

# THE EPOCH TIMES

# MIND & BODY

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WEEKLY



# How Living in a City Can Mess With Your Mental Health

City living takes a high psychological toll, but there are ways to protect your well-being



JULI FRAGA

As an urbanite, I enjoy many things about city living, such as walking to quaint, local coffee shops and restaurants, attending cultural events, and meeting people from diverse backgrounds. But even though living in a metropolis can be exciting, there are some downsides. For instance, heavy traffic makes it challenging for me to socialize with my suburban friends. Additional frustrations include crowded public transportation, noise pollution, and having to pay nearly \$15 to see a movie.

These might sound like small annoyances, but studies show that the hustle and bustle of urban life can actually take a toll on our physical and mental health. Here's what you can do about it.

## Mental Toll From City Buzz

While living in a metropolis has its perks, it can take a big toll on our mental health. Compared to rural residents, researchers have found that urbanites are 21 percent more likely to have anxiety disorders and 39 percent more likely to have mood disorders. A 2017 meta-analysis also found that rates of PTSD, anger management, and generalized anxiety disorder were higher among those living in urban areas.

The same was true for more serious psychological disorders like schizophrenia and paranoia.

So, what's the explanation? According to psychiatrists, urban living gives the brain a workout, which alters how we cope with stress.

Here's how it works: The constant stimulation of city life can propel the body into a stressful state, known as the fight-or-flight response. That can make us more vulnerable to mental health concerns, such as depression, anxiety, and substance use. This might help explain why 19.1 percent of Americans live with an anxiety disorder, while 6.7 percent have depression.

City living can also chip away at your psychological immune system, which can be precarious for those with a family history of mental illness. According to psychologists, this environmental stress can increase your risk of developing a psychiatric condition, such as anxiety, depression, or bipolar disorder. Even though urban life may lead to emotional distress, shame and stigma can stop young adults from talking about their struggles. This may explain why they feel lonelier than older generations, according to a Cigna study.

What's more, young adults, especially

Urban living can bring as much stress as it does excitement.

millennials, often feel burnout—a stressful state of mental and physical exhaustion that can squeeze the joy out of life.

Older generations may view millennials as incompetent adults who shy away from responsibility, but as Anne Helen Peterson wrote for Buzzfeed, millennials have “errand paralysis” and think they should always be working.

For young adults living in cities that never sleep, this belief may be intensified, adding to the psychological hardships of urban dwelling.

## Sleep and Cardiovascular Health

Not only can city life affect our mental well-being, it can also affect our physical health as well. A 2017 study suggests too much exposure to air pollution and city noise may cause damage to a person's cardiovascular health.

It seems traffic noise may interfere with sleep quality and cause cortisol, the stress hormone, to spike. Over time, elevated levels of this hormone can increase a person's risk for developing cardiovascular disease.

It also seems urban dwellers may be more prone to insomnia and sleep difficulties. In a survey of more than 15,000 individuals, researchers at Stanford University found that the bright lights of a city can dampen a person's ability to get a good night's rest.

According to the survey, 6 percent of people living in highly lit, urban areas slept less than six hours each night. They also found that 29 percent of these urbanites were dissatisfied with the quality of their nighttime rest.

Crowded city life can also make us more prone to contracting viruses, especially during cold and flu season. Studies have also found that people living in urban areas often eat too much processed and fast food, which puts them at greater risk for weight gain, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

## Protection From City Living Side-Effects

Learning how to deal with the stressors of city life can help bolster your physical and emotional well-being. The following tips may

help to prevent burnout, loneliness, and depression from yanking the happiness out of urban dwelling.

## Spend Time Outdoors

Spending too much time surrounded by concrete can cause a bad case of city-living blues. But heading to the park or going for a nature walk may offer a solution. Studies show that connecting with nature can help improve your psychological well-being and even prevent depression.

Busy urbanites may worry, however, that they don't have enough time to spend outside. Luckily, you don't need to carve out an entire weekend to benefit from the great outdoors. Try getting outside and finding green spaces like a park during your lunch hour, or set up a weekly walk and talk with a close friend.

Stanford researchers have found that walking in nature helps reset the brain's emotional thermostat. That helps us get a grip on distressing emotions, which then bolsters our ability to cope with stress.

## Create a Community

Connecting to your neighborhood can make it feel more like home, but in the era of social media, we may be less likely to ask our neighbors for small favors.

However, these social interactions help build social connections and form intimacy. They may even improve our physical health.

With that in mind, embrace your inner Mr. Rogers and take time to get to know your neighbors. Invite them over for dinner or strike up a conversation with the barista at your local coffee shop. Connecting with others, even strangers, can help combat loneliness. Small conversations are wonderful ways to foster new relationships.

## Exercise

It's no surprise that exercise is good for our physical and mental health. Studies show that working out can make us happier, improve our immune system, and help prevent heart disease.

However, the business and expense of city living may prevent us from working out as much as we'd like. If a gym

membership or cycling class isn't in your budget, try a group fitness routine. In cities like Los Angeles, San Francisco, and London, outdoor group exercise classes are often less expensive and can be found in local neighborhoods.

## Talk About It

Talking about the ups and downs of city living is one way to cope with the stress. Finding others who validate your experience can affirm that you're not alone. If you're dealing with a mental health concern like depression or anxiety, therapy can help. However, depending on your insurance coverage, it can be costly.

Don't let that stop you from seeking support. Most major cities in the United States offer low-cost mental health clinics and support groups. Learning about affordable mental health care options can help you find the right type of support.

If the process sounds daunting, remember that therapy doesn't last forever, but talking to a professional can prevent stress from becoming something more serious and long term, such as burnout, generalized anxiety, or major depression.

## The Bottom Line

Urban living can bring as much stress as it does excitement. Knowing how to prevent city life from affecting your physical and mental health can make a world of difference.

It comes as no surprise that exercise, talking with loved ones, and finding a community can give your mood a boost. And while these activities can benefit us all, these interactions can help city dwellers stay afloat

Juli Fraga is a licensed psychologist based in San Francisco, California, with a doctorate in psychology from the University of Northern Colorado and a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of California—Berkeley. This article was first published on Healthline.

HELP!  
HELP!



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# Searching for PURPOSE

Break the Script and Take the Harder Path

Purpose gives us hope when things get tough.

JAY HARRINGTON

In 1916, Robert Frost published one of the most renowned poems of the 20th century, “The Road Not Taken,” which begins: “Two roads diverged in a yellow wood...” The metaphor of the “fork of the road,” upon which Frost’s seminal work is based, is so enduring because it is so universal.

Every day, each one of us is confronted with choices, big and small, that determine the direction of our lives.

In most cases, particularly when it comes to the “big” choices in life, each path is distinctly marked. There is the easy, default path, and the hard, purposeful path. Too often, people look back on their lives and realize that many of the actions they took (or didn’t), choices they made (or didn’t), and priorities they set (or didn’t) happened by default; guided by the expectations of society and others, and not by their own inner compass. They traveled the safe, smooth path, not the uneven, winding one, and ultimately reached a destination, but one they regret in the end.

We all grapple with regret stemming from the choices we make (or don’t). Again, it’s a universal part of the human condition. What’s important to realize, is that at any point in life’s journey, if you can summon the courage, you can stop, assess, and change direction.

The key to making positive change, to live a life free of regret and full of passion, is to open yourself up to what truly matters—to you, not others—and to embrace the risks involved in pursuing it. After all, isn’t the risk of not living a life true to yourself an even greater risk?

“The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.” – Mark Twain

After all, isn't the risk of not living a life true to yourself an even greater risk?

## Passion Follows Purpose

In my professional life outside of Life and Whim, I coach and consult with high-performing attorneys who are looking to take their practices to the next level. Most of my clients are, according to traditional notions of success, high achieving. They have good jobs, earn high incomes, and do sophisticated, impactful work.

But they feel adrift. They don’t have a specific direction in which they’re headed. They don’t have a big picture view of what they want out of their lives and careers. They lack a mission. As a result, they’re afflicted with ambivalence—they aren’t passionate about the day-to-day work of being a lawyer.

They come to me hoping to revive (or discover for the first time) their passion for what they do as if it’s some flame that can simply be lit in order bring light back to their lives.

What we come to realize, together, is what they’re really seeking is purpose. Passion builds over time, but it’s a by-product of living a purpose-driven life. Passion follows purpose.

## Purpose to Impact

Think about the people in your life who you are most drawn to. The odds are that they are burning bright with the light of passion because they have a clear purpose for their lives. Their inner glow draws us to them. They’re confident because they are animated by purpose. They’re decisive because their purpose informs their actions. They don’t sleepwalk through life—they don’t even use the snooze button—because they can’t wait to jump out of bed in the morning. They’re in control because they’re living life on their terms, not someone else’s.

Purpose is what keeps us motivated and gives us the energy to push forward. Purpose is what gives us direction and gets us reoriented when we get off-track. Purpose makes us resilient and enables us to embrace life’s challenges. Purpose gives us hope when things get tough. Purpose even allows us to live longer. Studies have found that those with a strong sense of purpose live longer than those who lack purpose in their lives.

So what is purpose, exactly? It’s not marked by what you do or what you have in your life. In other words, you don’t need to be a company CEO, celebrity, or politician—with a large amount of resources at your disposal—to lead a life of purpose.

In fact, those who allocate their own resources toward such high levels of personal achievement often lack purpose in their lives. They push aside the pursuit of purpose for other priorities. Put simply, purpose is a reflection of how you lead your life and why, irrespective of how seemingly insignificant your influence may be. Purpose is mission. Purpose allows you to make an impact.

## Think Big, Act Small

Living a purpose-driven life has many benefits, but it can be frustratingly hard to identify what your life’s purpose actually is. It’s not the type of thing that can be pinpointed by merely sitting down with a pen and a journal and ruminating.

If it was easy, we’d all know exactly why we’re here and be living in accordance with a defined mission each and every day. But of course, that’s not the case.

Part of the problem is that we are besieged by messages from others—parents, friends, colleagues, advertising agencies, and others—exhorting us to live a certain way; quite possibly a way that is not of your own choosing.

To figure out who you are and what your purpose is in such a world, you must open yourself up to introspection and new experiences. In my experience, both in my personal life and in my work helping others discover their life and career purpose, I’ve found that flashes of inspiration and insight come when you least expect them.

Take Blake Mycoskie, for example. While traveling in Argentina in 2006, Mycoskie witnessed the hardships faced by children growing up without shoes. Inspired to do something about the problem, Mycoskie founded a small, for-profit company for the purpose of donating one pair of shoes to the poor children of Argentina for every pair of shoes he sold in the United States. Out of this small idea, born out of a seemingly unrelated travel experience, the multi-billion dollar TOMS shoes empire began.

For an example that hits a little closer to our home, consider the experience of Ty and Joanna Schmidt in Traverse City, Michigan.

After moving to the community in 2006, they noticed things that bothered them: long car lines at school drop-off and pick-up, empty bike racks, and few kids walking to school. They set out to do something about this.

They began by inviting neighborhood families to drop their kids off at their house before school, and Ty would lead a “bike train” of kids to the local elementary school. At first, just a few kids participated, then it took off. Fast forward to 2018, and the Schmidts’ Norte non-profit organization is a community force, leading a thriving movement in our community and beyond that gets kids outside, active, and on bikes so that they can lead healthy, happy lives.

Notice the parallels between these two examples. Mycoskie and Schmidt weren’t on missions to find purpose, but they opened their eyes to issues impacting those in their communities, and around the world, and purpose found them. This happened not by focusing on themselves, but by focusing on others. In addition, they didn’t fixate on big, grandiose goals immediately. Mycoskie simply set out to sell a few hundred pairs of shoes so he could donate a few hundred pairs to hundreds of kids in need. The Schmidts didn’t set out to create a movement. They just wanted to get a few more kids riding bikes. They started very small and discovered their purpose in the process. Now they are doing very big things.

No matter how big your ambitions, start small.

On a smaller scale, just last weekend we had the chance to witness the manifestation of our purpose as a business, and as business owners, through Life and Whim. Our purpose is to empower children and families to actively and creatively engage in new experiences in the great outdoors. We recently hosted our third annual “Fairy Fest” event in Traverse City. Over 1,000 people gathered to celebrate the opening of the Traverse City Fairy Trails for the season, and kids spent an afternoon outside exploring and discovering over 40 new fairy houses placed on the trails, doing creative crafts, listening to live music, and interacting with other people in a beautiful setting.

In the grand scheme of things, it was an afternoon of insignificance. But to many in our community, and especially to the kids in attendance, it was magic. And, for us, it was a reminder: You may never be able to make a significant impact on the world, but if you take the time to define your purpose, and then take actions aligned with your purpose, you can make an impact.

No matter how big your ambitions, start small. Take a step, then another. You never know where the path will take you. But one thing is certain—if you don’t take the time to figure out where you want to go, and you come to a fork in the road, you’ll almost always take the default, easy path. And in most cases, that’s a road to nowhere.

Jay Harrington is an author, lawyer-turned-entrepreneur, and runs a northern Michigan-inspired lifestyle brand called Life and Whim. He lives with his wife and three young girls in a small town and writes about living a purposeful, outdoor-oriented life.



# What to Know About High-Fat Diets and Your Microbiome

New research finds high-fat diets may change the makeup of people’s gut bacteria

SHAWN RADCLIFFE

New research finds a high-fat diet changes the bacterial communities in the gut and increases biomarkers of inflammation. The typical “Westernized” diet of processed and fast foods—high in fat and added sugars—has been linked to many health problems, including obesity, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. The research shows that how they interact with your gut microbiome. This is the community of bacteria and other microorganisms that live in the intestines. One recent study published this month in the BMJ Gut medical journal found that a high-fat diet is linked to “unfavorable” changes in the communities of bacteria in the gut, with possible negative effects on health.

**A high-fat diet is linked to unfavorable changes in the communities of bacteria in the gut.**

This is relevant for developing countries moving from a traditional high-carb, low-fat diet to a more Westernized, high-fat diet and to countries like the United States that are already there, write the authors of the study. The study also raises questions about the long-term effects of higher-fat diets like paleo and keto on the gut microbiome.

**High-Fat Diet Affects Gut Bacteria**  
In the new study, researchers assigned 217 healthy 18- to 35-year-olds to one of three diets for six months:

- lower fat with 20 percent of calories from fat
- moderate fat with 30 percent of calories from fat
- higher fat with 40 percent of calories from fat

The diets for all three groups included the same amount of protein and dietary fiber.

In comparison, the keto-genic diet is 60 to 75 percent fat, while the paleo diet is about 40 percent fat.

At the start and end of the study, researchers collected fecal samples in order to analyze the participants’ gut microbiome. They also measured inflammatory biomarkers in the blood at both times.

After six months, the gut microbiome of people on a high-fat diet had shifted in ways that could have a negative impact on their health.

One group of bacteria decreased in people eating a high-fat diet and increased in those on a low-fat diet.

This group includes beneficial bacteria that produce short-chain fatty acids. These molecules help regulate inflammation in the body and protect the cells that line the intestines.

Another group of bacteria increased in the high-fat group. This group includes bacteria that show up in higher amounts in people with type 2 diabetes, compared to those with normal blood sugar levels.

People on a high-fat diet also had an increase in certain molecules linked to inflammation.

Tiffany Weir, an associate professor of food science and human nutrition at Colorado State University, who wasn’t involved in the study, says the findings aren’t surprising.

When you reduce the number of carbohydrates in the diet, “the organisms that are best able to use those for energy will suffer, and as a consequence, fewer metabolites like the short-chain fatty acids will be produced,” she said.

**Keto Diet and the Microbiome**

The study has some limitations. One is that researchers included only young, healthy adults. A high-fat diet may affect the microbiomes of other people differently.

Also, all three groups lost weight during the study, with people on the low-fat diet losing the most. The weight loss could have positively affected the microbiome or reduced inflammation levels.

Weir says it will be interesting to see if the benefits of the faster weight loss while on a high-fat, low-carb diet outweigh the possible negative changes to the gut microbiome.

Previous studies have found a link between the gut microbiome and diet, including with high-fat diets like keto.

Some research shows that keto has benefits for conditions like epilepsy or type 2 diabetes. But this diet may also reduce the diversity of the gut microbiome, at least over the short term.

Higher gut microbiome diversity—greater numbers and types of bacteria—is thought to have positive effects on health.

So, the keto diet may not be beneficial over the long run, unless for a specific health condition.

“The ketogenic diet was really designed for specific clinical applications,” Weir said. “So, to strictly follow a self-prescribed ketogenic diet without medical reasons or oversight seems like it may backfire by introducing new issues rooted in the gut.”

**Many Factors Affect Gut Bacteria**

Paleo is another popular higher-fat diet. Little direct research, though, has been done looking at its effects on the gut microbiome.

But studies of the Hadza tribe, modern-day hunter-gatherers, show that eating a natural “paleo” diet is linked to higher gut diversity, compared to people living in Western countries. The Hadza also don’t experience obesity, type 2 diabetes, or other metabolic diseases of the developed world.

This suggests that eating a paleo diet may have beneficial effects on the gut microbiome.

Other lifestyle and diet factors, though, are likely involved in keeping the Hadza healthy.

“The paleo diet, if followed properly, is neither high fat nor low carbohydrate,” Weir said. “True paleo diets should include lots of vegetables and fruits that are high in the fibers needed to maintain a healthy microbiota.”

**A paleo diet may have beneficial effects on the gut microbiome.**

Other research supports the need for this kind of variety in the diet. A recent study in lupus-prone mice showed that resistant starch—which is fermented in the intestines—has beneficial effects on the gut microbiome.

Resistant starch works by promoting the growth of certain bacteria that produce short-chain fatty acids, which in turn suppresses “bad” bacteria.

The author of that study, Dr. Martin Kriegel, an assistant professor of immunobiology and rheumatology at Yale School of Medicine, cautioned that diet can affect people’s microbiome differently, depending on genetic and other factors.

“The microbiome is certainly about personalized medicine,” Kriegel said. “We normally view disease as a single entity, but driven by different components of the microbiome or different genetics, there are really subgroups.”

MINDSET MATTERS

# Why Paying Attention to This Moment Creates Your Best Future

Many of the moments that make up our life slip by in a cloud of extraneous thinking

NANCY COLIER

Living in the present moment is at the heart of all mindfulness teachings and the essence of well-being. But what is this thing we call being present?

I’m not sure we all share the same answers, or if it even matters that we do. What does matter is that we know what being present means for ourselves in a practical way. And perhaps too, that we have a sense of why we even want to be in the present moment as an intention for our lives.

There’s something inherent in all human beings that longs to feel connected to everyone and everything else. At a deep level, we want to heal our fundamental aloneness.

When we’re fully present, we feel connected to life and everything in it. We are part of the moment, inside it. So too, there exists a drive within us to directly experience life and know our experience more intimately than we can through any idea, concept, memory, or fantasy.

We crave the flow experience, to be fully absorbed into an activity to the point where the separation between doer and doing evaporates and all notions of time disappear. We want, ultimately, to return to a state of oneness we seem to remember at a psychic level.

On a more immediate level, we want to be in the present moment because the distracted experience of not being present feels unsatisfying. It leaves us feeling empty, unfulfilled, and unreal—like ghosts in our own lives, the whole adventure slipping past us.

Profound regret appears for so many when they realize that they’ve missed out on their life. Not being present is like winning a ticket to the most amazing adventure ever created and choosing not to attend. We want to be present so that we can be in the game while this amazing opportunity is here.

Being in the present moment includes a few fundamental practices. Most of all, it involves experiencing what’s happening in our senses right now. It’s feeling what our body is feeling, inside and out; seeing what we’re seeing, smelling what we’re smelling, tasting what we’re tasting, and hearing what we’re hearing—as it’s happening. It means experiencing the feelings and sensations through our body and not our mind’s interpretation of them.

Being present means not thinking about our past, nor projecting our future. It means paying attention to this moment as it’s arising through our senses without judgment or commentary.

While being present means not being engaged in thinking, it’s important to mention that being present does not require the absence of thought. Being in the present moment doesn’t mean the mind stops producing thoughts, and thoughts in and of themselves are not a problem for presence. Thoughts happen, they keep coming on



We live in a linear frame, with the present moment inextricably linked to an imagined future.

**Being present means not thinking about our past, nor projecting our future.**

matter how present we are. To be present with thoughts involves being aware of the fact that thoughts are appearing, but (and here’s the big but) without identifying with those thoughts. In other words, noticing the presence of thoughts without getting involved in their stories, content, or going down the rabbit hole into which they beckon.

Being in the present moment means directly experiencing what’s arising in the body, in the senses, which also includes paying attention to what’s happening in the mind.

Simultaneously, living in the present moment involves experiencing whatever’s happening right now without an agenda for where it needs to lead us. Being present is turning our attention to right now without trying to build this moment into a desired outcome.

Many of us, myself included, struggle with this more subtle aspect of presence.

Deep within us there exists a drive to make something with our moments, to move our life in a positive direction that will create what we want. As we’re living this moment, a part

of us, sometimes unconsciously, considers the present a stepping stone in the larger path of our life. We live in a linear frame, with the present moment inextricably linked to an imagined future.

This linear frame emits a subtle, sometimes imperceptible energy that keeps us at a slight distance from life. It keeps us doing something with life, making something out of it that will benefit us. With our “now” perpetually linked to a future we cannot trust that it’s safe to truly let go and surrender entirely into this moment, as its own destination.

To be fully in the present moment is to show up without demanding or expecting that it lead to anything else. It’s to be here without using this moment to promote any particular identity, or demonstrate that we are or aren’t something we imagine.

To be fully present is to relate to each now as a vertical eternity, a moment complete and whole, a hologram of everything. It is to release the idea of now as an usher between the past and future.

To live with profound presence is to trust that life will be enough and we will be enough if we simply show up for it one moment at a time. It’s to believe that like a necklace of pearls, life can be well-lived as a series of present moments strung together. The shift into this sort of presence is about letting go of the idea that we are the directors of our life and we need to use it to achieve a particular agenda.

When we pay attention to our senses without judgment, interpretation, or agenda, and refrain from engaging in thinking, we start to experience, at a gut, heart and mind level, that simply taking care of our now is the most skillful and successful means for taking care of our future and ending up where we want. It’s much easier than we’re conditioned to believe.

Counter to everything we’re taught, the best way to create a joyful life is to pay attention to this moment and then the next and then the next. We can only learn this truth through practice. Attending to now is all we ever really need to do.

**Practices for Being Present**

1. Take a few minutes each day to drop out of your mind and into your body. Feel the experience of right now as it’s happening in your senses. Allow your attention to sync into frame with your body. Sense the felt experience of returning your attention to your own physical being. Feel the sense of relief, calm, joy, or whatever arises as you bring your body your full attention. Feel the “Aaah yes, I’m here with you, I’m home.”
2. As you go through your day, notice the subtle drive to live the present moment as a means to an end, to be doing something with the moment. See if you can drop that agenda. Practice surrendering into now without any thought or plan for a future. Play with living in this moment as if there really is nowhere else to go. Give yourself permission throughout the day to require only one thing from yourself, that you show up for this now. Approach it as an experiment to discover if taking care of your present moment, and only your present moment, can be enough to generate a good life.

Nancy Collier is a psychotherapist, interfaith minister, public speaker, workshop leader, and author of “The Power of Off: The Mindful Way to Stay Sane in a Virtual World.” For more information, visit [NancyCollier.com](http://NancyCollier.com)



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Children have fewer opportunities to engage, explore, and challenge their world.

# Helicopter Parents

## The Real Reason Teenagers Are So Unhappy

Lessons from British research reveal the cost of taking the risk out of childhood

ROB CREASY & FIONA CORBY

Children growing up in the United Kingdom are said to be some of the unhappiest in the industrialized world. The UK now has the highest rates of self-harm in Europe. And the NSPCC’s ChildLine Annual Review lists it as one of the top reasons why children contact the charity.

Children’s mental health has become one of British society’s most pressing issues. A recent report from the Prince’s Trust highlights how increasing numbers of children and young people are unhappy with their lives, sometimes with tragic consequences.

This is a generation of young people that have been labeled as “snowflakes”—unable to handle stress and more prone to taking offense—too emotionally vulnerable to cope with views that challenge their own. They are also said to have less psychological resilience than previous generations.

Social media likely plays a part in all this. Studies show nearly three-quarters of 12 to 15-year-olds in the UK have a social media profile and spend an average of 19 hours a week online. After all, this is the Facebook generation—and never before have children grown up with such a daily bombardment of images, products, and messages.

But there is also another factor at play—a factor much closer to home. In our new book *Taming Childhood?* we put forward the argument that children and young people may indeed have less resilience than previous generations, but argue this is because they have fewer opportunities to develop it. The reason for this is that childhood has become tame.

**The ‘Dangers’ of Childhood**

Childhood these days is often seen by parents to be fraught with danger. Not only are there issues with where children can play, who they can talk to and what they should and shouldn’t be doing, but the internet has opened up a whole new set of problems that parents must try and police.

Children’s lives are being stifled. No longer are children able to spend time with friends unsupervised, explore their community, or hang around in groups without being viewed with suspicion. Very little unsupervised play and activity occurs for children in public spaces or even in homes—and a children’s spare time is often eaten up by homework or organized activity.

This is further impacted by the way children are taught in schools and how pressure to succeed has led to a taming of education. But if children are never challenged, if they don’t ever experience adversity, or face risks, then it is not surprising they will lack resilience.

**Taking Control**

This is not the consequence of one particular change or development, nor is it purposeful. In many ways, the stifling of children’s experiences is often wrapped up in ideas about what is best for children, or what it means to be a good parent.

This can be seen in approaches to safeguarding which seek to remove all risks from children’s lives, or in approaches to parenting where adults take over decision making and restrict what children can do. This ultimately means children have fewer opportunities to engage, explore, and challenge their world.

Children are being micromanaged and controlled; it’s not surprising this impacts their mental health.

Ideas about good parenting, which emphasize knowing where children are and keeping them safe, combined with contemporary ideas that view children as naturally vulnerable, also fail to recognize their ability to cope with situations which we, as adults, deem to be complex.

This all comes against a backdrop of increasing concern for children’s well-being. But what adults see as important for a child’s well-being and what children themselves see as being important may not be the same.

**Competitive Parenting**

Children are very often seen in terms of what they will become, rather than what they are. This has led to a rise in an intensive type of parenting—often referred to as “helicopter parenting.” Studies have reported that well-being is reduced in children who experience helicopter parenting.

It may well be that the competitive nature of contemporary society contributes to parents dominating their children’s lives—for reasons that are rational to them. But in doing so they act against the long-term interests of their children.

The idea that children should not encounter risk and should be protected from everyday adversity means that parents restrict where children can go, and what they can do—especially when unsupervised. This leads to a childhood that for many children, is characterized by supervision, surveillance, and a lack of any real challenges.

So rather than this being an issue with young people, this is an issue with society and parenting. What is clear then is that parents need to be supported rather than judged so they can feel confident in giving some level of decision making and freedom to their children. Children also must be also viewed more as valuable to communities—so that a playground of unsupervised children is commonplace again. Education also needs a rethink, so that children are not under constant pressure but are enabled to be independent and resilient beings once more.

*Rob Creasy is a subject director of social science at York St John University, and Fiona Corby is a senior lecturer in education at Teesside University in the UK. This article was first published on The Conversation.*

THE EPOCH TIMES Week 11, 2019

## ELEVATE AND INSPIRE

# A Former Felon Finds Redemption Through Fitness

### Prison gave him a chance to get clean and get fit

ANDREW THOMAS

Physical fitness isn’t just important for one’s physical health, it can be critical to one’s general well being. For one young man fitness not only improved his health, it arguably saved his life.

Doug Bopst is a 31-year-old personal trainer from Maryland who owns his own training business. Before he became interested in physical fitness, he was far from fit. As a teenager and young adult, he didn’t exercise, ate unhealthily, and had a several-hundred-dollar-a-day painkiller addiction. He was also selling large quantities of marijuana.

“I was just a wreck. Emotionally, mentally, spiritually,” Bopst told *The Epoch Times*.

**Flashing Lights**

On May 5, 2008, his lifestyle finally caught up to him. Bopst was on his way to buy some painkillers when he saw flashing lights in his rearview mirror. He had been driving with a broken headlight, a major mistake for a drug dealer.

“I just had no idea the direction my

life was going to head. To be honest I didn’t think it was going to head in any way positive because I had no intention of changing,” Bopst said.

When the police pulled him over, he had half a pound of marijuana and \$2,000 cash in his trunk. Bopst received a five-year suspended sentence with a mandatory 90 days in prison.

“I was scared. I had no idea what to expect other than the clichés you hear about. I didn’t know where my life was going to head. I was hopeless. I was very very fearful. I was obviously depressed,” he said.

Bopst walked into his cell block and noticed a bunch of inmates playing scrabble. One of them looked up, and asked him what he was in for. Later that night, he saw the same man, who was his cellmate, exercising, and was blown away by his abilities. They got to talking, and the man told Bopst he was going to start working out with him.

**Felony Fitness**

After his fellow inmate pestered him about it, Bopst finally decided to give exercise a try. The first night, he couldn’t even do one push-up. While Bopst was embarrassed, it was a critical moment for him. He had finally decided if he was going to improve himself or end up back in prison or worse.

Bopst’s cellmate was tough on him and motivated him to keep going. Bopst started off with small goals like doing one set of 10 pushups every night. Then he started doing calisthenics and running to lose weight and improve his cardiovascular conditioning.

There was no exercise facility, but Bopst and his cellmate were innovative with their routine. They would do several sets of push ups and sit ups, tricep dips using a bench, and jumping jacks. They would fill trash bags with water to do arm curls. They also figured out how many laps around the common area equaled a mile.

Bopst lost 50 pounds and lowered

Bopst feels special satisfaction helping those of his clients who are in recovery.

# The Strange Reason You Aren’t Sleeping

MOHAN GARIKIPARITHI

There are many reasons we can’t sleep, like drinking coffee late at night, exercising before bed, stress, an uncomfortable bed, and medical conditions. But did you ever think that who you share your bed with could also be a risk factor?

“Although a large body of evidence shows that relationships are important for health, we are just beginning to understand how the characteristics of people’s close relationships affect health behaviors, such as sleep,” said lead author Chloe Huelsnitz, a doctoral candidate at the University of Minnesota.

“The findings of our study suggest that one way that relationships affect health behavior is through their effects on an individual’s stress.”

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF DOUG BOPST

▲ Doug Bopst is a personal trainer, motivational speaker, and author.

◀ A young Doug Bopst before he gained an interest in fitness following his arrest.

his blood pressure and cholesterol significantly by the time of his release. His time in prison allowed him to stop filling his body with fast food and opioids and instead build up his self-esteem and confidence by setting goals and meeting them.

“That saved my life,” Bopst said.

**Redemption**

Bopst was released on Dec. 26, 2008, and had to stay out of trouble or serve his full five-year sentence. He was scared when he left prison and struggled to find a job. But he didn’t want to let his cellmate down and continued to exercise and look for work.

After working at a liquor store for two years, he decided to leave and pursue his personal trainer certification.

“I just saw how fitness impacted my life, and how it changed me completely. I wanted to help other people use fitness in the same aspect,” said Bopst.

Despite his felony conviction, Bopst found a job working the front desk at a Maryland Athletic Club in late 2010. While working at the gym, he

pursued his certification and became a certified personal trainer in April 2011. Three years later, Bopst started his own personal training business.

“I just felt like a new high for me was helping other people,” Bopst explained.

Bopst is also a motivational speaker and author, and has a book called “The Heart of Recovery: Real People. Real Life. Real Success Stories,” coming out on March 12, 2019. The book will feature stories about people who are in recovery, the advice they have to stay the course, and Bopst’s thoughts on recovery, fitness, relationships, and spirituality.

**A Clean Record**

Bopst completed his five-year probation without incident, including 200 hours of community service. As a result, Bopst’s felony conviction was struck from his record.

“It was life changing. You just never know in a matter of seconds how your life can change completely,” Bopst recalled.

According to Bopst, fitness does more than provide physical benefits like improving heart health and reduce body fat, it can also improve mood, confidence, and self-esteem. Bopst feels special satisfaction helping those of his clients who are in recovery because he can empathize and show them that he is an example of how drastically someone can change themselves for the better.

“I think relatability is everything. Being able to relate to people in my business is one of the most important things about being a trainer, no matter who your client is,” Bopst said.

# THE EPOCH TIMES

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TRUTH and TRADITION

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# The Wonders of Ashwagandha

Ancient herb offers health benefits with its potent compounds

One of the most powerful herbs used in Ayurveda—the healthy lifestyle system practiced in India for millennia—is ashwagandha (Withania somnifera). Now this potent herb is getting some serious buzz.

Ashwagandha is so well known for its rejuvenating properties it is often referred to as Indian Ginseng, though it is not actually part of the ginseng family. Considered a “building” herb, ashwagandha has the lore of being able to impart the strength and stamina of a stallion.

Although using Ashwagandha may not send you galloping through the fields, it has been shown to deliver significant health benefits.

**Ashwagandha the Adaptogen**

For starters, ashwagandha is an adaptogen, which means it is a substance that can help restore balance to the body when it is exposed to physical and emotional stressors, including environmental toxins, stress, insomnia, and harsh weather.

The herb does this through an ability to lower cortisol levels and act like GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid), a neurotransmitter that is associated with anxiety relief and mood regulation.

Ashwagandha has been valued for its calming features for about five millennia, as well as for curing insomnia, constipation, inflamed joints, parasites, rheumatism, skin irritations, and more. It is a key remedy in Ayurvedic medicine and a common natural treatment option among many areas of the

world.

Does your immune system need a boost after you’ve been ill or recovering from surgery? Experiencing inflammation and pain from arthritis? Need a natural way to help you cope with the stressors of your job, relationships, financial situation, or family pressures? Ashwagandha could help.

**What Is Special About Ashwagandha?**

Ashwagandha contains a wide spectrum of potent compounds, including alkaloids, choline, amino acids, fatty acids, sugars, and naturally occurring steroids known as withanolides. The healing powers of the herb can be found in its leaves and roots, although it is the latter that is usually used in Western supplements.

Here’s a rundown of the healing benefits of ashwagandha that have been studied and reported:

- Helps protect against harm to the immune system
- Protects against the negative impact of stress on the body and mind
- Enhances memory, reaction time, concentration, and learning
- Stabilizes blood sugar, which is especially important for those who have diabetes
- Helps reduce the degeneration of brain cells
- Can aid in pain relief
- Assists in lowering cholesterol, which benefits heart health

- Reduces depression and anxiety without causing drowsiness
- Has anti-inflammatory properties
- Promotes the growth of new nerve cells
- Has demonstrated an ability to fight tumors
- Boosts sexual potency in both women and men

In a 2016 report appearing in Current Pharmaceutical Design, the authors noted the “unique medicinal properties of Withania somnifera.” They pointed out that some of the herb’s biological constituents, such as withanolide A, withanolide D, withaferin A, and withaniamides, provide important pharmacological properties, including an ability to address cancer, infections, neurodegenerative disorders, and anxiety.

**Taking Ashwagandha**

Common dosages of ashwagandha range

Ashwagandha has been valued for its calming features for about five millennia.



Ashwagandha has been valued for its calming features for about five millennia.

from 125 mg to 1,250 mg daily. Generally, the higher the dose, the more significant the impact. If you are taking any medication for thyroid disease, diabetes, or any autoimmune conditions such as rheumatoid arthritis or lupus, you should discuss the use of ashwagandha with a health care professional before you begin taking it.

When shopping for ashwagandha, look for root powder or extract in capsules (450 to 500 mg). Typical dosing directions are to take the supplement once or twice daily.

This article was first published on NaturallySavvy.com



ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

# How Can You Keep Your Microbiome Healthy?

The beneficial bacteria, viruses, and fungi that help us survive in this world need our attention

ALL IMAGES BY SHUTTERSTOCK

CAITLIN COYLE

The human microbiome—that invisible world of bacteria, viruses, and fungi in and on our bodies—was little studied even though scientists have known about it for centuries. Now the world of science and medicine is paying closer attention.

“There is an ecological problem—a climate change—now happening inside of us,” Martin Blaser said, a pioneer in the field and the new director of the Center for Advanced Biotechnology and Medicine at Rutgers University Biomedical and Health Sciences.

“There’s a lot of discussion about climate change in the world but very little about a parallel process happening within us as our modern lifestyle affects the microbes that live inside us.”

Here, Blaser discusses how his work will help researchers and clinicians better understand the benefits of the microbiome and how it can be harnessed and protected to promote human health.

**Q: WHY SHOULD PEOPLE CARE ABOUT THE MICROBIOME?**

**A:** We all have a microbiome—every human, animal, and plant—that’s been around for a very long time. For **cons**, it’s served many functions, including training our immune system to do its work, and our brain in how to think and [assist] our bodies to digest food,

“Some modern-day practices intended to improve health and medicine are over-used and may actually be doing more harm than good.”

Martin Blaser, director, Center for Advanced Biotechnology and Medicine

absorb vitamins, and defend against invaders.

It has also changed drastically in developing countries [and the] United States, specifically in early childhood when babies develop their lifelong patterns of immunity and metabolism. Over the last century, our microbiome has been depleting, losing some of the ancestral microbes, and [I have hypothesized] that it is leading to major diseases and epidemics such as obesity, asthma, food allergies, diabetes, inflammatory bowel disease, and cancer.

**Q: WHAT IS THREATENING THE MICROBIOME, CAUSING IT TO CHANGE SO MUCH?**

**A:** As a whole, the public will try anything to attain and maintain a healthy lifestyle, but some modern-day practices intended to improve health and medicine are over-used and may actually be doing more harm than good. These threats include the very widespread over-usage of antibiotics, C-sections, use of baby formula over breast milk, and antibacterial products.

Antibiotics are the number one threat to our microbiome, but it’s complex because while they are a pillar of modern life. Almost all children are receiving multiple courses in the first few years of life. Every time a child takes a dose of an antibiotic, doctors need to account for the cost-benefit of the antibiotics and how it may be increasing the risk of other diseases.

We need to educate medical professionals to understand that every prescription has a cost and to question whether it is absolutely

necessary. Infants’ microbes are threatened when they are delivered via C-section or given formula as opposed to breast milk.

Every generation hands over their microbiome to the next as the baby passes through the birth canal, but babies born through C-section lack that transfer. At some point early in life, babies will then be given their first course of antibiotics. It takes a while for the microbiome of babies born by C-section to normalize and in that time when the brain and immune system develops, they become more at risk for developing obesity, celiac disease, and juvenile diabetes.

Next, babies fed formula receive important nutrients such as calories and calcium, but they’re missing the micronutrients that breast milk has evolved to contain. As a result, the microbiome is altered in ways that could increase the later risk of obesity, asthma, and allergies.

The last major threat is the use of antibacterials, whether it be soaps or hand gels, as they get rid of the “good” germs as well as the “bad.” We need good germs to help our bodies defend against the bad, but with antibacterials, we are washing everything away.

“Over the last century, our microbiome has been depleting, losing some of the ancestral microbes.”

Martin Blaser, director, Center for Advanced Biotechnology and Medicine



**Q: WHAT CAN PEOPLE DO TO MAINTAIN THE HEALTH AND INFLUENCE OF THEIR MICROBIOME?**

**A:** Each person, especially parents of young children, should consider the benefits and risks associated with the use of antibiotics, C-sections, baby formula, and antibacterials, and question whether they are completely necessary. For example, question your doctor if you are prescribed an antibiotic. The illness may resolve itself just as well on its own without it.

Sometimes, C-sections and formula feeding are medically necessary, but if there is a choice, women should opt for vaginal delivery and feeding their infant with breast milk.

Lastly, rather than buying antibacterial soaps, consider washing with plain soap and water instead. Any benefits from antibacterial soaps have not been proven, despite their widespread marketing.

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# Problem Drinking Among Women a Growing Concern

How to tell if you have an alcohol problem and what you can do about it

Women experience more severe and lasting health problems from alcohol due to their lighter frames and different biochemistry.



NICOLE LEE

Last month, close to 40,000 people, mostly women, gave up alcohol for FebFast and many others will be participating in Dry July.

These events began as fundraisers for various social causes. But the main reasons people cite for participating are related to personal benefits, including giving their body a break from alcohol and improving their health.

The proportion of young people drinking has decreased over the past 10 years. But more women in their 40s and 50s are drinking at risky levels. And women are catching up to men when it comes to drinking at levels that damage health.

Women's relationship with alcohol has become a hot topic. Many women, including celebrities Nigella Lawson, Kristen Davis, and Jada Pinkett Smith, have been vocal about their decisions to reduce drinking to improve their health and well-being.

## Alcohol Affects Women More Than Men

Women start to have alcohol-related problems sooner and at lower drinking levels than men.

If a man and a woman drink the same amount, in general, a woman's blood alcohol concentration will be higher.

Women tend to be smaller and lighter than men; a person who is lighter or who has a smaller body frame will be more affected than someone who weighs more or has a larger body frame. If the same amount of alcohol is going into a smaller body there will be a higher concentration of alcohol.

Even if a man and woman are the same sizes, women tend to have a higher percentage of body fat and a lower percentage of body water than men.

Dehydrogenase is the enzyme that breaks down alcohol in the body. Women tend to have less active dehydrogenase and therefore take longer to process alcohol, so they will get drunk faster and have alcohol in their system for longer.

Women who drink experience health problems sooner and that are more severe than men who drink the same amount.

## How Alcohol Affects Your Health

Alcohol can increase the risk of significant health problems, including cancer, brain damage, liver disease, and heart disease.

Women who are pregnant or trying to get pregnant

More women in their 40s and 50s are drinking at risky levels.



should not drink alcohol at all until the baby is born.

If you drink while pregnant, the alcohol can go through your blood and to the baby. This can cause deformities and cognitive damage in the baby, known as fetal alcohol syndrome.

If you are breastfeeding, small amounts of alcohol can go through breast milk to the baby. It's better to drink after breastfeeding times rather than before or during.

## How Much Is Too Much?

The idea that a little bit of alcohol is good for your health has been debunked due to flawed sampling in the original study.

The Australian alcohol guidelines recommend healthy adults (men and women) should drink no more than two standard drinks on any day to reduce the lifetime risk of harm from an alcohol-related disease.

The guidelines also recommend consuming a maximum of four standard drinks on a single occasion to reduce the risk of alcohol-related injury.

The percentage of pure alcohol varies across different types of drinks, so the guidelines convert alcohol to standard drinks. In

Australia, a standard drink contains 10 grams of alcohol, which equates to 100mls (3.4 oz) of wine or 285mls (9.6 oz) of regular strength beer or cider or 30mls (1 oz) of regular strength spirit. A cosmopolitan or mojito typically counts as two or three standard drinks.

## Signs You May Need to Cut Back

If you answer used to any of the following questions, you likely need to reduce your alcohol intake.

- Are you drinking every day or nearly every day? Daily drinking is associated with dependence.
- Are you drinking more than the recommended limits? Drinking more than two drinks on any day is associated with long-term health problems.
- Do you need to drink more to get the same effect? This indicates growing tolerance to alcohol and is an early sign of dependence.
- Do you have difficulty taking a break or cutting back? Are you drinking more than you intend to? These are signs that you have less control over how much you drink.

- Do you find that drinking is interfering with day-to-day activities on a regular basis, for example being late for work because you have a hangover?
- Do you notice your well-being is affected by drinking? For example, do you get feelings of anxiety or depression during or after drinking, or have trouble sleeping? Alcohol can make relaxing while you are drinking, but it can make anxiety, depression, and sleep problems worse.
- Are doing things while you are drinking that you later regret?

If so, it's time to reassess your drinking. This online assessment tool may help.

## How to Cut Back

If you're drinking more than you'd like to, make a plan to cut back. Here are some approaches that may work for you.

- Set a drink limit that reduces health risks.
- Have alcohol-free days every week.
- Drink non-alcoholic "spacers" before and in-between alcoholic drinks.
- Sip your drinks rather than gulp them down. Slowing your drinking enables your body to process the alcohol and you will drink less.
- Try drinks with a lower alcohol content.
- Eat before and/or while you are drinking. This helps slow the absorption of alcohol.
- Skip a round. Don't feel like you need to keep up with everyone else.

## Where to Get Help

Most women who drink alcohol, even those who drink a little too much, don't need specialist treatment. That said, taking a break from alcohol can improve your physical and mental well-being.

There are resources online that may help you cut back your drinking, such as Hello Sunday Morning.

Your doctor is a good place to start if you have questions or concerns about your drinking.

Your state, county, or city may also have its own resources for problem drinking. Many people have also found success with Alcoholics Anonymous.

Nicole Lee is an adjunct professor at the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University in Australia. This article was first published on The Conversation.

# Hidden Habits That May Affect Your Blood Pressure

America's silent killer can be caused by unexpected activities

RAJIV BAHL

Your blood pressure is a result of your genetics and aspects of your lifestyle such as diet, activity level, and sleep habits.

Many people know that a sedentary lifestyle and a diet high in fat, salt, and sugar can create dangerous blood pressure rates, but experts warn that other habits also have an important, if rarely recognized, impact.

Recently, the American Heart Association released a list of hidden habits that can affect a person's blood pressure.

Fighting high blood pressure, or hypertension, is key for those 75 million Americans, or one in three adults, who have high blood pressure, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

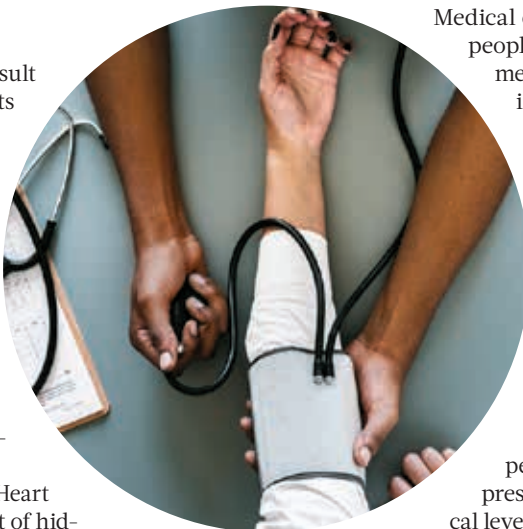
## OTC Drugs

People who use over-the-counter medications to treat minor aches and pains risk spikes in their blood pressure.

OTC medications, including anti-inflammatory drugs such as naproxen (Aleve) and ibuprofen (Advil), can increase blood pressure. Drugs such as acetaminophen (Tylenol) are less likely to cause such increases.

Many OTC decongestant medications are also known to raise blood pressure. So too are many prescription medications used to treat mental health, provide oral birth control, or to act as immunosuppressants, cancer medication, and steroids.

Of course, the cost of hypertension may be small compared to the ailment such medications treat.



Sometimes simply being in a doctor's office can lead to stress and give a false blood pressure reading.

Medical experts recommend that people don't stop taking these medications without consulting their physician.

## Daily Coffee or Cocktail

Both alcohol and caffeine can also contribute to rising blood pressure.

Research suggests limiting caffeine to less than 300 milligrams (mg), or about two to three cups of coffee per day, to avoid high blood pressure from reaching critical levels. Many nutritionists will recommend replacing it all together.

Alcohol should be also limited to "no more than one drink per day for women and no more than two drinks per day for men," Dr. Elizabeth A. Jackson, professor of medicine in the Department of Cardiovascular Disease at the University of Alabama, told Healthline.

"Green tea extract and other caffeine-related products, such as matcha, all increase the adrenalin surge in a patient," said Dr. Satjit Bhushri, attending cardiologist at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City. Bhushri went on to say that these products are "meant to make one more alert, but in doing so, [they elevate] blood pressures into dangerous categories."

## Food Ingredients and Supplements

Supplements and certain food combinations can also lead to elevated blood pressure.

Not all supplements that are labeled "natural" are considered to be safe. Herbal supplements and home remedies that use ingredients such as licorice can lead to hypertension, for example.

Also, foods with strong cheeses, cured meats,

and even soy products can contain high levels of tyramine. This substance can interact with anti-depressants such as monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), resulting in hypertensive episodes.

## Improper Blood Pressure Readings

Some people experience "white coat hypertension," which can occur when medical settings bring on anxiety, leading to high blood pressure readings.

These measurements can incorrectly give the picture of hypertension in the doctor's office, and that means people may end up on unnecessary blood pressure medications.

To offset this, people can take their blood pressure readings at home, and then compare those readings to measurements at their doctor's office.

Herbal supplements and home remedies that use ingredients such as licorice can lead to hypertension.

"If the blood pressure numbers are higher in a doctor's office, taking blood pressure at home provides [patients] and their healthcare provider with an accurate picture of what the blood pressure is in a natural environment," said Jackson.

To get as accurate a measurement as possible at home, take your blood pressure using a portable device that is well-calibrated and has good batteries.

Prepare for blood pressure readings by emptying your bladder, avoiding cigarettes or caffeine for 30 minutes before the measurement, and sitting quietly for a few minutes before taking a reading.

## How to Know You're in Trouble

As reported by the CDC, in 2014 more than 410,000 American deaths, almost 1,100 deaths a day, involved high blood pressure as a primary or contributing cause.

Under current guidelines, normal blood pressure is having a systolic (upper) number of less than 120 and a diastolic (lower) number of less than 80.

Stage 1 hypertension occurs when the systolic number is between 130 to 139 and the diastolic is between 80 to 89. Stage II hypertension is a systolic greater than 140 and a diastolic greater than 90.

Bhushri said that if you have a systolic blood pressure greater than 180 and a diastolic greater than 120 and you have "symptoms of chest pain, dizziness, or shortness of breath—this is a hypertensive emergency."

For anyone in this situation, his advice is to "go to the nearest emergency room, as their risk of stroke or heart attack is very high."

## The Risk of High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure is a contributing factor to multiple dangerous health conditions.

According to the CDC, seven out of 10 Americans who have a heart attack have high blood pressure. Almost eight in every 10 Americans who have had a stroke for the first time also have high blood pressure. And chronic heart failure is associated with high blood pressure in about 7 in every 10 Americans.

"Hypertension is known as the silent killer. If [a patient] notices high blood pressure, they should see their primary care doctor who then can, based on their evaluation, send them to a hypertension specialist" said Bhushri.

"Their risk of heart attack and stroke can be lowered if high blood pressure is caught and managed early."

In addition to the above recommendations, the American Heart Association has some online resources for people to check out: suggestions for simple things you can do to reduce your blood pressure, information on blood pressure medication, and tips for reducing your sodium and salt intake.

Rajiv Bahl is an attending emergency medicine physician based in Orlando and New Smyrna Beach, Florida. This article was first published on Healthline.

# When It Comes to Love, A Rational Checklist Is No Match for Emotion

Researchers find that the heart cares little for the good intentions of the mind



In the heat of the moment, emotions may override preconceived notions about what you desire.

KAREN WU

For many people, there are few things more rewarding than crossing an item off a checklist. But what if the checklist is about your dream partner? And what if the checklist is wrong?

"Relationshopping" is when you hunt for the perfect partner as if people were products. Online dating, now used by almost 40 percent of Americans who are "single and looking," might be normalizing this tendency. Often aided by search filters, potential daters seek the perfect combination of attributes rather than focusing on the experience of being with a person.

Relationshopping might work if people knew themselves well, but research indicates the contrary. In recent years, psychologists, economists, and neuroscientists alike have found that decisions are largely driven by emotion. Furthermore, in the steady, logical environment in which we anticipate our decisions, people struggle to account for visceral drives such as excitement, hunger, and sexual arousal.

Psychology researchers like me call this the "hot-cold empathy gap." This distance between our predicted behaviors in a cold, rational state and our actual behaviors in a hot, aroused state, explains why people often don't do as they say. It might explain, for example, why you swore you'd stop eating cookies for the New Year—and you really meant it—but then went and ate a dozen because they just smelled so good when your colleague brought them to work.

In the cold state, it's easy to forget about the power of emotions. Given the strong and complex feelings involved, you may be prone to the empathy gap in your search for the perfect partner.

**Hot-Cold Decision-Making in Dating** Studies have documented the hot-cold empathy gap in an array of behaviors, people's inability to empathize with social suffering unless they feel a similar pain themselves.

Psychology researchers are now turning to the hot-cold empathy gap to understand why the attributes that people say they want in a romantic partner often differ from the attributes they actually choose in real life. Speed-dating studies provide an ideal venue for examining this question: Researchers are able to compare people's reports of what they want to their decisions about whom to date.

In one speed-dating study, college students' reported preferences in a partner showed typical gender differ-

ences. Women preferred wealth more so than did men, and men preferred beauty more so than did women. When these same participants speed-dated, however, there were no gender differences in preferences for wealth and beauty. Furthermore, participants' self-reported preferences did not predict whom they offered a date to in the speed-dating event.

In another study, men found more intelligent women to be more desirable in hypothetical situations, but less desirable if they actually interacted with them in a live scenario. These findings might be accounted for by people's failure to account for their emotions—like excitement inspired by beauty or inadequacy aroused by a smarter woman—in the presence of a potential partner. In the heat of the moment, emotions may override preconceived notions about what you desire.

Although some of the current research may make it seem like hot states lead people astray in love, there may be a brighter side to them.

Currently, ethnic preferences in dating are common, even among highly educated circles. Interested in understanding the match between stated and actual ethnic preferences, I conducted a speed-dating study of young Asian-Americans, who may approach love more practically due to a cultural emphasis on meeting their family's expectations rather than following their own desires. Thus, Asian-Americans may not show the empathy gap in dating if they strongly prioritize their cold list of parent-approved attributes over any hot emotions of their own.

Unsurprisingly, the Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean and Filipino American participants told me in advance that they most preferred dating within their own group. Their speed-dating decisions, however, did not reflect their stated preferences. Speed-daters weren't more likely to want to see partners of the same ethnicity again. Perhaps in person, they were too overwhelmed with desire to consider the negative social consequences, such as parental disapproval, of dating outside their ethnicity. The visceral experience beat out the logical checklist again.

## How to Jump Beyond the Gap

With knowledge of the hot-cold empathy gap, finding a partner might seem even more intimidating. There are, however, some things you can do to bridge the gap between your hot and cold states and hopefully come closer to finding love.

First, understand your own biases so you can then account for them. How? Ask others. Research suggests that people easily identify others' bias, but not their own. Another method is to put yourself in the hot state and reflect, at that moment, on what you're really drawn to in a person. In one study, researchers induced social rejection in teachers—only in this condition did teachers start to truly understand the pain experienced by bullied students.

Once you identify biases, you may want to avoid some of the decisions that you make in your hot states. Another tactic is to remove yourself from undesirable situations. For instance, maybe you're attracted to "bad boys" or "bad girls." Knowing the power of emotions, stay away from places you might meet one, perhaps by having friends or family hold you accountable.

Then be reasonable in your expectations. Carefully go through your cold checklists of desired qualities in a potential partner and consider removing superficial ones. All those criteria might not matter as much as you think when it comes to falling in love. Consider whether you're ruling people out unnecessarily based on ideas of what you should desire.

Too many options can mean never being happy. Rather than always searching for the next best thing and "relationshopping," researchers suggest that people should try "relationshopping"—developing a healthy partnership through mutual time and effort. This doesn't mean settling down with just anyone. Look for someone who is willing and able to invest the blood, sweat, and tears necessary for a successful relationship.

As easy as it is to blame our emotions for "irrational" decisions, people should celebrate emotions as well. At times, hot emotions steer people in a more positive direction, perhaps making them care less about the ethnicity or earning potential of potential partners. Emotions serve an important purpose spurring us into action. They push us to help each other, to bond, and to take the leap of faith needed to find and build love, sometimes in places we least expect.

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All those criteria might not matter as much as you think when it comes to falling in love.



WISE HABITS

# How to Go Beyond the Self-Concern of Our Small Mind

Three practices to let go of self and find the freedom of a vast mind

LEO BABAUTA

Most of the time, we are caught up in what can be called our “small mind.” This is the small world of self-concern: wanting to get what we want and avoid what we don’t.

This is the cause of much suffering, from always running to distraction, procrastinating, or getting caught up in worries and fears. It can lead us to worry about what people think of us, what we’re missing, what someone did to offend us, and more.

It’s a small world to get trapped in, leading to stress, anger, hurt, worry, fear, anxiety, and distraction.

The antidote is having a vast mind and growing beyond the small mind that we’re habitually stuck in.

Opening myself up to the love I have for others gets me past my small mind.

What is a vast mind? It’s opening to the freshness of the present moment and something bigger than our self-concern.

Let’s imagine that there’s someone whose family member has said something insulting to them. They immediately get caught up in a small mind, thinking about how they don’t deserve to be treated this way, that they’re a good person and that this person is always inconsiderate. They are worried about themselves, and their world is very small and constricted.

What if, instead, this person dropped their self-concern, and opened their awareness to something wider than themselves. Instead of formulating self-concerned opinions on the insult, they take it as pure experience. There’s no injustice in it. That value hasn’t been assigned.

Suddenly, everything is open and vast. They relax into this openness. They might notice that this other person, whom they love, is suffering in some way. Now, rather than feeling injured, they are able to find compassion for the person.

That’s the difference between a small, constricted mind that’s full of suffering, and a vast mind that’s open, unbounded, and full of love.

You don’t have to take my word for it. Here are three practices for growing from a small mind to a vast mind.

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Practice 1: Ego-Dropping Meditation

A great place to start is by sitting in meditation, opening your awareness, and dropping the boundaries between you and everything else. You can find a detailed description at zenhabits.net/dropself.

The idea is that we practice dropping into a relaxed, open awareness, and then start to relax any boundaries we have between ourselves and all that surrounds us. We drop the construct we’ve created that we call ourselves, and then there’s just sensation, just pure experience.

It’s a returning to wholeness, a wonderful practice.

Practice 2: Radical Not-Knowing

Most of the time, we act as if we know exactly how things are. We don’t pay too much attention to this moment, because it’s boring to pay attention to the breath, body, and our sense of everything around us, because we already know all about that. But in fact, every moment is completely fresh, open, and full of new possibilities to explore.

When we get stuck in a small mind, we are in a narrow, constricted view of the world. And it’s a hardened view—“I know what I want and I just want to get it. I know what I don’t like and I want to avoid it.” It’s the hardened view of fundamentalism.

The practice of radical not-knowing is to act as if you’ve never experienced this before. Everything is completely new to you, with no preconceptions or labels.

You look around at everything as if you’ve never seen it before. It’s fresh, wondrous, and breathtaking. There are no names for anything, just the pure experience.

Try walking around like that for a few minutes, and see what it’s like: be open and curious.

We can become much more open to the vastness of experience. There is no, “I want this” or “I don’t want that.” It’s just, “This is the experience I’m having right now.”

This is pure boundless awareness, and it’s vast.

Practice 3: Opening to Devotion to Others

When I notice that I’ve gotten caught up in my small mind, I try to think of people other than myself.

This person is being inconsiderate because they’re suffering. The people who I love are more important than my discomfort.

The love I have for my family is so much bigger than my small wants.

Opening myself up to the love I have for others gets me past my small mind, and into an openness. What would it be like to be completely devoted to other people? It’s a fresh experience, boundless and vast.

Now, rather than feeling injured, they are able to find compassion for the person.

