

MIND & BODY

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Understanding the Skin You Are In

A closer look at skin and the vital role it plays in protecting us

Our skin is an impossible harmony of specialized cells working in an intricate synergy.

JACQUELYN WATERS

The skin is a formidable barrier with attributes far beyond the potential workings of scientists or chemists. It is strong but supple, it fixes itself when damaged, and it changes color to adjust to the climate.

The skin is more active than many people realize; it even synthesizes various compounds, including immunoglobulin A, an antibody important in immune defense systems.

It isn't just a covering, but plays diverse roles in the body—from helping to regulate body temperature to initiating the process of vitamin D production. The skin's absorptive property allows it to take in things from the environment, such as beneficial medicines or harmful toxins.

The dermis has many functions, but of particular importance is the role the dermis plays in regulating body temperature.

Studies have found that the body excretes toxins through the sweat glands, including phthalates, bioaccumulated toxic elements like cadmium and aluminum, and organochlorinated pesticides. The skin even has a secretion function to produce a layer of oil and acid that keeps it supple and protects it from outside invaders.

Our skin is an impossible harmony of specialized cells working in an intricate synergy. There are likely other functions of the skin we haven't even begun to understand. It's one of our most visible organs, yet few people know much about what skin looks like below the surface or how it functions.

What kinds of cells are found in the skin? What factors contribute to skin color? Why do blisters occur? What is psoriasis? Your skin can tell you a lot about your physical health and can reveal underlying medical

conditions, such as anemia, hepatitis, heart disease, and heavy metal poisoning.

A Quick Overview

The skin is part of the integumentary system, which also includes hair, nails, and certain exocrine glands, such as the sweat glands. It forms a physical barrier between the environment outside our body and our internal body structures, such as muscles, bones, and other organs.

The skin has to have strength and durability but must also be flexible and able to repair itself. Three layers work together to accomplish these goals: the epidermis, the dermis, and the hypodermis. Let's take a closer look at each layer and its specialized functions.

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**4
WEEKS**

This is how long it takes new keratinocytes to reach the surface of the skin and offer you a new covering of epidermal cells.

The Key to Defeating Procrastination-Induced Stress

When we procrastinate, we betray ourselves and lose self trust, but the cure is simple and small



MIKE DONGHIA

Procrastination is a pervasive human problem.

The more people I've talked to, the more I've realized that nearly every person struggles with it in certain areas or time periods of their life. There are very few exceptions.

For me, it's been a problem that I've struggled with since high school. Depending on how you look at it, I was either for-

tunate (or unfortunate) to be the kind of student that could wait until the very last minute to study for a test or write a paper and still do well. The thrill I experienced and the relative success that followed cemented a pattern of behavior that stuck with me for years.

Without the adrenaline rush of a tight deadline or a pressing challenge, I couldn't find the motivation to start.

This approach worked for a while, but as my responsibilities increased, I could

feel stress mounting in my life. I also had a growing sense that procrastination was robbing me of becoming the person I wanted to be.

I was still getting the job done, but I became increasingly worried about what would happen if I messed it all up—or worse, what people would think if they knew that behind the scenes I was such a procrastinator.

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Procrastination and Stress

I discovered that as I matured, procrastination had transitioned from a questionable time management strategy to the primary source of stress in my life.

Research supports what I was feeling: Procrastination contributes to both perceived stress and measurable increases in biomarkers that are prevalent under conditions of stress.

This happens for two powerful reasons:

Procrastination reduces your sense of personal autonomy. When you procrastinate, you're delaying the start of something you know you should be doing. By definition, you're fighting against yourself and losing the battle.

Do this enough times and slowly you begin to lose trust in yourself. Instead of having a strong, internal locus of control, you begin to feel that you are at the mercy of your emotions and impulses. Not feeling in control of a situation is a recipe for internal stress.

Procrastination pulls you away from the present moment. Being able to stay present in the moment you're in and savor what you're currently doing are two habits that are strongly correlated with positive day-to-day emotions.

Procrastination undermines these abilities by causing you to feel guilty when you aren't working and then regretful when you finally do get started. This combination leaves you susceptible to stress.

Stress Consumes Our Health

There was a time in college when I was studying abroad, that I attempted to (and succeeded in) doing the vast majority of a semester's assignments in a single week. It

was hard, exhausting, and stressful work.

It was no surprise when I came down with a nasty head cold at the end of the week.

We've all been there, right? After a stressful period at work or a string of bad sleep, your immune system is suppressed and you become ill. But have you ever stopped to consider the implications? If stress can cause that degree of harm that quickly, what's the impact of a lifetime of stress on other long-term health outcomes?

Well, the results aren't pretty. It turns out that long-term stress can indeed damage your health and influence the course of chronic disease. And the effect isn't just a small one. One particular meta-analysis of 228 studies shows that having a high-stress job raises the odds of having a physician-diagnosed illness by 35 percent.

I'm used to seeing this strong of a correlation in health studies about diet, exercise, and smoking cessation—lifestyle factors that have incredibly high evidence to back them up—but I had no idea stress could potentially be in the same league.

Turning Procrastination Into Motivation

Realizing that my health was at stake turned out to be just the motivator I needed to get serious about my procrastination problem.

Over the years, I've spent countless hours learning about the causes and cures for procrastination—often doing so while avoiding other more urgent work. I have come to the conclusion that there are many techniques that work in the short-term, but most don't lead to sustainable change.

The reason so many of them fail is that they treat procrastination as a time management or laziness problem. While it may have components of those, it is at its heart a problem of emotional regulation. You don't

When people sense that they're making progress, no matter how small, they feel empowered and motivated to continue.

DONE IS BETTER THAN PERFECT

The right mindset can make it easier to maintain forward progress.

want to do something when you don't feel like doing it.

The solution is clear: You need to get your emotions working for you by making progress. It turns out that when you sense you're making progress, no matter how small, you feel empowered and motivated to continue. Even a small bit of progress increases your sense of control and brings you back to the present moment.

This is exactly the opposite of what happens when you procrastinate.

This might sound like circular reasoning: How can the solution to procrastination be as simple as making progress?

But the part that isn't intuitive is realizing that it really doesn't matter how small your progress is at first. Nearly any amount will begin the positive feedback loop that you need.

A wonderful book on this subject is "The Progress Principle" by Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer. The book is focused on how to increase engagement at work, but the lessons apply to any area of life.

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.

3 Steps to Progress

Don't be fooled by the simplicity of this idea. It works. In fact, it's the only thing that has ever moved the needle for me in a sustainable way.

The key is in the execution of the idea, not in being more complicated or sophisticated than other ideas you may have heard. I'll leave you with three pieces of advice that I've walked away with after many personal experiments:

Start smaller than you think.

When you are feeling behind the ball after a bout of procrastination, there's a temptation to go big and change your life all at once. Remember, the motivation you feel in this moment won't last. The key is to develop the muscle memory of action, not to make huge progress in one week.

Make it visual. Don't rely on your memory to do the thing you've committed to. Create a big, visual chart to track your progress. Best of all, you'll get a boost of motivation from checking your progress off each day and seeing how far you've come. These positive emotions are reinforcing the behavior you want to continue and counteracting the years of procrastination.

Don't have a 'zero' day. One of the most dangerous patterns of thought I see in procrastinators is one I call "throwing the baby out with the bath water." Maybe you had a bad morning, and now you feel thrown off course or discouraged, and you tell yourself that today is wasted and you'll just get started tomorrow. Avoid this line of thinking at all costs! Make progress today—no matter how small.

Don't allow a single day to pass with zero progress toward your goal, and by the end of a week or month, you will have a track record of progress you can feel proud of.

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Cooking for Healing: The Pungent Potency of Ginger

The incredible benefits of this long-revered herb can be enjoyed in several ways

SINA MCCULLOUGH

Herbs and spices were used by ancient cultures to heal the body, mind, and spirit. While the Western world has largely replaced these natural remedies with pharmaceuticals, roughly 80 percent of people worldwide still use traditional or ancient medicine. This isn't surprising considering that more than 80 percent of pharmaceuticals are derived or developed from natural products, including plants. In this series, we will explore the healing power of herbs and spices while learning how to incorporate these ancient remedies into our daily diet.

Did you know that ginger was used to ward off the plague in the Middle Ages? In fact, ginger was so highly revered, it was placed on the table like salt and pepper.

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale* Roscoe) is an herbaceous plant with annual leafy stems that has been used as an herbal medicine for over 5,000 years and a flavoring agent in food long before recorded history. It has been used by Chinese and Ayurvedic practitioners for at least 3,000 years for its anti-inflammatory properties. Ginger was also used by ancient Greeks and Romans for its medicinal properties.

Ginger was an important article of trade throughout history because of its medicinal and flavoring qualities. It was exported from India to the Roman Empire over 2,000 years ago. Even after the fall of the Roman Empire, ginger continued to be highly sought after. In fact, in the 13th and 14th



Ginger is a powerful herb with flavor that lends itself to several foods.



Humans have recognized ginger's effects and used it as an herbal medicine for at least 5,000 years.

centuries, one pound of ginger cost the same as one sheep.

Today, ginger is perhaps best known as a digestive tonic in ginger ales, as well as the essential ingredient in gingerbread men, which Queen Elizabeth I of England is credited with inventing.

Modern Science Catches Up to Ancient Wisdom

While the healing power of ginger has been harnessed among ancient cultures for thousands of years, modern medicine has been slow to recognize its benefits. However, the perception of ginger is changing as scientists have begun validating the wisdom of the ancients through studies that demonstrate numerous healing abilities, such as:

Protects the Heart

In a 2015 study, rats were supplemented with ginger for 28 days followed by induction of myocardial infarction i.e., heart attack. Compared with controls, the structural and functional integrity of the heart muscle was largely preserved in ginger supplemented rats. In fact, at higher doses of ginger, the heart tissue was reportedly almost "normal" even after the heart attack.

In addition, ginger supplementation resulted in an increase in antioxidant enzymes, which suggests that ginger may have prevented damage to the heart and improved the ability to defend against oxidative stress caused by the heart attack.

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Getting Beyond the Habit Honeymoon

Starting a new habit can be exciting, but how do you keep going once it's become tough and boring?

MOLLIE DONGHIA

Habits. It's the small decisions we make every hour of the day that predict how great or little our success, productivity, and focus can be.

I choose to wake up an hour before anyone else in my house so I can have peace and quiet to start my day. I track my daily exercise on a simple chart so that I can maintain a healthy, active lifestyle. We have a set time each day when the lights turn out in our kids' bedrooms so that my husband and I can have uninterrupted time for conversation and productivity.

My regular habits are the driving force that fuels me toward something greater—less stress, more intentionality with work, and greater overall well-being. I've learned how to perform certain habits regularly, not just because I've done them over and

over again, but because of the results those actions deliver.

When we develop healthy habits (particularly in the categories of exercise, diet, and sleep), we're able to create and sustain a healthier lifestyle, which has been a personal motivator for me.

Even though I've developed a bank of healthy habits that I do regularly, I've found that beginning a new habit isn't the hard part—maintaining it is.

Habits often have a 21-day honeymoon period. This is when the habit is fresh, we've never missed it, and we are excited about realizing our goal.

But then life happens, challenges arise, motivation dwindles, and the honeymoon stage ends—leaving us uncertain whether we can stick to our new habit.

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Habits are the automatic activities that keep us productive and healthy without too much thinking. They can keep us on track even when we aren't motivated.

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Model Contentment for Your Kids Today

6 practical ways you can show your children how to be satisfied

JOSHUA BECKER

“How do I keep my kids from always wanting more stuff?”

I’ve been asked this question countless times. And understandably so. In fact, I often find myself asking the same question.

It’s a hard one to answer—mostly because the answer includes something we don’t always like to think about: our own actions.

But the simple truth is this: We can’t expect our kids to stop constantly wanting new things until we ourselves stop constantly wanting new things. If we’re always chasing the latest and greatest new thing, our kids are going to do the same.

When we model contentment for them, however, our kids will learn it from us.

Our kids always take their cues from us. We hear it when they repeat a catchphrase or joke we use. Harder to see are the worries or desires kids acquire from their parents. We might be unable to see it, but our children pick up on our stress and our joy.

The same goes for contentment. Our kids can tell if we’re content or not. They hear our complaints, they see our unnecessary upgrades, and they take note of our gratitude. When we start to be content with what we have, our kids will notice and begin to be content as well.

In teaching about financial literacy, Sam X Renick reminds us: “If you want your children to develop good spending and saving habits, they need to see you making smart spending and saving choices. In short, practice what you preach.”

There are studies behind this advice. Behavior formation through modeling is so strong that researchers have been writing about it for years, and there’s even a theory based on the reality of imitating the behaviors of others.

Social learning theory states that we learn from the models of what others around us are doing. Learning takes place in a social con-

text, and we make changes in our knowledge or behavior based on the positive or negative experiences we witness in others’ behavior.

So, if we want kids who are content, pursuing a meaningful life of purpose, we must begin by modeling contentment ourselves.

Equally, we shouldn’t be surprised that our kids want stuff they don’t need when our homes are filled with stuff we don’t need—we’re modeling the behavior for them, and they’re fast learners.

Simply put, it’s hard to convince our kids they have too many toys in their toy room when we can’t park in our own garage.

When it comes to our children, life lessons are always caught more than taught. Fortunately, there are several ways we can model contentment for our children:

1. We can be content with our mode of transportation.

Whether we bike, walk, drive, or take public transportation, we can be grateful for the ability to get from here to there. Our car may not be the latest and greatest; our walk to work may mean we need to build more time into our routine; or the bus might sometimes be late.

But think about the purpose of your transportation, and be grateful that it gets you where you need to go. Voice that gratitude instead of your wishes for a different car.

2. We can be content with our food.

There are those who like variety in their meals, others who prefer the ease of repetition, and still others who have no choice.

Learn to be content with the food you have to nourish your body each day.

What’s the purpose of food? To sustain the body, to give us energy to tackle our purpose every day, and to share as a means of friendship or service. Whether it’s dinner with a flair or leftovers again, be grateful for the food you have.

3. We can be content with our entertainment and toys.

Recreation is a good thing. We need time to play and relax—time to connect with others over sports or games or movies.

Think through your choices of entertain-



When we start to be content with what we have, our kids will notice and begin to be content as well.

ment. Can you be content with a hike through the woods or a picnic at a local park, instead of front-row seats at the stadium?

There are times for extravagant trips and events, but if we’re always looking for the next big adventure, our children will learn that it’s more important to spend a lot of money than to spend time together. And be especially careful at displaying discontent when talking about someone else’s vacation.

4. We can be content with our exercise.

Another area where we can model contentment is in our opportunities to exercise the body.

Instead of adding one more machine to your home gym, lace up your running shoes and take your kid to the high school track for a few laps in the sun. Park your car farther away from the store, so everyday errands become a simple form of extra movement for your body.

See the limits on your resources as opportunities to get creative.

5. We can be content with our relationships.

Relationships are essential, and they take work.

Show your kids contentment by investing in the relationships you already have—even the tough ones.

Instead of going through relationships like some of us go through new sweaters, take time and energy for the relationships already in place. Voice your gratitude for those rela-

tionships so your kids can hear it.

6. We can be content with our possessions.

We can model contentment for our kids when we find contentment in our possessions, no matter how many or how few we may have.

Next time you want to buy an unnecessary item, ask yourself how you’d answer if your child asked, “Why did you buy that?”

In addition, model contentment with your possessions by practicing generosity. When your child sees you holding things lightly and giving freely to others, they learn that you’re not defined by your possessions.

Ultimately, as parents we have to accept the fact that our children will make their own choices. Embracing a life of contentment with fewer possessions, however, models for them the important truth that we aren’t defined by our possessions, our vehicles, or our gym memberships.

Celebrate with your kids what you already have, and teach them through your actions the values of both gratitude and contentment.

This is how we keep our kids from constantly wanting more stuff.

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



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