

MIND & BODY

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Breathe Yourself to Better Balance



Stress isn't just in your mind; it's a physiological shift in your body's biochemistry.

How to build stress resilience with breath training—and the help of your wearable fitness tracker

PATRICK MCKEOWN

We all have off days: times when we're jumpy, irritable, or overworked.

Sometimes, prolonged periods of high pressure catch up with us. Before we know it, we become less adaptable, and our range of responses to challenging situations becomes more narrow.

When this happens, it's normal to want to grit your teeth and carry on. This can eventually lead to burnout and disease. Then you're left trying to clamber back to



MIŁE ATANASOV/SHUTTERSTOCK

A wearable tracker can monitor your heart rate variability.

your starting position, bruised and anxious. Fortunately, there's a simple way to develop greater resilience against the twists and turns of everyday life—breathe.

Breathing Away Stress

Stress isn't just in the mind; it's a physiological imbalance that affects every aspect of your life. When you're stuck in a high-stress state, it's difficult to put space between your emotional reactions and your responses. Relationships, performance, and self-esteem all suffer.

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Why Do Few Women Know the Dangers of the Pill?

An interview with safety researcher Mike Gaskins on his book 'In the Name of the Pill'

MARTHA ROSENBERG

Mike Gaskins is a women's health advocate, independent researcher, and author who spent much of the past decade exploring the dubious history and science of birth control. In a recent interview, Epoch Times contributor Martha Rosenberg asked him about his 2019 book, "In the Name of the Pill," the culmination of his investigation, which was recently updated in its audiobook release.

Martha Rosenberg: Other a 2016 study linking hormonal contraception to depression, birth control pills are seldom in the news. Yet your 2019 book, "In the Name of the Pill," pulls back the curtain on unresolved and ongoing safety questions that few are addressing. What inspired you to write this book and at this time?

Mike Gaskins: Several years ago, I heard a lecture by an autoimmune disease expert who explained how endocrine disruptors that mimic natural estrogen play a crucial role in the condition, but when I asked him about the pill specifically, he said it played no role "at all." In fact, he said it had never been linked to any of the diseases.

Later, I went online and discovered a study that found a significant link between the pill and the autoimmune disease, lupus. I thought the expert must be unaware of the study, until there was a quote from him in that very article saying it didn't mean women should stop taking the pill. I became interested in why the medical community seems eager to downplay the pill's risks and began my research.

Ms. Rosenberg: In light of the scientifically documented links of the pill to blood clots, breast cancer, lupus, multiple sclerosis, Crohn's disease, and 10 other effects you cite, what explains the medical "pass" the pill has been given for over 50 years?

Mr. Gaskins: There were several factors. The pill was strongly linked to the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s and people didn't want to appear to be criticizing the movement. (To a certain extent, the same is true today). Secondly, the pill debuted at a time when world overpopulation was a huge issue frequently lamented on the nightly news by Walter Cronkite and the likes.

Some may remember ZPG, or Zero Population Growth. Overpopulation was such an overriding issue, some early feminists felt like their movement was being co-opted to promote the pill. As this was playing out, concerned health leaders around the world were watching because they knew a successful push for the pill in the United States would create ripples for its reception globally.

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Going for barefoot walks in nature can help our bodies wake up and absorb the yang energy of spring.

CHINESE WISDOM FOR SEASONAL LIVING

Spring Awakens

Solar Term: 'Spring Equinox' (March 20 to April 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: 'Spring Equinox'

2022 Dates: March 20 to April 4

When the "Spring Equinox" arrives on March 20, day and night are exactly equal and the universal yin and yang energies are perfectly balanced, both on earth and inside our bodies.

From this point forward, yang energy, associated with the light, begins to build in the body as the days lengthen, suppressing the dark yin.

According to traditional Chinese solar terms, at the spring equinox, we're already halfway through spring. In other words, it's the peak of spring. Before this time, spring's energies are intangible yet gradually moving beneath the surface.

Yet the Western calendar states that spring begins at the equinox. This contrast is a perfect example of the difference between the Eastern and Western approaches. Chinese culture values intangible phenomena and philosophical concepts and treats them as being just as important as the tangible. Western culture tends to value the material world—what can be seen directly.

Another example of the Chinese approach is seen in the work of renowned Tang Dynasty medical doctor Sun Simiao (581-682), who classified disease into three stages: prior to the arrival of disease, disease just setting in, and having the disease.

"Ancient people were good at being medical doctors," Sun said. "[At that time], the best doctors worked on preventing disease, mediocre doctors worked on disease just setting in, and the lowest-level doctors worked on diseases that already existed."

This theory emphasizes the importance of preventative medicine, nutrition, and, more fundamentally, maintaining a healthy lifestyle—both physically and mentally.

Spring Equinox is a very important date for planting. In ancient China, before this date, farmers grew beans and peas, both as protein-rich crops and as a way to nurture the land for the following crops. Rice was usually grown after the Spring Equinox.

Living in Harmony With 'Spring Equinox'

The earth's relatively balanced state during Spring Equinox represents a great opportunity to adjust your body to its most balanced state.

Consider the symbol of the tai chi. In it, the yin and yang are perfectly balanced, with a dot of yang existing in yin and a dot of yin existing in yang. In this harmonized state, the tai chi rotates ceaselessly. What

we don't want is these energies fighting each other.

The main concern is that preexisting health conditions and diseases may appear, much like grass popping up in spring. This may be seen particularly in the areas of sleep quality, mental and emotional health, menopause, circulation-related problems, and other issues related to the eyes, blood, and heart.

This happens because when the yang energy is revolving inside one's body and overtaking the yin energy, the blockages built up from a heavy diet and a lack of movement in the winter come to the fore. When the energy circulation hits the places where we're already weak, we feel discomfort.

We've already said that yang energy is pouring in at this time, so we must be careful that this energy isn't too hot, as it can overpower the yin and cause stress or problems to our bodies.

To avoid hot energy, try to detox in early spring by emphasizing fresh seasonal vegetables and beans. This prepares our bodies to let the yang energy flow through them and strengthens our overall health. Barefoot walks on the grass, in forests, and in fields can help our bodies wake up and absorb the yang energy from nature.

The earth's relatively balanced state during Spring Equinox represents a great opportunity to adjust your body to its most balanced state.

To help open up all of the body's energy channels and meridians, try gently pressing at their entry points, located on both sides of your fingertips and on the fingertip pads. Also, touch and press gently on the edges of the facial bone below both eyes. This helps reduce pressure on the eyes, enhances eye and face health, and beautifies the skin.

The peak season for many flowering plants is right around Spring Equinox. Those who have weaker respiratory systems should wear masks to avoid pollen.

Seasonal Foods

This is a good time to eat fennel, spinach, spirulina, leeks, chives, dark green vegetables, black beans, green beans, black sesame, and soy products.

The herbs Roman chamomile, German chamomile, geranium, frankincense, cedarwood, and douglas pine are also beneficial during this time.

Epoch Times contributor Moreen Liao is a descendant of four generations of traditional Chinese medicine doctors. She's also a certified aromatherapist, former dean of an Institute in Sydney, and the founder of Heritage Formulations, a complete solution for TCM professionals. Visit RootsTCM.com for details.

MEDICALLY CORRECT

The Serenity and Danger of Childbirth in Nepal

In some places in the Himalayas, doctors are few and hospitals are far, far away

PETER WEISS

I don't remember her name, but I do remember her courage. We had all our gear packed, and we were ready for our caravan to take us back to "civilization." Our guide received a call that a woman was about two hours out and badly needed to see the "doctor" who she heard was visiting from America.

We had an eight-hour trek by car ahead of us in our Tata Jeeps, driving down what was nothing more than a goat path. Travel time in this part of the Himalayas, in Nepal, is measured by walking. This woman was two hours away by foot, not by car; she had been already walking for six hours trying to get to us. It's fascinating that travel time here is measured by walking, and yet there is better cell reception than I have at home.

I spent almost three weeks in Nepal in the spring of 2014 as a guest of One Heart Worldwide, a truly amazing organization dedicated to helping establish safe birthing sites in third-world countries. Arlene Samen, the founder, has a special heart for Nepal, and her work is literally blessed by the Dalai Lama.

Looking at health data from Nepal in 2018, the Maternal Health Task Force blog at Harvard noted: "The maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in Nepal decreased from 539 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births to 239 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births between 1996 and 2016. In 2016, roughly 12 percent of deaths among women of reproductive age were classified as maternal deaths."

By comparison, the maternal mortality rate in the United States, according to Statista, was 17.4 per 100,000 live births in 2020, while that of Norway was 1.8 per 100,000 live births. There are a lot of reasons for the differences in maternal mortality rates between countries, drug abuse being a key factor for the United States.

Of course, we said we would wait for this woman. The only limitation I had was that, while I was a guest in Nepal and could observe health care and its services, I was forbidden to provide any health care whatsoever.

One Heart Worldwide helped establish such simple concepts as a clean and safe birthing site for women in the countryside. They would teach local women the basics for a safe delivery, and these women would be the health and delivery providers for their community. Many women's lives and that of their newborns were saved because of their work.



The people of rural Nepal have a beautiful spirit but limited access to medical care.

While we waited, I was reminded of another situation where a father brought his 16-year-old daughter to see the "foreign doctor." This occurred while we were waiting for our caravan from a small town on the Indian border back to Pokra, the regional center, where so many Himalayan treks begin.

The poor man saw us at the small airfield and approached us with a sad and pleading demeanor. This poor young woman was obviously very ill; she looked jaundiced and had ascites (a significantly swollen abdomen from abnormal fluid collection). I didn't examine her—I wasn't allowed—but the father did have some lab tests with him from a local clinic.

The father told us she was raped about two years ago and soon after got sick. She had what looked like obvious liver failure to me, from hepatitis C, as her lab tests showed deadly elevated liver enzymes. There was nothing we could do; there was only a sliver of hope if she could get to Kathmandu. Our guides spoke with the man and daughter and arranged for their transportation to the capital.

Nepal is an amazing place with amazingly strong and kind people, whom we all fell in love with. We had two absolutely fantastic guides, Suraj and Surya. These two devote their lives to helping their countrymen and women.

It was getting late, and we had to leave soon. No one wanted to drive down through this mountain goat path at night, not even the drivers. When this woman arrived, the local "provider" determined that she had been in labor for well over 24 hours, and the woman felt something was wrong. The baby was "not coming down the canal." Even this poor woman and her companion knew

she would need a Cesarean section, and they thought we were their best hope. The only solution was to take her with us, and hope we could get to the local hospital in time. We left a few bags behind and made room.

While in Nepal, I met with the director of the Nepal Obstetrics and Gynecology Association in Kathmandu, as well as doctors in smaller town hospitals and clinics. Some of the smaller town hospitals were frightening from a spoiled Western perspective, with blood-stained walls, limited supplies, wards filled with patients, and clinics overpacked with lines of patients going out the building. But there was also a serenity and appreciation that's hard to describe. It reminds me of Albert Einstein and his theory of relativity. Basically, we need to have some comparison to realize and appreciate what we really have.

The eight-hour drive was daunting, especially for this poor woman, who was stoic and brave. While I was sweating and scared as one of our back tires screeched over the ledge on this goat path road, she just looked at peace as I looked down the side of the mountain.

My wife and eldest daughter (23 years old at the time) had joined me on this life-changing journey. We made it down to the local hospital in about eight hours, where there was a physician waiting for us at the local hospital. We left the woman there, in good hands, as we needed to continue before nightfall. Later that night, we heard she did indeed get a Cesarean and had a healthy baby boy.

The vast majority of births in Nepal are "natural," with no need for a Cesarean. The work of organizations such as One Heart Worldwide helps ensure those safe deliveries.

Visiting Nepal was indeed a life-changing experience from many different perspectives. We have to appreciate what we have and always be willing to help our fellow human beings.

As President Ronald Reagan said, "We can't help everyone, but everyone can help someone."

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.

We have to appreciate what we have and always be willing to help our fellow human beings.



In some areas of Nepal, there's no easy access to health care facilities like Khunde Hospital, which also serves the village of Khumjung.

Nuts for Peanuts!

LORI ZANTESON

Peanuts are more than the traditional snack to enjoy at baseball games in the iconic peanut butter and jelly sandwich; they're also a global culinary superstar and a nutrient powerhouse.

The Folklore

Native to South America, this dietary staple dates back thousands of years. The Aztecs used peanuts medicinally to cure fever and soothe the sore gums. Today, every part of the peanut is put to good use.

The Facts

Nut-like but not a nut, the peanut (*Arachis*

hypogaea) is a legume in the same family as peas, lentils, and beans. Each brown, veined pod or shell houses two or three "nuts"—kernels encased in a reddish papery skin. A one-ounce serving, about a handful, packs a filling 13 percent DV (daily value, based on 2,000 calories per day) of protein, 29 percent DV of bone-building manganese, a healthy dose of monounsaturated fatty acids, and antioxidant plant compounds.



Peanuts are nutritional powerhouses that we often overlook.

The Findings

Tree nuts and peanuts, which are protein- and energy-rich and contain several health-enhancing plant compounds, including resveratrol, have been associated with improving several risk factors related to age-related

diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, and brain disorders, because of antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects (Antioxidants, 2019). Peanuts have also shown potential to help manage Type 2 diabetes. Patients with Type 2 diabetes who ate a low-carb diet that replaced part of a starchy carbohydrate food item with peanuts lowered their fasting blood glucose and blood sugar after a meal (Nutrients, 2018).

The Finer Points

You have several options when it comes to how to use peanuts: peanut butter, peanut oil, peanut flour, and flakes, raw or roasted, shelled or unshelled, plain, or a variety of flavors. Store whole in-shell peanuts in a cool, dry place or refrigerate them for

longer freshness. Shelled and raw peanuts should be refrigerated or frozen, where they'll keep up to six months. Snacking on peanuts out of the shell is hard to beat, but try tossing roughly chopped peanuts into a stir-fry, over roasted vegetables, onto salads, or layered in a yogurt parfait. Blend them into a smooth butter that promises to make veggies, whole grain crackers, sauces, and dressings even tastier.

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Why Do Few Women Know the Dangers of the Pill?

An interview with safety researcher Mike Gaskins on his book 'In the Name of the Pill'

Continued from Page 1

Ms. Rosenberg: In "In the Name of the Pill," you revisit the comprehensive 1970 Nelson Hearings led by Wisconsin senator Gaylord Nelson. While risks were exposed at the time by experts, why did the safety scrutiny seem to end there?

Mr. Gaskins: I think the Nelson pill hearings are an important moment in history because they mark one of the very few times the drug companies had no control over the narrative. Plus, many of the risks and side effects they discussed are even more relevant today.

Senator Nelson's team along with some of the feminists who became allies during the hearings felt like they had accomplished their mission. They brought national attention to the risks of the pill. Drug companies were forced to include the first-ever patient information pamphlet in each package of the drug. And, new formulations were developed, which the drug makers claimed were safer.

In the end, the drug companies managed to make the pamphlet virtually unreadable for the average layperson, and there was no real science to prove the new formulations were any safer, but the appearance that they were complying and looking for safer solutions probably helped them deflect ongoing scrutiny.

Ms. Rosenberg: "In the Name of the Pill" contains information that looks like bad medicine or even cover-ups. Can you please recount the "green plasma" chapter?

Mr. Gaskins: Yes, there's a lot to unpack with the green plasma chapter. I'll try to hit the highlights. It begins when a group of modern-day doctors in an operating room at Penn received a unit of plasma with a striking green color. Plasma is usually straw yellow. They rejected the plasma and sent it back, but couldn't shake their curiosity at having never seen anything like it.

They discovered several studies on



JOHN GOMEZ/SHUTTERSTOCK

green plasma dating back to the 1960s. Doctors at that time started seeing green plasma coming from young, female donors and determined it was caused by the pill. Their studies identified the source of the green color as an overabundance of the copper-carrying protein, ceruloplasmin. They learned that green plasma had much higher propensity for clotting. But, all of these studies mysteriously ended in 1969. The doctors from Penn couldn't find any literature from the subsequent decades.

The Red Cross eventually came out with visual guidelines, which essentially removed green plasma from the inventory at blood banks. That's why most clinicians have never seen it.

If the lack of intellectual curiosity from researchers since 1969 and putting the green plasma out-of-sight and out-of-mind isn't enough, the chapter goes on to explore how people receiving blood transfusions from women often develop clotting issues, known as Transfusion-Related Acute Lung Injury. TRALI became such a concern that by the early 2000s, the United Kingdom and United States moved to a male-preferred policy for plasma donations. It starts to feel like the powers that

The pill was strongly linked to the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s, so people were reluctant to raise questions about its safety.

“**By shutting down the body's natural production of hormones for so long, the system essentially atrophies and leaves the woman infertile.**”

Mike Gaskins, researcher and women's health advocate

be are only willing to address those things that draw the most attention.

Ms. Rosenberg: You also write that the effect on babies of mothers who are on the pill has not been studied.

Mr. Gaskins: Often, a young mother will weigh the pros and cons of taking hormonal birth control if she's breastfeeding. It's only natural that she would worry about how these potent drugs might affect her baby. If she does a web search, many of the top hits will assure her it is completely safe for her and the baby. Usually, the only caveat is that she wait until 3 or 4 weeks postpartum to start an estrogen-containing birth control because of her risk of developing blood clots.

However, when you start trying to locate the science behind these assurances that it's safe for the baby, you find inadequate studies, with dubious results that are, at best, 40-years-old.

The facts are these drugs do reduce the mother's quantity of milk production. Those old studies found that the drugs did change the composition of the mother's milk, but deemed it within an acceptable range. And, this is the frightening part, several published case studies shared stories of infants—both boys and girls—who developed bilateral breast growth after the mother began taking hormonal contraceptives. Their breasts returned to normal when she stopped breastfeeding.

These are anecdotal, and are also over 40-years-old, but again, I have to ask, where is the intellectual curiosity? Why aren't researchers trying to find a better answer for mothers who want to know what effect hormonal birth control might have on their children?

Ms. Rosenberg: In 2009 Bayer had to run ads retracting earlier promises that its birth control pill, Yaz, would clear up acne and reduce PMS. Has such "off-label" marketing of the pill—claiming benefits not recognized by the FDA—stopped?

Mr. Gaskins: Not at all. There are several examples of off-label prescribing that are very common. When a young girl reaches menarche [her first period], her cycle is irregular. Her periods may be heavy or unpredictable because she hasn't yet matured. Doctors use this as an opportunity to put her on birth control to "regulate" her period. Then, when women get older and approach perimenopause, the pill is again recommended to "regulate" periods, despite them being at an age where the risks are even more pronounced.

The irony is birth control doesn't regulate periods in either case because it actually shuts down their cycle. The monthly bleeding isn't even a period, it's a pill withdrawal.

Many doctors also lead their patients to believe hormonal birth control is the only treatment available for PCOS [polycystic ovary syndrome] or endometriosis, when it really isn't a treatment at all. There's nothing therapeutic about it. It may elevate some of the pain or relieve some symptoms, but it's doing nothing to treat the underlying issue.

Consequently, this over-prescription of steroids in birth control starting in very young women has created an epidemic of infertility. I've had many women tell me they took the pill for 10 or 20 years, only to find out afterwards it was unnecessary, because they were infertile. They are stunned when I tell them that birth control may have actually contributed to their infertility. It's a phenomenon called "Oversuppression Syndrome." By shutting down the body's natural production of hormones for so long, the system essentially atrophies and leaves the woman infertile.

Ms. Rosenberg: You write that the pill risks are routinely downplayed by doctors, including liver and gallbladder issues and potentially serious eye changes.

Mr. Gaskins: I think doctors downplay the risks of birth control in general. This goes for copper IUDs as well. There are lots of side effects and complications that go along with all of these products, but, overall, doctors don't tend to take them seriously when a woman tries to discuss it with them.

Hormonal birth control has been linked to everything from strokes and breast cancer to glaucoma and multiple sclerosis. But, many of the doctors who prescribe birth control know very little about these complications.

Part of the problem is how compartmentalized Western medicine is. For example, there are tomes of studies on the thromboembolic effects of hormonal contraceptives, but most of the studies are published in journals for pulmonologists and cardiologists, not gynecologists. Doctors are also over-scheduled. They don't have time to keep up with all the latest science. Unfortunately, that means they often rely on the drug companies' sales reps to keep them 'informed.'

Ms. Rosenberg: Since early concerns about the pill safety, drug makers have implied their products are safer. Is that true?

Mr. Gaskins: When you have something that's been on the market as long as the pill, we tend to already have this assumption that it must be safe, without really digging any deeper. We've also been conditioned as consumers to think

“**I became interested in why the medical community seems eager to downplay the pill's risks and began my research.**”

Mike Gaskins, researcher and women's health advocate

Hormonal birth control has been linked to strokes, breast cancer, glaucoma, and MS.

of any reformulation of a product as "new and improved."

So it's not surprising that we assume new delivery methods or newer-generation birth control must be safer. In actuality, the risks are higher for some complications, like liver adenomas or gallstones, in the third- and fourth-generation hormones. As an example, Bayer has paid out more than \$1.02 billion to settle over 10,000 blood clot-related lawsuits for Yaz and Yasmin. Bayer paid another \$21 million to settle thousands of gallbladder-related lawsuits.

You also have new devices like NuvaRing. A study recently found that women using this device are twice as likely to develop a blood clot as women using other forms of birth control and six times more likely than women using no birth control.

And then, there's the Depo shot, which suppresses a woman's immune system and leaves her more vulnerable to HIV infection from her partner. This is a unique side effect that hasn't been linked to any other formulation or device.

An expanded audio version of "In the Name of the Pill" with new content about modern devices and little-discussed dangers scientists have linked to the various forms of birth control is now available.

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.



(PILLS) CRISTI/BOBBBA/SHUTTERSTOCK; (WOMAN) WATERS/REX MEDIA; GETTY IMAGES; PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY THE EPOCH TIMES

Cosmetic Acupuncture Trades Knives for Needles

Before going for cosmetic surgery, you may want to try a gentler approach

EMMA SUTTIE

A statistics report from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons states that in 2020, there were 15.6 million cosmetic procedures and 6.8 million reconstructive procedures performed in the United States. A report by Fortune Business Insights noted that the global cosmetic surgery market was worth \$50.67 billion in 2018 and is projected to reach \$66.96 billion by 2026.

An article from the Baylor College of Medicine explores the reasons behind the increase in plastic and cosmetic surgery and explains the difference between the two. "Cosmetic surgery is a specialty within plastic surgery that often focuses on appearance. Plastic surgery incorporates procedures that also restore form and function, such as breast reconstruction, burn surgery, and pediatric plastic surgery."

Cosmetic Acupuncture—a Natural Alternative

While plastic surgery can help many people who have a medical need or severe issues, there are ways the average person can look younger without a scalpel. If the thought of going under the knife makes you nervous, there's a nonsurgical alternative called cosmetic acupuncture. It uses the body's innate healing to achieve a more youthful appearance.

Cosmetic acupuncture is a specialty

within acupuncture, and both are modalities used in Chinese medicine. To give you a little background, here is a brief description of acupuncture and Chinese medicine.

What Is Acupuncture?

Acupuncture is a technique that uses tiny sterile, disposable stainless steel needles inserted at specific points on the body (called acupuncture points) to correct various ailments and restore the body

Cosmetic surgery offers a quick way to look younger but for those looking for firmer skin and a healthier glow, cosmetic acupuncture may be a safer way to go.



MASAFUMI NAKANISHI/GETTY IMAGES

to homeostasis. The nature of the problem determines where the needles are applied on the body and the depth of insertion. Some theorize that there are as many as 2,000 acupuncture points on the human body.

Cosmetic acupuncture is a specialty that deals mainly with acupuncture points on the face. Acupuncture points are also performed on the rest of the body to eliminate any other health problems that may be present.

What Is Chinese Medicine?

Chinese medicine is an umbrella term that encompasses numerous modalities, including acupuncture and herbal medicine. One of the first records of acupuncture is found in the Huang Di Nei Jing (The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine) and is approximately 4,700 years old.

According to Chinese medical theory (as well as Eastern philosophy), a universal energy called qi (pronounced "chee") is present in all living things and circulates along pathways in the body called meridians. The theory states that health is maintained as long as this energy flows freely along these pathways. However, if the energy or qi is blocked, the system is disrupted and pain and illness result.

Cosmetic Acupuncture

Cosmetic acupuncture is a nonsurgical treatment used to reduce the signs of aging. Very fine needles are inserted on the face and body, increasing local circulation and stimulating collagen and elastin, filling out

lines, and giving firmness to the skin for a healthy glowing complexion. Cosmetic acupuncture is an all-natural procedure with minimal risk and without the danger of side effects such as scarring, infection, or a lengthy recovery time.

Current cosmetic surgery statistics seem to demonstrate a large global market for methods of improving one's appearance. Cosmetic acupuncture offers a noninvasive option for those interested in enhancing their appearance with a more natural approach. While some people can have dramatic results with cosmetic acupuncture, they are usually more subtle than with surgical procedures, so being aware of the limitations of cosmetic acupuncture treatments is something to consider before taking the plunge.

There are many benefits to cosmetic acupuncture:

- Minimize fine lines
- Eliminate dark circles and puffy eyes
- Improve complexion by increasing local circulation
- Tighten skin
- Lighten scars
- Improve dark spots and skin blemishes
- Tighten pores
- Brighten eyes
- Improve the look of wrinkles
- Reduce frown lines
- Lift sagging skin and drooping eyelids

Even though cosmetic acupuncture treatments primarily treat the appearance of the face, a comprehensive intake process is still essential. This is because there are often other issues that will come up.

For example, someone may be coming in for cosmetic acupuncture treatments, but

during the initial questioning, they explain that they're having some digestive problems. Interestingly, the other issues often affect the facial features they're unhappy about. The good news is that we can do the cosmetic treatment and work on the digestive issues simultaneously. Many internal problems can manifest in changes on the skin, so digging deeper is vital to figuring out what can be done to correct any underlying health concerns.

Asking questions, listening to the patient, and observing are important skills you should expect from each practitioner at every visit. If someone is coming for cosmetic acupuncture treatments, we would ask questions like what the patient doesn't like about their face and why, and include questions about behaviors that affect the skin, like smoking, drinking alcohol, and how often they use sunscreen and wear makeup. These are all factors that can cause certain facial features, like dark circles under their eyes or broken vessels on their cheeks. Understanding these causative factors can help address and prevent undesired facial features.

Cosmetic Acupuncture Treatments

A variety of things can be incorporated into cosmetic acupuncture treatments, and each practitioner will have their own approach. Some examples are facial masks, essential oils, serums, different types of massage, and assorted manipulation tools to stimulate specific points. These can all be used to enhance the treatments' overall effect.

The number and length of treatments depend on where you go but are generally done once a week for about ten weeks. After that, treatments go down to once a

month for a few months and then on an "as needed" basis. Frequency can also depend on the individual, what they're trying to achieve and how well they respond.

Patients may also have contraindications to cosmetic acupuncture:

- abnormal clotting
- blood thinners
- bruising easily
- pacemakers
- high blood pressure
- diabetes
- migraines

Although acupuncture needles are extremely thin (a few times thicker than a human hair) and inserted superficially, certain conditions have to be taken into consideration. The skin on the face is very delicate, so every precaution is taken to make sure the treatments are successful, and patients are as comfortable as possible. Most people find them very relaxing.

So, whether you are noticing changes in your skin, want to improve the way you look and feel, are looking for a natural alternative to surgery, or all of the above, cosmetic acupuncture might be something to consider. It's a safe, inexpensive way to enhance the natural beauty already present in all of us.

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



Millions of Procedures

In 2020, \$16.7 billion was spent on cosmetic procedures in the United States. These were the most common procedures in three categories:

Top 5 Cosmetic

- Surgical Procedures**
- Nose reshaping (352,555)
 - Eyelid surgery (325,112)
 - Facelift (234,374)
 - Liposuction (211,067)
 - Breast augmentation (193,073)

Top 5 Minimally Invasive

- Cosmetic Procedures**
- Botulinum toxin type A—Botox, Dysport, Xeomin (4.4 million)
 - Soft tissue filler (931,473)
 - Chemical peel (931,473)
 - Laser skin resurfacing (997,245)
 - Intense pulsed light (IPL) treatment (827,409)

Top 5 Reconstructive

- Procedures**
- Tumor removal (5.2 million)
 - Laceration repair (386,710)
 - Maxillofacial surgery (256,085)
 - Scar revision (263,643)
 - Hand surgery (206,928)

Breathe Yourself to Better Balance

How to build stress resilience with breath training—and the help of your wearable fitness tracker

Heart rate variability is a valuable tool for optimizing performance, reducing stress, and improving physical and mental health.

FCSCAFFE/GETTY IMAGES

MADISON/SUTHERSTOCK

Patrick McKeown is an internationally renowned breathing coach, author, and speaker. He's the creator of Oxygen Advantage, founder of Butayko Clinic International, and a fellow of the Royal Society of Biology in the UK. His published works include research in the Journal of Clinical Medicine and books including "The Oxygen Advantage," "The Breathing Cure," and "Atomic Focus."

Continued from Page 1

One of the best ways to increase our resilience to stress is to make sure we're breathing effectively. Few things can trigger stress with the speed and certainty of poor breathing.

While being deprived of air can send us into shockwaves of fight or flight, improper or inadequate breathing can feed low-grade, persistent stress. It can also undermine the body's ability to regulate our stress response.

We can all experience and appreciate the benefits of effective breathing. Sometimes, however, it helps to have a quantifiable way to mark improvements in our breathing. This can encourage us to keep up the habits and exercises that help us breathe better. One way to do that is with a stopwatch. Another way is through the use of a wearable tracker that can monitor heart rate variability (HRV).

HRV is a valuable tool for optimizing performance, reducing stress, and improving physical and mental health. Let's explore what it means and how you can harness it for great results—with the help of your fitness tracker.

What Is Heart Rate Variability?

We think of the heart beating with a regular rhythm. But there are small differences in speed between every beat. These differences are called heart rate variability. While you might think it's better to have a steady, even heart rate, it's actually healthier to have greater variability. HRV can tell you if your autonomic nervous system is balanced. It can indicate good physical and mental health or alert you to potential problems. It can also let you know if you've over-trained and need more time to recover before hitting the gym again.

High HRV represents greater variability between heartbeats and indicates greater resiliency. In a nutshell, your heart can change gears more quickly.

The heart must adapt to millions of processes throughout the day, so we always want to work toward optimal adaptability. Low HRV is synonymous with poor health, old age, and conditions such as sleep apnea, chronic stress, and asthma.

It means you're not in such good shape, and you're more likely to struggle when small things go wrong.

What Is 'Good' HRV?

First, it's important not to get obsessed with numbers. There's a common belief that higher HRV is always better and you may be told to aim for a certain HRV. This isn't necessarily the case. It's more valuable to focus on self-comparison than to try to measure up to what's "normal" or "best." The aim is to control and optimize HRV and to continually progress in an upward direction.

The goal is to modulate your nervous system so you can get out of a stress state. Don't be surprised if your first readings look low. Even top athletes often have low HRV because they've spent years overtraining and pushing themselves to the max. These high performers often turn to HRV to find out what's holding them back.

Using Breathwork to Optimize HRV

There are many popular health hacks to improve HRV, from ice baths to intermittent fasting. But in my experience, the most effective and accessible way to control the nervous system and optimize HRV is through the breath. You see progress in real time via your wearable device, and this can be incredibly motivating.

The usual advice is to focus on slow breathing at 4.5 to 6.5 breaths per minute. This is correct, but it overlooks other aspects of breathing that are equally important. Functional everyday breathing is a crucial factor in nervous system balance and therefore in your resilience against stress. Nose breathing is infinitely better for you than mouth breathing. Breathing should be light, low, and quiet, rather than heavy, loud, and shallow. And healthy breathing has three interdependent dimensions:

Biochemistry: light breathing to correct the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide.

Biomechanics: diaphragm breathing to support the spine, improve lung capacity, and massage the heart.

Cadence or resonance frequency breathing: slow, paced breathing to

activate the vagus nerve's rest and digest functions.

Slow breathing at 4.5 to 6.5 breaths per minute will improve HRV, but you can also influence your results (and your well-being) by breathing only through your nose, breathing light, and engaging your diaphragm to breathe.

Nose Breathing

The first step in optimizing your health, happiness, and longevity—because after all, that's what we're talking about here—is to address persistent mouth breathing. This includes sleep-disordered breathing, which is often compounded by nocturnal mouth breathing.

Mouth breathing is closely related to stress and hyper-arousal in the brain. It causes you to breathe too much air, negatively affecting the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in your blood. Habitual over-breathing (hyperventilation) makes you more sensitive to carbon dioxide. It perpetuates hard, fast breathing. It's also a key factor in anxiety, sleep apnea, and asthma—all of which are associated with lower HRV.

Many of my students have reported improvements to their HRV just by switching to nose breathing during sleep. In one of my Oxygen Advantage podcast episodes, HRV expert, Dr. Jay Wiles, tells the story of a professional tennis player with very low HRV. This athlete markedly improved his results, both in terms of HRV and match performance, by working on light, slow, and deep breathing, as well as taping his mouth at night.

Reduce Breathing Volume

The next step is to integrate some simple breathing exercises into your day. These will increase your awareness of your breathing, normalize your blood biochemistry, and strengthen your diaphragm. They will also boost your ability to respond to physical and mental challenges.

When you consciously manipulate your breathing patterns, levels of blood carbon dioxide change. This influences HRV via the vagus nerve. Light, slow breathing floods your body with feel-good hormones such as dopamine, and it reduces adrenaline and inflammation. It

increases blood carbon dioxide, causing blood vessels to dilate. This modulates HRV via the blood pressure receptors. With regular practice of breathing exercises, you'll gradually find that you're more adaptable in tough situations.

Breathe Light—an Exercise to Reduce Breathing Volume

Sit up tall in a straight-backed chair, and allow your shoulders, chest, tummy, and jaw to relax. Bring your focus to the airflow. Notice the slightly colder air as it enters your nose and the slightly warmer air as it leaves your nose. Keep your focus on the inside of your nostrils and begin to gently slow down the speed of air entering the nose. At the top of each in-breath, allow a relaxed, gentle slow breath out.

The goal is to breathe about 30 percent less air into the body. You'll notice that there's much less turbulence inside your nose. You're doing the exercise correctly if you feel you would like to take a slightly bigger breath.

BOLT—Another Measure of Breath

Improving our breathing will improve our HRV, but there's also another important number you should measure. When I teach functional breathing, I use a breath-hold test called the body oxygen level test (BOLT). This test, which involves an easy breath hold after exhalation, gives an objective measure of your sensitivity to carbon dioxide and your tolerance for breathlessness.

As you practice breathing exercises and nasal breathing, your body becomes less sensitive to carbon dioxide. Breathing becomes easier and your blood pressure receptors function better. I recommend that you take your BOLT score each morning and observe whether improvements are reflected in your HRV readings.

How to Measure Your BOLT Score

Sit up straight in a chair or cross-legged on the floor. Have your stopwatch at hand.

Take a normal, silent breath in through your nose and a normal, silent breath out through your nose. Pinch your nose to hold your breath. Start the clock.

When you feel the first definite desire to breathe in, inhale gently through your nose and stop the clock. This "definite desire" might be a constriction in your throat, a small fluttering of the diaphragm, or just a feeling you would like to breathe in.

The first inhalation after your breath hold should be soft. If you need to take a big breath, you've pushed it too far. The time in seconds for which you can comfortably hold your breath after exhalation is your BOLT score.

You'll continue to have breathing symptoms and be more susceptible to stress until your BOLT score reaches 25 seconds. For optimal breathing, aim for a BOLT score of 40 seconds or more. The practice of holding your breath after you exhale is another great breathwork exercise.

If your BOLT score is below 15 seconds, practice the breathe light exercise above in several small doses of 30 seconds, with a one-minute break between each. If your BOLT score is 15 seconds or more, you can continue the practice for five to 15 minutes. If you feel a little panicked at any point, or your breathing muscles begin to contract involuntarily, the air hunger is too strong. If this happens, take a rest.

Breathe Slow—an Exercise to Slow Breathing Rate

The objective of this exercise is to breathe slowly through the nose for between five and 15 minutes. During this exercise, you don't need to take big, full breaths to fill the lungs. As with the breathe light exercise, you may experience air hunger. This is because the volume of air you breathe each minute reduces as breathing slows. If the air hunger becomes too intense, take a rest from the exercise.

With a clock or timer, breathe softly through the nose for a count of five seconds. Breathe out softly through the nose for a count of five seconds. Your breathing should be silent and slow.

If your BOLT score is very low, you may prefer to start with a three-second inhale and a three-second exhale.

Using Breathing Exercises With Your HRV Monitor

Begin your practice of breathing exercises gently. As with any training, if you

go all-in straight away, your body will respond with stress. Adjust your training as you progress and work your way up from a few minutes each day. You'll be motivated to continue as your HRV, BOLT score, energy, and performance all improve.

Practice light (reduced volume) breathing with air hunger and breath holds after exhalation. Dramatic exercises that use deliberate hyperventilation shouldn't be practiced until your breathing is fully functional and your BOLT score is 25 seconds or more. These exercises are designed to stress the body.

When you first practice light breathing and breath holds, HRV may drop. This is because the body registers stress. As you practice, your systems will adapt. It's likely you'll find that HRV becomes significantly higher after practice, even if it dipped during the exercises.

Use HRV to help you gauge your physical training load, whether you choose to do so by lifting weights or running. If your HRV drops by more than 20 percent after your workout, you've overtrained. If you notice a 40 percent drop overnight, take the day off. This drop in HRV is one of the biggest predictors of injury during physical training.

You can use your overnight reading along with your BOLT score to inform how hard you train the next day. If your HRV level is increasing, you have a much better chance of a successful workout. If your BOLT has dropped, focus on light, slow, nasal breathing during exercise, but ease off the pace. The same goes for if you're working in a high-pressure corporate environment. If you have low HRV before a big day at work, give yourself extra time to practice some breathing exercises and bring a little extra focus to the job at hand.

A Final Word

It's much easier to use HRV than it is to get to grips with the science. But breathing exercises, tailored via your wearable device, provide a simple way to feel better and to manage your life with greater ease.

You can find much more detailed information about HRV, the vagus nerve, and breathing exercises in my book, "The Breathing Cure."

Improving Core Strength Important No Matter What Your Age

Strengthen your critically important core with a few simple exercises

HOWARD LEWINE

Question: I'm in my 70s. I keep hearing about the importance of a strong core. What are some easy exercises I can do?

Answer: Your core is the stable part of your body that's more than just your abdominal muscles. It also involves your hips, back and even your shoulders. A strong core helps make everyday movements more efficient and safer—like whenever you reach, carry, walk, bend, or twist.

Core strength is crucial for fall prevention. Our bodies constantly have to adapt not only to different surfaces, but to different weighted loads. Adequate core stability and strength can prepare you to better react to these changes and keep you from losing your balance and stumbling.

Some floor exercises like the plank and superman poses are great for engaging your core muscles. A plank pose is where you hold a push-up position—with straight arms or resting on your forearms. You might only be able to hold

it for 15 seconds at first, but over time you'll increase the duration.

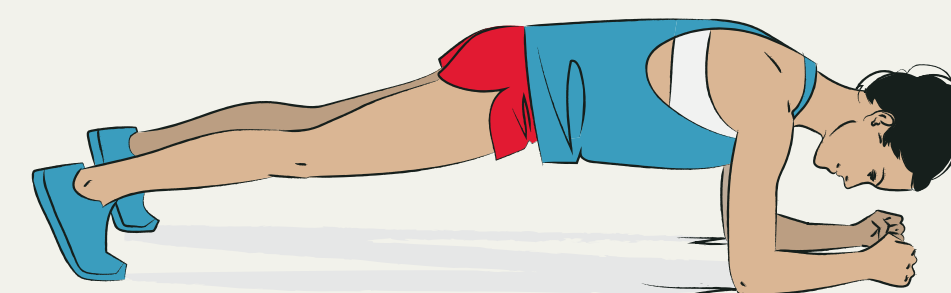
With superman, you lie face down with arms extended overhead, and you lift legs, shoulders, and arms off the floor simultaneously and hold for two to three seconds.

Another type of core workout involves walk-and-carry exercises, also known as "loaded carries." You hold weights, such as dumbbells or kettlebells, while walking. Carrying a heavy object while you walk engages much of your entire core musculature. Loaded carries can improve everyday movements like holding and carrying groceries, moving furniture, or rising out of bed.

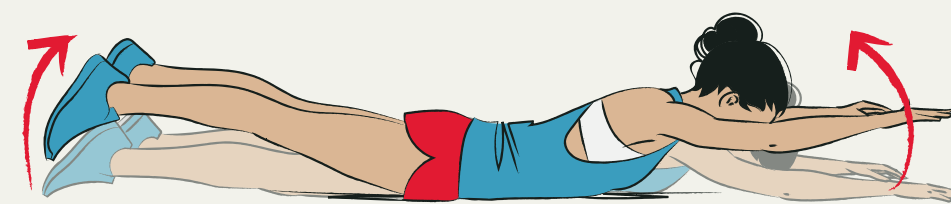
Howard LeWine, M.D., is an internist at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston and assistant professor at Harvard Medical School. For additional consumer health information, please visit Health.Harvard.edu

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CORE STRENGTH Exercises



PLANK. Hold a push-up position—with straight arms or resting on your forearms. You might only be able to hold it for 15 seconds at first, but over time you'll increase the duration.



SUPERMAN. Lie face down with arms extended overhead, and you lift legs, shoulders, and arms off the floor simultaneously and hold for two to three seconds.

Here Are 3 Easy-to-do Loaded Carries to Try:

FARMER'S CARRY. Stand tall and hold either a dumbbell or kettlebell in each hand. (Begin with a moderate weight, like the amount you use to do biceps curls. Keep your arms down at your sides. Engage your core muscles by taking in a deep belly breath and then blowing it out while you tighten your abs. Walk for a minute. (You mimic a farmer carrying pails of milk, hence the name.) Continue to breathe throughout the carry, maintain proper posture, and try to keep the tension in your abs as you move. Rest for 30 seconds, and repeat until you've completed two or three sets.

CROSS-BODY CARRY. This is performed like the farmer's carry, except you keep one arm straight overhead with the other hand down at your side as you walk. After you have completed your walk, rest for 30 seconds, switch hand positions, and repeat. This completes one set. Do two or three sets.

SUITCASE CARRY. This is also done like the farmer's carry, except you hold a weight in only one hand while your other hand is free. After you have completed your walk, rest for 30 seconds, switch the weight to the other hand, and repeat the walk to finish one set. Do two or three sets.

MADISON/SUTHERSTOCK

How to Enjoy Making Dinner

These 6 practices can lower the stress and increase the joy of making dinner

MOLLIE DONGHIA

Let's talk about a daily task that many (if not most) of us share—making dinner. It's evolved into a love/hate relationship for me over the past several years. Let me explain why.

As a child, I loved to help my mom bake and cook. I grew up learning the skills in our local 4-H club, where I took various cooking classes and entered dozens of baked goods into our county fair each summer.

It's been a hobby of mine since then and one that I still greatly enjoy.

But since having my own children, making dinner has become one of those daily chores that always seems to fall at the wrong time of day, require too much of my energy, and take a lot longer than the time we actually spend eating the food I just prepared.

Like several of the regular routines that Mike and I have tried to simplify over the past year (laundry and cleaning, decluttering our home, coming home from vacation, or making natural household cleaners), making dinner was one I knew I had to work on improving.

I considered the pain points of this task, what expectations were misaligned, and what would make it easier and more enjoyable.

Here are the 6 ways I've learned for how to make dinner prep more enjoyable. Because it has to get done every day, so why not simplify the process and enjoy the journey?

1. Have a Plan

Whenever you have a plan for something, it usually yields a better result, not to mention less stress. The same is true with making dinner, where rarely does my "winging it" approach turn out favorably.

At the start of each week, I make a very basic plan of what dinners we'll have each night. One important thing I've learned is to make the plan realistic. Don't try to go all out with some creative, labor-intensive meal if you're not likely to have the time and energy.

Instead of searching the sea of possibilities on Pinterest, I've found a simple system that has been a game-changer when planning my dinners—my "go-to recipe book." It's a binder that holds about 20 recipes that I know my family will eat and aren't complicated to make.

2. Ask Yourself the Magic Question

If you've followed along with me on Instagram, you know I'm a big fan of The Lazy Genius and her life-saving hacks and productivity strategies.

One of the most helpful strategies I've learned from her is the magic question—what can I do now to make life easier later? It's eliminating the pain points in your life by making small choices ahead of time. So in order to make dinner prep more enjoyable and less burdensome, I ask the magic question: What can I do now to make dinner prep less stressful later?

I look at my meal schedule to make sure I know the plan for dinner.

I get any meat or frozen ingredients out of the freezer as I start the day.

I have my dishes washed so I'm not faced with a dirty kitchen when it's time to cook. I marinate any meat in the fridge before the afternoon begins.

I open up my recipe binder to the right page so I'm all set.



None of these require large amounts of time to do, but when I commit to doing small steps to make the task easier later in the day, it makes a big difference. See how you can ask the magic question early on in the day to make dinner prep more manageable.

3. Lay Out the Ingredients Before You Begin

This one doesn't need much explanation, but when I lay out all of my ingredients before I start cooking, it makes the whole process go more smoothly and quickly. I spend less time looking through the recipe and fewer trips to my pantry or fridge.

Getting everything out at once allows for more ease when the process has begun.

4. Leave Enough Time (but Expect Delays)

Making dinner usually falls at a harder part of the day—nap and quiet times are over, the kids want a snack, and I'm usually having to settle sibling disagreements.

Whatever this time looks like for you, the most important way to avoid feeling overwhelmed is by leaving enough time, but expecting delays.

Take into consideration how long tonight's dinner will take to make. Can anything be done early on in the day? If you have older kids, can they be responsible to help out with any steps? Start early enough so that dinner is ready by the time you want to eat, but be prepared to multitask or juggle whatever else is going on at that time of day.

Having this mindset helps to alleviate feeling frustrated when my kids require more of my attention while I'm trying to get dinner on the table.

5. Play a Podcast or Music

Whenever I'm able to listen to something while I make dinner, it's always more enjoyable. That little bit of passive listening makes the task of dinner prep so much less tiring.

Whenever you have a plan for something, it usually yields a better result, not to mention less stress.



Listening to music or podcasts can be a great way to make cooking dinner more enjoyable.

MICROONEY SHUTTERSTOCK

Here are some of my favorite podcasts right now:

- Lazy Genius Podcast
- The Simplicity Parenting Podcast
- Walk in Love
- Minimalist Moms Podcast
- At Home With Sally

6. Elevate the Experience

The last way I've found to make the dinner-making experience more enjoyable is by the way we share our meal together. Most of our dinners aren't fancy or elaborate, but one way that I've found to take the experience to the next level is by doing a few simple things.

Try family-style serving. Placing the food on nice plates or serving platters and then directly on our table is one of my favorite things to do before I call everyone to dinner. Even if it's just a pot of soup, a frozen pizza, or tacos, it's a way to make dinnertime feel more like a valued family experience.

Light pillar candles. During the winter months, we enjoy lighting our candles and dimming the lights for a more cozy atmosphere. It makes any dinner seem more fancy and it encourages lingering as the gentle flicker of the flame always seems to slow us down.

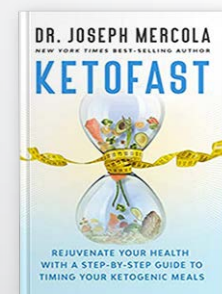
And that's it. Those are the six practices that have helped to make the daily chore of dinner prep more enjoyable for me and my family. I hope you find some inspiration in them.

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

PIXEL-SHOT/SHUTTERSTOCK

8 Important Health Screens Commonly Overlooked

For those who want to avoid the daily blood sugar checks that come with diabetes, a fasting insulin test may provide an important early warning.



"KetoFast: Rejuvenate Your Health with a Step-by-Step Guide to Timing Your Ketogenic Meals (2019)."



Getting these tests done can tell you much about your health and risk of disease

JOSEPH MERCOLA

This article was previously published on Sept. 24, 2018, and has been updated with new information.

While studies suggest that the health of Americans suffers because of excessive, unnecessary, and/or ineffective medical tests and treatments, certain lab tests can offer truly important clues about your health. Unfortunately, some of the most valuable tests are rarely ordered by conventional physicians.

What's more, the reference ranges provided on lab test reports are often misleading, as what's considered "normal" isn't

necessarily ideal for optimal health. So, which lab tests are really worth getting on an annual basis, and what are the ideal reference ranges that you're looking for? I wrote this chapter for "Ketofast," my book on partial fasting, but it was so important that I wanted to give it to you for free. So below is a list of eight of the most important lab tests that are frequently overlooked.

NO.1 Vitamin D

Optimizing your vitamin D is one of the easiest and least expensive things you can do for your health. My recommendation is to get your vitamin D level tested twice each year, when your level is likely to be at its low-

est (midwinter) and highest (midsummer).

This is particularly important if you're pregnant or planning a pregnancy or if you have cancer. Based on the research done and data collected by GrassrootsHealth, 40 ng/mL (100 nm/L) is the cutoff point for sufficiency to prevent a wide range of diseases.

For example, most cancers occur in people with a vitamin D blood level between 10 and 40 ng/mL, and published data suggest a whopping 80 percent of breast cancer recurrences—four out of five—could be prevented simply by optimizing vitamin D and nothing else.

Continued on Page 12

Heartbreak: Devastating for Our Mind and Body

Heartbreak takes a toll, but research points to 6 ways to get through it



Breakups can have a profound impact on our well-being, but we can take steps to recover.

JILL SUTTIE

Heartbreak is inevitable. Romances end, loved ones die, friends let us down. These experiences might be universal, but their impact can still be devastating.

That's what science journalist Florence Williams discovered after her husband of 25 years unexpectedly asked for a divorce. William found herself in a daze, shocked and miserable, and even ill.

"Physically, I felt like my body had been plugged into a faulty electrical socket," she writes. "In addition to weight loss, I'd stopped

Heat has been found to soothe the pain of loneliness, and it is also associated with 'warmer' social interactions.

sleeping. I was getting sick. My pancreas wasn't working right. It was hard to think straight."

To help understand what was happening to her, she turned away from self-help book advice—such as "learn to love yourself first" or "beware of rebound relationships"—and instead looked to science. The result is her book, "Heartbreak"—part memoir, part exploration into the science and practice of healing from heartbreak—which offers hope and guidance to anyone who's experienced heartbreak themselves.

Continued on Page 15

THE EPOCH TIMES

The Book You've Been Waiting For ... **"An eye-opening and sobering read on where we find ourselves today and how we arrived here."**

— B. Miller

HOW THE SPECTER OF COMMUNISM IS RULING OUR WORLD

The specter of communism did not disappear with the disintegration of the Communist Party in Eastern Europe

"Makes a very clear case against communism and explains how it rules every aspect of life worldwide. A must read if you want to understand the world we live in."

— Jason E.



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Beans, Microbes, and Immunity

Your gut microbiome influences immune function—and beans keep it healthy

JOEL FUHRMAN

Beans, lentils, and split peas are rich in fiber, resistant starch, and plant protein, and they are a low-glycemic carbohydrate source. The health benefits of these legumes sometimes get overlooked, but adding beans to your diet promotes weight loss, cardiovascular health, and insulin sensitivity.

The Microbiome in Action

The human microbiome is a complex collection of bacteria, viruses, fungi, and other microorganisms that inhabit body surfaces, including the skin and digestive tract. The majority of the microbiome lives in the gut, where there are more than 1000 different species of bacteria.

The health benefits of these legumes sometimes get overlooked, but adding beans to your diet promotes weight loss, cardiovascular health, and insulin sensitivity.

The trillions of organisms in the gut microbiome are busy: They produce vitamins, such as K2 and B12, help develop immunity, enhance the benefits of some phytochemicals, and protect against pathogens. The bacteria of the microbiome convert dietary fiber and resistant starch from plant foods into short-chain fatty acids (SCFA) that protect intestinal cells and regulate metabolism. The gut microbiome can even be considered an organ of the human body; without it, the body would not function properly.

The intestinal mucosal immune system is a large and important part of the whole human immune system, and the microbiome is closely connected with intestinal immunity. The microbiome modulates the activity of immune cells, counteracts inflammation, and maintains the integrity of the intestinal barrier. This means we count on a healthy gut for a powerful immune response.

What Makes Beans Special?

Beans, lentils, split peas, and other legumes are rich in fiber and resistant starch, carbohydrates that can't be broken down by human digestive enzymes.

The bacteria that reside in the large intestine depend on "microbiota-accessible carbohydrates," also known as

prebiotics, to survive; prebiotics are food for gut bacteria. Without enough prebiotics in our diet, gut bacteria begin to consume an alternative energy source: the first line of our immune defense on the surface of the intestinal lining. This intestinal lining is made up of molecules called mucins.

All plant foods contain some prebiotics, but beans are special because they are very high in resistant starch, making them especially rich in prebiotics. Not all indigestible plant carbohydrates act as prebiotics, but resistant starch from beans provides large amounts of prebiotics. Prebiotics nourish the microbiome and allow for the production of SCFAs.

So the fiber and resistant starches from beans are waiting in our digestive tract and full of microbiota-accessible carbohydrates. To sum it up, we eat beans because they nourish our microbiome and promote the production of short-chain fatty acids. SCFAs help kick our immune system into gear.

Short-Chain Fatty Acids

Diet plays a large role in determining what kinds of microbiota live in the colon. Prebiotic fiber and resistant starch can only be broken down and fermented by enzymes from microbiota living in the colon. SCFAs are released as a result of this fermentation.

Growing research on SCFAs explores their wide-ranging effects on health, including stimulating immune cell activity and maintaining normal blood levels of glucose and cholesterol.

The production of SCFAs is an essential part of the microbiome's effects on immune function. SCFAs both have anti-inflammatory effects and promote integrity of the intestinal epithelial barrier. This barrier helps to prevent pathogenic bacteria in the gastrointestinal tract from causing an infection.

When we eat fiber- and resistant starch-rich foods, we support the growth and development of a healthy microbiome.

Legumes to Try

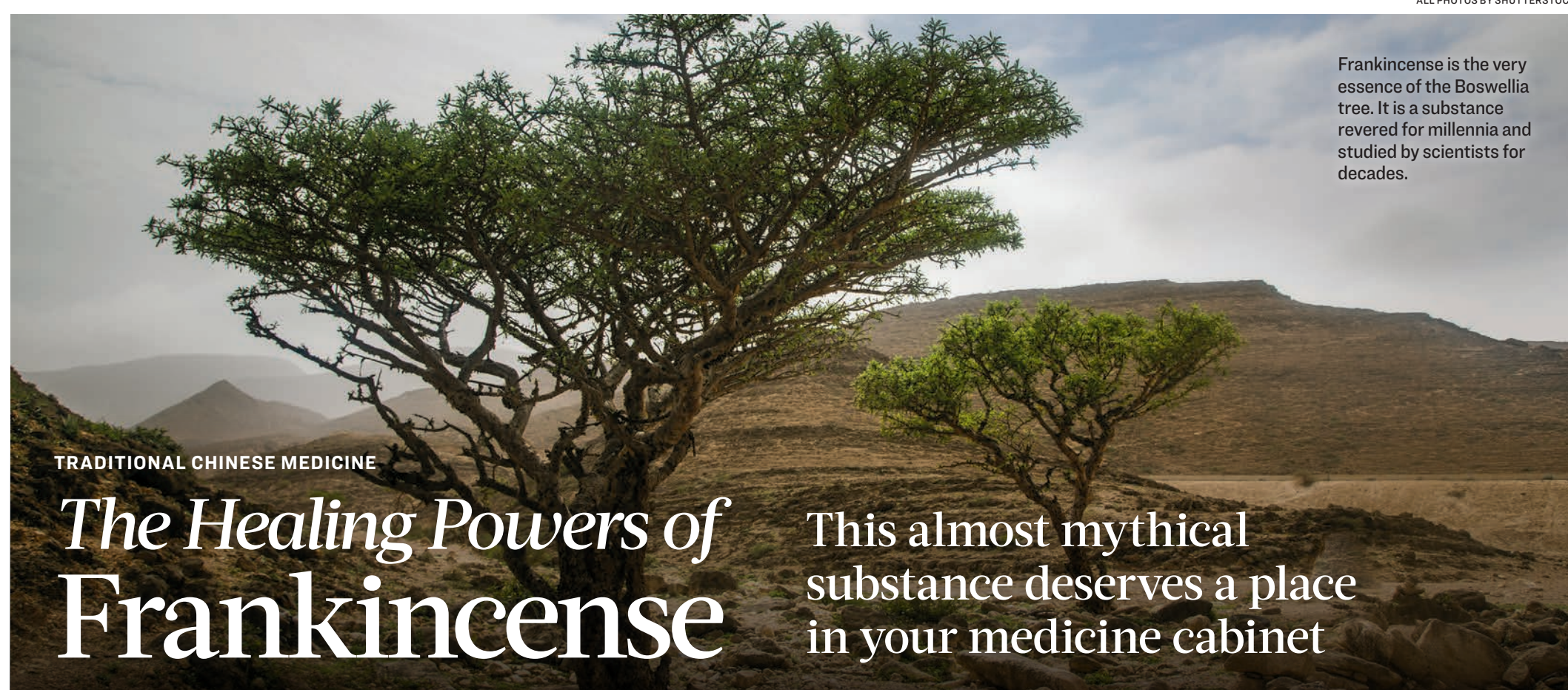
There are so many beans and other legumes you can eat and so many ways you can eat them. An incomplete list in alphabetical order includes adzuki beans, black beans, cannellini, chickpeas, edamame, green split peas, kidney beans, lentils, navy beans, and pinto beans.

Joel Fuhrman, M.D. is a board-certified family physician, seven-time New York Times best-selling author and internationally recognized expert on nutrition and natural healing. He specializes in preventing and reversing disease through nutritional methods.



Legumes have a special quality, a kind of fiber that feeds the microbes that fuel your immune system.

To find the studies mentioned in this article, please see the article online at TheEpochTimes.com



TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

The Healing Powers of Frankincense

This almost mythical substance deserves a place in your medicine cabinet

Frankincense is the very essence of the Boswellia tree. It is a substance revered for millennia and studied by scientists for decades.

EMMA SUTTIE

Frankincense, a popular essential oil, has been revered for millennia for religious, medicinal, and beautification purposes. A literal testament to its value comes from the Bible, where many know it as one of the three gifts the wise men brought to the birth of Jesus.

Frankincense comes from the Boswellia tree, which is native to Africa, much of the Middle East, parts of India, and Pakistan. An incision is made in the trunk of the Boswellia tree, which exudes a milky sap that hardens upon contact with the air, turning it into a resin. The resin also can be steam-distilled, producing a fragrant essential oil.

Frankincense Throughout History

The ancient Egyptians used frankincense resin as incense in religious rituals and for beautification by charring it and grinding it into a powder for eyeliner and tattoos. The Egyptian Ebers Papyrus, dated to 1500 B.C., prescribes frankincense resin for throat infections and asthma attacks.

The Iranian physician Avicenna (980-1037) recommended frankincense for tumors, ulcers, and fevers in his ancient medical texts.

There are earlier medicinal references to frankincense in the Chinese herbal manuscript, the Ming Yi Bie Lu, in the 6th century.

Several mentions of frankincense are found in both the Old and New Testaments of the Judeo-Christian bible, sometimes in regard to its use as an offering, and other times as a metaphor for what it means to endure without grievance.

Frankincense also had various uses in everyday life. Melted incense resin was used to repair pots and jars, creating a watertight seal, and the bark of the Boswellia tree made dye for cotton and leather clothing.

Frankincense in Chinese Medicine

In Chinese medicine, frankincense is the herb ru xiang and has been used medicinally for thousands of years. It has pungent, bitter, and warming properties and works specifically on the liver, heart, and spleen. Frankincense is in a class of herbs that move blood, strongly stimulating blood flow.

In the Eastern view, many health problems are caused by a "stagnation" or blockage of

either qi (energy) or blood flow. When qi and blood are flowing freely in our bodies, the system is balanced, and we are healthy. But, when there is a blockage in this flow, problems arise. Pain is one example. Pain is a symptom of a blockage or "stagnation" of the qi or blood flow. Frankincense is often prescribed for pain because of its strong blood-moving properties and ability to break up stagnation.

Tumors, cysts, and other masses are considered accumulations of blood in Chinese medicine. The thinking is that if the blockage goes untreated for long enough, it will accumulate into a mass or tumor. Because of its powerful blood-moving actions, ru xiang is used to treat tumors and other masses. A lot of scientific research is being dedicated to its cytotoxic, anti-tumor effects.

Frankincense and Cancer

Research has been affirming frankincense and its potential effectiveness against cancer. In one study published in BMC Complementary Medicine and Therapies, frankincense essential oil induced cell death in human pancreatic cancer cells. This research is hopeful as it might offer a more natural alternative to chemotherapy and radiation therapy for pancreatic cancer, an often aggressive cancer with a poor prognosis. In a research review published in 2016, researchers noted that the boswellic acids of frankincense have an antiproliferative effect on tumors.

"They inhibit proliferation of tumor cells of the leukaemia and glioblastoma subset. They have an anti-tumour effect since they inhibit topoisomerase I and II-alpha and stimulate programmed cell death (apoptosis)," they wrote.

Contraindications

Frankincense shouldn't be used in pregnancy and should be used with caution for those with digestive problems because of its strong moving actions and potential toxicity. For these reasons, long-term use isn't recommended.

As an additional warning, if you are considering taking frankincense internally, be sure that you are using a 100-percent pure oil that is labeled for internal use and not an aromatic or scented oil, and do so under the supervision of a health care professional.



It's known as the king of oils because it benefits every system in the body.

Frankincense's Everyday Uses

Frankincense is an incredibly versatile oil with many practical uses. You can use the oil topically on the skin, or put a few drops in a carrier oil such as coconut, jojoba, almond, or avocado for pain or inflammation. To reap its beneficial effects, you can also add a few drops to an essential oil diffuser or vaporizer.

Frankincense and Health

Frankincense has antiseptic, astringent, anti-inflammatory, disinfectant, digestive, diuretic, and expectorant properties. It's known as the king of oils because it benefits every system in the body. It strengthens the immune system and helps to absorb nutrients. Frankincense helps healthy cell regeneration and keeps existing cells and tissues at optimum levels, giving it a wide variety of applications in medicine to treat a multitude of conditions.

A lot of scientific research is being dedicated to its cytotoxic, anti-tumor effects.

Here are some ways you can use frankincense essential oil at home.

Stress

A few drops of frankincense essential oil in the bath will calm the nervous system and help you relax, making it a great thing to do right before bed to ensure a restful, rejuvenating sleep. This aspect of frankincense also has been studied by researchers. In one study on rats published in the Journal of Oleo Science in 2019, researchers declared, "Frankincense essential oil can counter the effects of stress by effectively relieving sleep debt and maintaining antioxidant capacity without increasing oxidative stress, and, therefore, may be beneficial in the management of stress."

Skin Conditions

Known for its ability to treat skin conditions and heal wounds, frankincense is also an astringent and helps protect skin cells. It reduces acne and the size of pores, heals blemishes, prevents wrinkles, and lifts and tightens skin naturally. You can use it topically anywhere you have loose skin (six drops to an ounce of carrier oil on the skin). Frankincense also strengthens gums and hair roots, stops bleeding

from wounds on the skin, speeds healing of cuts, acne, insect bites, and boils.

Oral Hygiene

Frankincense prevents tooth decay, cavities, bad breath, as well as oral infections. Research published in the Journal of Ethnopharmacology in 2018 found that "The antimicrobial properties of essential oil derived from frankincense, a compound with well-known traditional use, showed that it possesses a clear potential as a natural antimicrobial agent." It also helps to strengthen gums. You can add a drop of Frankincense oil to your toothpaste to help improve oral health.

Anti-Inflammatory

Research has shown that frankincense reduces inflammation, in particular helping to inhibit the breakdown of cartilage and painful swelling associated with both osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.

Pain Killer

You can use frankincense oil directly on the skin or with a carrier oil such as coconut or jojoba for pain relief because of its blood-moving, as well as anti-inflammatory, properties.

Colds and Respiratory Health

Frankincense breaks up phlegm in the respiratory tract and the lungs, relieves congestion, and eases bronchitis. Add a few drops of the essential oil to a diffuser or vaporizer to clear the respiratory tract. Diffusing frankincense will also deodorize and disinfect your home of germs, bacteria, and viruses.

As you can see, frankincense has many health benefits. The fact that so many cultures have been using it for centuries is a testament to its healing prowess. When using essential oils externally, always ensure that you are getting high-quality, organic oils. They are very concentrated, so a drop or two goes a long way. If you are interested in using frankincense internally, be sure to do so under the supervision of a health care practitioner. Frankincense is a wonderful addition to your life and your home and is yet another example of how nature can heal us, body, mind, and spirit.

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

'Low-Value' Medical Tests and Procedures

Outdated practices, billing incentives, and patient demand drive ineffective care

MAT LECOMPTE

At what point does the best quality care lose its value?

That's a question a new report by the American Heart Association (AHA) has attempted to answer. These days, there are several diagnostic tests and procedures that can offer plenty of information to both patients and doctors. But are they worth it?

Just because humans can do something doesn't necessarily mean they should. And the AHA report states that Americans are receiving too many heart tests and treatments that don't really do anything.

And all of these potentially useless tests can lead to plenty of stress, a loss of time, money spent, and more invasive testing that compounds the stress, time, and money.

"Low-value" medical care is a longstanding issue. AHA data suggest that about half of Americans will receive at least one of these tests or procedures every year. They also account for about 30 percent of annual

'Low-value' medical care is a longstanding issue.

health care spending in the country.

Low-value tests and procedures span various fields, but when it comes to heart procedures, the AHA identifies three tests in particular: annual stress tests for people who have had angioplasty or surgery to clear blocked arteries, echocardiograms to assess people who have fainted but show no

signs or symptoms of heart problems, and coronary calcium tests for people already known to have heart disease.

So, what can you do? You can ask your doctor why you needed these tests. And it's not that these tests are inherently low-value. However, they aren't necessary for certain cohorts.

Why do doctors keep doing them? There are a few reasons. One is that doctors continue to apply outdated best practices. These tests may have seemed great 15 years ago, but new data gathered since then show otherwise.

Financial motives may be in play as well. More testing means more services to charge patients for.

Lastly, patients can also play a role. Sometimes they demand unnecessary tests or treatments, and their caregiver obliges.



There are many tests your doctor can do, but sometimes all these tests do is cost money and create stress.

In any event, it's a good idea to educate yourself about what specific tests are for and if you need one. Talk to your doctor and ask their opinion, and, of course, why you may need a particular assessment or treatment.

Mat Lecompte is a freelance health and wellness journalist. This article was first published on Bel Marra Health.

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THE EPOCH TIMES

8 Important Health Screens Commonly Overlooked

Getting these tests done can tell you much about your health and risk of disease



Continued from Page 9

For optimal health and disease prevention, a level between 60 and 80 ng/mL (150 to 200 nm/L) appears to be ideal. While the American Medical Association claims that 20 ng/mL is sufficient, research suggests that 20 ng/mL is barely adequate for the prevention of osteomalacia and clearly far too low for other disease prevention or improvement.

When it comes to dosage, you need to take whatever dose is required to get you into the optimal range, with 40 ng/mL being the low-end cutoff for sufficiency. Research suggests that it would require 9,600 IUs of vitamin D per day to get 97.5 percent of the population to reach 40 ng/mL, but there's a wide variance in individual requirements. If you've been getting regular sun exposure, have eaten vitamin D-rich foods, such as beef liver, mushrooms, and organic free-range egg yolks; and/or taken a certain amount of vitamin D3 for a number of months and retesting reveals that you're still not within the recommended range, then you know you need to increase your dosage.

Over time, with continued testing, you'll find your individual sweet spot and have a good idea of how much you need to take to maintain a year-round level of 40 to 60 ng/mL. GrassrootsHealth offers vitamin D testing at a great value through its D*Action study, and it has an online vitamin D calculator you can use to estimate your vitamin D3 dosage once you know your current serum level.

NO. 2 Omega-3 Index

Like vitamin D, your omega-3 level is also a powerful predictor of your all-cause mortality risk and plays a vital role in overall health, especially your heart and brain health.

Recent research funded by the National Institutes of Health found that having a higher omega-3 index was associated with a lower risk for cardiovascular events, coronary heart disease events, and strokes. Omega-3 also helps improve pain reduction, especially when combined with vitamin D.

(Omega-3 fats are precursors to mediators of inflammation called prostaglandins, which is, in part, how they help reduce pain. Anti-inflammatory painkillers also work by manipulating prostaglandins.)

The omega-3 index is a blood test that measures two of the most significant omega-3 fatty acids: eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). Your index is the amount of EPA and DHA omega-3 fatty acids in your red blood cell (RBC) membranes and is expressed as a percent of your total RBC fatty acids.

The omega-3 index reflects your tissue levels of EPA and DHA and has been validated as a stable, long-term marker of your omega-3 status. An omega-3 index of more than 8 percent is associated with the lowest risk of death from heart disease. An index of less than 4 percent puts you at the highest risk of heart disease-related mortality. If you're index is less than 8 percent, increase your omega-3 intake and retest in three to six months.

You can save money by getting the combined vitamin D and omega-3 index testing kit, offered by GrassrootsHealth as part of its consumer-sponsored research.

Your best sources of animal-based ome-

ga-3 are small, cold-water fatty fish, such as anchovies, herring, and sardines. Wild Alaskan salmon is another good source that's low in mercury and other environmental toxins. These fish are also a decent source of vitamin D, making them doubly beneficial.

If you're not eating these foods on a regular basis, your alternatives include fish oil and krill oil. Krill is my preferred choice, as it contains DHA and EPA in a form that's less prone to oxidation. The fatty acids in krill oil are also bound to phospholipids, which allow the DHA and EPA to travel efficiently into your hepatic system; hence they're more bioavailable. Studies have shown that krill oil may be 48 times more potent than fish oil.

NO. 3 Fasting Insulin

Insulin resistance is a driving factor for virtually all chronic disease, making fasting insulin testing a really important health screen. Any meal high in grain and sugar carbs typically generates a rapid rise in your blood glucose. To compensate, your pancreas secretes insulin into your bloodstream, which lowers your blood sugar.

If you didn't have insulin to do this, you would go into a hyperglycemic coma and die. However, insulin will also catalyze the conversion of excess sugar into fat cells.

Typically, the more insulin you make, the fatter you become. If you consistently consume a high-sugar, high-grain diet, your blood glucose level will be correspondingly high and, over time, your body becomes desensitized to insulin, requiring more and more insulin to get the job done.

Eventually, you become insulin resistant and prone to weight gain, then prediabetic, and then you enter full-blown diabetes. Prediabetes is defined as an elevation in blood glucose of more than 100 mg/dL, but lower than 125 mg/dL, at which point it formally becomes Type 2 diabetes.

However, any fasting blood sugar regularly of more than 90 mg/dL is really suggestive of insulin resistance, and the seminal work of the late Dr. Joseph Kraft, considered the father of the insulin assay, has suggested that 80 percent—or eight out of 10—Americans are insulin resistant. Although he recommended an oral glucose tolerance test, which also measures insulin, this is a far more challenging test, and for most people, a fasting insulin test will suffice.

The fasting blood insulin test is far better than a fasting glucose test, as it reflects how healthy your blood glucose levels are over time. It's important to realize it's possible to have low fasting glucose, but still have a significantly elevated insulin level. And yes, it must be fasting for at least eight hours, otherwise the results are nearly meaningless.

A normal fasting blood insulin level is below five, but ideally, you'll want it below three. If your insulin level is more than three to five, the most effective way to improve it is to reduce or eliminate all forms of dietary sugar. Intermittent fasting, partial fasting, and/or water fasting are also effective, and intermittent fasting combined with a ketogenic diet appears to be the most aggressively effective of all.

NO. 4 Serum Ferritin

A ferritin test is a laboratory blood test that measures the amount of ferritin in your

One of the most important tests you can get to determine your heart disease risk is the NMR LipoProfile, which measures your low density lipoprotein (LDL) particle number.



If you're not getting enough sunlight on your skin, you may be deficient in vitamin D.



Eating magnesium-rich may not be enough because soils are depleted of this nutrient.

To find the studies mentioned in this article, please see the article online at TheEpochTimes.com

blood. Ferritin is the major iron storage protein in your body, so the ferritin test is ordered as an indirect way to measure the iron stores in your body.

For adults, I strongly recommend getting a serum ferritin test on an annual basis, as iron overload can be every bit as dangerous as vitamin D deficiency. While iron is necessary for biological function, when you get too much, it can do tremendous harm by increasing oxidative stress.

When iron reacts with hydrogen peroxide, typically in your mitochondria, dangerous hydroxyl free radicals are formed. These are among the most damaging free radicals known, and they're highly reactive and can damage DNA, cell membranes, and proteins. They contribute to mitochondrial dysfunction, which in turn is at the heart of most chronic degenerative diseases.

Unfortunately, the first thing people think about when they hear "iron" is anemia, or iron deficiency, not realizing that iron overload is actually a more common and far more dangerous problem.

Virtually all adult men and postmenopausal women are at risk for iron overload, since they don't lose blood on a regular basis and since humans aren't at all designed to excrete excess iron—it's simply stored for a rainy day when you might need extra iron from some type of trauma resulting in blood loss.

There's also an inherited disease, hemochromatosis, that causes your body to accumulate excessive and dangerously damaging levels of iron. If left untreated, high iron can contribute to cancer, heart disease, diabetes, neurodegenerative diseases, and many other health problems, including gouty arthritis.

As with many other lab tests, the "normal" range for serum ferritin is far from ideal. A level of 200 to 300 ng/mL falls within the normal range for women and men, respectively. But if you're in this range, know that you're virtually guaranteed to develop some sort of health problem.

An ideal level for adult men and nonmenstruating women is actually somewhere between 30 and 40 ng/mL (you don't want to be below 20 ng/mL or much above 40 ng/mL). The most commonly used threshold for iron deficiency in clinical studies is less than 10 ng/mL.

You may also consider doing a gamma-glutamyl transpeptidase (sometimes called gamma-glutamyltransferase or GGT) test. GGT is a liver enzyme correlated with iron toxicity and all-cause mortality. Not only will the GGT test tell you if you have liver damage, but it's also an excellent marker for excess free iron and is a great indicator of your sudden cardiac death risk.

In recent years, scientists have discovered GGT is highly interactive with iron, and when serum ferritin and GGT are both high, you're at a significantly increased risk of chronic health problems, because then you have a combination of free iron, which is highly toxic, and iron storage to keep that toxicity going.

NO. 5 High-Sensitivity C-Reactive Protein (hs-CRP)

The hs-CRP Test is a highly sensitive test that measures a liver protein produced in response to inflammation in your body. Chronic inflammation is a hallmark of



Foods rich in omega-3 lower your risk for heart disease and strokes.



Paying for lab tests can save you money down the road.



A blood draw is required to test for various nutrients and levels.

most chronic diseases. The lower your level the better. The goal would be to be less than 0.7 mg/dL. I like to keep mine less than 0.2 mg/dL.

Conventional medicine will typically treat underlying inflammation with nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs or corticosteroids. Patients with normal cholesterol, but elevated CRP are also frequently prescribed a statin drug. None of these drug treatments address the underlying cause of the inflammation and can do more harm than good in the long run.

Eating a healthy diet low in added sugars and higher in healthy fats, optimizing your vitamin D and omega-3, lowering your insulin level, and exercising on a regular basis will all help to address chronic inflammation. Certain herbs and supplements can also be useful, including astaxanthin, boswellia, bromelain, ginger, resveratrol, evening primrose, and curcumin (found in turmeric or as a supplement).

One drug option that's both safe and effective is low-dose naltrexone. Naltrexone is an opiate antagonist, originally developed for the treatment of opioid addiction. However, when taken at very low doses, it triggers endorphin production, which helps boost immune function and has anti-inflammatory effects on the central nervous system.

NO. 6 RBC Magnesium

Magnesium deficiency is extremely common, and recent research shows that even subclinical deficiency can jeopardize your heart health. Magnesium is also important for brain health, detoxification, cellular health and function, energy production, regulation of insulin sensitivity, normal cell division, the optimization of your mitochondria, and much more.

Magnesium resides at the center of the chlorophyll molecule, so if you rarely eat fresh leafy greens, you're probably not getting much magnesium from your diet. Furthermore, while eating organic whole foods will help optimize your magnesium intake, it's still not a surefire way to ward off magnesium deficiency, as most soils have become severely depleted of nutrients, including magnesium.

Magnesium absorption is also dependent on having sufficient amounts of selenium, parathyroid hormone, and vitamins B6 and D, and it's hindered by excess ethanol, salt, coffee, and phosphoric acid in soda. Sweating, stress, lack of sleep, excessive menstruation, and certain drugs (especially diuretics and proton-pump inhibitors) also deplete your body of magnesium.

For these reasons, many experts recommend taking supplemental magnesium. The recommended dietary allowance for magnesium is 310 to 420 mg per day, depending on your age and sex, but many experts believe that you may need 600 to 900 mg per day.

Personally, I believe many may benefit from amounts as high as one to two grams (1,000 to 2,000 mg) of elemental magnesium per day in divided doses, as most have electromagnetic field exposures that simply can't be mitigated, and the extra magnesium may help lower the damage from that exposure.

However, the key to effectively using higher doses is to make sure you avoid loose bowels, as that will disrupt your gut microbiome, which would be highly counterproductive.

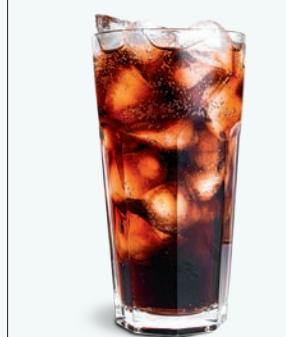
One of the best forms is magnesium threonate, as it appears to be the most efficient at penetrating cell membranes, including your mitochondria and blood-brain barrier. Another effective way to boost your magnesium level is to take Epsom salt (magnesium sulfate) baths, as the magnesium effectively absorbs through your skin.

I prepare a supersaturated solution of Epsom salts by dissolving seven tablespoons of the salt into six ounces of water and heating it until all of the salt has dissolved. I pour it into a dropper bottle and then apply it to my skin and rub fresh aloe leaves over it to dissolve it. This is an easy and inexpensive way to increase your magnesium and will allow you to get higher dosages into your body without having to

For adults, I strongly recommend getting a serum ferritin test on an annual basis, as iron overload can be every bit as dangerous as vitamin D deficiency.



Turmeric has powerful medicinal effects that can decrease inflammation and bring down C-reactive protein levels.



If you often eat foods with added sugar, you may be developing insulin resistance. A fasting insulin test can let you know.



Many people have too much iron in their blood due to overeating meat and iron-fortified processed foods.

2014 Rule Gave Patients Direct Access to Lab Results

While there are hundreds of blood tests and other health screens available, the eight reviewed in this article are, I believe, among the most valuable, arming you with vital information that you can then use to take proactive steps to protect and improve your health.

In case you've ever wondered if you can get your lab test results directly from the lab that conducted the testing, know that you do have that right. In 2014, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services issued a final rule that grants individuals (or a person designated by the patient) direct access to their laboratory test reports without having to have them sent to a physician first.

Clearly, doctors shouldn't have exclusive rights to information about your body, but prior to this rule, this wasn't a guarantee.

The final rule updated the Clinical Laboratory Improvement Amendments of 1988, allowing laboratories to give patients direct access to their lab results.

Even so, it's not always as simple as it should be to get your results without going through your doctor. Laboratories may require patients to make requests for lab results in writing, and they may charge you extra to mail or electronically deliver them.

Further, the rule states that most results must be made available to patients within 30 days of the completion of testing, so depending on the contentiousness of the lab, you may have to wait weeks to find out crucial health information. Most tend to be fairly quick, however.

deposits in arteries.

Oxidized LDL is more harmful than normal nonoxidized LDL because it's smaller and denser. This allows it to penetrate the lining of your arteries, where it stimulates plaque formation.

Some groups, such as the National Lipid Association, have started to shift the focus toward LDL particle number instead of total and LDL cholesterol, but it still hasn't hit the mainstream. Fortunately, if you know about it, you can take control of your health and either ask your doctor for this test or order it yourself.

There are several ways to test for your LDL particle number. The NMR LipoProfile is offered by a lab called Liposcience and is the test used in most scientific studies on LDL particles. If your LDL particle number is high, chances are that you have insulin and leptin resistance, as these are driving causes of high LDL particle numbers.

Endotoxins in your gut will also increase your LDL particle number, and thyroid dysfunction may be at play as well.

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



New guidelines are being weighed as statins come under greater scrutiny for side effects.

Approval Still out on Latest Statin Guidelines

Some doctors eye drug alternatives amid public hesitancy about statins

KRISTEN FISCHER

Statins have long been a controversial medication in the health world. While some studies say they're effective at reducing cholesterol and the risk of cardiovascular disease, others highlight the harms and adverse effects that can come with taking the drugs.

The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), which delivers recommendations on statin use, recently drafted guidance to update recommendations that were approved in 2016.

Some medical experts say the recommendations aren't rigorous enough, while others say the drugs benefit fewer people than some may think. All of the back and forth highlights newer treatments and the possible efficacy of lifestyle interventions.

The Latest USPSTF Standards

Currently, the USPSTF recommends that people should take a statin if they're high risk—that's between the ages of 40 to 75, with at least one cardiovascular disease (CVD) risk factor, and a 10 percent or greater 10-year risk for CVD. CVD risk factors include diabetes, hypertension, smoking, or high cholesterol.

The current recommendation released in 2016 divides statin recommendations based on the following grades:

B grade: People between 40 and 75 years of age who are at high risk should take a statin.

C grade: People between 40 and 75 years of age who are at increased risk, but not at high risk, may benefit from statins. They should talk with their clinician and decide together if taking a statin is right for them.

The USPSTF says more research is needed

“**In effect, we are using statins to cover up the effects of what we eat, instead of changing the food. It actually makes no sense.**”

Dr. Elizabeth Klodas, cardiologist

on whether people 76 years of age or older should take a statin to prevent a first heart attack or stroke.

“This new draft recommendation is consistent with the prior recommendation and reinforces that for some people, taking a statin can help prevent a first heart attack or stroke and prolong life,” USPSTF Vice Chair Dr. Carol Mangione told The Epoch Times.

The draft statement is open for comments through March 21. From there, the updated guidelines would have to be approved. The final recommendation statement is then published on the USPSTF website and published in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

Assessing Statins

Dr. Robert S. Danziger, a cardiologist and professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, told The Epoch Times that he agrees with the guidelines, as they're consistent with the American College of Cardiology (ACC) and American Heart Association (AHA) recommendations. However, that guidance is much more detailed on specific patient scenarios and statin recommendations, Danziger said.

“Statins are a cornerstone of lipid management and almost always lowers LDL [low-density lipoproteins],” he said.

Other medications or alcohol use can exacerbate adverse effects, according to Danziger.

“Statins are not for all because some people experience adverse (side) effects,” he said.

There are a variety of forms of lipid disorders (such as hypertriglyceridemia), for which statins aren't the optimal treatment, according to Danziger. Patients who don't respond positively to statins do have other options. Those with non-severe adverse ef-

fects can discontinue the medication and replace it with a modified dose, a different statin, or a combination of statin and non-statin therapy (known as a “statin re-challenge”).

People at risk for CVD who don't want to start a statin should give them a try.

“They are the most established treatment for hypercholesterolemia with elevated LDL,” he said.

Some patients undoubtedly benefit from taking statins, according to Danziger. This is true for patients with clinical atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease (ASCVD), those who have had a previous heart attack, those for a very high risk of ASCVD with severely high LDL-C over 190 mg/dL, and people aged 40 to 75 who have diabetes and LDL of greater than 70 mg/dL.

Statin Alternatives

Statins aren't the only option for lowering cholesterol, some doctors say.

“There are a variety of alternatives to statins and more are coming,” Danziger said.

Other drugs that lower LDL, which is the “bad” cholesterol, include bile acid sequestrants, ezetimibe, and PCSK9 (proprotein convertase subtilisin/kexin type 9) inhibitors.

A new PCSK9 inhibitor on the market is inclisiran (Leqvio), which is an injection taken every six months.

“It has a new mechanism which uses the RNA silencing mechanism (RISC) in liver cells to block the production of [PCSK9] enzyme,” Danziger said.

Lifestyle modifications can lower cholesterol, but not often to the level that most patients and doctors want to see.

Kevin C. Maki, an adjunct professor at the Indiana University Public School of Health, said the USPSTF guidelines may be too conservative. His interpretation of evidence aligns more closely with the ACC/AHA recommendations.

“Many who don't tolerate a particular statin or dose can tolerate a lower dose or another agent,” Maki said.

He advised taking other medications (such as ezetimibe, PCSK9 inhibitors, citrate lyase inhibitor, or bile acid sequestrants) in addition to lifestyle modifications.

Other alternatives are alirocumab, evolocumab, and inclisiran, but they're about \$450 per month, so they can be difficult for people to afford, according to Dr. Elizabeth Klodas, a cardiologist from Minnesota.

Klodas pointed out that the USPSTF recommendations are largely in line with the 2018 ACC/AHA cholesterol management guidelines, except that high-intensity statin use isn't specifically recommended for “high risk” individuals by USPSTF. ACC/AHA guidelines identify high-risk patients as those having a 20 percent or higher risk of a cardiovascular event in the next 10 years. USPSTF identifies “high risk” as anyone with 10 percent or more, she noted.

“One could definitely argue that intensity of statin therapy should go up with increasing risk—and I do think this is a potential problem,” Klodas told The Epoch Times. “In my own practice, I try to get to lower LDL goals with increasing levels of overall CVD risk.”

A Battle for Better Health

“However, the bigger concern is that neither USPSTF nor ACC/AHA address the real issue: High cholesterol is not caused by a deficiency of statins,” Klodas said. “High cholesterol is caused in part or in whole by a deficiency of the right foods. And unless you tackle the root cause of the health problem, you will never cure it.”

Klodas is also the chief medical officer and founder of Step One Foods, a line of foods designed to lower cholesterol.

“In effect, we are using statins to cover up the effects of what we eat, instead of changing the food. It actually makes no sense,” she said, noting that statins can benefit certain groups of people, such as those with a history of known coronary or vascular disease, diabetics, and people with familial hypercholesterolemia.

With many people hesitant to take statins, that means there are many people not doing anything to manage high cholesterol, according to Klodas.

“What we eat has a tremendous impact on cholesterol levels, with even small changes yielding medication-level LDL reductions in some,” she said.

Klodas recommended trying a food-based approach, even to those already on statins.

“Statin side effects are dose-dependent, and this may allow you to use lower medication doses to get to the same cholesterol goal,” she said. “Statins just lower cholesterol. They don't help you lose weight, improve your blood pressure readings, improve blood sugar control, or make you feel better.”

Kristen Fischer is a writer living in New Jersey.

Heartbreak: Devastating for Our Mind and Body

Heartbreak takes a toll, but research points to 6 ways to get through it

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By studying research, Williams found that heartbreak can be more harmful to our health than people typically think. Ironically, heartbreak does affect the heart, with one study finding that men and women aged 30 to 65 years old are at a significantly increased risk of having a heart attack within the first year after a romantic breakup—25 percent and 45 percent, respectively.

Williams also learned from neuroscientist Helen Fisher that parts of the brain linked to addiction and pain light up during heartbreak, and that this pattern is tied to obsessive, erratic behavior—such as thinking about the rejecting partner 85 percent of the time, showing up at an ex's workplace unexpectedly, and leaving long voicemails full of rage, despair, and passionate love.

People who are dumped go through a protest phase, Fisher told Williams, during which dopamine and norepinephrine flood their brains, making them act as if they are in a threatened state. That makes sense, as rejection taps into that part of us that recognizes we need others around us for safety and survival. But, as a heartbreak victim becomes more resigned, dopamine and serotonin levels drop, which can lead to depressive symptoms.

With all of this discouraging news, Williams was determined to figure out how to move through heartbreak more quickly and come out the other side of it.

“Why was heartbreak so hard to get over?” she wrote. “If I learned the answers, maybe I could speed it up and feel better.”

Here are some tips that helped her through her own heartbreak.

1. Don't Take Rejection Personally

“When we feel unloved by key people in our lives, we easily assume we are unlovable,” Williams wrote. While it's important to understand our role in a breakup, we shouldn't feel responsible for our rejection, nor take it as a blanket evaluation of our unworthiness.

It's possible to gain some perspective and remind ourselves of who we are at heart, which helps lessen the sting of rejection. One way is through expressive writing, which has been shown to help people manage painful experiences better and find some peace or meaning.

WISE HABITS

The Joy of Letting Go

Our attachments can fuel our suffering—until we let them go

LEO BABAUTA

A surprising number of our daily struggles stem from our attachments, such as overeating, or procrastination. In other words, if we take a closer look, we can see that the challenge we are dealing with is something we are actively enforcing. That also means it is something we can let go.

Overeating. There's nothing wrong with eating, but when we eat out of the habit of comforting ourselves or don't know when to stop, it can lead to feeling bad or declining health. The attachments to comforting ourselves with food, to tasting certain foods every day, or to finishing everything on our plate—even if we've already had enough—fuels overeating.

Overworking. If we're working too much, there might be an attachment to getting as much done as possible, maybe to feel like we're good enough. Or maybe the attachment is to showing others how good we are.



Finding a meaningful way to help others is a healthy way to cope with heartbreak.

ing from them. Creating a narrative, in which you are at the center of the story (and not just a casualty), can help diminish the link between heartbreak and later psychological problems—perhaps because it decreases rumination and gives us a sense of agency.

2. Reduce Stress

As Williams discovered, heartbreak puts you in a hyper-alert state, which wreaks havoc with your brain and body, especially if it becomes chronic. To counteract that, you need to find ways to reduce stress, whether that means trying meditation (which Williams found less than helpful) or taking regular walks in the woods (more up her alley).

One good reason to reduce stress is that it can open you up to other avenues of thinking that might help you through the heartache.

“When we calm down, the real healing can happen: the emotional growth, cognitive insights, planning for the future, and the ability to connect with other people in reciprocal, meaningful ways,” she wrote.

3. Soothe the Pain

As the pain of heartbreak affects the same parts of the brain as physical pain, things that reduce physical pain can help. For example, loving touch can be a good thing for reducing pain and also has been shown to reduce the pain of rejection.

One interesting idea Williams tried was applying heat to her body, by taking hot baths, using a hot water bottle in her cold bed at night, and drinking warm beverages. Heat, which has been found to soothe the pain of loneliness, also is associated with “warmer” social interactions.

“One doesn't typically read this in breakup manuals, but now the science is in: Seek heat,” she wrote.

4. Turn Toward Supportive Social Contact

Loneliness is a hallmark of heartbreak. Af-



Once we see the attachment, it may require persistent practice before we let it go.

Putting things off. Procrastination can have any number of causes. Some possibilities include attachment to perfection or getting a particular outcome that makes us feel good about ourselves or safe. Or maybe it is an attachment to control and we delay doing things we are uncertain about.

Frustrations with other people. The attachment here might be to having people behave the way we want them to, or to having them be happy with us. We may be attached to expectations about how they should be.

Feeling overwhelmed. We might have an attachment to a feeling of order, simplicity, or knowing exactly what to do.

ter all, a major source of companionship has ended, and you can no longer count on that person's presence to provide social connection and care.

On the flip side, research shows that positive social connection reduces stress and improves health—something Williams needed at that very difficult time in her life.

At one point in her book, she describes going on a long river-rafting trip along the Green River, which turns out to be good when she's in the company of others, but not so good when she makes a solo trip. Being alone for long stretches on a dangerous river, while challenging and confidence-boosting, also made her hypervigilant and gave her too much time to ruminate.

“I came here to embrace being alone—or at least to face it—but the fact is I liked having other people around,” she says. “Relying at times on a kind someone—or a close group of kind others—has always been our cellular superfuel.”

5. Practice Awe

When we experience awe, we not only feel happier, we also have a sense of ourselves as part of something bigger than us. It can help us be more creative and even improve our immune system. The perspective and creative problem-solving that comes with experiences of awe, argues Williams, can be good for heartache.

One way to find awe is by tuning into beauty. For Williams, a nature enthusiast, that meant spending time in natural settings. Staring at sunsets, looking closely at the intricacies of flowers, or doing a full-on wilderness retreat helped shift her mind away from personal suffering to a more positive, outward focus.

“It's possible that awe can help us swerve toward becoming more helpful, purposeful, and resilient, or toward any other goal,” she wrote.

6. Find Purpose

Helping others, doing meaningful work, creating community—all of these can bring a sense of purpose, which is good for our mental well-being, Williams wrote. She talks with researcher Steven Cole, who studies how emotions affect our gene expression. He says volunteering is one of the best interventions to prevent the negative effects of loneliness on our genes.

“If we can muster some optimism about the state of the world, and even better, if we feel we are actively contributing to its improvement, our genes will thank us,” Williams wrote.

Beyond these, Williams offers many prescriptions for shifting out of heartbreak and trying to forge a new path—including working toward becoming more open to new experiences. While no one method is foolproof, put together, many of them helped her move through heartbreak better—even if it was never a straight line.

“I'd hoped through this long process, to find the terminus of pain,” she says. “Resolution doesn't come that easily. Most of the things I'd tried had helped, some hadn't. The best I could hope for now was distance, perspective, and the passage of time.”

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Addictions to social media. The attachment might be to a feeling of comfort, or maybe a feeling of being entertained. We may also be attached to the endless novelty of new content and the possibility of something new and surprising.

Clutter. If we have too much clutter, we might have attachments to the comforts and security of shopping and receiving packages in the mail, an attachment to possessions for emotional reasons, or it could be the attachments mentioned in “Putting things off” above.

Social anxiety. There are lots of reasons for social anxiety, but the attachment might be to having people view us a certain way, or a feeling of comfort or safety.

Just because a difficulty arises from an attachment, that doesn't in anyway imply it is an easy problem to deal with. Our attachments are a part of us, and sometimes we can't even distinguish between ourselves and the things we are attached to.

What would it be like to gently release what we're holding on to?

And that raises the questions, can we let go of our attachments? And if we can, what would it be like to gently release what we're holding on to? They answer to the first question is yes, and to the second is freedom. When I am facing an attachment, I try to practice a joyful letting go. Let's take a look at how that might go in practice.

A Joyful Letting Go

The first thing is to realize that our struggle comes from an attachment. Review the list above and see if any of them apply. It can be easy to point the finger in someone else's direction, or to feel bad about things. But what if we could simply notice where we're feeling attached to something?

Once we can see the attachment, we can practice with it, and see if we can release the attachment.

It might go something like this:

1. Breathe. Turn towards the present moment.
2. Let yourself feel the emotion associated with the attachment. Just be with it, mindfully, and feel it as sensation in the body.
3. Ask if the attachment is serving you.
4. Ask would it be like without the attachment?
5. Joyfully release the attachment like releasing your grip on a balloon. Let it float away. See if you can experience a few moments without the attachment, and see what that's like. What's available to you when you are free of the attachment?

Try it now. Is there something you've been frustrated about, avoiding, addicted to? Could you notice the attachment that you have and joyfully release it? What would that be like for you?

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Small Steps to a Simpler Life

These 8 tips can help you lighten your load and uplift your life

Mike Donghia

Don't be like me.

When I come across a good idea for my life, all I can think about is transforming myself all at once. It's great to be motivated, but the cost is that you begin to see the journey as an obstacle, instead of the precious gift that it is.

If you're just beginning to simplify your life, try taking it one small step at a time.

Enjoy the changes you're making and the progress you see.

Believe it or not, this is something you can teach yourself to do. For example, my wife and I have made a lot of progress with living simply with kids, but I still can't help but feel that there are always toys scattered across our house.

In the past, this would have driven me crazy. I wouldn't rest until I came up with a perfect plan to conquer the "toy problem" once and for all. But you know what? We actually have made progress in this area. And I know we'll keep making progress as we learn and try new methods. There's simply no reason to rush through the season we're in (and not enjoy it) just because I wish everything were perfect all at once.

Getting started with a simpler life is really as easy as taking one small step and seeing what you learn.

Want to try? Here are 8 small steps that have been particularly valuable to me and my family this past year. Just pick one and get started.

Declutter 100 items in 100 minutes. You don't need a master plan to start decluttering. Every item you remove from your home that you no longer need is a small victory and a step in a new direction. There's no wrong way to do it. But if you're looking for some structure, start with a simple formula to declutter 100 items from 10 areas of your home in under 100 minutes. Those areas can be your closet, pantry, bookshelf, kitchen, or garden shed. Got ten old cans of beans you'll never eat? Time to give them away.

Set a time limit on your favorite



Sometimes it just takes a few small changes to tilt the balance in your day-to-day living.

apps. Achieving a simpler life is sometimes as easy as adding friction in the right areas. I noticed that when I was bored, or switching between tasks, I was a little too quick to pick up my phone. The solution has proven to be simple but effective. I used my phone's built-in functionality to set daily time limits on the various apps I'm prone to overusing. Of course, I can easily turn those off, but just that small bit of friction is enough to slow me down and then decide how I really want to use my time.

Do a month of no spending. When I say no-spend month, what I really mean is no spending on nonessentials and keeping your essential spending as low as possible. Mollie and I are doing this now and learning a lot about our various impulses to spend and the conveniences we've begun to take for granted. A no-spend month is a simple way to reset your spending expectations back to a new baseline without having to commit to any permanent changes.

Create a meal plan for the next week. My wife has come up with a great system for

improving the experience and simplicity of meal planning in our home, in part by preparing in advance. But, if you were to take just one part of that plan to implement today, the biggest bang for your buck would come from setting aside one day each week to write down your meals for the next 7 days. This one little step, as straightforward as it sounds, simplifies so many other decisions around meals.

If you're just beginning to simplify your life, try taking it one small step at a time.

Do it now. This tip doesn't sound super practical, but hear me out—it's actually one of the most powerful tools on this list. How much of the complexity in our lives comes from the fact that we put off small things that later turn into a source of stress or frus-

tration? Instead, try asking yourself: What can I do now to make my life easier later? My wife got this "magic question" from Kendra Adachi's bestselling book, "The Lazy Genius Way." Once you've decided on the task, just do it right then. Maybe it's not that simple ... but maybe it can be.

Do one thing at a time. Choosing to focus on one thing at a time is perhaps the quickest way to simplify your entire life. Complexity comes from trying to carry too much at once or juggle multiple things at the same time. But anyone has the power to bring clarity to their world by deciding that the one thing they're doing right now will get their full attention. As you read this article, don't think about what you'll be doing next, just read. And when you're done, put all of your focus and energy into the next thing that you do. If taken seriously, this idea can completely change your life.

Get enough sleep and exercise. Maybe some people don't consider this to be simple living advice, but I find it hard to see it any other way. When you don't take care of yourself, particularly in the areas of sleep and exercise, it's like you are going through your entire life in "hard" mode. If you've been neglecting good sleep or daily exercise, it's probably the lowest-hanging fruit on this list to make your life feel simpler.

Start small. Am I allowed to use "start small" as an item on my list of small steps? Why not—it's my list, after all! The truth is, I end this list with the encouragement to start small because I know how tempted I am personally to "go big," and maybe you are too. If you're trying to create the biggest possible change all at once, then sure, go for it—try accomplishing every item on this list. But if your goal is to adopt a lifelong change, then the speed in your first few weeks doesn't matter nearly as much as finding the habits that you can stick with for the long run. Find a way to love the journey, not the destination.

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



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