

THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND &

BODY

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TREATMENT

Vitamin D deficiencies are linked to muscle weakness, fatigue, and poor cognitive abilities.

65

PERCENT

A 2016 report found that women whose vitamin D levels were raised above 40 ng/ml had a more than 65 percent lower risk of cancer incidence.

HIGH-DOSE VITAMIN D

May Treat Incurable Diseases: Experts

The sunshine hormone reveals surprising effects on several diseases at doses far beyond official guidelines

By **MARINA ZHANG**



SUPPLEMENT

Vitamin D is more than an effective preventative vitamin, high doses have also been used as medicine.

BRIAN A. JACKSON/SHUTTERSTOCK

Vitamin D supplements are currently recommended at a dose of 600 international units (IU) per day by the National Institutes of Health, alongside a warning about the potentially toxic effects of taking more.

But for some people, supplementing with what would be seen as a very high dose of vitamin D every day may reap health ben-

efits rather than toxicities, experts suggest.

In 2019, board-certified internist Dr. Patrick McCullough published a report on the experiences of three patients who were taking high doses—20,000 to 60,000 IUs daily—of vitamin D for many years, all three of whom have since seen significant health improvements.

One patient started supplementing with vitamin D3 eight years be-

Vitamin D regulates immune cells, reduces inflammation, and activates immune cells.

fore the publication of the report and saw his asthma attacks decline from five or six severe exacerbations per year to only one serious exacerbation from 2011 to 2019.

He started at 10,000 IUs per day, and by the time of publication, he had stopped most of his asthma medication and was taking 30,000 IUs daily.

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Can the Nutrition Industry Be Trusted? New Report Says 'No'

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics denies it faces conflicts of interest due to funding from junk food makers

EMMA SUTTIE

A recently released report has found that a highly influential group representing about 100,000 dietitians, nutrition practitioners, and students who advise people on what foods to eat accepted millions of dollars in

contributions from ultra-processed food, pharmaceutical, and agribusiness companies.

The report finds that the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) and its corporate donors had a "symbiotic" relationship and that the group often acted as a pro-industry voice, with policy positions that conflicted with its mission to improve global health.

The study, published in Public Health Nutrition, is titled "The Corporate Capture of the Nutrition Pro-

fession in the USA: The Case of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics."

The Academy is largely dismissive of the report, claiming it's misleading, and categorically denies that corporate funding has any influence on its policies or positions.

"The Academy's procedures and formal agreements with external organizations are designed to prevent any undue corporate influence," it states.

Continued on Page 4



A recent report alleges the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is compromised by ultra-processed food corporations.



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TREATMENT

High-Dose Vitamin D May Treat Incurable Diseases: Experts



85%
REMISSION

Dr. Cicero Coimbra, author of the Coimbra Protocol, has treated more than 15,000 patients with autoimmune diseases. Among multiple sclerosis patients, he says nearly 85 percent went into remission.

ALL IMAGES BY SHUTTERSTOCK UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

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Another patient's ulcerated hand lesion, which was presumed to be a form of skin cancer, shrank after taking high doses.

One patient had extensive psoriasis across his scalp, forehead, and ears, and some on his chest, abdomen, elbows, and thighs. He was given 50,000 IUs of vitamin D2 and soon saw a dramatic improvement in his psoriasis. His skin cleared after a few months of treatment and he was able to stop using steroid creams and medicated shampoos.

Although the clinical improvements were impressive, the dosages these patients received—which would be considered potentially toxic—are particularly astounding.

Adequate Versus Optimal Dose

The current recommendations stem from a 2010 dietary reference by the Institute of Medicine (IOM).

The reference suggests a daily intake of 600 IUs to reach a serum level of 20 nanograms/milliliter (ng/ml) of vitamin D in the blood—an adequate amount. It set an upper tolerable limit of 4,000 IUs per day; any dosage higher than that would be considered a high dose.

Yet some experts believe that the current recommendations aren't sufficient for optimal health.

McCullough said that “the current doses recommended by the IOM are sub-physiologic,” meaning that they are below the natural needs of the body. McCullough proposed that 10,000 IUs a day is the adequate physiologic dose.

His claims have been echoed by other health care professionals.

Before the IOM's recommendations, experts from the Council for Responsible Nutrition suggested increasing the maximum daily limit to 10,000 IUs a day, after finding no toxicities in vitamin D clinical trials in which subjects were given dosages of 10,000 IUs and more.

In 2011, the Endocrine Society similarly said that up to 10,000 IUs per day was safe for adults.

The disparities in the dosage limits are caused by the different considerations in the potential health benefits of vitamin D.

The IOM's lower dosage recommendations were based mainly on the role of vitamin D in promoting bone health by enhancing calcium absorption. However, the Endocrine Society and other experts argue that vitamin D may also play important roles in other systems and organs, suggesting that the dosage be adjusted accordingly.

600 IUs May Not Be Enough for Overall Health

Board-certified internist and integrative physician Dr. Ana Mihalcea said that most of her patients need 10,000 IUs a day to reach optimal function with their cognition and energy levels.

Many of her patients came to her with fatigue, muscle weakness, and poor cognitive abilities, all of which may be linked to vitamin D deficiencies despite these patients' “adequate” levels of 20 ng/ml.

Once she boosted their serum levels to 70 ng/ml or more using supplements, some of them saw great improvements.

Optimal Dose Differs Among Patients

A surgeon and physician for more than 20 years, Dr. Joseph Bosiljevac likewise reports great variability in

optimal vitamin D serum levels among different patients.

He told The Epoch Times that some patients see great improvements once their levels hit 60 ng/ml, and he would deem them sufficient, but other patients may need 120 ng/ml or more.

Studies have shown that vitamin D toxicities may develop when serum vitamin D levels are above 150 ng/ml, though McCullough said he has seen some patients operate fine at more than 200 ng/ml.

High-Dose Vitamin D as Medicine

Doctors say people with certain pathologies may need more vitamin D than healthy people. Some people with incurable diseases have made a great recovery after being prescribed high-dose vitamin D.

The extra vitamin D can be used “as a medicine, not just a preventative vitamin,” Mihalcea said.

Research has indicated that sufficient vitamin D levels may reduce the risk of many conditions, from cardiovascular disease to allergies.

Autoimmune Disease

Autoimmune diseases occur when the body's immune system starts attacking healthy tissues. It's associated with inflammation.

Vitamin D regulates immune cells, reduces inflammation, and activates immune cells that counteract autoimmune responses.

Some autoimmune disease patients have vitamin D resistance; the person becomes less responsive to vitamin D supplementation and sun exposure. Therefore, they need higher doses of vitamin D to raise their serum vitamin D levels to a suitable range.

Autoimmune specialist Dr. Cicero Coimbra, who authored the famous Coimbra Protocol, has found many of his patients with multiple sclerosis reach remission after taking massive doses of vitamin D, along with other supplements.

The protocol can start as low as 150 IUs per kilogram of body weight and can potentially increase to doses as high as 1,000 IUs per kilogram of body weight daily, provided that patients are routinely tested to ensure their parathyroid

hormones, calcium, and other micronutrient levels are in balance.

In an interview with The Epoch Times, Coimbra said that his clinic has treated more than 15,000 patients with autoimmune diseases; among multiple sclerosis patients, about 85 percent reach remission. His protocol has also been used in rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, inflammatory bowel disease, psoriasis, and Crohn's disease around the world, with the majority of patients following these protocols reporting significant improvements.

Regarding those who don't respond well to vitamin D treatment, Coimbra has observed that most tend to experience a high level of stress, and only by changing the way they respond to stress do they start to see improvements.

For some people, supplementing with what would be seen as a very high dose of vitamin D every day may reap health benefits.

Cancer

Higher doses of vitamin D are associated with lower risks of cancer progression and mortality.

Deficiencies in B-group vitamins, vitamin C, iron, zinc, magnesium, and selenium have been linked with increased cancer risks.

Many observational studies on cancer patients have found vitamin D deficiency to also be a risk factor.

A 2016 report found that women whose vitamin D levels were raised above 40 ng/ml had a more than 65 percent lower risk of cancer incidence. Another 2019 study that followed end-term colon cancer patients found that those who increased their vitamin D levels experienced a slower worsening of their symptoms.

Grant's research shows that vitamin D reduces the risk of cancer incidence by

products that doctors have found effective in practice, including off-target generic antivirals and anticoagulants. Operation Warp Speed didn't test simple, affordable, available prevention strategies. Fortunately, such RCTs were done outside of the United States and have brought us important findings.

Balmforth, et al., conducted a prospective double-blind, placebo-controlled trial of a xylitol-based nasal spray in the prevention of SARS-CoV-2 infection in exposed healthcare workers in two hospitals in Uttar Pradesh, India. Xylitol is known to have anti-infective and anti-inflammatory properties and is

used in XLEAR nasal spray and anti-infective chewing gum to prevent dental caries.

Damian Balmforth, a cardiac surgeon at St. Bartholomew's Hospital in London, and a team of researchers found that SARS-CoV-2 infection confirmed by serology was 71 percent lower with xylitol compared to placebo [36 cases (13.1 percent) vs. 97 cases (34.5 percent); odds ratio [OR] 0.29 (95 percent CI: 0.18–0.45), p < 0.0001]. Fewer clinical symptoms were also seen in the test group [57 cases (17.6 percent) vs. 112 cases (34.6 percent); OR 0.40, (95 percent CI: 0.27–0.59), p < 0.0001]. No harmful effects were associated with

affecting differentiation, proliferation, and apoptosis (disintegration) of cells, prevents mortality by reducing the formation of new blood vessels to sustain tumor growth, and reduces metastasis.

Since vitamin D acts by blocking pathways that promote further cancer growth and metastasis, it's better at preventing cancer mortalities than cancer incidence, Grant said.

It's worth noting that cancer can be triggered by a multitude of factors, including environmental toxins, smoking, radiation, genetics, and inflammation, many of which can't be controlled by vitamin D intake alone.

Furthermore, it's still uncertain whether vitamin D is effective for all cancers, and the reason for cancer patients' ailments vary from one to another.

Nonetheless, there have been case reports of cancer remission after taking high doses of vitamin D, though other factors may play into patients' recovery. Anesthesiologist Dr. Judson Somerville said his patient's wife was told by the highly renowned cancer center MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston that she only had six months to live because of advanced ovarian cancer. She figured she had nothing to lose, so she started taking magnesium and high doses of vitamin D3.

She started feeling better, and after a few months, she went to the doctor for a checkup. “They examined her and to their surprise, found her cancer-free,” Somerville said. It has been almost 12 years, and the cancer still hasn't recurred.

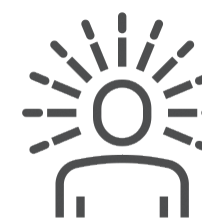
How Much Vitamin D Is Necessary?

Board-certified internist Dr. Syed Haider recommends a certain amount of sun exposure as the best option to get vitamin D, as the body has a mechanism to prevent excessive production that would cause toxicity.

Yet with most people living in urban areas and being indoors for most of the daytime, taking supplements is probably the most convenient option.

One can supplement with either the plant-based vitamin D2 (ergocalciferol) or the animal-based vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol). The two vitamins aren't the

Reposted from Peter A. McCullough's *Substack*



Vitamin D is good medicine for your brain and your mental health.

BRAIN HEALTH

Low vitamin D levels have been associated with higher risks of anxiety, depression, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, and autism.

Vitamin D regulates chemicals in the brain that help neurons in the cortex and the hippocampus grow and survive. These two areas are involved in memory and cognitive functions, processing emotions, and complex motor functions.

Dr. Ana Mihalcea, a board-certified internist and integrative physician, said that the brain fog her patients experience as part of their deficiency would ease once she raised their vitamin D levels.

Psychiatrist Dr. John J. Cannell said in an interview with ZME Science that in treating children with autism, he has found that a dose of 5,000 IUs a day helped nearly 80 percent of these children with their symptoms.

“My experience, having treated about 100 children with autism, is that 25 percent respond dramatically to high dose vitamin D, 50 percent respond significantly, and 25 percent do not respond at all,” he said.

VITAMIN D IS MORE THAN A VITAMIN

Multiple studies show that vitamin D has a host of roles across multiple processes and organs. Most cells have a specific receptor for vitamin D, and when the vitamin D molecule binds to its receptor, it can activate about 2,000 genes in the body.

Expert William Grant, who has published more than 300 papers on vitamin D, told The Epoch Times that the vitamin should actually be viewed as a hormone. Vitamins are micronutrients; the body uses them in small amounts for their assisting roles in establishing health pathways.

Vitamin D, however, acts on many genetic pathways as a direct contributor rather than an assistant, regulating calcium levels and parathyroid hormones and interacting with immune cells, neurons, pancreatic cells, and many other cells.

Most importantly, while all the other vitamins have to be obtained through the diet, the body naturally produces vitamin D with sunlight. Many studies have also shown that without sun exposure, it's quite difficult to obtain sufficient vitamin D through a natural diet alone.

Deficiencies in vitamin D are associated with poor cardiovascular health, diabetes, hypertension, cancer mortalities, cognitive decline, infections, autoimmune disease, and allergies.

same; the body produces different metabolites depending on which is ingested.

Doctors tend to prescribe D2, as it's more available on the market, but the body absorbs D3 better, and it also lasts longer in the body. Moreover, D3 may be less associated with toxicities, as the body is more tolerant of it.

It's advisable to take vitamin D with K2 and magnesium when supplementing, as this will prevent vitamin D toxicity.

K2 and magnesium both help deposit calcium in the bones rather than the arteries, and therefore prevent hypercalcemia, which can occur as a result of vitamin D toxicity.

Mihalcea emphasized the importance of testing serum vitamin D levels as an indication for dosage, since the following conditions may all impair the absorption of vitamin D:

- Inflammation
- Stress
- Obesity
- Poor gut health

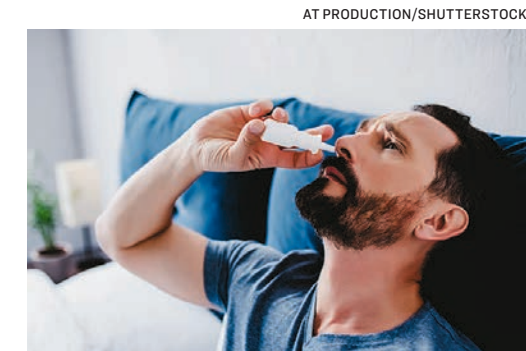
Endocrinologist and vitamin D expert Dr. Michael Holick found that obese people tend to be deficient and require much higher dosages because the extra fat in their bodies sequesters more vitamin D in their cells rather than allowing it to free-float in serum.

AUTISM TREATMENT?



Psychiatrist Dr. John J. Cannell has found that a dose of 5,000 IUs of vitamin D daily helped ease autism symptoms in 80 percent of patients.

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



A team of researchers in London found that SARS-CoV-2 infection rates were 71 percent lower with xylitol compared to placebo.

Can the Nutrition Industry Be Trusted? New Report Says 'No'

Continued from Page 1

"As the report itself notes: 'This study does not include interviews with key actors, which would have provided a detailed narrative of actions and decisions in the AND [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics] and ANDF [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation] and would have helped contextualize our findings.'"

The AND refers to itself as "the world's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals" and, according to its website, represents over 112,000 credentialed practitioners which include registered dietitian nutritionists, nutrition and dietetics technicians, and other professionals and students. The group is one of the most influential professional health associations in the United States and helps shape U.S. health policy.

What Is the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics?

The AND was founded as the American Dietetic Association in 1917 by a group of women aiming to help the government conserve food and improve public health and nutrition during World War I.

The AND promotes itself as "committed to improving health and advancing the profession of nutrition and dietetics through research, education, and advocacy." The group lobbies Congress, influences the development of U.S. dietary guidelines, and is considered an authority in food policy-making.

The Report's Findings

The study was produced by researchers from nonprofits and universities in the United States and the United Kingdom, and U.S. Right to Know—a nonprofit investigative public health group. It was based on a five-year investigation and approximately 80,000 internal AND documents that were obtained through freedom of information requests.

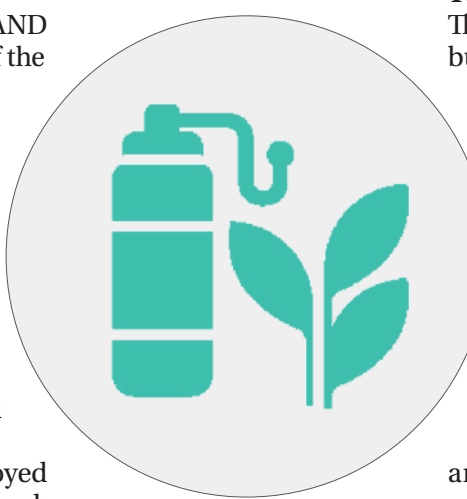
The documents show that the AND had an ongoing relationship with ultra-processed food, beverage, pesticide, and pharmaceutical corporations that included

accepting contributions as well as the AND and its foundation investing in some of the companies who gave them money.

Here are some of the study's main findings:

- "The Academy accepted millions of dollars from food, pharmaceutical, and agribusiness companies, and had policies to provide favors and benefits in return."
- "The Academy and its foundation have invested in ultra-processed food and pharmaceutical companies."
- "Academy leaders have been employed by or consulted for multinational food, pharmaceutical and agribusiness corporations."
- "The Academy has discussed policies to fit the needs of its food, agribusiness, and pharmaceutical industry sponsors."

The documents are posted on the U.S. Right to Know's website.



In 2022, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' list of sponsors included Bayer Crop Science, makers glyphosate.

AND CONFLICTS

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics says they have stringent guidelines that prohibit external influence from sponsors.

The AND counters that its investments are managed at arm's length by an independent investment company "that has sole authority to make decisions to invest or sell equities on the merits of the stocks themselves."

"Because all sectors of the S&P 500 are represented in the Academy's and Foundation's portfolios, investments in the Consumer Staples and Healthcare sectors are to be expected," the Academy wrote.

Top Contributors

The report details several specific contributions the AND received and while the group doesn't deny the contributions, it does criticize how the report characterized the money.

"There is no reference in the report to the Academy's stringent guidelines and principles that prohibit external influence from sponsors or any other group or individual," notes the Academy's response.

"Nor does the report cite the fact that less than 3 percent of the Academy's and its Foundation's investments are in food companies; or that less than 9 percent of the Academy's funding comes from sponsorship."

The study does, however, reveal that the AND accepted more than \$15 million from corporate and organizational contributors in 2011 and from 2013 to 2017, according to its IRS forms 990. The top contributors to the AND in 2011 and 2013–2017 were:

- National Dairy Council \$1,496,912
- Conagra Inc. \$1,414,058
- Abbott Nutrition \$1,246,389
- Abbott Laboratories \$824,110
- AND Foundation \$801,261
- PepsiCo Inc. \$486,335
- Coca-Cola Co. \$477,577
- Hershey Co. \$368,032
- General Mills Inc. \$309,733
- Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality \$296,495
- Aramark Co. \$293,051
- Unilever Best Foods \$276,791
- Kellogg USA \$273,272

According to one internal document, the AND appears to have allowed quid pro quo purchases of "rights and benefits" by corporate sponsors. The documents show that the Academy makes a distinction between "sponsors" and "supporters"—Corporate "sponsors" receiving specific "rights and benefits" whereas "supporters" make "a charitable contribution with no expectation of a commercial return."

In AND's statement, it claims that there were key factors not included in the report in regards to its corporate sponsor guidelines and principles: "The Academy's programs, leadership, decisions, policies and positions are not influenced by sponsors."

But that position appears contradicted by an email from 2015 between AND members discussing AND business and sponsorship in particular, which includes a bulleted list of "recent conversations" about AND's sponsors.

The first item is Abbott Nutrition's product PediaSure, a "nutritional supplement" for children. Abbott is an Academy sponsor. The email says both the AND and its foundation would form a collaboration with PediaSure around the FNPA, or Family Nutrition and Physical Activity Self-Assessment tool, and its usage in pediatrician's offices with a tie to registered dietary nutritionists (RDNs), the title given to those credentialed by the AND to give nutrition advice) as well as participation in a retailer program

which would include stores like Walmart and Target with RDN support.

This seems to imply that Abbott's sponsorship indeed came with "rights and benefits."

Abbott Nutrition had a two-year sponsorship deal with the AND, for \$150,000 a year between 2015 and 2017.

Another item on the list is Subway, which apparently approached the AND looking for an organization that would endorse the company's "healthier product offerings."

These examples certainly seem to suggest that companies sponsoring the AND gain commercial benefits.

It may also be interesting to note that the same document lists organizations that had AND Foundation donations/grants pending that included Monsanto (\$175,000) and the Gates Foundation (\$200,000).

AND's Investments

in Ultra-Processed Food Companies
The investments held by the AND and its foundation also present the appearance of an ethical issue, according to the report. The AND's investment portfolio for 2015 included \$244,036 in stock holdings in Nestle S.A. and \$139,545 in PepsiCo. The AND foundation's investment portfolio in June 2013 included \$209,472 in stock holdings in Nestle S.A. and \$125,682 in PepsiCo.

Those investments are problematic because of the nature of the foods produced by those companies, suggests Gary Ruskin, executive director of U.S. Right to Know and a co-author of the study.

"Nutrition groups should not buy ultra-processed food stocks," Ruskin said in a statement. "They are a blaring conflict of interest. Public health groups should not invest in companies that make products that detract from our health or directly conflict with their mission."

Financial Ties to Corporations

The AND has several financial ties to corporations that are cause for concern, isn't entirely transparent about its corporate financial contributions, and doesn't disclose the amounts of the contributions it receives.

In 2022, some of its sponsors included:

- The National Confectioners Association, which represents candy makers.
- Bayer Crop Science, makers of toxic pesticides, including glyphosate.
- Tate & Lyle, makers Splenda sucralose—an artificial sweetener linked to obesity, diabetes, and cancer.
- Abbott, makers of a baby formula recently recalled from a Michigan plant that an FDA commissioner described as "shocking" and "egregiously unsanitary."

Messaging With Obscuring Information in Mind

Americans are suffering from lifestyle diseases at epidemic numbers, with obesity, metabolic syndrome, cancer, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes contributing to millions of deaths and billions in health care expenses every year. So why is there so much ambiguity and confusion about the health hazards of ultra-processed foods linked to these conditions? Gary Ruskin, co-author of the study, says the

influence of industry is largely to blame. "Industry is pushing their products, but our government does not say the obvious. It does not say 'eat as little ultra-processed foods as possible, eat as little added sugar as you can, eat as little vegetable and seed oil as you can, eat as little refined grains and corn as you can,' and of course, they subsidize those. It's definitely industry, but it's our federal government too—their silence is purchased," Ruskin told The Epoch Times.

Those subsidies come in many forms, including significant subsidies for crops that are key to the processed food

industry, like genetically modified corn.

"One of the things that's sad to see is how little talk there is and reporting there is about corruption in our health institutions," Ruskin said.

The wide reach and influence of the AND and its ties to food makers producing foods widely linked to common chronic conditions raise troubling questions about the integrity of nutrition guidelines in the United States, the new report suggests.

"This is one of the health tragedies that is happening in our country right now," the report states. "If we're ever going to

Dietary Defenders

Americans eat one of the unhealthiest diets in the world—with staggering health consequences—but little is done to fix root problems in the food system.

High-ranking AND members seemed to be aware of the activities, as one of the documents revealed an email from a then-treasurer (who has also been an Academy president) saying:

"PepsiCo is one of our top ten stocks (in which the AND has invested). I personally like PepsiCo and do not have any problems with us owning it, but I wonder if someone will say something about that. Hopefully, they will be happy like they should be! I personally would be OK if we owned Coke stock!"

The Academy's Influence

As for how far the AND's influence goes, the White House's National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health includes several recommendations from the AND.

Six AND members will also serve on the 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee (DGAC) which provides "independent, science-based" advice and recommendations to be considered by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as they develop the dietary guidelines for Americans for 2025–2030.

To fully appreciate the extent of this influence, dietary guidelines are the basis of recommendations given by people who work in federal agencies, public health, healthcare, education, and business when providing information about diet and health to the general public. They set the very standards by which foods can be considered healthy or unhealthy by these key decision-makers.

Who Does AND Support? Where Do They Work?

You may be wondering where you might come into contact with the people the AND supports and where they exert their influence.

The AND represents and supports registered dietitian nutritionists, and according to the Academy's website, a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) is a "food and nutrition expert." RDNs have a wide reach and perform many roles influencing large sections of the population from children in daycare centers and nursing home residents to hospitals and other healthcare facilities where they educate patients about what to eat.

Perhaps most notably, RDNs work in

universities and medical centers, teaching physicians, nurses, dietetics students, and others "the sophisticated science of foods and nutrition."

While individual RDNs may supplement their education or even disagree with many of the positions of the AND, the report raises questions about the quality of their professional credentials.

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Response to Report

On its website eatright.org, the AND put out a statement in response to what it calls an "inaccurate and misleading report." The statement reads:

"This report is a calculated attack against the more than 112,000 credentialed nutrition and dietetics practitioners whom the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics proudly represents. The report contains numerous factual and methodology errors, omissions and information taken out of context.

"As a result, the report contains a great deal of opinion and unsupported assertions, coupled with many factual inaccuracies that misled the public."

The statement continues for many paragraphs.

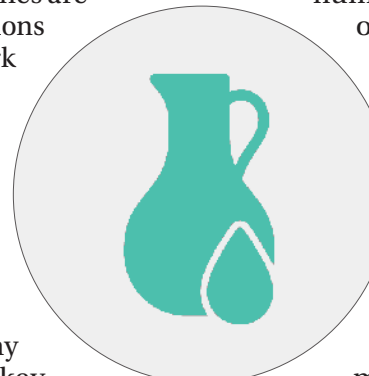
On the same statement page, the AND states that "Academy/Foundation financial investments are managed by an independent investment company that has sole authority to make

decisions to invest or sell equities on the merits of the stocks themselves."

While the statement does detail the relatively minor amounts of its overall funding and investments linked to food companies, it doesn't deal with the ethical issue raised by taking money from the producers of foods generally considered unhealthy and disease-causing.

The AND's statements don't deny taking millions from junk-food makers or investing in those companies.

The Epoch Times reached out to the AND, which responded that it had nothing to add regarding the report.



Unhealthy ingredients like over-processed seed oils are subsidized by the government, raising questions about industry influence.



DRAZEN ZIGIC/GETTY IMAGES

FOOD AS MEDICINE

Garlic Beats Antibiotic in Bacterial Vaginosis Trial

This ancient remedy is proving that our so-called 'primitive' ancestors knew what they were doing

SAYER JI

In the past few years, interest in evidence-based, natural alternatives, which provide safer and more effective relief, has increasingly expanded. Together, we are relearning and remembering the wisdom of the ancients: Let food be your medicine.

At GreenMedInfo.com, we've indexed a

broad range of natural substances that have potent antimicrobial qualities, including commonly available and inexpensive "kitchen remedies" like honey, garlic, and lemon, to name a few. In actuality, thousands of natural substances have antimicrobial qualities, which, unlike conventional drugs, are far more capable of restoring balance within the microbiome. We've indexed hundreds of studies on this topic, all of which can be found on our Research Dashboard dedicated to antibiotic-resistant infections.

Garlic Versus First-Line Antibiotic for Vaginal Infection

A relatively recent study adds to the already impressive body of research in this field. In their study, "Comparing the Therapeutic Effects of Garlic Tablet and Oral Metronidazole on Bacterial Vaginosis: a Randomized Controlled Clinical Trial," medical researchers demonstrated the power of garlic in treating bacterial vaginosis, one of the most common gynecological infections afflicting women of reproductive age today.

Bacterial vaginosis (BV) affects 29.2 percent

Antibiotics are notorious for lacking specificity in inhibiting only those opportunistic strains that can cause harm.



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

of women aged 14–49 and 25 percent of pregnant women in the United States, according to CDC statistics. According to the study, the infection is "asymptomatic in 50 percent to 75 percent of cases and symptomatic cases present with homogeneous gray-white vaginal discharge with fishy odor, especially after intercourse or during menstruation."

It's believed that BV results from reduced quantities of hydrogen peroxide-producing Lactobacillus and increased anaerobic organisms such as Gardnerella vaginalis, Mycoplasma hominis, and Prevotella species. Antibiotics are notorious for lacking specificity in inhibiting only those opportunistic strains that can cause harm, which is why it's no wonder that the standard of care treatment of BV with metronidazole has a notoriously poor success rate, according to a research review published in The New Microbiologica in 2013.

Moreover, antibiotics like metronidazole come with a wide range of side effects, including nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, headache, dizziness, weight loss, and abdominal pain.

Even more concerning is the fact that the

drug has been identified as a potential carcinogen both by the U.S. National Toxicology Program and the WHO International Agency for Research on Cancer.

The new study tested whether garlic could compete with metronidazole in treating BV. Garlic was a logical choice, since it has been used as an anti-infective agent for millennia, and has seen a tremendous amount of clinical validation in the past 10 years. Much of this research also demonstrates the potent anticancer properties of this powerfully medicinal food.

The design of the new study involved giving two groups of 60 married women (aged 18 to 44 years) either 500 mg garlic tablets comprised of 85.42 percent garlic powder, or metronidazole. Each dose of garlic powder contained the equivalent of 8.9 milligrams of allicin, a potent antimicrobial compound. Both drugs were taken with meals at the dose of two tablets every 12 hours for seven days.

The two different treatments were evaluated using diagnostic criteria known as Amsel's criteria, which looks at active infection. Not surprisingly, garlic was found superior to met-

ronidazole in reducing infection at 70 percent and 48.3 percent, respectively. Additionally, garlic was found to have far fewer side effects.

The researchers concluded that the study revealed "that garlic could be a suitable alternative for metronidazole in treatment of BV in those interested in herbal medicines or those affected by side effects of metronidazole."

Isn't That Amazing?

Before the advent of modern, conventional medicine, the world over used natural substances—spices, foods, herbs—to prevent and reverse disease. In fact, these were so important and valued that they were sometimes traded for their weight in gold. Now that we know that the ancients weren't as "primitive, superstitious, or prescientific," as widely believed, we can appreciate the science that honors their wisdom. It was their use of these substances that enabled them to survive thousands of years without modern medicine, and it's the use of these substances that will now allow us to survive modern medicine itself, which has become a major contributor to death due to causes ranging

Garlic was found superior to metronidazole in reducing infection and was found to have far fewer side effects.

Garlic has held a unique renown in many culinary traditions for centuries.

from drug side effects, the opioid epidemic, superbugs, medical errors, and so on.

Sayer Ji is the founder of GreenMedInfo.com, a reviewer at the International Journal of Human Nutrition and Functional Medicine, co-founder and CEO of Systeme Biomed, and vice chairman of the board of the National Health Federation. This work is reproduced and distributed with the permission of GreenMed-Info LLC. Sign up for their newsletter at GreenMedInfo.com/newsletter



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TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE

Grief and the Power of Letting Go

Traditional Chinese medicine has important insights on the effects of grief and how to process this emotion

EMMA SUTTIE

No one on earth escapes grief. It's woven into our human experience and is something we'll all inevitably endure many times throughout our lives.

Heartbreak, the loss of someone we love, lost opportunities, disappointments, and hardships are unavoidable—and life doesn't care who you are, what you believe, or where you come from; grief happens to all of us.

So how do we deal with grief in a healthy way? Fortunately, Eastern medicine has a unique perspective on grief that can help us understand how it works and ways that we can move through it and emerge stronger on the other side.

Emotions and Our Bodies

Eastern medicine views emotions as an integral part of the human being and vital to overall health. Unlike the Western view that has separated the body into the physical realm and the less important mental and emotional realm, Eastern medicine has remained holistic. In the Eastern view, every aspect of ourselves—physical, emotional, and spiritual—is an essential component of a whole, healthy human being.

In Eastern medicine, our emotional lives are just as important as our physical and spiritual ones. Emotions and their expression are a normal part of being human, but when they're repressed, unexpressed, or expressed without control or in the proper context, they can make us sick.

Emotions being a cause of illness probably doesn't seem so strange if we consider how our emotions can make us feel physically. When we get bad news, we feel it in our bodies. When you get angry or worried, where do you feel it? These sensations often manifest physically, and if we don't acknowledge and process them, they can linger and become causes of disease.

In Eastern medicine, these connections are well known and understood, and emotions are associated with different organs, which is how they affect the body.

Grief is associated with the lungs and its partner organ, the large intestine.

Each emotion is associated with a specific organ, as listed below:

- the lungs—grief, sadness
- the heart—joy
- the spleen—worry, overthinking
- the liver—anger
- the kidneys—fear

Emotions can affect all organs and the entire body, but each emotion is seen to have the most potent effect on its associated organ and organ partner. This partnership is also used as a diagnostic tool, helping a practitioner to isolate a problem depending on its location and what is being felt.

The Lungs and the Power of Letting Go

Every organ in Eastern medicine has a

partner organ, one yin and one yang, that work in tandem to keep the body balanced. When dealing with grief, the lungs are the yin organ, and their yang partner is the large intestine.

The lung's job is to bring oxygen-rich air into the body, and the large intestine releases the waste in a constant cycle of interaction—taking in the new and letting go of what's no longer needed. Many breathing and bowel disorders are rooted in excess grief—conversely, excessive grieving can lead to problems of the lungs and large intestine. This connection between grief and our physiology happens because the balance of yin and yang, or intake and outtake, are vital to health and well-being—allowing the new to come in and letting go of the old. Therefore, being open to new experiences and letting go of things that are no longer useful is essential to our physical and emotional health.

In Eastern medicine, emotions can either be the cause or the result of an illness. For example, asthma can be caused by prolonged sadness (the emotion of the lungs). In contrast, someone who has had chronic asthma over many years can develop grief—the cause of the grief is the asthma.

The Emotional Aspect of the Lungs

In the Eastern view, when the energy of the lungs is balanced and plentiful, we think and communicate clearly, are open to new ideas and experiences, have a positive self-image, and can relax, let go, and be happy.

When we grieve, especially intensely or over extended periods, it can weaken the energy of the lungs and diminish lung function. Energetically, when dealing with intense grief, we'll have difficulty coping with loss and change, a sense of detachment, and a lingering sense of sadness that doesn't improve.

The lungs are also associated with our sense of attachment, so if you have a hard time letting go of people, places, or experiences—or are constantly reliving the past—it can lead to weakness in the lungs. These feelings can be common when going through an intense or extended bout of grief.

Prolonged grief can weaken the lungs and their ability to bring new energy, or qi, into the body. Qi is the energy the body gets from eating and breathing, and we need it to perform multiple vital functions. This is how grief can negatively affect the lungs and the whole body. Extended grief that isn't acknowledged, processed, and released can lead to depression and other more serious problems.

Lung Associations in Eastern Medicine

- Yin organ: lung
- Yang organ: large intestine
- Emotion: grief, sadness
- Season: fall/autumn
- Flavor: pungent
- Color: white

When we grieve intensely or for a long time, it can weaken the energy of the lungs.

Moving Through Grief in a Healthy Way

Thankfully, there are many things we can do to help us through a difficult period of grief. One of the most important is to acknowledge how you're feeling. Many people have a hard time acknowledging difficult, overwhelming, and unpleasant emotions, and some would rather avoid them, which is understandable. The problem is that until you bring your attention to what you're feeling, it will sit and wait. This stagnant grief can wreak havoc on your body and your life until it's processed and let go.

There's no "best way" to deal with grief, and everyone must find the way that works for them. But acknowledging, processing, and letting it go is vital to our health and well-being.

The good news is that grief that's expressed fully and resolved is strengthening, both physically and psychologically. This kind of emotional regulation is key to attaining balance in all aspects of life. Below are some ways to help you deal with grief in a healthy way.

Breathing Exercises for Releasing Grief

Because of the association between grief and the lungs, one of the most effective ways to release grief is through deep breathing exercises—breathing deeply into your belly and filling the lungs to capacity. Even more powerful is the addition of visualization, which helps to cleanse, detoxify, and release grief from the body.



Deep Breathing

Breathe in slowly through your nose, focusing on breathing into your belly, taking in as much air as is comfortable. Hold for a count of five when your lungs are full, then slowly exhale through your mouth from the very bottom of your lungs until they're empty. Repeat three times. This exercise should be done three times daily for the best results when grieving.



White Light Technique

This technique uses breathing and visualization. Because white is the color associated with the lungs, we'll envision white light.

Find a comfortable place to sit with both feet flat on the ground. Place your hands in your lap. Mentally locate your lungs in your chest and connect to them. The more clearly you connect to them, the better and quicker the results.

Slowly breathe in through your nose, all the way into your belly, filling your lungs to capacity, while visualizing your lungs filling in your chest. Now, while holding your breath for a count of five, picture flooding your lungs with a white, healing light. Then slowly exhale, completely emptying your lungs, visualizing the grief leaving with your exhalation. Repeat three times, each time sensing the white light healing your lungs. With each exhale, you're literally breathing out the grief and sadness. This exercise can be done as many times as you wish and will help to move grief out of the body.



Walking Outside in Nature

Being outside in nature is one of life's most healing activities, and this is especially true when you're grieving. Walking outside, particularly surrounded by trees—the literal lungs of the planet—while taking deep healing breaths helps us to take in oxygen-rich air and exhale what we no longer need.



Talk to a Friend You Trust

Talking to a friend is also helpful to get grief moving and to help us process it. Emotions can harm us if we let them linger and don't acknowledge their presence. Talking to a trusted friend can help you process your feelings and get some perspective. Talking is another avenue that allows grief out of the body.



Acupuncture and Massage

Because our goal in Eastern medicine is to constantly keep energies moving, when we have difficulty coping with emotions, they can get "stuck" and stop the flow, eventually making us sick.

Acupuncture and massage are both very moving to our internal energies, which is how they help keep us healthy. How often have you been on the massage table, and the therapist rolls over a big knot? That's a physical manifestation of energy getting stuck.

When grieving, acupuncture and massage are beautiful tools to help get things moving and release anything that might be stuck. People sometimes cry during acupuncture and massage treatments because these treatments move things that have accumulated, sometimes for months or years—which is an excellent thing. Crying is another way to move grief out of the body—a powerful catharsis.



Final Thoughts

Some of these concepts might seem strange to us in the West, but thousands of years of observation and practice have borne them out. Emotional awareness is something that needs to be learned and cultivated, and it behooves us to do so because of its impact on our health and well-being.

Understanding and processing our emotions is an opportunity for growth, self-discovery, and, ultimately, self-mastery. Understanding ourselves helps us extend that understanding to others and operate in the world with greater compassion and awareness, which, according to many ancient traditions, are the keys to a happy, fulfilling life.

Meditation's Powerful Effect On Emotional Well-Being

MERCURA WANG

Meditation can be a safe and effective way to help us control our emotions, alleviate our mood disorders, and improve our emotional intelligence.

Hu Naiwen is an internationally renowned traditional Chinese medicine doctor. Now in his mid-70s, he is still seeing patients.

He used to be quick-tempered and very impatient when speaking with his young son at dinnertime, he said. After a long day in his clinic, he would often get angry at trivial things. But meditation changed him. After meditating regularly, his mind gradually became calmer and he became less prone to anger.

Another benefit of meditation is excellent sleep quality at night, which helps Hu concentrate on his work during the day, he said.

What Are the Emotional Effects of Meditation?

Reduce Negative Thoughts and Feelings

In one study, participants were asked to list their thoughts while viewing negative images (e.g., a dead cat in the middle of the road). People who meditated listed proportionally fewer negative thoughts.

In another study conducted at Michigan State University, 68 female participants were divided into two groups, with one group listening to an 18-minute guided meditation session and the other group listening to an 18-minute TED talk on language learning.

Then they were instructed to view some neutral or negatively arousing pictures. The study found that the meditation session helped the first group tame their negative emotions, as that group had significantly less of a reaction to the negative stimuli.

Reduce Anger and Fear

As demonstrated by Hu's experience, meditation can help us manage anger. According to one study, anger reduction can be achieved by a single meditation session, as demonstrated by slower breathing and heart rate and decreased blood pressure.

Meditation can also reduce fear. For example, many cancer survivors fear cancer recurrence, and this fear can have negative effects on their daily life, work, and relationships. According to a systematic review, mind-body interventions (including different forms of meditation) are effective for significantly reducing the fear of cancer recurrence.

Boost Positive Feeling

In one study, 25 participants practiced group meditation three times a week for four weeks, with each session lasting about 30 minutes. They experienced significant improvement in positive emotions, interpersonal interactions, and complex understanding of others compared with people who didn't meditate.

Increase Compassion

People can join others in meditating together, thus creating a sense of community and increasing feelings of empathy and compassion.

According to one study, meditation helped 153 people reduce loneliness, increase social contact with others, and generate compassion toward other people.

In another study, 210 university students were randomly divided into three groups that performed different tasks: practice meditation, listen to music, or listen to a lecture. After two sessions were completed, 50.8 percent of participants in the meditation group showed a willingness to help others, whereas only 31.2 percent and 31 percent of students in the music and lecture groups were willing to help.

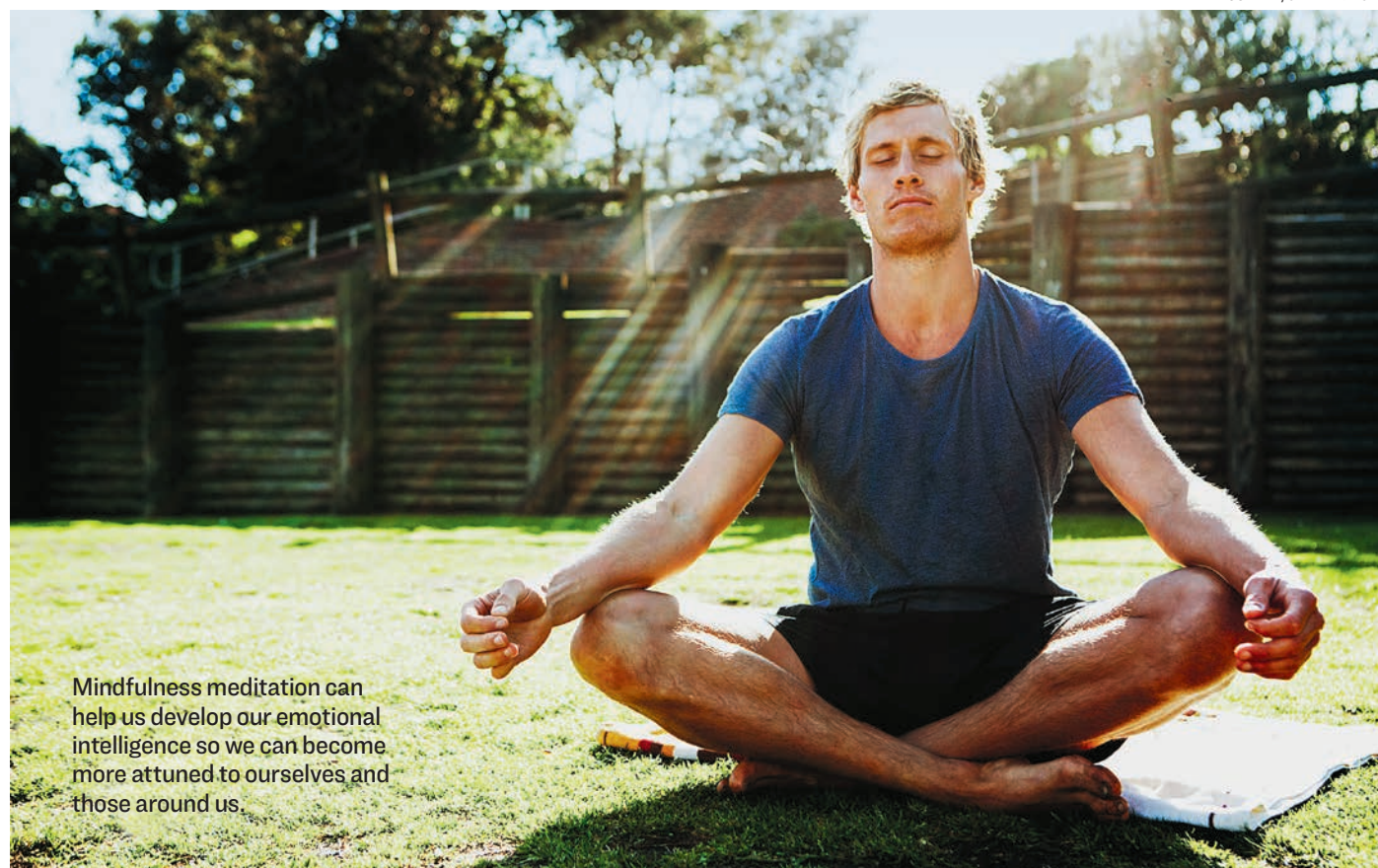
Increase Self-Esteem

Also, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, low self-esteem can be linked to mental health issues. And meditation can help us become more confident and have higher self-esteem, as it trains our minds to become calmer and clearer. In addition, as we become more compassionate toward others, we can be more compassionate toward ourselves. This is achieved as we become more self-aware through practicing meditation, encouraging us to better accept and embrace ourselves.

Meditation Can Improve Emotional Disorders

The National Institute of Mental Health states that an estimated 21.4 percent of U.S. adults experience an emotional disorder sometime during their lifetime.

Meditation has been proven to be effective in improving the symptoms of several emotional disorders.



According to a study, meditation can help students with emotional or behavioral disorders regulate their emotions. The study took place in a self-contained school for adolescents with emotional problems such as anxiety disorders, mood disorders, and adult attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

Mindfulness activities, including meditation, were integrated into these students' daily activities for six weeks. Afterward, the students were more optimistic, adaptable, and focused and had a greater sense of self-efficacy, and their emotional reactivity decreased significantly.

Several of them also expressed a desire to continue these mindfulness exercises in a classroom setting throughout the school year.

Emotional Disturbance

Emotional disturbance is a severe emotional disorder that can cause clinically significant distress and interfere with a patient's functioning in society. Symptoms of emotional disturbance can include hyperactivity, aggressive behaviors, social withdrawal, property destruction, temper tantrums, and learning difficulties.

One small study showed that meditation can help prevent and manage socially inappropriate and harmful behaviors among primary and elementary students with emotional disturbance and behavioral problems. Four of the five students who participated in a 10-week program of mindfulness meditation practices showed a decrease in noncompliance afterward.

Also, the children were increasingly aware of and paid attention to their emotions, which helped curb their inappropriate behaviors, such as aggression toward others and self-injurious behaviors.

Seasonal Affective Disorder

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a type of depression most often associated with fewer hours of sunlight during the fall and winter months. However, it can also affect people in the spring and summer.

Meditation can activate the pineal gland, releasing melatonin that can improve depressive symptoms. Meditation can also increase serotonin levels, which can also help with SAD.

Currently, the most effective treatment methods for SAD include cognitive behavioral therapy, antidepressants, and light therapy.

However, according to one study, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), a therapy that involves meditation, can be more effective at preventing episodes of SAD than light therapy. Sixty-five percent of the MBCT group participants developed depression in the following winter compared with 78 percent of those who developed it in the treatment-as-usual group, which got to participate in light therapy.

Additionally, in a survey conducted in several German-speaking countries, some psychiatric institutions indicated that they had already recommended meditation as an alternative preventive measure to their SAD patients.

Disruptive Mood Dysregulation Disorder

Disruptive mood dysregulation disorder is a condition of chronic and persistent irritability and frequent and intense temper outbursts in children or adolescents. It's common in people with ADHD.

MBCT and other mindfulness exercises are

Meditation can reduce symptoms of mood disorders and mental illness while increasing empathy and emotional intelligence

Meditation can help us become more confident and have higher self-esteem, as it trains our minds to become calmer and clearer.



Dr. Hu Naiwen, internationally renowned traditional Chinese medicine doctor.



210 university students were randomly divided into three groups that performed different tasks:

- 1 PRACTICE MEDITATION,
- 2 LISTEN TO MUSIC
- 3 LISTEN TO A LECTURE

After two sessions were completed,

50.8% of participants in the meditation group showed a willingness to help others, whereas only

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31% of students in the music and lecture groups were willing to help.



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

an effective and safe alternative approach to treating mood-dysregulated adolescents.

In one study, several ADHD patients attended weekly meditation training sessions of 2 1/2 hours each for eight weeks. The patients reported that they were better able to stay focused, and their symptoms of emotion dysregulation improved.

Dysthymia

Dysthymia is a chronic depressive mood disorder characterized by persistent but low-grade depression.

According to one study, 50 dysthymic patients were divided into two groups, with one group receiving eight weekly MBCT treatment sessions and medication, which involved meditation exercises, and the other receiving only medication. After receiving the treatment, the MBCT group's depression scores considerably decreased, and participants' ability to regulate emotions also significantly improved, in comparison with the other group.

Other emotional disorders, including depressive, bipolar, and anxiety disorder, can also be alleviated by meditation.

Practicing Meditation Can Increase Emotional Intelligence

Meditation can even improve emotional intelligence (EI). According to a systematic review in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, EI is an individual's ability to control and manage emotions and to understand and influence the emotions of others. An emotional quotient (EQ), on the other hand, is like an IQ in that it's a testing measurement that indicates an ability to understand our own emotional minds.

According to the review, mindfulness meditation can promote the development of health care professionals' EI, which in turn would lead to greater job satisfaction and retention and better care provided to patients.

There are several ways in which meditation can boost our EI. It helps us:

Control Our Emotions

Low EQ sometimes causes one to struggle to control emotions (e.g., the person flares up easily).

As mentioned, meditation is an excellent tool to help us regulate emotions so we can carry on in our daily lives with a calm mind. And meditation can reduce our stress, which can often trigger anger.

Understand Our Emotions

If we practice meditation, we will naturally and gradually develop self-awareness, which is the ability to recognize and understand our feelings and thoughts. When we meditate, ideally, we take time and space to block out external influences and focus on our own minds.

Once we become self-aware, it's easier for us to manage our feelings and thoughts, thus keeping us composed and collected and improving our EI.

Understand Other People's Emotions

Meditation can help increase our pro-social dispositions, including compassion, empathy, and forgiveness toward ourselves and others.

As we become more compassionate and caring toward others, we recognize their energy, body language, social cues, and facial expressions more accurately. Therefore, we can understand others' emotions better.

WESTENBIL/GETTY IMAGES



It's important to process grief so that rather than stagnate in the body, it can move through us and allow us to move on.

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INTENTIONAL LIVING

Prioritize an Interesting Life Over a Happy Life



If you want to live a satisfying and meaningful life, don't get too caught up in chasing happiness

MIKE DONGHIA

I've heard people say that boredom is good for us, and that we need more of it in our lives.

They rightly observe how addicted we are to our smartphones, and how rarely we allow ourselves to feel bored without reaching for instant relief. The problem, they suggest, is in our burning desire to relieve boredom.

But I can't get myself to see our hatred of dullness as a problem. To me, the desire to be interested in something is a sign of health—a sign that the spark of life still exists inside us.

In my eyes, the problem is trying to satisfy ourselves only with mental junk food and shallow alternatives to the real thing. Instead of running away from our restless feelings and toward people, projects, or adventures, we're settling for cheap hits of dopamine that pacify our minds instead of truly engaging them.

The Indirect Pursuit of Happiness

I believe that more people should strive to live an interesting life.

I don't, however, believe that leading an interesting life is the highest human value. And I don't think it's a helpful goal for everyone. It will certainly need to be constrained by other values such as love and responsibility.

But, the fact is, even the noblest human is going to be self-interested in some ways. It's not a flaw in our design, but part of it. That aspect of our nature needs somewhere to aim too. In the United States, we mostly aim at being happy. But at the margin, I argue that we should direct more of that energy toward leading an interesting life.

Happiness is a great byproduct, but a direct pursuit can get you off track as it tends to be too self-centered. To be happy, you need

Happiness is a great byproduct, but a direct pursuit can get you off track as it tends to be too self-centered.



The insatiable curiosity of children reveals the value of interesting engagements.

ANNA KRAYNOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK



Distractions like Netflix promise pleasure but deeper satisfactions are found in the real world.

SOLOVIOVA LIUDMYLA/SHUTTERSTOCK

to want other things even more—things outside yourself. And if you do it right, this newfound happiness can have a positive impact on your health.

To Be Interesting, Be Interested

The way to start cultivating an interesting life is to be interested. Being interested and being interesting are two sides of the same coin.

If you are someone who reads great literature or travels broadly on a modest budget or takes risks in the pursuit of some great cause, you become a vivid, living example to those around you of what life can be.

Being interested in those things makes you an interesting person to others. Because you are interesting, and not boring, they will give you a second look, and in doing so, see the world in a new way. You are helping to expand the horizon of possibilities they might consider in their own lives.

The Moral Weight of Curiosity

In my eyes, boredom isn't just a nuisance, it's a moral concern. When my young children complain about being bored, they never also, in that moment, express gratitude. Boredom and gratitude are like oil and vinegar.

But gratitude is possibly the most undervalued value. As a Christian, I think it our duty to be grateful for the life we've been given. But even for the secular person, gratitude is the surest path to a contented and happy life. Boredom undermines all of this.

For these reasons, I think leading an interesting life should be given a higher status. By cultivating curiosity about the world around you, and then doing things that are interesting and risky, I think you are providing a compelling path beyond the smartphone to defeat boredom. Not only will this benefit your own life, but you will also become a great example to your family, friends, and others of a mature way to attack this common enemy.

Practical Ways to Be Interested

To end on a practical note, I'll share a short

list of ways I am pursuing a more interesting life. There's so much more I'd like to say, and will someday, but for now, this will give you a taste of what's possible.

Have lots of conversations with a variety of people.

Say yes to new experiences. Vivid, real-world experiences lead to great memories and increased appreciation.

Travel as often as possible. Even within the United States, there are so many subcultures to explore and understand. But international travel is my favorite. England, Ireland, and Greece top my list.

Listen to a wide variety of music. I like to listen to different genres and try to appreciate why others enjoy them.

Create or build something. There's nothing interesting about being a passive consumer. Interesting people build things such as blogs, companies, nonprofits, families, institutions, and more.

Read about a diverse range of topics. Don't be pigeon-holed into a certain type of reader. Add an element of serendipity to the books that end up on your nightstand.

Take risks. The fastest way to be interesting, and interested, is to put real skin in the game.

Write in public. Writing forces you to have ideas and try to be interesting. It's also a multiplier of opportunities.

Increase your ambitions. In the past year, I've realized how complacent our culture has become. To push against this, I'm personally setting bigger goals and doing hard things.

Think independently. My favorite conversation partners are those whose opinions on a given topic I can't easily guess.

If you're interested in these ideas, you might also check out Tyler Cowen's blog at MarginalRevolution.com. His writings on being interesting and living a less complacent life have been an inspiration.

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.

Interesting ideas, experiences, and pastimes can pay much richer dividends than the single-minded pursuit of happiness.

Not All Sugars Are Bad

These alternative sugars and sweeteners have medicinal and nutritional benefits

FLORA ZHAO

The human body needs a certain amount of salt but we don't need refined sugar, which only provides calories and has no nutritional value.

However, not everyone needs to quit sugar. Most healthy people can get away with occasionally adding sugar to their diets for flavor.

So are there any sweeteners or sugars that are less harmful or even beneficial? The answer is yes.

'Sugar Substitute' Isn't Necessarily a Good Substitute

When it comes to reducing sugar intake, many people first think of sugar substitutes. While replacing sugar with "sugar substitutes" sounds wonderful, artificial sweeteners should be chosen carefully.

Sugar substitutes can be divided into artificial sweeteners and natural sweeteners—the former are synthesized from chemicals, while the latter are obtained by fermentation or plant extraction.

Some sugar substitutes derived from natural plants are less harmful to our bodies.

"Zero-calorie" artificial sweeteners such as aspartame, sucralose, and saccharin have adverse effects on the body and can lead to metabolic syndromes such as insulin resistance and diabetes. There are three mechanisms by which artificial sweeteners affect metabolic function:

- Interfere with glycemic control and energy homeostasis.
- Disrupt gut microbiota and induce glucose intolerance.
- Interact with sweet taste receptors expressed in the digestive system, thereby interfering with glucose absorption and insulin secretion.

In addition, a study published in the International Journal of Molecular Sciences in 2021 proved that the artificial sweeteners (aspartame, sucralose, or saccharin) in two cans of sugar-free drinks were sufficient to turn normal and healthy gut bacteria into pathogenic bacteria that invade the body's intestinal epithelial cells.

Continued on Page 10



DIANA TALUN/SHUTTERSTOCK

FCFOTODIGITAL/GETTY IMAGES



The GAPS diet is an elimination diet that helps quickly regrow cells in the gut lining and soothes inflammation.

FOOD AS MEDICINE

Heal Your Gut Microbiome With the GAPS Diet

A 20-year-old protocol for severe autoimmune diseases offers different variations

AMY DENNEY

River Yeo was a nursing student when she first recognized red flags in her health including joint pain, constant exhaustion, brain fog, skin irritation, and headaches.

She eliminated gluten from her diet with modest results. Still seeking answers, she came across Dr. Natasha Campbell-McBride's book "Gut and Psychology Syndrome." Called the GAPS diet, it's a strict protocol for those who are serious about healing their gut. Campbell-McBride has a degree in medicine and postgraduate degrees in both neurology and human nutrition.

Yeo felt compelled to try GAPS because of the science-based explanations offered

in the book. While the protocol itself hasn't been heavily researched, it relies on findings in the field of microbiology—the study of microorganisms such as bacteria, viruses, and fungi. Yeo was curious about the diet's ability to reverse an imbalance of the gut microbiome known as dysbiosis.

"Even just two weeks into it, I felt a world of difference," she said. "It flipped my world upside down. It's not just about digestion but the community of microbes in your gut."

Cultivating the Microbiome

The microbiome, a relatively new frontier in health, refers to any collective of microbes that reside in an area of the body. We have skin, nasal, lung, oral, and other microbiomes. The community living in our gastrointestinal tract—the gut microbiome—is the largest of these collectives. It plays an essential role in digestion, metabolism, immune function, and vitamin synthesis, as well as neurotransmitter production along the gut-brain axis.

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The Core Foods in a GAPS Diet

The GAPS diet is similar to a ketogenic or paleo diet but narrower and starts with just meat stock and gradually introduces the other whole foods.



Eggs.



Meats.



Shellfish.



Meat or fish stock.



Fish.



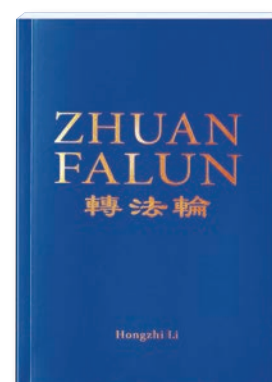
Nuts.



Fresh vegetables and fruits.



A Life-Changing Bestseller



Zhuan Falun expounds on the profound principles of Truthfulness, Compassion, and Tolerance. It focuses on a long-forgotten term called "cultivation" and the importance of moral character on one's path to spiritual perfection.

The book is the main text of the spiritual practice Falun Dafa. It was a national bestseller in China in the 1990s, and has since been translated into more than 40 languages. Find out why it has captured the hearts and minds of tens of millions of people in more than 100 countries worldwide.

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

Arthur Waldron
LAUDER PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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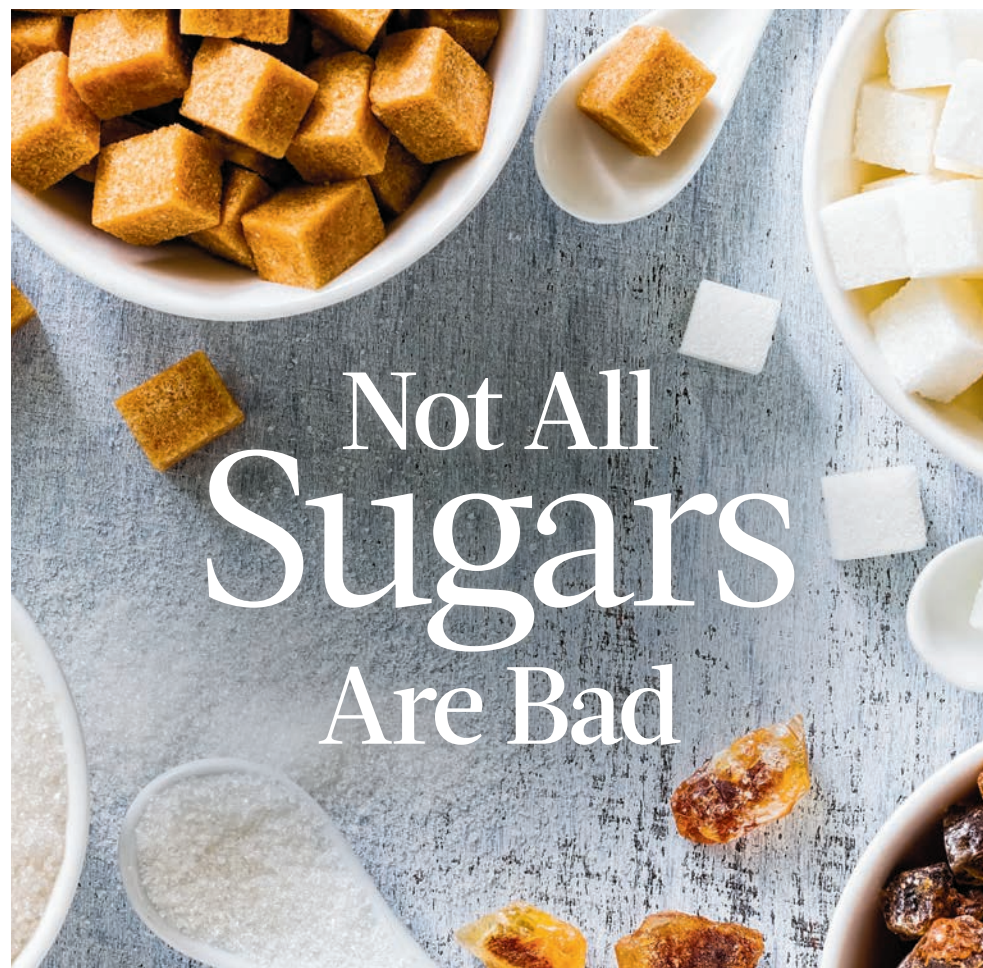
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Continued from Page 9

The types of sugar substitutes used in major brands in the U.S. artificial sweetener market are as follows:

- Sucralose: Splenda
- Aspartame: NutraSweet, Equal, and Sugar Twin
- Saccharin: Sweet'N Low, Necta Sweet, and Sweet Twin

In the product ingredient list, the sugar substitute numbers 950, 951, 952, and 954 represent acesulfame potassium, aspartame, cyclamate, and saccharin, respectively.

Natural Sweetener Products Have Other Ingredients

It's worth noting that the sweetness of stevia and monk fruit sweeteners reaches or even exceeds 300 times that of sugar. Due to various reasons, such as taste, usability (difficulty of dosage control), cooking effect, and pricing, these sweetener products are usually mixed with other ingredients, even sugar itself (such as sucrose and glucose).

Stevia or monk fruit sweetener products labeled "sugar-free" are also mixed with many other types of sugar substitutes. Erythritol is one of the more common ingredients, and it generally accounts for up to 99 percent of the ingredients in these products. While generally considered safe, recent research does raise some questions about its long-term effects, especially with people at risk of cardiovascular events.

Erythritol is a type of sugar alcohol that is about 70 percent as sweet as sucrose. Sugar alcohols are also called hydrogenated sugars—substances such as xylitol, sorbitol, and mannitol are all sugar alcohols. Similar to xylitol, with which people are more familiar, erythritol is also pro-

duced through microbial fermentation. Compared with xylitol, erythritol is less irritating to the human digestive tract and has a lower rate of adverse reactions. According to a paper in the British Journal of Nutrition, only about 10 percent of erythritol enters the colon, while 90 percent is absorbed by the body and excreted through urine without being utilized by cells. Until recently, there was no reason to be concerned that erythritol could be harmful in human studies, especially since it was shown to have beneficial effects.

A clinical study published in June 2021 reported that healthy subjects who received erythritol ranging from 10 to

50 grams had no significant changes in blood glucose, insulin, glucagon, blood lipids, and uric acid. The secretion of gut hormones for satiety increased in the subjects, indicating that erythritol may also reduce appetite. Another human study showed a significant reduction in serum ghrelin and an increase in satiety after consumption of an erythritol-sweetened beverage compared to aspartame, but this study only involved non-obese subjects.

Increased nausea and borborygmi (the sounds made in your stomach or intestines when gas or fluid moves through them) have been reported with the consumption of a single oral dose of 50 grams of erythritol. While it seems unlikely that erythritol will be fermented in the gut, as stated in the British Journal of Nutrition paper, it isn't known whether long-term consumption of erythritol could lead to an imbalance in the gut microbiota, and according to the Nutrients paper, the effect of erythritol on body weight and risk for metabolic diseases remains to be discovered.

Unfortunately, new research from the Cleveland Clinic linked erythritol to an increased risk of heart attack and stroke,

FOOD AS MEDICINE

Symptoms of Iron Deficiency and Where to Find It in Food

ELLEN WAN

The health of the human body requires a variety of nutrients, and iron is one of them. Iron has the important function of transporting oxygen throughout the body, and an iron deficiency can affect our health. While there are many ways to supplement iron, traditional Chinese medicine believes that the safest way is dietary supplements.

It's important to be careful not to take too much, however. Iron presents health risks when taken in excess.

Iron, an important component of hemoglobin, myoglobin, and cytochrome, is an indispensable element in the body. However, the body can't produce iron on its own and has to derive it from food. If iron intake is too low and can't make up for the body's daily loss, it

can lead to anemia.

Symptoms of iron deficiency include fatigue, cold hands and feet, tachycardia, shortness of breath, loss of appetite, and brittle nails. Iron deficiency in pregnant women can affect the future cognitive development of their children and even lead to anemia, low birth weight, and premature birth. Iron deficiency in children under 2 may also have irreversible serious consequences for brain development.

Iron is absorbed mainly through the gastrointestinal tract, transferred from the gut to the blood for storage, and then supplied to needed tissues and organs through the blood, Li Qing, a Chinese medicine doctor based in Japan, told The Epoch Times.

"People can usually get enough iron by having a balanced diet," he said. "However, those with hemorrhagic anemia due to surgery, serious injury, gastrointestinal bleeding, gastrointestinal cancer, and other factors should take iron supplements under the guidance of a doctor."



Brittle nails can be a sign of low iron.

though the study participants were already at a significantly elevated risk and the findings aren't conclusive.

Participants were 63 to 75 years of age on average and overweight. Most had high blood pressure, more than 20 percent had diabetes (type unspecified), more than 13 percent smoked, and more than 70 percent had existing cardiovascular problems.

Excessive intake is also linked to gut problems including nausea, abdominal bloating, and diarrhea, but it demonstrates fewer digestive side effects than sorbitol and xylitol.

In addition to these almost calorie-free, plant-derived sweeteners, there are also naturally occurring sugars. They too can sweeten our diets and offer health benefits when used in the right amounts.

Some sugar substitutes derived from natural plants are less harmful to our bodies.

Honey Can Fight Flu and COVID-19

Honey is made up of about 82 percent carbohydrates and 17 percent water—of the carbohydrates, fructose accounts for about 40 percent, and glucose accounts for 30 percent. It also contains 4 to 5 percent fructooligosaccharides, which are prebiotic agents. The physicochemical properties of honey can vary depending on the botanical sources, so its glycemic index (GI) varies between 32 and 85.

Honey contains about 180 different substances, including organic acids, enzymes, proteins, amino acids, minerals, vitamins, etc.

Compared with processed honey that has been sterilized at high temperatures, raw honey retains more nutrients. In particular, probiotics such as Lactobacillus and amylase are retained. Raw honey is also generally considered more nutritious and provides more health benefits.

A systematic review and meta-analysis study published in the journal Nutrition Reviews in 2022 showed that within a healthy dietary pattern, eating unprocessed raw honey provided better blood glucose and lipid control compared with eating processed honey. The subjects' fasting glucose decreased by 1.05 mmol/L, total cholesterol decreased by 0.61 millimoles per liter (mmol/L), fasting triglycerides decreased by 0.27 mmol/L, and HDL cholesterol increased by 0.11 mmol/L. These benefits were not seen in people who consumed processed honey.

Because of its broad spectrum activity against pathogenic bacteria, honey has been used for wound healing since ancient times.

An in vitro experiment found that honey can kill the influenza virus. The study tested five common kinds of honey, including manuka honey, buckwheat hon-

Stevia, Monk Fruit Sweeteners Are Less Harmful

Meanwhile, some sugar substitutes derived from natural plants are less harmful to our bodies.

For example, stevia and monk fruit are both natural sweeteners.

Stevia

Stevia is a sweetening ingredient extracted from the leaves of a plant called Stevia rebaudiana. It has zero calories and doesn't affect blood sugar or insulin levels. It may be a good sugar substitute for diabetics and obese people.

A meta-analysis of nine studies with 756 participants showed that the intake of stevia can significantly reduce blood pressure and fasting blood glucose; the blood pressure decreased by an average of 2.98 mm Hg (millimeter of mercury) and the largest reduction was 6.23 mm Hg.

In fact, previous studies have shown that stevia can stabilize insulin levels.

It is worth noting, however, that stevia has a slightly bitter aftertaste.



Monk fruit is a potent natural sweetener with anti-tumor, anti-diabetic and anti-inflammatory properties.

Monk Fruit Sweetener

A review article published in Scientific Reports indicated that monk fruit could be the second-best natural sweetener after stevia.

Monk fruit sweetener is extracted from the fruit of *luo han guo*. Current studies have found that it has anti-tumor, anti-diabetic, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidative properties.

It also is zero-calorie and won't be absorbed and metabolized by the body, so it won't affect blood sugar and cause obesity.

Monk fruit sweetener is a sugar substitute suitable for a wide range of people—its sweetness is relatively pure, close to that of white sugar. In addition, monk fruit sweetener can inhibit the growth of *Streptococcus* mutants and reduce its acid production and adhesion ability, which is beneficial to our oral health.

Stevia in the Raw, Pure Via, Truvia, and other sugar substitute brands use stevia in their recipes, while Monk Fruit in the Raw, Lakanto, etc., use monk fruit sweetener as raw material.

ey, honeydew honey, etc., and found that they all demonstrated strong inhibitory activity against influenza. In particular, manuka honey is the most effective type in killing the influenza virus.

In addition, a review study published in 2021 suggested that honey and its main components could combat COVID-19, and may also be effective against infection-induced pulmonary edema and fibrosis. Moreover, honey and its main components can suppress systemic inflammation in patients with COVID-19.

Glucose and fructose in honey can be directly absorbed by cells, and acetylcholine in honey has an anti-fatigue effect, so it can quickly restore physical strength and energy. The organic acids in honey can induce the secretion of digestive juices and promote digestion. Honey is

also believed to promote bowel movements, relieve hangovers, protect the liver, moisten the lungs, relieve coughs, and boost immunity.

Traditional Brown Sugar Has Health Benefits

Traditional brown sugar in the East is classified as non-centrifugal sugar (NCS) in the Western world. This refers to sugar obtained by boiling and drying sugarcane juice. Non-centrifugal sugar has different names in different countries, such as muscovado, panela, kokuto, jaggery, cane sugar, (ancient) brown sugar, brown sugar, and red sugar.

But be warned, there are two forms of brown sugar. This article uses the term to refer to the traditional form. The modern commercial form is made by adding molasses to refined white sugar.

White sugar is made by boiling the sap of sugar-containing plants and adding ingredients such as decolorizers, then spinning it at high speed in a centrifuge to separate the sucrose crystals, while the remaining dark brown molasses are discarded. In contrast, traditional brown sugar is reddish-brown because it retains molasses and has been boiled. It generally comes in the form of solid blocks or coarse particles, but some are in liquid form.

Rich in nutrients, brown sugar has been used since ancient times for its potential to treat and improve certain diseases, as it's rich in minerals, bioactive compounds, flavonoids, phenolic acids, etc.

Current studies have found that monk fruit has anti-tumor, anti-diabetic, anti-inflammatory, and antioxidative properties.

Brown sugar contains more iron than refined sugar—it also contains selenium, which is an insulin mimetic. In addition, there are minerals such as calcium, magnesium, and zinc in brown sugar.

Scientists have isolated about six antioxidants from Japanese jaggery (kokuto), including syringaresinol, coniferyl alcohol, and sinapyl alcohol.

There are 20 amino acids in brown sugar, among which is gamma-aminobutyric acid, which can regulate neurotransmission, promote neuron development and relaxation, and prevent insomnia and depression. Policosanols are also found in brown sugar and have cholesterol-lowering and lipid-lowering properties.

The conversion of sugar to acetic acid in the stomach increases enzyme activity, which improves digestion and stimulates appetite.

Animal experiments show that brown sugar effectively inhibits chromosomal aberration in cells caused by arsenic, which helps to prevent and treat arsenicosis.

Traditional Chinese medicine believes that brown sugar is a warming and tonifying food. Li Shizhen's "Compendium of Materia Medica" records that brown sugar has the effect of "harmonizing the spleen and soothing the liver,"

while "Truth-Seeking Herbal Foundation" describes that it can "nourish blood, improve blood circulation, and remove obstruction in collaterals."

A similar view is shared in traditional Ayurvedic Indian medicine—it also dictates that brown sugar can treat migraines and throat and lung infections.

In a review article covering 46 studies of non-centrifugal sugars, the most reported effects were immunological (26 percent of all studies), followed by anti-toxicity and cytoprotective effects (22 percent), anticarcinogenic effects (15 percent), and diabetes and hypertension effects (11 percent).

Foods With High Iron Content

For dietary supplementation, one can choose foods rich in iron to improve iron deficiency anemia. Iron-rich foods include (based on the amount of iron in 100g of cooked food):



Beans such as red beans, peas, soybeans, black beans, dried bean milk cream in tight rolls, etc. Among them, black beans contain 7.2 mg of iron and dried bean milk cream has 16.5 mg.



Vegetables such as spinach and broccoli, which have 3.6 mg and 1.0 mg of iron, respectively. Spinach is also a good source of vitamin C, which greatly improves the absorption of iron.



Dried fruits such as raisins, black dates, and red dates, which have 3.8 mg, 3.7 mg, and 2.3 mg of iron, respectively.



Seafood such as clams, which contain 27.5 mg of iron.



Nuts such as hazelnuts, almonds, and walnuts, which have 3.2 mg, 3.0 mg, and 2.9 mg of iron, respectively.



It's worth noting that pork liver contains 17 mg of iron. The liver and other organs of most animals are rich in iron as well. However, it isn't recommended to eat them too often because they are high in

cholesterol and fat.

To better absorb iron-rich foods, Li suggests combining them with fruits and vegetables rich in vitamin C, such as kiwifruit, orange, strawberry, tomato, and green leafy vegetables.

In addition, using an iron pot to cook can also help with daily iron supplements. The iron on the wall of the skillet or wok falls off under the scrape of utensils. After coming into contact with acidic

substances in food, chemical reactions occur and produce iron ions, which mix into food and increase the iron content in food. In this way, the body can constantly be replenished with trace

iron elements.

Those who don't have iron deficiency anemia shouldn't eat a large amount of food with high iron content. Li says, so as to avoid iron excess, which may affect liver function.

Iron deficiency in children under 2 may have irreversible serious consequences for brain development.

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FOOD AS MEDICINE

Heal Your Gut Microbiome With the GAPS Diet

Continued from Page 9

The GAPS protocol is an elimination diet that begins by mostly deriving nutrition from bone broth to build back the integrity of the intestinal epithelium—the cells that line the inside of the intestines. As tolerated, more whole foods are added to the diet and the gut is gradually fed prebiotics and probiotics to restore balance to the microbiome. Meat stock, soups, meats and organ meats, eggs, animal fats, seafood, and fermented foods are the staples.

Campbell-McBride's first book, "Gut and Psychology Syndrome" published in 2004, focused on the brain, including autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, schizophrenia, dyslexia, depression, and other neuropsychological or psychiatric problems. In 2020, her second book, "Gut and Physiology Syndrome," completed the GAP concept by including autoimmune conditions such as celiac disease, chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, arthritis, multiple sclerosis, Type 1 diabetes, asthma, allergies, and other chronic diseases and infections.

Most people with severe gut issues or other diseased states—including children—can expect to spend 18 months to two years on the plan. It's recommended that anyone interested begin with the full GAPS diet—described as being similar to the Specific Carbohydrate Diet, ketogenic, paleo, and primal nutritional protocols. Deeper healing may require the GAPS introduction diet, which eliminates far more foods and gradually reintroduces them to get to the full GAPS diet.

"It's the best diet you can be on to restore gut health hands down, but it's slow. It takes time," Dr. Armen Nikogosian told The Epoch Times. Nikogosian is board certified in internal medicine and a member of the Institute of Functional Medicine and the Medical Academy of Pediatric Special Needs. He's a functional medicine provider who specializes in gut issues, immune dysfunction, toxicity, and children and adults with autism. Nikogosian said the children who go on GAPS in his practice typically end up having a growth spurt.

"Dysbiosis seems to be increasing. The younger the generation, the more dysbiosis we see," Nikogosian said. "The food is different today. A whole lot of our food is genetically modified ... what that translates to is food with a whole lot more pesticide."

How the GAPS Diet Works

The GAPS diet is a six-step plan aimed at the slow and steady work of repairing and rebuilding damaged intestinal lining that plays a role in autoimmune, digestive, and neurological conditions.

TANG MING TUNG/
GETTY IMAGES



The GAPS diet is a highly restrictive therapeutic diet meant, first and foremost, to repair the gut.

ALL PHOTOS BY
SHUTTERSTOCK UNLESS
OTHERWISE NOTED

“It's the best diet you can be on to restore gut health hands down, but it's slow. It takes time.”

Dr. Armen Nikogosian, board-certified internal medicine and a member of the Institute of Functional Medicine and the Medical Academy of Pediatric Special Needs

The protocol is based on traditional diets found all over the world. Today, it's used to calm inflammation by removing food triggers, supporting detoxification, and offering clean nourishment in stages tolerated by the body with home-cooked foods from fresh ingredients. Its main purpose is to correct a compromised intestinal epithelial barrier, called "leaky gut," that allows bacteria and toxins to migrate out of the gut and into the body, crossing into the bloodstream, and contributing to disease. Research has linked many autoimmune diseases to dysbiosis.

Campbell-McBride first developed the GAPS concept while dealing with autism in

one, and Yeo says that understanding the concepts behind it and incorporating even some elements of it is better than eating the standard American diet.

"Just pulling out processed foods and cooking from scratch, which is much cheaper, makes a huge difference for people," said Yeo, who has worked as a GAPS coach. "I'm more of an all-or-nothing person, so I just dove in completely."

Those suffering from food allergies and sensitivities may already have leaky gut. Others with digestive distress may not realize they are reacting to foods until they eliminate them for a period. Yeo suspected dysbiosis because she had to take Benadryl every time she ate cheese, and all dairy made her feel sluggish.

While food such as grains and potatoes aren't generally recommended on the full GAPS diet, dairy is permitted—eventually—but raw milk is preferred. The protocol is more than a list of foods you can and cannot eat. It emphasizes growing or buying foods that are organic and sustainable, prepared traditionally and sometimes with special equipment, and eaten mindfully.

"There's a whole community of people who are moving out in the middle of nowhere to be homesteaders for this reason," Yeo said.

Nikogosian agreed that the protocol is more challenging in metropolitan areas, where direct access to farms is rare.

"A lot of times patients get hung up on some of the details of it," he said. "You have to be a little patient with it."

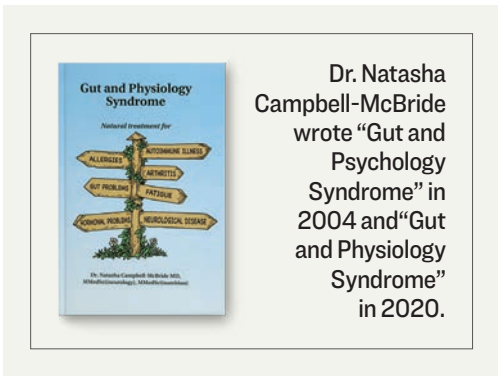
Some people, Yeo said, even go on GAPS retreats where someone does the cooking for the initial phases of the diet. Others have changed employment or housing because of stress and toxins that contribute to gut damage.

"It's astronomically more expensive to pay the pharmacy than your farmer in the end," she said.

Often those drawn to GAPS are people who have run out of options—parents of children with severe health problems who are told there's nothing that can be done, and people with chronic diseases pronounced as incurable. Campbell-McBride said her patients have shown her what is possible.

"There is not one illness that doesn't respond to this protocol because every chronic illness begins in the gut," Campbell-McBride said. "The human body is a microbial community—there are far more microbes in you than human cells. Food is the No. 1 medicine for us because food is the most powerful influence on any microbial community in nature."

Even cancer responds to the GAPS Diet. Certified GAPS practitioner Meme Grant



Dr. Natasha Campbell-McBride wrote "Gut and Psychology Syndrome" in 2004 and "Gut and Physiology Syndrome" in 2020.

her family. Her books have been translated into 26 languages, and she trains practitioners around the world to implement the diet correctly with their patients. The GAPS Science Foundation was also formed to raise money for scientific studies to be conducted and published in peer-reviewed journals.

Many people who try to correct dysbiosis after reading generic advice may feel worse and give up. Campbell-McBride told The Epoch Times that's because making rapid changes isn't well tolerated by the body. For instance, adding too much fiber, which is a prebiotic food for good bacteria or probiotics, can upset the system. Unlike well-meaning blanket recommendations, GAPS is strategically designed to undo gut damage while educating and empowering patients.

"You have to introduce these sorts of things gradually," Campbell-McBride said. "You have to be careful with fermented vegetables, especially for someone who hasn't had them before."

Who Is Helped by GAPS?

GAPS can be an eating approach for any-

one, and Yeo says that understanding the concepts behind it and incorporating even some elements of it is better than eating the standard American diet.

"What's compelling to me is there are so many women who try to obviate bone loss by non-pharmacological strategies," Mary Jane De Souza, the principal investigator of the study and others focusing on prunes, told The Epoch Times. De Souza, who has a doctorate in exercise physiology, is a professor at Pennsylvania State University.

"It's so nice to help those women who are averse to pharma therapy. We know there's a problem out there with compliance to osteoporosis drugs."

Bisphosphonates are the drugs commonly used to reduce fracture risk among patients with osteoporosis, which affects one in every two postmenopausal women. Prolonged use of bisphosphonates are associated with atypical femoral fracture and jaw osteonecrosis—disruption of blood flow to bone that can cause pain and collapse. Postmenopausal women have a 44 percent chance of having a fracture in their lifetime.

The pharmacological approach also has unappealing side effects that include gastrointestinal distress, musculoskeletal pain, low levels of calcium, and eye inflammation. Because of that—and evidence that indicates long-term use doesn't actually lower a woman's risk of hip fracture—women often seek alterna-

tives, either full-time or when they take "holidays" from drug treatment.

Building Better Bones

More than a dozen rodent studies have revealed prune consumption can prevent and even reverse bone loss. In two clinical trials, dried plum consumption in postmenopausal women showed promising effects on bone mineral density and bone biomarkers.

Menopause is a phase marked by 12 consecutive months without menstruation. The average age of menopause is 51, and osteoporosis is the most common disease in postmenopausal women. By 2025, osteoporosis is expected to cause 3 million fractures and cost \$25.3 billion annually. While hip fractures account for just 14 percent of all fractures, it represents 72 percent of fracture-related costs.

Participants in American Journal of Clinical Nutrition were divided into three groups—a control group, a group that consumed about six prunes a day for 12 months, and a group that ate 10-12 prunes a day. Several participants in the latter group dropped out due to the serving being hard to manage.

"We are super pleased that the women tolerated the six prunes a day very well for 12 months, and we were able to maintain bone density at a very important site, the hip,

healed her husband from melanoma as described in her book "How We Beat Cancer the Natural Way."

"Everybody improves to a certain degree. It depends on how much effort someone is prepared to put into their health," Campbell-McBride said. "There are miracles happening every day."

The Nuts and Bolts of GAPS

Much of the protocol can be found online, but working with a practitioner or coach can help with customization and accountability. The GAPS books offer full explanations.

The GAPS diet is about 85 percent meat (including organ meat), fish, broth, eggs, vegetables, and fermented dairy if tolerated. Baked goods using nut and seed flours and fruit are allowed in moderation. There are books, tips, recipes, and protocols for dairy intolerant, keto diet, vegan, and others.

The recommended food list is generous, but the restricted food list is much longer. Among some of the suggestions for adopting the full GAPS diet are:

- Avoid all grains, sugar, potatoes, parsnips, yams, and sweet potatoes.
- The best foods to eat are eggs, meats, stock, fish, shellfish, fresh vegetables and fruits, nuts, seeds, garlic, and olive oil.
- Avoid smoked, canned, and processed meats.
- Fish and shellfish should be fresh or frozen from wild-caught sources.
- Each meal should have vegetables—which are more alkaline—and meats or fish, which accumulate as acids in the body, to balance pH.
- Cook with animal fats, coconut oil, or ghee.
- Plant oils should be cold pressed and organic and consumed raw.
- Baked goods and fruit should be limited to snacks between meals.
- Avoid all processed and packaged foods and all artificial ingredients and preservatives.
- Do not microwave food.

The introduction diet starts with homemade meat or fish stock, which quickly helps regrow cells in the gut lining and has a soothing effect on inflammation. Very small amounts of probiotic foods are introduced gradually in the soups. In stage two, raw organic egg yolks are added, along with stews, casseroles, more probiotic food, and ghee.

Various foods are added to each stage until you reach the sixth stage, when apples and other fruits and baked goods can be incorporated. Reactions and digestion are carefully monitored through each stage before moving on.

Preparation Is Key

The biggest hurdle with using GAPS is rarely the foods themselves, but rather the mindset and lack of preparation before starting the protocol.

Jennifer Scribner loves to help her clients in this space. A functional nutritional therapy practitioner certified in GAPS, she's written the book "From Mac and Cheese to Veggies, Please" and a specialized GAPS journal.

"I would rather have people spend more time making their plan, doing their preparation, and then know they're ready," she said. Journaling helps them understand how they are feeling as they record eat-

ing and symptoms and even bowel movements. They review it every 30 days and look for patterns such as frequent headaches or skin issues. They also record detox baths and how they are feeling afterward. "They start paying attention because they see these clues or patterns," she said. "Then when they can't do it all, they can really double down on the things that are helpful."

Prunes May Boost Gut Health

Previous research has made a connection between the health benefits of eating prunes and the gut microbiome, which plays a role in how the gut stores fat, metabolizes food, and takes up glucose from the blood. Microbial diversity may play a role in whether or not a person develops Type 2 diabetes. The gut microbiome is the symbiotic community of microbes made up primarily of trillions of bacteria.

Osteoporosis is a systemic bone degenerative disease, and a loss of estrogen is a major factor. Lower gut microbial species are also associated with less circulating estrogen. New evidence has also shown a relationship between the gut microbiome and bone metabolic function and bone diseases.

That relationship is of particular interest to De Souza as she dives deeper into the role of prunes for preventing and possibly reversing bone deterioration. Her new-

A Therapeutic Diet

Healing the gut is often the key to restoring the mind and body. The GAPS diet is designed to restore the gastrointestinal tract and the community of beneficial microbes that lives there.



Not for Vegetarians

While vegetables are a critical part of a healthy diet because of the wide range of nutrition they provide, they play a relatively small role in the GAPS diet, which is mostly meat.

Avoid Processed Foods

Processed foods—and the damage they can cause to the body—are often one of the reasons people resort to a GAPS diet. All processed foods, artificial ingredients, and preservatives are to be avoided.



Abstain from Grains

Grains are a backbone food for most people today. Unfortunately all those breads, cereals, crackers, baked goods can cause inflammation and irritate the gut wall—especially since grains are often in processed foods. The GAPS diet is a low-to-no grains diet.



A Focus on Meat

Following bone broth, the GAPS diet introduces other whole foods, but meats make up the majority—up to 85 percent of the diet.



Nutritious Oils

The GAPS encourages using animal fat, butter, ghee, and coconut oil for cooking. All plant oils should be organic, cold pressed, and consumed raw.



In two clinical trials, dried plum consumption in postmenopausal women showed promising effects on bone mineral density and bone biomarkers.

ing and symptoms and even bowel movements. They review it every 30 days and look for patterns such as frequent headaches or skin issues. They also record detox baths and how they are feeling afterward. "They start paying attention because they see these clues or patterns," she said. "Then when they can't do it all, they can really double down on the things that are helpful."

She challenges her clients to think ahead about how they'll handle the classroom for their children, restaurants for the whole family, social functions, moments of weakness, and how they'll know whether the protocol is working.

"Don't just show up and see what happens mentally ... for a lot of us that's how we got sick because we didn't state our preferences," Scribner said.

Instead of feeling like their eating habits are bothersome, her clients flip the script and feel empowered to take their food when they need to, make decisions on where to eat out so they can opt for farm-to-table restaurants, and say "yes" to meeting with friends even if they only order herbal tea.

"A lot of us want to justify our own choices by having them validated by others," Scribner said. "You have to have your own reasons even if other people don't understand."

It's astronomically more expensive to pay the pharmacy than your farmer in the end.

River Yeo, GAPS coach

Making GAPS Realistic

While medication may offer relief for a lot of these diseases, it only masks symptoms without addressing the underlying root issues. The GAPS protocol isn't a quick fix, which is why Scribner said it probably remains on the fringes even after two decades.

In his clinic, Nikogosian speeds up the process by prescribing large doses of herbs, using coconut extracts and colostrum, and also putting patients on commercially available probiotics and prebiotics.

"GAPS is one of the modalities we use to heal the gut. In the end, it will probably do the job, but it just takes longer," he said. "We are doing it from more angles, and it complements what we do very nicely."

He also pointed out, as GAPS practitioners did, that food isn't the only reason for dysbiosis. It's simply the main reason. Other things to consider are toxic products used on the body and in the home, being overworked, stress, and lack of sleep.

Yeo also recommends going barefoot outside, getting plenty of sunlight, and spending time in nature. Besides healing her gut, she said the GAPS diet reversed eight cavities that were found just before starting the protocol.

"I eat all kinds of things now that I couldn't eat before, and I feel fantastic. I think that's really important," she said.

"I know there's a big choice in diets out there. GAPS is different because it's out of the mainstream," Campbell-McBride added. "It was developed out of love, for love. It works."



Researchers found a daily serving of prunes preserved hip bone mass in postmenopausal women.

FOOD AS MEDICINE

Menopausal Women May Want to Pop Prunes Instead of Pills

New studies show daily consumption helps build bone, ease digestive problems

AMY DENNEY

Menopausal and postmenopausal women looking for a non-pharmacological solution to symptoms such as loss of bone density and digestive distress might find

support from prunes.

A recent study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition found that eating a serving of prunes every day preserved bone mass in the hips of postmenopausal women, potentially lowering

FERTILITY

Sperm Counts Declining Worldwide at Accelerating Rate: New Meta-Analysis

Plummeting sperm counts and rising infertility are linked with several worrying health issues.



Researchers concerned that rise in endocrine-disrupting chemicals linked to genital deformities in animals could be affecting humans

DAVID CHARBONNEAU

Sperm counts are declining worldwide at an accelerating rate, according to a recently published meta-analysis.

An international team of researchers, who reviewed 2,936 scholarly abstracts and 868 full articles, analyzed data from 38 sperm count studies done on six continents, updating their landmark study of 2017. The study, published in the journal *Human Reproduction Update* in November 2022 is based on semen samples collected from 1973 to 2018.

The 2017 study found that sperm counts had fallen in North America, Europe, and Australia by more than 50 percent in a 50-year span. The current study updated this data as well as added data from South and Central America, Asia, and Africa.

"The aim of this study was to examine trends in sperm count among men from all continents. The broader implications of a global decline in sperm count, the knowledge gaps left unfulfilled by our prior analysis, and the controversies surrounding this issue warranted an up-to-date meta-analysis," the authors wrote.

The analysis found that sperm counts had declined at the average rate per year of 1.16 percent between 1972 and 2000. Since 2000, the rate of decline has increased significantly.

Reviewing the findings in an *After Skool* YouTube episode, study author Shanna Swan said researchers were able to confirm a significant decline in sperm counts in areas left out of the original study, including Asia, Africa, and South America.

"We can say that our finding of a significant decline in sperm concentration and count is worldwide—that was a big change from the 2017 paper," she said.

"The other change from the 2017 paper was the rate at which sperm counts are declining: When we look at recent years—particularly since the turn of the century—the rate is 2.64 per year. That's more than double 1.16, the prior finding."

The Role of Plastics in Reproductive Disruption

The obvious question is—why the accelerated rate of decline?

Swan dismissed genetic explanations, pointing out that genetic changes take "many generations to appear" while the noted changes are taking place in two generations or less.

"That leaves us with environment," she said.

Swan and other experts believe that the problem is a class of chemicals called endocrine disruptors, which interfere with the body's hormones.

These endocrine disruptors are found in many everyday products, including plastic bottles and containers, liners of metal food cans, detergents, flame retardants, food, toys, receipts from ATMs, and pesticides.

Phthalates, commonly found in personal care products, plastics, and children's toys, are one common class of these compounds. They're hard for consumers to avoid, par-

“Pollution in general ... stimulates aromatase which then converts available testosterone to estrogen. It is quite scary.”

Dr. Robin Bernhoft, M.D., past president of the American Academy of Environmental Medicine



The plastics of everyday life are leaching chemicals that contribute to falling sperm counts.

From **1.16%** to

2.64%

Researchers found sperm counts were falling by 2.64 percent a year in 2022, more than twice as fast as the rate of 1.16 percent found in 2017.

ticularly since manufacturers are under no obligation to identify these chemical ingredients.

Also, many of these disruptors are slow to break down in the environment, making them a long-term hazard.

One particular area of concern for researchers is reproduction, as these disruptors can interfere with fetal maturation and sexual differentiation in early pregnancy.

In the YouTube video, Swan illustrates how these disruptors can short-circuit testosterone production in the male fetus and lead to biological changes.

"There's the male fetus developing around the first couple weeks of the first trimester. The genetic signal is for the testicles to develop and start making testosterone, and here comes this foreign influence from phthalates telling the body, well, you don't need to make as much testosterone [because] we got it covered as they occupy the spaces ... of the androgen receptors, the testosterone receptors," she said.

"They sit there and they say: 'Okay we're good here—you don't need to make any more [testosterone].'" So the body says: 'Okay—it won't make any more' ... and the boy will be under-masculinized."

Dr. Robin Bernhoft, past president of the American Academy of Environmental Medicine, told *The Epoch Times* that plastics are part of a larger picture of toxins affecting reproduction throughout the biosphere.

"The proliferation of estrogenic chemicals is a major concern. Research has shown that 80 percent of male trout in Colorado had intersex genitalia, a high percentage of male crocodiles in Florida lack penises, and so forth. This is happening on many levels: Direct toxicity from PCBs, direct estrogenic effects from plastics, pesticides, and mercury among other toxins—but also a secondary effect—the stimulation of aromatase, a hormone which then converts testosterone to estrogen independently of the other factors. Pollution in general ... stimulates aromatase which then converts available testosterone to estrogen. It is quite scary."

Criticism of Sperm Count Analysis

The 2017 study by Swan and her colleagues was criticized in an article published in the journal *Human Fertility* in May 2021 by researchers at Harvard's GenderSci Lab. The researchers didn't conduct their own detailed meta-analysis of sperm studies but criticized the assumptions and conclusions of the original research.

"The extraordinary biological claims of the meta-analysis of sperm count trends and the public attention it continues to garner, raised questions for the GenderSci Lab, which specializes in analyzing bias and hype in the sciences of sex, gender, and reproduction, and in the intersectional study of race, gender, and science," Sarah S. Richardson, director of the GenderSci Lab and a professor of the history of science and studies of women, gender, and sexuality at Harvard University, told the *Harvard Gazette*.

The GenderSci authors argue that rather than concluding the results support a "sperm count decline" hypothesis, they

propose "the sperm count biovariability" (SCB) hypothesis:

"SCB asserts that sperm count varies within a wide range, much of which can be considered non-pathological and species-typical. Knowledge about the relationship between individual and population sperm count and life-historical and ecological [i.e., regional] factors is critical to interpreting trends in average sperm counts and their relationships to health and fertility."

However, the meta-analysis of Swan and her colleagues didn't deny the range of variations in individual sperm counts but examined declining overall averages spanning more than a half-century. How such a precipitous overall average decline across all groups can be explained by individual variation based on life-historical factors or regional variation is unclear.

The Health Consequences of Low Sperm Count

In contrast to the GenderSci Lab's science-as-culture analysis, a study in Italy conducted by endocrinologists found that low sperm count was associated with metabolic alterations, cardiovascular risk, and low bone mass, according to lead author Dr. Alberto Ferlin, an associate professor of endocrinology at the University of Brescia.

"Infertile men are likely to have important co-existing health problems or risk factors that can impair quality of life and shorten their lives," said Ferlin, who's also president of the Italian Society of Andrology and Sexual Medicine. "Fertility evaluation gives men the unique opportunity for health assessment and disease prevention."

Specifically, Ferlin and his colleagues found that about half the men had low sperm counts and were 1.2 times more likely than those with normal sperm counts to have greater body fat (bigger waistline and higher body mass index; higher blood pressure (systolic, or top reading), "bad" (LDL) cholesterol and triglycerides; and lower "good" (HDL) cholesterol.

Low sperm count was defined as less than 39 million per ejaculate, a value also used in the United States. All the men in the study had a sperm analysis as part of a comprehensive health evaluation in the university's fertility clinic, which included measurement of their reproductive hormones and metabolic parameters.

They also had a higher frequency of metabolic syndrome, a cluster of these and other metabolic risk factors that increase the chance of developing diabetes, heart disease, and stroke, the investigators reported. A measure of insulin resistance, another problem that can lead to diabetes, also was higher in men with low sperm counts.

David Charbonneau, Ph.D. is a freelance journalist who has also taught literature and writing at the college level for 25 years. In addition to The Epoch Times, his work has appeared in The Defender, Medium, and other online and print platforms. A staunch advocate for medical freedom, he lives and works in Pasadena, Calif.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Ashwagandha: Nature's Powerful Stress Reliever

Studies of this adaptogen affirm its powerful ability to help us regulate stress hormones, protect our brains

EMMA SUTTIE

Ashwagandha, also known as *Withania somnifera*, is an ancient herb revered in Ayurveda—the traditional medicine system of India—where it has been used for thousands of years. Modern researchers have now begun to unravel why this herb has so many wide-reaching benefits for human health.

Ashwagandha's traditional medicinal uses are so numerous, it's difficult to list them all. However, some of its well-known uses are promoting youthful vitality and longevity, enhancing the function of the nervous system, and sharpening the intellect.

In the West, ashwagandha has been studied extensively and is known as a potent adaptogen. Adaptogens, according to the Cleveland Clinic, "are plants and mushrooms that help your body respond to stress, anxiety, fatigue, and [improve] overall well-being."

Studies have also shown that ashwagandha supports the adrenals, increases stamina, and has neuroprotective effects.

Ashwagandha sales have skyrocketed in the United States due to its adaptogenic properties, and this has resulted in a rapid increase in research studies of its biological effects, particularly of its applications for stress, anxiety, depression, and insomnia.

Stress in Our Society

Americans are some of the most stressed out people in the world—at 20 percent higher than the global average—according to the American Institute of Stress.

A 2022 poll by the American Psychological Association details the main stressors for the average American:

- 87 percent: rise in prices of everyday items due to inflation (gas, groceries, energy bills)
- 81 percent: supply chain issues
- 81 percent: global uncertainty
- 80 percent: potential retaliation from Russia (e.g., cyberattacks, nuclear threats)
- 80 percent: Russian invasion of Ukraine

The survey also noted that 27 percent of Americans reported that on most days, their stress levels are so high they are unable to function. 70 percent reported they don't think people in the government care about them, and 64 percent said they felt their rights were under attack. More than three-quarters of U.S. adults (76 percent) said that the future of our nation is a significant source of stress in their lives and 68 percent said this was the lowest point in our nation's history that they can remember.

Stress and Our Bodies

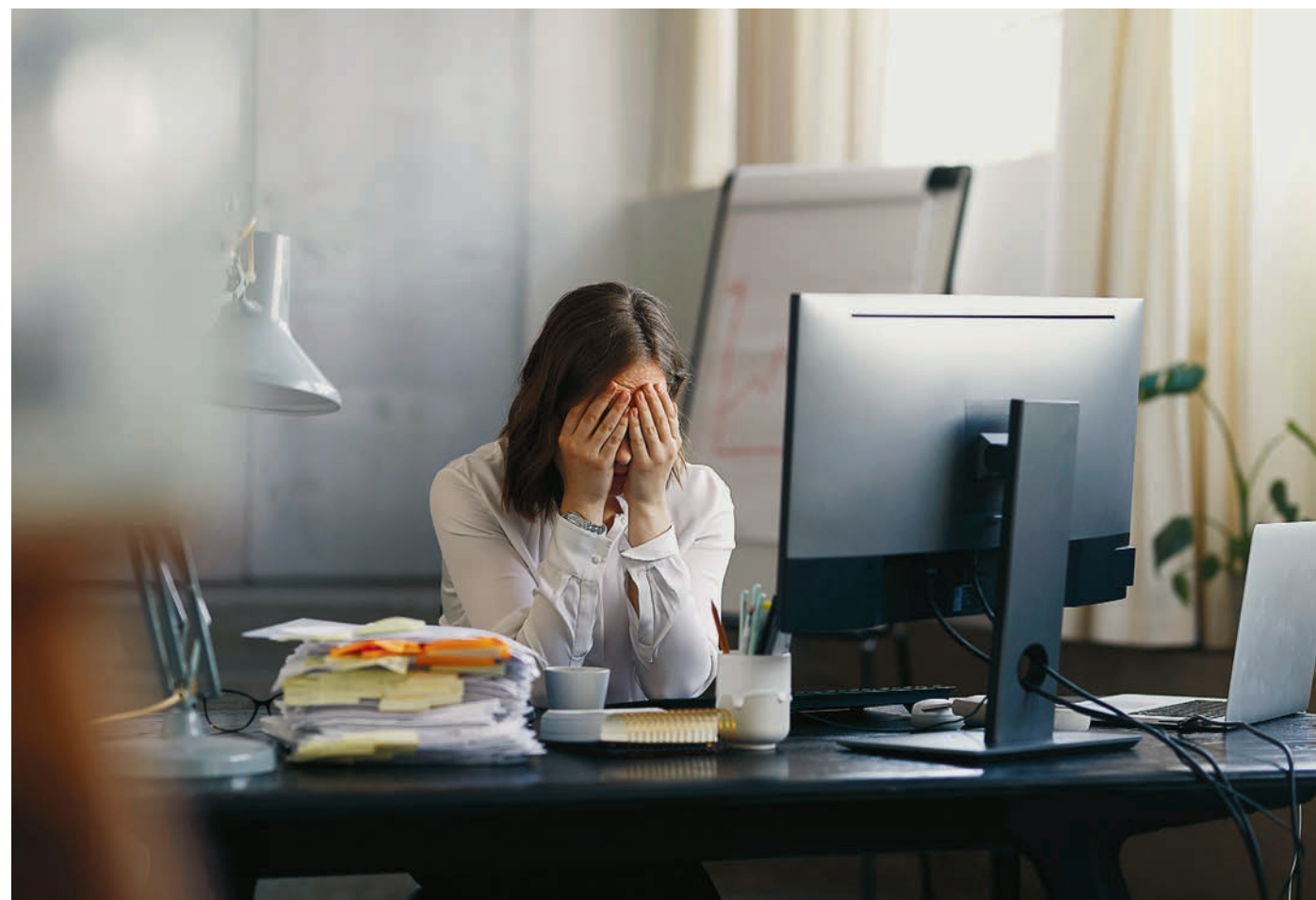
We all experience stress in our daily lives, from being late for work, taking a particularly difficult exam, or having to make a presentation in front of a room full of people. These are types of acute stress. They happen in bursts, and each time we encounter acute stress, the stress hormone cortisol is released into our bloodstream, our bodies pump more oxygen to our brains, and our heartbeat increases, which helps us focus on and deal with the stressful event as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Once the event is over, our bodies' systems normalize, cortisol levels return to normal, and we go on with our day. This type of stress usually doesn't cause us harm and, in small amounts, can actually be beneficial.

There is another type of stress however, that isn't good for us, and that is chronic stress—when the stresses in our lives are ongoing. Our bodies react in the same way they do to acute stress, but then remain on "high alert," with elevated cortisol levels and increased heart rate. That situation can depress the immune system, upset the digestive system, and trigger a whole host of other concerns because we simply aren't made to remain in that state for extended periods.

What Are Adaptogens?

Adaptogens are plants and fungi that naturally help the body resist the nega-



Americans suffer some of the highest levels of stress in the world, with rates 20 percent higher than the global average.

Adaptogens help us to build resilience to stress by stabilizing physiological processes and promoting homeostasis, or equilibrium.



Ashwagandha supplementation significantly reduced anxiety and levels of stress compared to a placebo.

tive effects of stress. Adaptogens help us to build resilience to stress by stabilizing physiological processes and promoting homeostasis, or equilibrium—keeping our internal systems balanced. Adaptogens help the body to "adapt" to stressors by strengthening and balancing internal systems, which help stabilize our moods, improve focus and performance, and promote vitality.

Adaptogens naturally work with the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, which is central to the body's ability to maintain homeostasis and works through a complex system of glands and hormones. For example, if we are feeling stressed or anxious because our bodies have too much of the stress hormone cortisol, adaptogens can help lower it to bring the body back to a state of balance, which makes us feel less stressed. Conversely, if there isn't enough of a certain hormone, adaptogens can return levels to where they should be, which is part of their ability to maintain homeostasis and help make us feel more even-keeled, especially when dealing with stress.

Supports Adrenals, Lowers Stress

Ashwagandha is most famous for its powerful ability to lower stress and anxiety, and for helping the body to build resilience with its normalizing effect on the body's processes. There have been numerous scientific studies demonstrating ashwagandha's beneficial effects against stress.

A systematic review published in 2022 evaluated whether ashwagandha supplementation had a beneficial effect on anxiety and stress based on previous studies. A total of 12 studies, including randomized clinical trials, were evaluated with a total sample size of 1,002 participants between the ages of 25 and 48 years. The review concluded that ashwagandha supplementation significantly reduced anxiety and levels of stress compared to a placebo.

In a randomized double-blind, placebo-controlled study published in the *Indian Journal of Psychological Medicine*, ashwagandha root was used to evaluate the effects of reducing stress and anxiety in adults. Sixty-four adults with a history of chronic stress were enrolled in the study after measuring levels of blood cortisol (a stress hormone) and assessing scores on standard stress assessment questionnaires. The group was randomized to either a placebo control group or the drug treatment group and each took a capsule twice a day for 60 days.

The treatment group had capsules that contained 300 mg of high-concentration, full-spectrum extract of ashwagandha root, the other group received a placebo. The group taking the ashwagandha showed a significant reduction in scores on all the stress assessment tests, and serum cortisol levels were substantially reduced in the ashwagandha group compared to the placebo group. The researchers concluded that (high-concentration full-spectrum) ashwagandha root safely and effectively improves resistance to stress and improves self-assessed quality of life based on the results of the study.

In mice, ashwagandha was shown to prevent stress-induced gastric ulcers. It also was shown to prevent an increase in the weight of the adrenal glands, which is a sign of chronic stress, as well as stabilize cortisol levels. The findings were published in the *International Journal of Crude Drug Research*.

Benefits the Thyroid

Ashwagandha has also been shown to benefit the thyroid. A study involving rats published in *Molecular Biology Reports* in 2019 concluded that ashwagandha (in the form

of a methanolic extract) improved thyroid function by enhancing and regulating thyroid hormones and preventing oxidative stress in mice with induced hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid). Ashwagandha was even found to be more effective than the anti-hypothyroidism medication used in the study.

In a double-blind, randomized placebo-controlled trial published in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* in 2017, researchers tested the efficacy of ashwagandha on subclinical hypothyroidism—a thyroid disorder without obvious symptoms of thyroid deficiency that, according to the study, affects about 3 to 8 percent of the global population.

A total of 50 subjects between the age of 18 and 50 with elevated levels of blood thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH)—a hormone produced by the pituitary gland—were included in the study. They were split into two groups, one receiving ashwagandha and the other a placebo over an eight-week treatment period. The treatment group received 600 mg of ashwagandha root extract daily and the other received starch as a placebo.

Thyroid stimulating hormone, T3, and T4 (both hormones produced by the thyroid gland and are at low levels in hypothyroidism) were measured. The results showed that patients receiving the ashwagandha had significantly improved levels of TSH, T3, and T4 compared to those in the placebo group. The researchers concluded that the ashwagandha treatment effectively normalized the serum thyroid measurements during the treatment period in a significant manner.

Protects the Brain

Ashwagandha is also known for its neuroprotective abilities.

In a review published in 2020 in the *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*, researchers set out to assess and summarize ashwagandha's use in brain disorders. The review concluded that ashwagandha has "extensive potential" as a neuroprotective in a variety of brain disorders, which is supported by preclinical studies, clinical trials, and published patents.

Final Thoughts

Ashwagandha is an incredibly versatile herb, and although there is much interest in studying its medicinal effects, science is still learning about its healing capabilities and how they work. Ashwagandha is a wonderful herb to help us manage chronic stress that may seem overwhelming or beyond our control. That is particularly helpful amid our ever-accelerating and stressful modern lifestyles.

Although ashwagandha can help us manage chronic stress, our best option is to try to keep stress to a minimum. Implementing some long-term strategies such as regular exercise, prioritizing sleep, and regular faith or meditation practice are excellent ways to manage chronic stress and keep us happy and healthy.

NATURE IS MEDICINE

Garden Appreciation Boosts Well-Being, Study Finds

The benefits of gardens extend to those who simply enjoy looking at them with friends

JESSIE ZHANG

In a first-of-its-kind study that looked at the appreciation of home gardening, rather than the active practice of it, researchers found that merely taking delight in the beauty of flowers and green spaces can boost the health and well-being of regional and rural populations.

Based on the experiences and perspectives of members of a gardening appreciation group in rural Australia, the Colac Horticultural and Marvellous Property Appreciation Society (CHAMPAS), sharing a love for home gardening was found to have both direct and indirect impacts on physical fitness, social connectedness, and friendship.

Formed in 2017, the volunteer group from southwest Victoria, Australia, hosts meet-ups of popular gardens and properties in the area.

“That whole idea that because people live in the countryside, they’re not desperate for green space and gardens is a bit flawed,” Swinburne University of Technology honors student and study lead Leith Symes said.

“It was extremely surprising the amount of people that were involved in CHAMPAS.”

Published last month in Health Promotion International, Symes said that while the

health benefits of gardening aren’t new, past research has focused on the act of gardening rather than the passive forms of engagement with gardens, such as viewing gardens.

He found that the building of strong social connections was a key theme, as it enabled new friendships and reinforced existing ones, which builds more sustainable communities.

“Participants [were] building broader ties to their local community through involvement with other related groups and this was perceived to positively impact participants’ well-being,” he said.

Gardeners have a lower risk of chronic and mental illness.

A similar study has found that touring gardens allows for a rewarding poetic and personal exchange between people and historical landscapes.

Roger Ulrich’s now famous study also revealed improved rates of recovery from surgery for those who had a view of nature from a window.

Gardeners Have Lower Risk of Chronic, Mental Illness

An earlier study published on Jan. 4 in the Lancet Planetary Health journal discovered that gardeners have a lower risk of chronic and mental illness.

In the first-ever randomized, controlled trial of community gardening, researchers found concrete evidence of gardening helping people to increase their intake of fiber and reduce their risk of mental illness.

“These findings provide concrete evidence that community gardening could play an important role in preventing cancer, chronic diseases, and mental health disorders,” said Jill Litt, senior author and environment professor at the Department of Environmental Studies at the University of Colorado–Boulder.

Gardeners who came into the study the



FLOWER_GARDEN/SHUTTERSTOCK

Research reveals that our love of beautiful gardens has important benefits for our health and well-being.

most stressed and anxious saw the greatest improvements in their mental health.

“Even if you come to the garden looking to grow your food on your own in a quiet place, you start to look at your neighbor’s plot and share techniques and recipes, and over time relationships bloom,” Litt said.

“No matter where you go, people say there’s just something about gardening that makes them feel better.”

Prior research was mainly undertaken in urban settings and focused on the health outcomes experienced by metropolitan Australians, leaving little known about the health impacts for rural populations.

Symes said more rural garden appreciation groups should be mapped and analyzed across the country, given the results of the research.

“This study suggests that engagement in a garden appreciation group could potentially provide a variety of health and well-being benefits mainly through the building of social connectedness and a sense of community,” he said.

Symes said identifying novel health promotion initiatives that improve health and well-being may assist rural communities as they’re “susceptible to poorer health outcomes than those in urban areas.”

HANNES EICHINGER/EYEEM/GETTY IMAGES



The research provides proof that community gardening could be an important part in efforts to prevent cancer, chronic diseases, and mental health disorders.

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