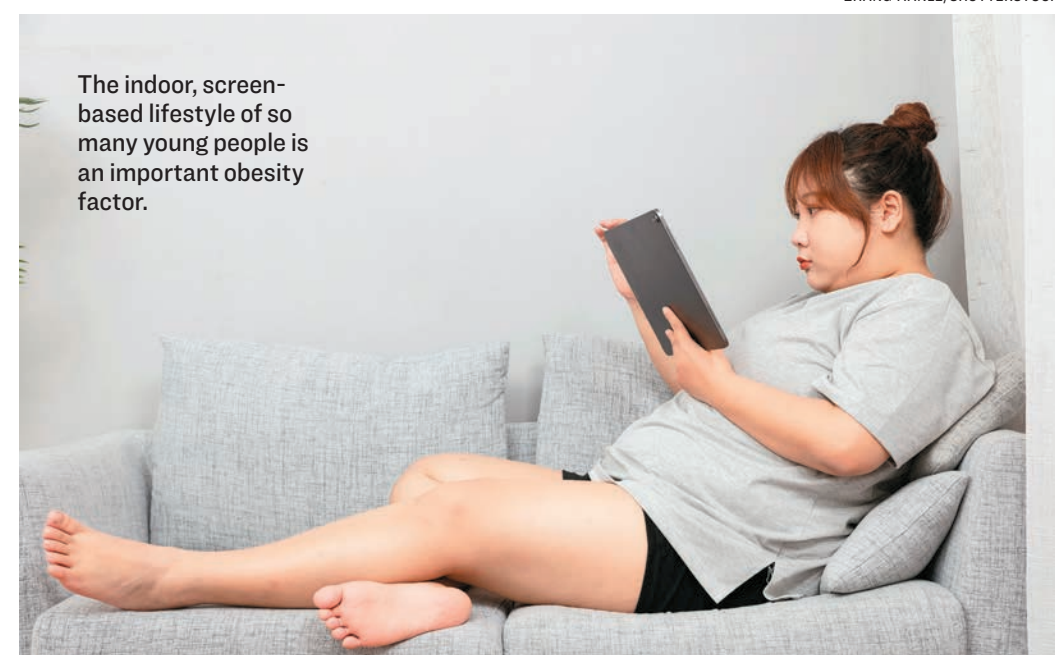
**The level of chemicals in the environment is purported to coincide with the incidence of obesity.**

Jerrold J. Heindel, author, "Endocrine Disruptors and the Obesity Epidemic"



Screen time, processed foods, antibiotics, environmental toxins, and psychiatric drugs have all been linked to obesity.

Children between 5 and 11 are **5 POUNDS** heavier during the pandemic than the same period before COVID-19.



The indoor, screen-based lifestyle of so many young people is an important obesity factor.

ZHANG TIANLE/SHUTTERSTOCK

with the incidence of obesity."

Endocrine disruptors are chemicals in the environment that can act like hormones and disrupt endocrine signaling pathways. They are found in most plastic products, even those marked "BPA free." These chemicals include polychlorinated biphenyls, polybrominated diphenyl ethers, phthalates, and brominated flame retardants—compounds frequently used in industry and found in pesticides as well as consumer goods, household products, and building materials.

While exposure to endocrine disruptors is never desirable, scientists are increasingly looking at exposure "during critical stages of development" in children as a factor in later obesity, according to a study in the *International Journal of Andrology*. Pregnant women who showed high levels of perfluorooctanoic acid, another endocrine-disrupting class, were three times as likely to have daughters who grew up to be overweight, according to research dating back to 2012.

Sadly, the same obesity effects in young people may also result from early exposure to antibiotics, according to some scientific studies. Both prenatal and postnatal exposure to antibiotics can result in offspring obesity, suggests research published in the *Journal of Epidemiology* in 2018. The obesity links aren't surprising when you consider the common use of antibiotics to produce extra weight in livestock. The antibiotics are even absorbed in crops from residues in manure fertilizers found in the soil.

## Exposure to Prescription Drugs

It's no secret that many children, teenagers, and young adults have been prescribed psychiatric drugs and drug cocktails for the many mental diseases that are thought to afflict them today.

"The consumption of psychiatric drugs by children (and adults) is far higher in the US than elsewhere, partly because of direct-to-consumer advertising by drug companies, which is illegal almost everywhere else," John Read, professor of clinical psychology at the University of East London, wrote in *Psychology Today*.

"Some (0.2 percent) very young children (2 to 7 years) are even being forced to take powerful antipsychotic drugs in the USA, mostly for the particularly vague diagnosis of 'pervasive developmental disorder' and mostly in conjunction with one or more other psychiatric drugs."

Authors of recent research in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* that studied 301,311 antipsychotic prescriptions used by U.S. children aged 2 to 7 wrote: "In youths, antipsychotic medication has been associated with risk of weight gain, sedation, diabetes, hyperlipidemia, cardiovascular effects, extrapyramidal side effects, and unexpected death. These concerns are especially salient in very young children, in whom antipsychotics have unknown developmental and other long-term adverse effects."

Clearly, parents can do a lot to address obesity in their children and teenagers. Screen time and processed food can be limited, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic eases and outdoor activities resume. Parents can protect children—and themselves—from endocrine disruptors in food packaging and consumer and household products and from excessive antibiotic use. Finally, they can explore natural treatments for behavior problems before allowing the use of psychiatric drugs linked to obesity.

It's true that many people battle weight gain and obesity as they get older, but young people should be free from this preventable health risk and barrier to their enjoyment of life.

Martha Rosenberg is a nationally recognized reporter and author whose work has been cited by the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, Mayo Clinic Proceedings, Public Library of Science Biology, National Geographic and Wikipedia. Rosenberg's *FDA exposé, "Born with a Junk Food Deficiency,"* was widely praised and established her as a prominent investigative journalist. She has lectured widely at universities throughout the United States and resides in Chicago.



"Fat acceptance" movements reject shaming bodies that don't conform to ideals but the issue isn't just aesthetics—it's also health.

YURI GOLUB/SHUTTERSTOCK

# Don't Trust the 'Gluten-Free' Label

A limited definition of gluten may be why many people suffer persistent celiac disease

SINA MCCULLOUGH

Have you tried a "gluten-free" diet and it didn't work? Maybe it didn't help you lose weight or reverse your symptoms. Or, perhaps you felt better for a short period of time but then your symptoms returned. If that sounds familiar, it's possible that gluten is problematic for you, but you made the mistake of trusting the "gluten-free" label—like I did.

While an estimated 2 million people in America have celiac disease, roughly 18 million people, or 6 percent of the population, have gluten sensitivity. And since well-meaning medical doctors, health practitioners, and dietitians routinely advise patients with celiac disease or gluten sensitivity to consume certified "gluten-free" foods, that means roughly 20 million Americans rely on that label for their health outcome. That's a problem because the "gluten-free" label might be making some of them sicker.

When I say "gluten," which foods come to mind? Most people think of foods containing wheat, barley, or rye, such as bread, crackers, and beer. That's because the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) decides what's allowed to be labeled as "gluten-free." According to the FDA, only wheat, barley, and rye contain gluten. However, that definition of gluten is based on outdated information from World War II.

In 1944, the Netherlands experienced a "Winter of Starvation" when the Germans cut off their supply of wheat, barley, and rye. At the time, a Dutch pediatrician, Dr. Willem Dicke, was caring for children hospitalized with celiac disease. Dr. Dicke observed that the forced change in the children's diet

resulted in elimination or alleviation of their symptoms, even though the children were starving. After the war ended, those three grains were once again consumed by the children, and they quickly relapsed. While this was the first conclusive evidence that grains trigger celiac disease, it also led to the mistaken "truth" that only wheat, barley, and rye contain gluten.

Those three grains were staples in the Netherlands at that time. Therefore, they were naturally characterized as gluten-containing foods. Other grains, such as rice and corn, were not as readily consumed and therefore were not tested to determine if the children's bodies reacted to those foods. As a result, for roughly 70 years, grains such as rice and corn have been considered "safe" to eat for people with celiac disease and gluten sensitivity. And in 2013, this generally recognized "truth" was officially adopted by the FDA when they defined "gluten-free" to be a food that does not contain "wheat, rye, barley, or a cross-bred hybrid of these grains."

However, when devising the definition of gluten-containing foods, the FDA simply "assumed" all other grains to be safe, such as corn, rice, quinoa, buckwheat, millet, amaranth, teff, and sorghum.



When devising the definition of gluten-containing foods, the FDA defined all other grains to be safe, such as: corn, rice, quinoa, buckwheat, millet, amaranth, teff, and sorghum.

ple, to substantiate their claim that rice and corn are "safe," the FDA cited evidence that acknowledged that those grains haven't been adequately studied. In a paper on the topic, research chemist Donald D. Kasarda writes that some people do react to those grains, and the distinction between "safe" grains and unsafe grains was determined "somewhat arbitrarily."

"Rice and corn have generally been considered safe grains for celiac patients, although once again there has been lack of rigorous, controlled, scientific study of these grains in relation to celiac disease, especially with up-to-date methods. ... Adverse reactions to what I shall somewhat arbitrarily term safe grains for celiac patients may not be common, but they do exist. Such adverse reactions should be the subject of more research as to the mechanisms involved."

While the FDA largely based its definition of gluten on gliadin, the primary gluten protein found in wheat, today we know there's not just one gluten protein. There are hundreds of gluten proteins, which means there are probably more than we haven't discovered. We also know gluten isn't just in wheat, barley, and rye. Gluten is in all grains, including corn and rice. Each grain contains one or more types of gluten proteins. The FDA doesn't acknowledge that gluten exists in all grains.

For example, corn surrounds you on all sides in the grocery store. Thanks to farm



The FDA says only wheat, barley, and rye contain gluten, but that is based on an overly narrow definition of the protein.

**People who react to the gluten in wheat (gliadin) may also react to the entire family of gluten proteins—including the gluteins in corn and rice.**

subsidies, genetically modified, processed corn derivatives are added to the majority of processed foods, from breakfast cereals to cakes to crackers and frozen meals. That means gluten is ubiquitous in the grocery store. Additionally, what are most certified "gluten-free" processed foods made of? Corn or rice.

That's concerning, because people who react to the gluten in wheat (gliadin) may also react to the entire family of gluten proteins—including the gluteins in corn and rice. I did. In 2014, I went "gluten-free" because I was trying to reverse rheumatoid arthritis. Despite adhering to a 100 percent traditional "gluten-free" diet, I couldn't heal my gastrointestinal tract. I was eating certified "gluten-free" foods thinking I was helping myself heal, but my body reacted to the gluten in corn and rice by mounting an immune response. That protective response created inflammation throughout my body, which contributed to the rapid progression of the autoimmune disease. Once I moved beyond the "gluten-free" label and removed all grains from my diet, I began to heal.

This pattern has also been reported in scientific studies showing that a traditional gluten-free diet (i.e., no wheat, barley, or rye) routinely fails to fully heal the gastro-

intestinal lining in people with celiac disease or gluten sensitivity. For instance, in 2009, an article published in *Alimentary Pharmacology & Therapeutics* concluded that after 16 months on a traditional gluten-free diet, only 8 percent of people healed their gut lining, 65 percent had persistent inflammation, 26 percent had no change, and 1 percent got worse. The authors concluded, "Complete normalization of duodenal lesions is exceptionally rare in adult celiac patients despite adherence to GFD [a traditional gluten-free diet]."

In other words, a traditional "gluten-free" diet failed to help 92 percent of people. Furthermore, a study published in 2013 in *BMC Gastroenterology* focused on patients who had previously followed a traditional "gluten-free" diet with no relief from symptoms. After following a diet of exclusively whole, unprocessed foods—including no "gluten-free" processed foods, 82 percent of patients reported elimination of symptoms, including resolution of prior celiac enteropathy.

The truth is, we have known since the late 1970s that gluten in corn can affect people with celiac disease and irritable bowel disease. A study published in *Clinical Experimental Immunology* in 1979 re-



The "gluten-free" labeling confusion is one reason why some people do not experience improvements when they go "gluten-free."



What are most certified "gluten-free" processed foods made of? Corn or rice.

ported that people with Crohn's disease, ulcerative colitis, and celiac disease had elevated antibodies when they ate corn. The authors concluded that the increase in antibodies suggested, "increased mucosal permeability," which is another name for leaky gut. Similar findings of an inflammatory response following corn exposure were published in 1991, 2005, and 2012.

To be clear, there's a lot we still don't know about gluten. For example, do people with celiac disease or gluten sensitivity always react to the gluteins contained in corn and rice? Not necessarily. In 2005, a study published in *Gut* reported that nearly 50 percent of subjects developed gastrointestinal inflammation and antibodies to corn—however, we don't know the exact number.

**The bottom line is this: The current "gluten-free" label doesn't support a true gluten-free lifestyle, which removes all forms of gluten.** It adds to the confusion because the label supports the traditional gluten-free diet (no wheat, barley, or rye).

The "gluten-free" labeling confusion is one reason why some people don't experience improvements when they go "gluten-free." If they removed wheat, barley, and rye, but their symptoms didn't improve,

it's possible they were still reacting to the gluteins in other grains. In addition, some people experience gluten-free whiplash, which occurs when the traditional forms of gluten are removed and initially there is improvement. However, a short time later, symptoms return. Gluten-free whiplash is proof that all grains contain gluten.

But there's good news. As awareness increases, some scientists are questioning whether corn and rice are safe for celiac and gluten-sensitive populations, which may lead to a revised definition of "gluten-free." For now, our grocery stores are filled with corn and rice. "Gluten-free" foods are still recommended by well-intentioned medical doctors and dietitians, and the FDA has not announced any plans to revise their definition of "gluten-free."

Now that you know the truth behind the "gluten-free" label, I encourage you to be your own solution by harnessing your power.

- If you've tried a traditional "gluten-free" diet and still have symptoms, check ingredient labels for gluten-containing compounds. It may be one of the triggers preventing you from achieving a full recovery. Keep in mind that gluten can be found in unexpected products, such as common table salt, which often contains a corn derivative used as an anticaking agent.
- Instead of trusting the "gluten-free" label, choose whole foods that are naturally gluten-free such as vegetables, fruits, meat from 100 percent grass-fed and grass-finished cows, pastured chickens and eggs, and wild-caught fish.
- If you want to avoid gluteins, be cognizant not only of what you put in your mouth but also what you put on your body. Many personal care products, household cleaning products, and other items such as the glue on the back of stamps or envelopes can contain grain derivatives. Even toothpaste commonly contains at least one grain-derived ingredient.

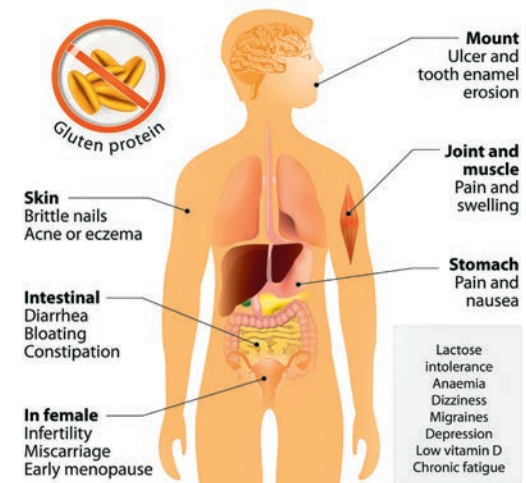
*Dr. Sina McCullough is the creator of "Go Wild: How I Reverse Chronic & Autoimmune Disease," and author of "Hands Off My Food" and "Beyond Labels." She holds a doctorate in nutrition from the University of California-Davis. She is a master herbalist, Gluten Free Society certified practitioner, and homeschool mom of three.*

## Types of gluten in common grains

Grain	Primary types of gluten protein	Gluten percent of total protein
Wheat	Gliadin	69
Rye	Secalinalin	30-50
Oats	Avenin	16
Barley	Hordein	46-52
Millet	Panicin	40
Corn	Zein	55
Sorghum	Kafirin	52
Rice	Orzenin	5

Above is a table listing some common grains and the primary type of gluten protein they contain (specifically, the prolamine subfraction of gluten).

## CELIAC DISEASE



Scientific studies have shown a traditional gluten-free diet (i.e., no wheat, barley, or rye) routinely fails to fully heal the gastrointestinal lining in people with celiac disease or gluten sensitivity.

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What Manassi and Whitney argue is that the brain is actively smoothing out the images our eyes take in.

## We're Literally Seeing the Past

New brain research shows we don't see in the present

Continued from Page 1

Their research, published in *Science Advances* on Jan. 12, indicates that our brains actively average visual input in a way that keeps our perceptions about 15 seconds in the past.

### With Constant Eye Movement, Why Isn't the World Choppier?

Like the images produced by movie cameras, our eyes send frequent snapshots of visual information to our brains. When we watch a movie, the projector only shows us still pictures in each frame, jumping from one to the next 24 times per second, but our brains perceive it as continuous motion.

In real life, our eyes are also always moving: As you read this right now, your eyes aren't scrolling smoothly across the words, but jerking across each line in three or four

jumps, then jumping from the end of one line to the beginning of the next. And you do this without feeling seasick. Instead, your brain perceives a smooth, continuous picture of the text. But if we were to move a movie camera like we move our eyes, the resulting film would be rough and hard to watch, like an avant-garde experimental movie. The images would be so choppy, in fact, that we likely would experience motion sickness.

Why then, do humans see the world in smooth, stable images?

Something neuroscientists call change blindness is often cited as the mechanism that supports image stability. According to research published in *Frontiers in Psychology* in 2018, change blindness is "when a stimulus undergoes change without this being noticed by its observer." In other words, our brains don't perceive changes when those changes aren't big enough to matter. While several studies have shown that the human brain engages in change blindness, this is a passive mechanism. However, what Manassi and Whitney argue is that the brain is also actively smoothing out the images our eyes take in.

The phenomenon of actively smoothing our perception has a name: perceptual serial dependence. In other words, our brains try to see different images over time as a related series rather than a bunch of random

snapshots. Perceptual series dependence, as the scientists said, "causes objects at any moment to be misperceived as being more similar to those in the recent past." Their research suggests that we literally don't see an object in front of us as it is now. Instead, we see it as it was in the past.

Using Amazon's Mechanical Turk, a crowdsourcing platform, Manassi and Whitney paid subjects 20 cents each for participating in what they described to participants as a "Very very very short survey." Qualifying subjects were then sent to an online study. For the first experiment, the scientists started with two images of the same face at different ages. They asked different groups of people to rate the ages of the person in the "young" photo and the "old" photo. The average age estimated for the first photo was 13 and 25.5 for the second photo. These ratings gave the researchers reference ages for each image.

Here's where things start to get interesting. The subjects' attraction to the past was strongest when the object in front of them changed slowly. Then the subjects were shown an image identical to the "old" image and asked again to rate the subject's age. After watching the 30-second clip, the subjects consistently rated the subject's age as younger than the reference age, by about five years.

Intrigued by this result, the scientists tried the same experiment in reverse, morphing the "old" image to the "young" image in the course of a 30-second movie. Then the subjects were shown the "young" face and asked to rate it. This time the subjects rated the age an average of five years older than the reference age. It seemed that the brain held onto the past image, rather than the image it was currently seeing.

### Are We Really 'Seeing' the Past?

In this study, the subjects' attraction to the past was strongest when the object in front of them changed slowly. Abrupt changes appeared to trigger more frequent image updates in the brain. The researchers confirmed this by breaking up the original smooth image progression into jump cuts, trying six steps from young to old, four steps, and even just showing the first face for 15 seconds and then jumping straight to the ending face for 15 seconds. They found that fewer steps produced more accurate age ratings. Yet even the jump from the first image to the last image still made subjects estimate the end face to be about two years younger than they judged it when they were just given a still picture. This might sound like support for the change blindness theory, with continuous changes being too small for

**The subjects' attraction to the past was strongest when the object in front of them changed slowly.**



Researchers used an experiment with a 30-second movie to reveal how the brain holds on to past images.

our brains to perceive. However, the researchers had made sure that the changes were perceptible.

To eliminate the possibility that the illusion was specific to how we perceive age, Manassi and Whitney redid the experiment with images that morphed from male to female and from female to male and again saw similar results.

To rule out the possibility that our brains tend simply to favor the "center," they also used a movie that aged an image from 14.6 to 20.5 and another that went from 25.5 to 20.5. In the first case, the subjects rated the image as younger (19.1 years) than the reference age. In the second case, they rated the identical image as older (22.1 years). Since the results were based on which movie the subjects were shown, the researchers concluded that the illusion wasn't due to a tendency for the brain to be biased toward the center of what the eyes see.

### Do We Live in the Past as Well?

This study raises some fascinating questions: What does our brain's tendency to pull toward the past—a seemingly literal inability to see what's right in front of us—mean for human psychology? Do other parts of our brains prioritize the past as much as the part that processes visual input? Do we actively smooth out other types

of information that we receive such that we may actually be simplifying or even misperceiving things? Do our brains see much of our world as it was and not as it is?

Practitioners of Zen Buddhism remind their students to be mindful, to fully experience each moment, and to live in the present. As Shunryu Suzuki, a Zen monk and teacher, wrote in the prologue to his 1970 book, *"Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind,"* "In the beginner's mind there are many possibilities, in the expert's there are few."

This new research suggests that our brains literally aren't seeing things as they are in the present. If we want to engage with the world as it actually is and not as our brains see and perceive it, we may need to continually remind ourselves that we aren't, in fact, seeing things as they are.

*Jennifer Margulis, Ph.D., is an award-winning journalist and author of "Your Baby, Your Way: Taking Charge of Your Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Parenting Decisions for a Happier, Healthier Family." A Fulbright awardee and mother of four, she has worked on a child survival campaign in West Africa, advocated for an end to child slavery in Pakistan on prime-time TV in Paris, and taught post-colonial literature to non-traditional students in inner-city Atlanta. Learn more about her at JenniferMargulis.net*

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During midlife we have more roles and responsibilities than at any other time of life. That can bring growth as well as difficulty.

## Sleep, Stress, and Happiness Shift After 35

Midlife isn't a crisis, but it can be a time of new challenges that sets the trajectory for aging



SOOMI LEE

Fewer than one-fifth of Americans say they actually experienced a midlife crisis. And yet there are still some common misunderstandings people have about midlife. I study midlife, and especially how people in this stage of life experience sleep and stress. In my research, I have also found that midlife brings both opportunities and challenges.

### Are We There Yet?

Exactly when midlife begins is hard to pin down. Compared with other developmental periods—such as childhood, adolescence, and older adulthood—midlife lasts longer and includes more diverse social roles. There are fewer published studies on midlife than studies on childhood and older adulthood. So researchers still know little about the timing and unique experiences of this stage of life.

Midlife may begin at different times for different people.

In the 1990s, people generally agreed that midlife began at age 35. This has shifted toward an older age. Now Americans might say midlife begins at age 44 and ends by 60. An increased life expectancy and medical advances may have contributed to this shift.

Today's adults are living longer and healthier lives than previous generations. Also, the demands of establishing a career while building a family have increased. That's why some researchers have started referring to the period occurring roughly from age 30 to 45 as "established adulthood," distinguishing it from midlife as it was

previously understood.

Chronological age is only one way to define the beginning of midlife. Psychologist Margie Lachman emphasizes looking at certain life transitions and social roles that commonly occur in midlife as a way of coming up with a definition.

### So Many Roles, So Little Time

Midlife is a time when individuals occupy the greatest number of social roles. The average U.S. adult in midlife typically has four key roles—paid worker or homemaker, spouse or partner, parent, and adult child. Having multiple roles may provide more opportunities to build resources such as income, self-esteem, relationships, and success. But people must also divide their time and energy across these multiple roles.

Risk factors for later-life diseases also show up in midlife. Slower metabolism, weight gain, and hormonal changes are common. Also, women experience menopause, which involves hot flashes and emotional ups and downs. Men in midlife are

**Midlife involves growth, including peaks in work productivity, better financial decision making, and greater wisdom.**

Common issues with sleep and stress in midlife can lead to lower levels of happiness.

more likely than younger men and women to develop sleep apnea.

All these factors are closely related to sleep, so it's no surprise to find poor sleep among midlife adults. Sleeping less than six hours a night, getting poor-quality sleep, and other sleep issues are prevalent.

### Sleep, Stress, Happiness

Age-related physical changes are not the only threat to sleep, however. The struggle of midlife adults to juggle multiple often incompatible roles also causes stress. Stress has negative consequences on sleep, such as chronic insomnia. What's worse, stress can result from poor sleep. So sleeping poorly or being stressed out can create a vicious cycle and cascading health problems.

Both sleep and stress affect emotions, so you might expect low levels of happiness in midlife. Research backs this up. Fewer people are happy during midlife than older and younger groups. Yet it's important to note that midlife also involves growth, including peaks in work productivity, better financial decision-making, and greater wisdom.

Although researchers have been able to identify overall patterns of degraded sleep, increased stress, and lower happiness in midlife, experiences vary from person to person. For some people, there may be more growth than decline, or a balance of both. Indeed, some research shows that personal growth is related to well-being during midlife.

For now, it's already clear that midlife is a pivotal time that determines the trajectory of aging. That's why self-care during midlife is especially important, despite the busy schedules brought on by a greater number of roles. It's hard to overemphasize the value of getting enough sleep and managing stress. Doing these things could help individuals turn a "midlife crisis" into "midlife potential."

*Soomi Lee is an assistant professor of aging studies at the University of South Florida. This article was first published on The Conversation.*



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Our mad scramble to 'be productive' is ruining our well-being and stressing our spleen.

## Why We Shouldn't Multitask

Focusing on one thing at a time is a healthier way to live, from both Eastern and Western perspective

EMMA SUTTIE

How many of us were raised singing the praises of multitasking? That shining beacon of productivity we are all supposed to aspire to? But the ugly truth is that multitasking is not only bad for our brains, it turns out that we are simply not designed for it.

Most of us spend a large part of every day multitasking. Whether it is listening to the radio while making breakfast, reading the newspaper while we eat, or scrolling through our Instagram feed while at work, we are rou-

tinely doing several things at the same time.

Multitasking seems like a great way to be productive by doing many things at once. But, what is actually happening is that we are switching our focus from one thing to another because the brain simply can't do more than one thing at a time. In fact, research shows that multitasking reduces our ability to focus, increases levels of stress, and causes us to make more mistakes.

### Multitasking and the Brain

Recently, there has been a lot of research investigating the functioning and processing limitations of the brain. An article

**Removing the temptation to check email, or look at notifications will help your brain focus, your body relax, and make you more productive.**

published in the journal Cerebrum in 2019 summarizes several interesting findings, including that we tend to overestimate our ability to multitask effectively when, in reality, there is almost no correlation to our actual abilities. Research has shown that the brain is suited to only do one thing at a time and multitasking places a burden on several important systems. Research shows that multitaskers complete tasks more slowly with less efficiency and are more easily distracted.

It's also interesting to note that some correlations were found between chronic multitaskers and certain personality traits, an example of which is that chronic multitaskers tend to be more impulsive, although it's still unclear whether people with certain traits tend to multitask more or if heavy multitaskers are actually rewiring their brains.

In a study conducted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, scientists present the dangers of multitasking, particularly in the context of driving. When the brain switches from one task to another, it is using what neurologists refer to as executive function. These are cognitive processes used to determine, how, when, and in what order tasks are performed.

This happens in two parts. Goal shifting and rule activation.

*Continued on Page 14*

## The Nutritional Magic in Orange Foods

Eating this shade of the rainbow is easy, fun, and offers unique health benefits

JENNIFER MARGULIS

"What should I eat?" is a question every parent hears, often several times per day. My teen stood by the open refrigerator, hanging on the door, sighing loudly.

"Mo-om, I'm hungry," he said. "There's nothing good in here. What should I eat?"

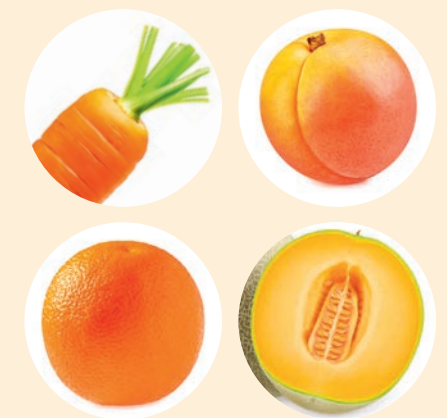
A car needs the right kind of gas to run smoothly. Humans need the right kind of food to optimize their health and well-

being. The best foods for our bodies and our brains are the freshest, made in our own kitchens instead of in industrial plants.

But eating should also be delicious and bring us joy. It's no good to shove "healthy" food into our mouths, standing by the sink, stressing about work, school, or the latest deadly infection.

*Continued on Page 11*

**Carotenoids aid in digestion and help prevent gastrointestinal ulcers.**



In general, the deeper the orange color of the fruit or vegetable, the higher its carotene content.

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We may be tempted by "bad" foods, so stop thinking of them as bad and start thinking of them as foods you eat less frequently.

## Balanced Eating

You can eat it all, but eat more of some things than others

KERI GANS

Many of you may have heard the term "balanced diet," but do you really know what it means? As a nutritionist, I will admit it might mean different things to different people. Personally, I have described it over many years to my clients and the media as meaning simply: "Eat a variety of foods packed with nutrients 85 percent of the time and 15 percent of the time not worrying about it so much."

### All Foods Fit

In a balanced diet, there is no discrimination against specific foods. You don't need to avoid foods that contain carbohydrates or fat, nor do you need to only fill your plate with those foods containing lots of protein. If there are no medical reasons to avoid a specific food, for example, an individual with celiac disease who can't tolerate gluten, then one should feel free to enjoy all foods.

### Choose Healthier Options Within a Food Group

It makes sense from a health perspective to choose foods that are better for you than those that aren't. In other words, eat plenty of 100 percent whole fruits that include naturally occurring sugar, vitamins, and minerals versus processed fruits with added sugars. Whenever possible, choose lots of vegetables, legumes, and 100 percent whole grains, all rich in fiber. Choose nuts, seeds, and other foods packed with heart-healthy fats. Enjoy dairy, seafood, poultry, and even red meat on occasion for adequate protein. Each of these food groups contains nutrients that have health benefits.

### Leave Room in Your Diet for 'Not-So-Good' Food Choices

This is where the 85/15 rule comes into play. Eating healthy doesn't mean eating healthy foods 100 percent of the time. If you never allow yourself to enjoy some of the more indulgent food choices, which vary according to personal tastes,

then you are restricting yourself. Restriction leads to feeling deprived, which almost always leads to over-eating.

However, if you allow yourself these foods from time to time, they can easily fit into a balanced diet. Chocolate, french fries, pizza, and ice cream can all add a little joy to life.

**A very important part of eating a balanced diet is to keep a balanced state of mind when it comes to food choices.**

### Check Your Portion Sizes

An important part of eating balanced meals is a balanced plate. What does that mean? One-quarter of your plate should come from protein, one-quarter of your plate from carbs, and one-half of your plate from vegetables, along with a serving of fat. The concept isn't cast in stone, however. It is unlikely that half of your breakfast plate would consist of vegetables. Rather, it is a guideline to help you think about having carbohydrates, protein, and fat together to achieve satiety while rounding out your meal with extra vegetables and/or fruit where applicable.

### Keep an Open Mind

Lastly, a very important part of eating a balanced diet is to keep a balanced state of mind when it comes to food choices. Let go of the "good" or "bad" food notions and embrace the idea that you can really enjoy all foods—just some more than others.

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An important part of eating balanced meals is a balanced plate.

## The Nutritional Magic in Orange Foods

Eating this shade of the rainbow is easy, fun, and offers unique health benefits

Continued from B1

It's also a mistake to stress about food. If we prepare a beautiful meal, but we do it resentfully, worried about the mess we're making in the kitchen and feeling insecure about whether our effort will be appreciated, we also miss the opportunity to nourish our minds and bodies.

This brings me to why I love to eat orange foods. Colorful fruits and vegetables are full of vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients (phytonutrients are chemicals that help protect plants from invaders and are also beneficial to humans). They're also easy to prepare and oh-so-tasty.

Unlike green leafy vegetables, orange foods usually aren't bitter. Like green leafy vegetables, eating orange veggies on a daily basis will help you have more energy, improve your digestion, and feel more vibrant.

So grab an orange pepper out of the fridge and squeeze yourself a glass of fresh orange juice, and I'll tell you more about these foods and why you should eat them.

Orange vegetables include acorn squash, butternut squash, carrots, chanterelle mushrooms (granted, mushrooms are fungi, but don't tell anyone), kabocha squash, orange peppers, orange tomatoes, pumpkin, saffron, sweet potatoes, and turmeric. Orange fruits include apricots, cantaloupe, guavas, kumquats, loquats, mandarins, mangoes, minneola tangelos, nectarines, oranges, papayas, peaches, persimmons, physalis, and tangerines.

### Crazy About Carotene

All of these vegetables and fruits are high in carotene, which is the yellow-orange pigment that gives them their bright orange coloring. Carotene is one of a group of orange, red, and yellow pigments known as carotenoids that are made by plants, animals, and even fungi. For the most part, the deeper the orange color of the food, the higher the carotene content it has.

So why do we want to eat foods high in carotene? Our bodies convert this plant-made hydrocarbon into vitamin A in the liver. In grade school, a teacher likely told you that if you eat carrots, you'll see better at night. Not only is it true that vitamin A helps maintain good eyesight, but it's also responsible for keeping us healthy in a variety of other ways.

To wit, carotenoids promote the growth and repair of epithelial tissue (the tissue lining your mouth and intestines), bones, and teeth. They help prevent acne and maintain healthy skin, which is why so many people report seeing their acne improve when they start eating a more whole-food, plant-based diet. Furthermore, carotenoids in general and vitamin A, in particular, support a healthy natural immune response by aiding mucous membranes in secreting mucus to keep them moist and healthy.

Indeed, scientists at the University of Heidelberg Medical School in Germany found that vegetables such as orange peppers and corn contain high quantities of two nutrients—lutein and zeaxanthin—that are antioxidants and help the body fight against the disintegration of the macula (part of the retina at the



Eating a variety of orange vegetables and fruits may protect you against cancer.

Carotenoids are crucial in helping protect against colds, flus, and infections of the kidneys, lungs, bladder, and mucous membranes.

But that's not all. They also aid in digestion and help prevent gastrointestinal ulcers.

Your body's natural vitamin A also functions as an antioxidant, which means that it helps the body get rid of harmful agents (called free radicals) that are generated during the metabolism of fatty foods.

**Carotenoids are crucial in helping protect against colds, flus, and infections of the kidneys, lungs, bladder, and mucous membranes.**

But we should eat a lot of orange foods for more than just their carotenoids. Many orange foods are also high in vitamin C, antioxidants, and micronutrients. There's no question that eating these fresh, healthy foods—in the form of whole foods—helps our bodies function better and avoid illness.

That's why I pulled three colorful bell peppers out of the fridge for my son. And, like a typical 18-year-old young man who's always ravenous, he enthusiastically ate them all.

### Fighting Macular Degeneration With Healthy Food

According to a 1998 study published in the British Journal of Ophthalmology, some orange vegetables can help older adults avoid macular degeneration, an eye disease that can eventually lead to partial or total blindness.

Indeed, scientists at the University of Heidelberg Medical School in Germany found that vegetables such as orange peppers and corn contain high quantities of two nutrients—lutein and zeaxanthin—that are antioxidants and help the body fight against the disintegration of the macula (part of the retina at the



Eating raw fruits and vegetables, preferably ones that are local, freshly picked, and organically grown, is often the best way to maximize their nutrient and fiber content, but cooking these foods can increase bioavailability.

## 5 Fun Ways to Eat Orange



**1 Slice some peppers:**  
Make yourself a veggie plate with orange, yellow, red, green, and purple peppers. Serve with a bowl of artichoke bean dip or some spinach hummus to make it an extra healthy and delicious snack.



**2 Host a citrus taste test:**  
This is one of my kids' favorite activities. Cut up five or six different kinds of citrus fruits, including regular and Meyer lemons, and do a taste test. Give each participant a score sheet so that they can rate their favorites. Or have them see if they can tell each fruit apart in a blind taste test. They'll have so much fun figuring out which is which that they won't realize that they're eating such healthy food.



**3 Roast a sweet potato:**  
Cut a sweet potato in half lengthwise and put it face down on a baking tray. You don't need to oil the tray first. Roast it at 425 degrees F for about 20 to 25 minutes or until soft and fragrant. You can eat it with your hands, as the skin makes a perfect "wrapping." Or you could drizzle it with olive oil and enjoy it with a knife and fork. The skin is edible too, as long as the potatoes were organically grown. They're also delicious with almond butter.



**4 Whip up some butternut squash soup:**  
Roasted butternut squash, sweet potato, and carrot soup are delicious and nutritious. It also freezes well, so you can make a double recipe and reheat it at your convenience.



**5 Make orange rice:**  
I love sautéing a lot of chopped vegetables, adding broth, and cooking them in rice to make what I call "busy rice." To make orange-colored busy rice, sauté 1/2 cup to 1 cup of minced carrots and orange peppers with half a chopped onion and two cloves of chopped garlic until all the vegetables soften (about 5 minutes). Season with salt and pepper, along with a teaspoon or more of paprika and turmeric and a pinch of saffron if you've got it. Then add 2 cups of broth or water and 1 cup of white rice, simmer for 15 minutes (depending on the rice variety), let stand for 1 minute, taste to adjust seasonings, and serve piping hot with a vegetarian stir fry or meat entrée.

*Jennifer Margulis, Ph.D., is an award-winning journalist and author of "Your Baby, Your Way: Taking Charge of Your Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Parenting Decisions for a Happier, Healthier Family." A Fulbright award-winning author, she has worked on a child survival campaign in West Africa, advocated for an end to child slavery in Pakistan on prime-time TV in Paris, and taught post-colonial literature to nontraditional students in inner-city Atlanta. Learn more about her at JenniferMargulis.net*

# Vagus Nerve

## What It Is and How to Make It Better

Getting this critical nerve into better ‘shape’ can have far reaching effects on how you feel

LISA ROTH COLLINS

The vagus nerve is the longest cranial nerve in the body, traveling from the brain stem down through the spinal cord to the abdominal area. Along the way, it reaches out and affects many organs. Also known as cranial nerve X and the pneumogastric nerve, the vagus nerve is the primary component of the parasympathetic nervous system, which is part of the autonomic nervous system. The autonomic nervous system also includes the sympathetic nervous system.

While the sympathetic nervous system triggers the fight-or-flight response, the parasympathetic nervous system sets off a calming response after the danger has passed. Feelings of safety trigger the front (ventral) part of the vagus nerve while danger activates the back (dorsal). When a vagus nerve is healthy, it leads an individual to respond in an appropriate or mindful way.

### What the Vagus Nerve Does

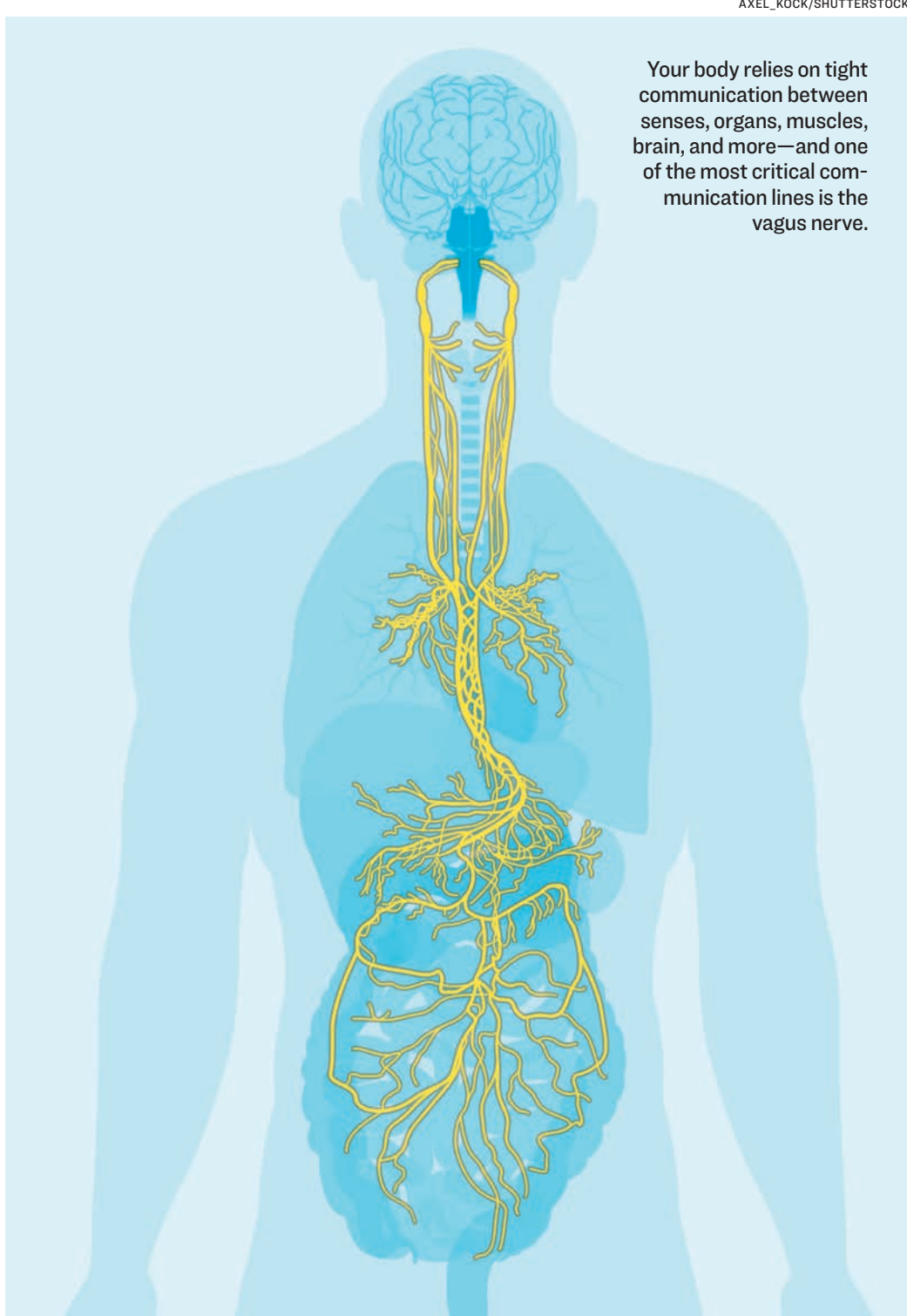
The vagus nerve is named after the Latin word for “wandering,” which is appropriate because it affects so many organs and functions in the body. It performs two types of functions:

- Sensory: involved in sensations on the skin, in muscles, and in organs
- Motor: includes activities such as swallowing, digestion, breathing, coughing, vomiting, and heart rate variability

This versatile nerve is also involved in the fight/flight response and how the body responds in a healthy way to stress. A healthy vagal tone, that is, the activity of the vagus nerve, would indicate generally healthy emotional regulation and physical health as well.

### How to Stimulate Your Vagus Nerve

All of these important functions indicate



that you should strive to maintain a healthy vagus nerve (good vagal tone). You can do this by stimulating your vagus nerve, which then results in feelings of calm and relaxation, a decrease in heart rate, and slowed breathing. Here are some ways to stimulate your vagus nerve at home.

**Exercise:** Physical activity has many health benefits, and better vagal tone is one of them. In research involving individuals

with heart problems, exercise therapy improved heart rate variability by increasing vagal tone and reducing the activity of the sympathetic nervous system.

**Meditation:** A 2020 study found that practicing mindfulness meditation can improve heart rate variability as well as sleep quality. In another study, individuals who participated in a six-week loving-kindness-meditation program showed an improve-

ment in vagal tone while those who were on a waiting list for the program didn't.

**Singing or humming:** When you sing or hum, it's been shown you are activating your parasympathetic nervous system, slowing breathing, and increasing heart rate variability. Chanting also results in the same benefits.

**Yoga:** This activity activates the parasympathetic nervous system and can help with blood flow, digestion, and heart rate.

**The vagus nerve is named after the Latin word for ‘wandering,’ which is appropriate because it affects so many organs and functions in the body.**

**Deep slow breathing:** Research shows that practicing deep, slow breathing can improve vagal tone and reduce anxiety.

**Relaxing (chillin' out):** Activities that are relaxing and calming help improve vagal tone, whether it's Tai Chi, socializing with friends, kicking back with a book, or some of the stress-reducing recommendations already noted here.

**Gargling:** The benefit from gargling is similar to that achieved by singing or humming.

According to clinical psychologist Dr. Glenn Doyle, “The vagus nerve is deeply plugged into our heart, our guts, and our voice. ... When we speak, shout, sing, the vagus nerve is lit up like a Christmas tree—which is one of the reasons why those activities can be so cathartic and emotional for so many of us.”

### Bottom Line

A healthy vagus nerve is essential for optimal function of many organ systems and overall good health. Take care of yours by engaging in stimulating activities as much as possible!

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

## Health Benefits of Chestnuts

Here are 5 great reasons to enjoy more of these delicious, nutritious nuts

Chestnuts roasting on an open fire is a timeless image of Christmas. These nuts, a gift from the Castanea genus family, deliver a slight sweetness along with a nutty crunch and the flexibility to be added to salads, soups, stuffing, and many other dishes.

Sweet chestnut trees are often called the “bread tree,” serving as a source of nutrition for people in the Mediterranean and Europe. Widely recognized for their nutritional value, the nuts provide carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, fiber, and protein. Here are five extraordinary benefits of chestnuts for human health.

### 1. Better Memory

Nuts in general are lauded for their nutrient profile. In particular, they're studied for combating oxidative damage, inflammation, aging, and dementia or memory loss.

A 2020 review, published in Current Pharmaceutical Design, looked at the anti-dementia property of nine different nuts, including chestnuts. It noted nuts' rich nutritional profile, including essential fats, proteins, vitamins, fiber, minerals, and trace elements. These properties and more “can make nuts an alternate therapy for human-kind to fight against memory loss,” the authors wrote.

### 2. Improved Heart Health

Chestnuts offer nutrients that assist in cardiovascular wellness. They're rich antioxidants, namely gallic and ellagic acids, which have been found to help protect the heart from oxidative stress. This condition may increase the risk of strokes as well as heart disease.

Chestnuts also provide a good

amount of potassium, a mineral that helps keep the heart healthy and regulate blood pressure levels.

### 3. Potential Diabetes Fighter

Consuming nuts, including chestnuts, has been linked to protection against Type 2 diabetes and related metabolic syndromes. This benefit is connected to reduced oxidative damage and inflammatory biomarkers, along with chestnuts' beneficial fatty acids, dietary fibers, vegetable proteins, and polyphenols.

This is where the rich antioxidant profile of chestnuts comes in: These compounds help protect cells against damage caused by unstable molecules known as free radicals. Oxidative stress can raise the risk of chronic illness such as diabetes, heart disease, and various types of cancer.

### 4. Weight Loss

The high fiber content of chestnuts is instrumental in keeping one feeling fuller for longer. This is because fiber helps de-

**Sweet chestnuts are often called the ‘bread tree,’ serving as a popular food and source of nutrition for people in the Mediterranean and Europe.**



Nuts are lauded for their nutrient profile and studied for combating oxidative damage, cancer, cardiovascular disease, inflammation, aging, dementia, and more.

lay the time it takes for food to go from the stomach into the intestines. Animal studies also suggest that dietary supplementation with chestnuts may reduce abdominal fat.

### 5. Anticancer Action

A 2014 study suggested that the Castanea mollissima Blume, also known as Chinese chestnut, contains flavonoids and polyphenolic acids that possess anticancer properties and may protect against diabetes complications. In test-tube research, the antioxidants in these nuts helped suppress the growth and spread of cancer cells, such as prostate cancer.

### How to Use Chestnuts

It's easy to add chestnuts to your diet. You may eat them raw, although their high tannin content may lead to digestive problems in sensitive individuals. You may also boil or roast chestnuts. Once cooked, their skin becomes easy to remove for healthy, delicious snacking or as stuffing in festive dishes.

Don't miss out on the standout health benefits of chestnuts and other nuts with hundreds of abstracts on the GreenMedInfo.com database.

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## The Ups and Downs of the Sun Hormone

Getting this critical nerve into better ‘shape’ can have far reaching effects on how you feel

ASHLEY TURNER

There has been a lot of discussion about vitamin D circulating among natural health enthusiasts recently. As a certified functional medicine practitioner, vitamin D status is something that I monitor very closely.

Vitamin D is actually a hormone, specifically a prohormone that the body converts into a steroid hormone. It's synthesized in the skin from sun exposure and activated in the liver and kidneys.

Lately, vitamin D has been a hotly discussed nutrient for its role in supporting the immune system. While vitamin D is a powerful modulator of the immune system, that's far from its only role in human health.

### Functions of Vitamin D

Vitamin D performs many functions throughout the body, many of them critical to core physiological processes. When we don't have adequate vitamin D levels, it affects every aspect of our physiology because it's intimately involved with cellular function and genetic expression. The hormone known as vitamin D:

- Regulates serum calcium and phosphorus
- Works synergistically with vitamin A and K2
- Reduces cellular growth
- Promotes apoptosis (proper cell death)
- Improves cellular differentiation
- Controls genetic expression

Vitamin D deficiency is rampant. In fact, 70 percent of American children aren't getting enough vitamin D. We've run tests on thousands of vitamin D over the years at The Restorative Wellness Center and it's rare to see someone with an optimal, functional level unless they are serious about optimizing their vitamin D status. We've had hundreds of patients who live in Florida, California, and other southern states that are well below optimal vitamin D, and magnesium for that matter. Magnesium is critical to getting good physiological mileage out of vitamin D.

### How to Optimize Vitamin D

From my perspective, there is unsurpassed value in consuming a nutrient-dense diet. I have studied the work of Dr. Weston A. Price, a dentist-turned-nutrition researcher, for close to 15 years now. His work clearly demonstrates the importance of not just consuming vitamin D alone, but also in conjunction with vitamin A and vitamin K2, which Price calls the X factor. These fat-soluble vitamins—A, D, and K—work synergistically, and K2 actually activates proper vitamin D metabolism.

In fact, research indicates vitamin D is less likely to reach toxic levels when consumed with vitamin A and K2.

### Food Sources of Bioavailable Vitamins A, D, and K2

- Pasture-raised egg yolks
- Grass-fed red meat
- Organ meats such as liver
- Grass-fed raw dairy products such as ghee, butter, cream, milk, kefir, and cheese (if tolerated)
- Cod liver oil
- Wild-caught fish such as salmon, herring, sardines
- Pasture-raised lard, duck, and chicken fat

It's much more difficult to have toxic levels of these nutrients when they are consumed together. Price observed traditional people groups that consumed nutrient-dense diets high in these fat-soluble vitamins and found they experienced exemplary dental health and overall wellness; chronic illness and disease was virtually nonexistent within these groups. Often, nutritional intervention isn't enough, especially among chronically sick individuals. A skilled clinician will take vitamin A, vitamin D, vitamin K2, and magnesium status into account when recommending supplementation and be guided by evidence on labs.

**When we do not have adequate vitamin D levels, it impacts every aspect of our physiology**

### Vitamin D From the Sun

Nothing can replace the health benefits of exposure to vibrant, natural sunlight. Our skin is ultimately responsible for producing vitamin D. During exposure to sunlight, ultraviolet radiation penetrates into the epidermis (skin) and photolyzes provitamin D3 to previtamin D3 to be used by the body.

It's estimated that 80 to 100 percent of the vitamin D we need is a result of sun exposure. The sun exposure that tans the skin (called 1 minimum erythmal dose) produces the equivalent of 10,000 to 25,000 international units (IU) of vitamin D in our bodies. Sadly, aging, sunscreens, and increased melanin have decreased the skin's ability to produce previtamin D3.

You may ask, “why don't I just avoid the sun and take vitamin D instead?” Well, even if you could get all the vitamin D you need through supplementation, and it was as perfectly designed and absorbed by your body as the stuff you make from your own skin, you would still miss the other benefits of sunlight, in-

cluding enhanced mitochondrial ATP production, cell signaling, and growth factor synthesis, and an attenuation of oxidative stress. So the best way to get vitamin D is through the skin. I recommend working up to 20 to 30 minutes of direct, unrestricted sun exposure a day between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. Those with fair skin may need to work their way up to this to avoid burning. Those with darker skin will need longer periods of sun exposure.

Still concerned about burning?

Evidence shows that optimal levels of other fat-soluble vitamins, vitamin C, magnesium, and essential fatty acids go a long way in protecting the skin from burning. Conventional wisdom asserts that the sun is to be feared and that we must slather hormone-disrupting, cancer-causing chemicals on our bodies to protect us from disease. I would suggest that the literature reveals just the opposite. Sunlight protects against many chronic illnesses and symptoms. In fact, a 2016 study following 29,518 subjects for 20 years found that individuals avoiding sun exposure were twice as likely to die from all causes.

### Should I Supplement?

When a clinician recommends vitamin D supplementation, they must consider a wide range of factors that could go into how the body metabolizes that supplement. Those factors include the patient's levels of vitamin A, vitamin K, calcium, magnesium, and parathyroid hormone status along with how they assimilate food. From my perspective, vitamin D3 is the only form that should be supplemented and it should be used in conjunction with vitamin K2. Everyone supplementing with vitamin D should be closely monitored to ensure that they are not going outside of the optimal range.

Scrutiny over vitamin D supplementation has arisen because vitamin D is a hormone. Not everyone needs to supplement with it. However, there is a time and place for supplementation when used in the correct ratios with other nutrients. Many clinicians consider blood lev-

Vitamin D is one of the easiest vitamins to get. All you need is some bare skin and sunlight. The consequences of not getting enough can be significant.



els of 25(OH)D (vitamin D metabolites in the blood) under 30 ng/mL to be problematic. You'll be hard-pressed to heal from chronic illness or put autoimmune disease into remission without optimal levels of this important vitamin, and others.

### Can You Get Too Much Vitamin D?

Absolutely! Just as low levels of vitamin D are cause for concern, so are levels in excess. Ideal vitamin D levels, like many things, fall onto a bell-shaped curve. When blood levels of 25(OH)D levels close to 100 ng/mL and beyond, it's considered toxic. With many people promoting vitamin D supplementation, often in high doses, it's wise to know that this vitamin can increase to toxic levels within the body because it is fat-soluble. This means they are stored in the liver, adipose tissue, and skeletal muscle and are more likely to become toxic than water-soluble vitamins that are relatively quickly excreted from the body.

There are cases, often with over-supplementation, that can cause significant problems. These include:

- Heart attack
- Stroke
- Kidney stones
- Headache
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Anorexia
- Weight loss
- Low bone density

Vitamin D can be a life-changing nutrient. It's important to understand its importance in human health and be armed with safe, appropriate strategies to optimize levels within the body.

*Dr. Ashley Turner is a traditionally-trained naturopath and board-certified doctor of holistic health for Restorative Wellness Center. An expert in functional medicine, Turner is the author of the gut-healing guide “Restorative Kitchen and Restorative Traditions,” a cookbook composed of non-inflammatory holiday recipes.*

## Symptoms of Vitamin D Deficiency

From my perspective, there is unsurpassed value in consuming a nutrient-dense diet. I have studied the work of Dr. Weston A. Price, a dentist-turned-nutrition researcher, for close to 15 years now. His work clearly demonstrates the importance of not just consuming vitamin D alone, but also in conjunction with vitamin A and vitamin K2, which Price calls the X factor. These fat-soluble vitamins—A, D, and K—work synergistically, and K2 actually activates proper vitamin D metabolism.

In fact, research indicates that vitamin D is less likely to reach toxic levels when consumed with vitamin A and K2.



70 percent of American children aren't getting enough vitamin D.

ALLIANCE IMAGES/SHUTTERSTOCK

# Why We Shouldn't Multitask

Focusing on one thing at a time is a healthier way to live, from both Eastern and Western perspective

Continued from Page 9

1. Goal shifting is what happens when we decide to switch to doing something else.
2. Rule activation is when the brain moves its focus from the information needed to accomplish the present task to the information needed to accomplish the new one.

These are what psychologists call “task switch costs,” which are the negative effects associated with switching from one task to another. They result in a decrease in accuracy and an increase in the time it takes to complete a task. All these processes take fractions of a second, but that time can add up when we are continually switching back and forth, and can become potentially dangerous when we are doing something where our undivided attention is critical, such as driving.

The MIT study's findings explain that our eyes are only able to see clearly at the center of our vision and the brain “fills in” the rest of the information in the visual field. The average adult is only able to perceive and process three or four things simultaneously, and cognitive performance decreases the more we try to process. Multitasking may be benign when we are doing something such as folding laundry while watching TV but it can be catastrophic amid tasks where fractions of a second matter, like driving. The study estimates that distracted driving accounts for 50 percent of all accidents on the road.

## An Eastern View of Multitasking

In Eastern medicine, the harmful effects of multitasking are well known, but their source is perhaps unusual. Multitasking is seen not to affect the brain per se, but the spleen. Yes, you read that right. The spleen gets little attention in Western medicine but is of vital importance in Eastern medicine. The spleen is located in the upper left quadrant of the abdomen, is an important part of the immune system, and is the largest lymphatic organ in the body.

In Eastern medicine, the spleen and

stomach are the main organs of digestion. But, this isn't digestion in the traditional sense. The spleen and stomach digest and process not only food and drink but all of the stimulus that comes in through our sensory organs.

In this view, the spleen is directly related to our capacity for processing information. How well we manage our thoughts, concentrate, exercise discernment, and form intentions are dependent on the strength of the spleen.

This idea may seem odd, but the more we learn about the impossible complexity of the human body, the more we learn that it functions as a highly integrated whole. It's now well recognized that what we eat affects mood, and how we move affects cognition and our chances of developing Alzheimer's.

So while Western science describes multitasking based solely on its effects in the brain, it's important to recognize that what happens in the mind has cascading effects on the body. In the Eastern medical view, the spleen has a significant role within this process.

Worry and overthinking both are associated with the spleen, and overindulgence in either impedes its ability to perform important functions in the body. This isn't unlike the discovery that stress shifts the body's biochemistry in profound ways, rousing different hormones and activating or shutting down different processes. Similarly, a spleen weakened from other factors, such as too much external stimulation, makes a person more susceptible to worry which can develop into things like anxiety and depression, commonplace in the modern world.

And just as nutrition or exercise can affect our emotions and neurology, in the Eastern view, cold is an important factor that impairs the spleen's ability to digest and process properly. Cold slows, hardens, and constricts various processes in the body and is also seen to “extinguish the digestive fire.” Putting ice in drinks and eating cold foods, especially ice cream, weakens the spleen. The spleen also has important responsibilities in creating qi, which is the energetic force that powers all biological processes, so keeping it functioning optimally is important for the health of the entire body. Qi is largely created from the food we eat and the air we breathe.

In the Eastern view, one of the best ways to support the spleen and ensure that it can process various stimuli properly is by doing one thing at a time, and doing it with mindful intention. This allows the spleen to focus all of its energy on the task at hand efficiently, without waste.

One way to support this is by reducing other loads on the spleen. For example, you can reduce the digestive load by eating soups. These are warming and take little energy to digest. That's also the reason they are prescribed when we are sick, as our bod-

ies need to conserve energy for fighting off invading pathogens.

We can also help the spleen conserve precious energy by chewing our food well. This, along with eating slowly, and mindfully—while not doing anything else—are simple but highly effective ways to keep the spleen in good working order.

With this in mind, the spleen is a very overworked organ in the context of our busy modern lifestyles. Our over-busy lives, complex processed foods, environmental toxins, and cacophony of media leave us overwhelmed. That takes a toll not only on the brain, but also on the spleen's finite capacity for digesting and processing. Doing one thing at a time and taking frequent breaks is important for a healthy body and mind.

## Breaking the Habit

Scientists suggest some ways that we can break the multitasking habit.

The first thing to do is evaluate all the things you are trying to accomplish and prioritize them. Then simply do the most important one first and try to allot a specific amount of time to it, like an hour or two, before moving to the next task on your list.

Schedule a specific time of day to do things like checking your email, looking at social media, and anything else that you feel has a strong pull on your attention. This will allow your mind to relax, knowing it will get to do those things, but also allow it to focus on the task at hand.

Putting cellphones and other devices that cause distractions in another room can also help break the habit of multitasking. Removing the temptation to check email, or look at notifications will help your brain focus, your body relax, and make you more productive. Multitasking seems to be a natural by-product of living in a fast-paced environment and having a wealth of information at our fingertips. While this is a wonderful benefit of technology and living in the information age, balancing how much we take in at any one time can prove a little more challenging.

The fact that science is discovering that this simply isn't good for us and that the benefits we may feel from doing many things at once simply don't exist, may encourage us to get back to just doing one thing at a time with attention and focus. After all, it seems that this is the way we were designed to be.

*Emma Suttie is an acupuncture physician and founder of Chinese Medicine Living—a website dedicated to sharing how to use traditional wisdom to live a healthy lifestyle in the modern world. She has lived 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.*

**It is important to recognize that what happens in the mind has cascading effects on the body.**

**Our over-busy lives, complex processed foods, environmental toxins, and cacophony of media leave us overwhelmed.**

We can't do everything, but we can prioritize and do the important things.

# Recovering From the Pandemic Aftershock

Those who recover from COVID-19 often experience a 2nd pandemic of pain and difficulty

PAMELA PRINCE PYLE

It was a lazy Saturday morning, and I sat curled up on the couch with a coffee in hand. My cell phone rang, and I was surprised to see a friend's daughter calling from the West Coast. It was 6 a.m. her time. I picked up with a little catch in my heart. I knew she wouldn't call this early without a reason. I was right. She was very concerned about her parents and hadn't slept well, and she knew that I would be awake.

Her parents, Frank and Sharon, like so many others, had been infected with COVID-19 in 2020. Though physically recovered from their brush with death, the fire had spread to their marriage, their relationships, and their mental health through severe post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and a suicide attempt. This was the reason for her call.

Prior to COVID-19, Frank and Sharon had lived a normal quiet life. While no marriage is perfect, it seemed that they had a pretty good one. Drastic changes in life were about to occur and neither were equipped to deal with them. Frank was diagnosed with COVID-19 and required immediate hospitalization. His respiratory status declined rapidly and would require ventilatory support within 12 hours of admission. Frank, while gasping for air, said, “I don't want to die.” The medical team sedated him and placed him on a ventilator. Sleep, blessed sleep, or was it?

Two days after Frank's admission, Sharon began to feel sick and also tested positive for COVID-19. She entered into home quarantine for 14 days. The support system she would typically have was gone, and she was alone.

Days turned to weeks and then the doctor finally delivered good news to Sharon. Frank was doing better. She shouted with joy, but the words that came next tempered her response. His body had become severely weak during this time, and he would require weeks in the hospital before he would be safe to return home.

Sharon's emotions ran high as she thought to herself, “He will survive, but will I?” She was suffering from her isolation. Life out there would never feel safe again.

Weeks later, they were reunited when Frank returned home. Happy ending, right? Unfortunately, no. They had each experienced a trauma that profoundly affected their lives. While physical healing had occurred, the greater battle was yet to come. It was their second pandemic.

Unfortunately, stories like Frank and Sharon's are more common than not. However, in this couple's anguish, they were also living in shame.

“Why are we not feeling better about life? What's wrong with us? What's wrong with you?” they asked themselves.

All of the shame, fear, anxiety, and stress they were feeling became someone else's fault. Unfortunately, these emotions are more easily attached to the person in front of you rather than to a virus that can't be seen. Words were spoken, “We need a divorce. I need to take my life. I can't live like this.”

**It can be difficult to manufacture hope when you can't see past your pain and fears, but know that it's possible and that it's there for you.**

**Shame pain only makes you isolate, which is the worst thing that you can do.**

It can be difficult to manufacture hope when you can't see past your pain and fears, but know that it's possible and that it's there for you. It's what will allow us to survive and sometimes thrive while still suffering. Let me share a little wisdom that I've learned by working with dying patients throughout my medical career and how hope could help Frank and Sharon and those like them.

- Look to your faith traditions to find hope. If faith isn't part of your lexicon, then look to the creation itself and seek answers. As a member of the Western Cherokee tribe, I know my ancestors sought spiritual answers from their physical world.
- Write down all of the bad things that have happened or could happen because of your second pandemic. Now write down all of the good things that have happened or could happen as you not only survived, but now can thrive through both pandemics.
- Know that this season of suffering has an end date. You're better prepared for the next season of suffering.
- Don't make long-term decisions while in the midst of short-term suffering.
- You aren't alone in your suffering and shame. Recent studies show severe emotional stress in approximately 30 percent of COVID-19 survivors. Finally, shame should never be attached to your emotions. Shame pain only makes you isolate, which is the worst thing that you can do.
- Finally, seek professional help. Time is your friend only if you feel better today than yesterday. If not, you may need to

seek professional help to find your hope.

For Frank and Sharon, their first step of healing from their second pandemic was accomplished by increasing their situational awareness. The same can be for anyone who has survived COVID-19, but is still struggling. Perhaps you haven't recognized your COVID-19 experience as the source of your emotions.

Frank and Sharon also started to understand that they weren't alone. Neither are you. Their third step was wearing the mantle of hope, even when they didn't feel like it.

Once you're aware, you can find the help you need from other people and professionals. One of my favorite resources for diagnosis and referrals is the National Institute of Mental Health's overview page for PTSD.

Remember: Don't let the pandemic that robbed part of your life continue to steal your days going forward. Life is short, and it's meant to be lived.

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COVID-19 can leave a devastating imprint that takes time—and help—to recover from.

WISE HABITS

## Why We Struggle to Make Time for Solitude

The haunting unease of uncertainty can keep us from a calm heart



LEO BABAUTA

How often do you take time to go out for an hourlong walk? Or just sit in contemplation in nature doing nothing but enjoying the silence?

I'm sure there are a few of you who indulge in this luxury regularly, but most of us don't make time for quiet solitude on a daily basis.

For some, it seems a luxury. The struggle of daily existence often feels too close to survival level to think about an hour in nature, especially when that nature might be a distance away.

But for many of us, the main reason is that our brain rationalizes staying busy or is addicted to distraction. We are filled with uncertainty all day long, and that drives us to try to do more in an effort to control things, or leaves us avoiding making mistakes by indulging our addiction to technology and distraction.

Uncertainty is woven into every hour of our lives. We are uncertain about what we should do, who we are, whether we're good enough, what is going to hap-

pen, what's going on in the world, and how to deal with the overwhelm of life. We don't often acknowledge it, but we feel uncertainty constantly. Can we succeed if we pursue our heart's desire? We don't know, and that uncertainty can lead us to retreat to distraction or busyness.

The idea of being in solitude and having quiet in our lives for contemplation might seem nice to many of us. But when it comes time to actually do it, we make excuses.

“I can't because I have too much to do.”  
“Just one more email.”  
“Just one more video.”

And yet, this constant busyness and distraction are draining us. We are always on, always connected, always stimulated, always using energy.

What would it be like to disconnect every single day for an hour? To remove ourselves from TVs, books, devices, and just go out for a walk? To not be productive. To be connected to nature?

We could use the downtime. We could recharge and be replenished by nature. We could use the easy physical movement to burn off the excess energy that drives our chattering minds and open ourselves to the tranquility that gives our brains a chance to rest with space for contemplation and nothingness.

**Go to the solitude and be with your urges, your rationalizations, your stress.**

To do this, we have to stop letting uncertainty rule our lives. It can be with us, a constant companion, and we can learn to be comfortable with it and even love it as it is. But it doesn't have to drive us.

The way to shift this is to create the space for solitude, even just half an hour, and then make it happen. Watch your mind try to rationalize why you shouldn't do it. Watch it squirm to stay churning and urge you to put the solitude off for just a little longer. Then don't give in to that urge. Go to the solitude and be with your urges, your rationalizations, your stress.

See what happens when you give these things some space. They air out. They calm down. And you get nourished by the space and life around you.

*Leo Babauta is the author of six books, the writer of “Zen Habits,” a blog with over 2 million subscribers, and the creator of several online programs to help you master your habits.*



# Childhood Trauma Creates Seeds of Disease

Childhood adversity is a 'cause of causes' of adult illnesses, mental health problems

ROBERT MAUNDER & JON HUNTER

Every day, we are exposed to things such as pollution that can increase our risk of illness. Many people take on additional risks—due to tobacco smoke, fast food, or alcohol, for example.

But there's a less-recognized exposure that is even more common than smoking and increases the risk of heart disease, diabetes, cancer, chronic lung diseases, sexually transmitted infections, chronic pain, and mental illness, and reduces one's life by as much as 20 years.

This public health hazard that hides in plain sight is childhood adversity: experiences such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect.

## Childhood Adversity Is Common

In the United States, more than two-thirds of children reported at least one traumatic event by age 16, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. In Canada, one child in three is physically or sexually abused, or witnesses violence between adults in their home. Other adversities such as emotional neglect, living in an unsafe neighborhood, or experiencing prejudice and bullying are even more common. Studies in the United States show about 60 percent of children and teenagers have these adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs. The more severe the exposure, the greater the health risk.

The reason that ACEs contribute to so many diseases is that they are associated with many things that trigger other causes of disease. Think of ACEs as a "cause of causes."

## Health Risk Behaviors and Physiological Changes

As kids who have had adverse experiences grow up, they are more likely to smoke, drink excessively, and use non-prescription drugs. They are more likely to engage in risky sexual activity and to become obese.

Growing up in conditions that are consistently frightening or stressful affects the biology of developing bodies, especially the development of the systems that regu-

late our reactions to threats, from predators to viruses. ACEs are even associated with changes in our chromosomes that are linked to early mortality.

## Interpersonal and Psychological Effects

As psychiatrists for adults who experience physical and mental illness in combination, our patients often tell us about the personal impact of ACEs. One man said he didn't "have even the slightest shadow of a doubt that a loss of human connection is the most substantial negative impact" of these experiences. The health costs of human disconnection are profound. Indeed, lacking interpersonal support may hasten mortality as much or more than smoking, excessive drinking, inactivity, obesity, or untreated high blood pressure.

The psychological effects of ACEs may be more obvious and can include fearful expectations, a conviction that one is unworthy of love or protection, unregulated anger or shame, and discombobulating memories of bad events.

It greatly increases the risk of depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, and addictions. The one in three adults who experienced childhood sexual or physical abuse or witnessed interpersonal violence at home have at least twice the incidence of these disorders compared to others.

And then the dominoes fall: mental illness greatly increases the likelihood, burden, and consequences of physical illness. To give just one example, in the months after experiencing a heart attack, those who are depressed are several times more likely to die. So, we see that ACEs don't only lead to one kind of trouble, but to many.

**Growing up in conditions that are consistently frightening or stressful affects the biology of developing bodies.**

## Social Determinants of Health

Finally, the burden of illness isn't distributed fairly. Maintaining health is more challenging for those who are disadvantaged by poverty, lack of education, language barriers, discrimination, and living with the continuing systemic harms of colonization and multi-generational trauma.

Childhood trauma has a complex relationship with these social determinants of health. On one hand, ACEs aren't unique to marginalized groups and can occur across all strata of society. On the other hand, the risk of experiencing ACEs may be greater in some groups and the consequences of ACEs may multiply as social forces interact.

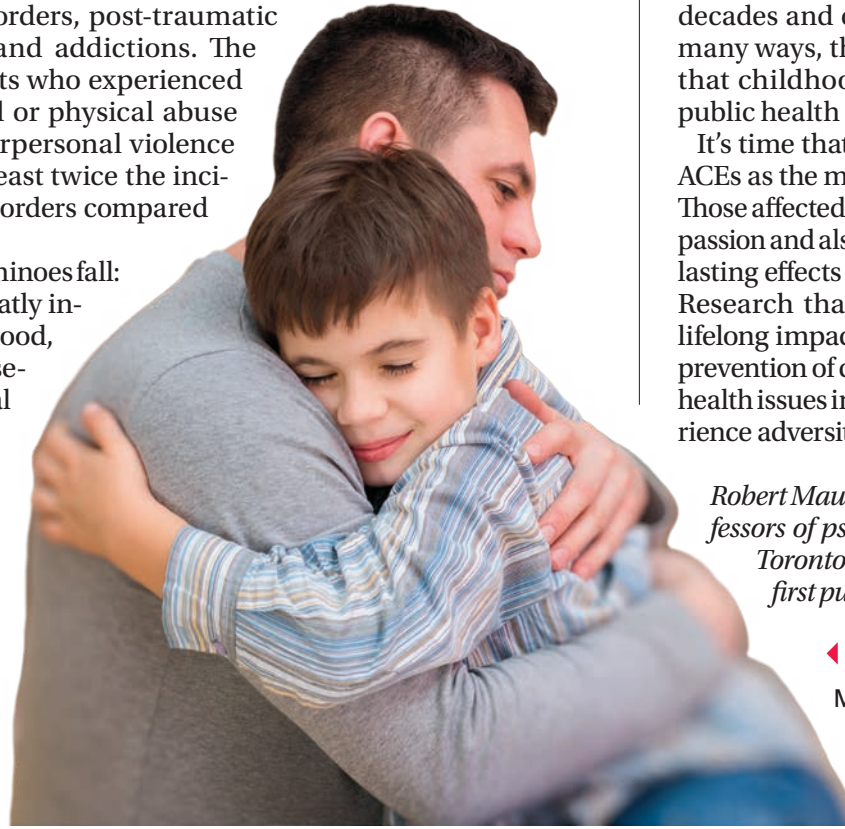
For example, childhood trauma is strongly associated with behaviors that increase the risk of sexually transmitted infections. About half of the people living with HIV have experienced childhood abuse.

## A Cause of Causes

Events that occur in childhood may contribute to cascading health risks over one's lifetime. There are so many paths to illness interacting with one another over decades and compromising health in so many ways, that it should be no surprise that childhood adversity is a profound public health problem.

It's time that we, as a society, recognize ACEs as the malignant force that they are. Those affected need to be treated with compassion and also with awareness of the long-lasting effects of early adversity on health. Research that helps us understand the lifelong impact of ACEs could help guide prevention of chronic illnesses and mental health issues in the many people who experience adversity during childhood.

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Most people suffer adversity in childhood that undermines their ability to maintain healthy thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

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