

# MIND & BODY

## Walking Your Way to Emotional Balance

Walking is the very best form of exercise and a neurological tonic, say experts **2**

## Meditating in the Middle of Chaos

Life is full of uncertainty, so why not embrace it **6**

**3**

myths about how to  
accept what we really  
don't want to accept  
PAGE 5

WEEKLY



# Walking Your Way to Emotional Balance

## CONAN MILNER

In 2007, author Nita Sweeney suffered one devastating loss after another. That year, seven of her close friends and family members died.

Sweeney already struggled with chronic depression and bipolar disorder. But with so many loved ones passing away in such a short period of time, she fell to new depths, both mentally and physically.

"I was just emotionally paralyzed, and I started to gain a lot of weight," she said. "I was in such bad physical shape that even walking around the block was kind of a stretch."

Sweeney finally climbed out of her despair by putting one foot in front of the other. From 2007 to 2017, she went from barely being able to get out of bed, to walking every day and clocking many miles per week. Today, she walks alone, with her husband, in groups, with her dog, and whenever or wherever she finds an opportunity.

She says the rhythm of walking heals her.

"I don't know the science, but I know that there is something that happens when I feel the sway and rhythm of my body and my arms swing," she said.

This feeling has carried Sweeney through three full marathons, 26 half marathons, and more than 60 shorter races. Her running is slow (and mixed with lots of walking), but Sweeney isn't driven by speed, medals, or even physical fitness. For her, it's a "mental health journey."

In her upcoming book "Depression Hates A Moving Target: How Running with My Dog Brought Me Back from the Brink," Sweeney describes how she was able to find emotional balance one step at a time.

"I know there are physical benefits. When I stop walking, I gain weight. When I walk again, I lose it. It's that simple," she said. "But for me, it's more emotional than physical. There is something about slowing down to the pace of the walk, that lets things drop away in a way that they don't with other exercise."

There is a lot of evidence to validate Sweeney's experience. Studies have shown that walking can relieve depression, reduce anxiety, and boost our creative and cognitive function.

When you add in the proven physical benefits that come from walking, it almost sounds too good to be true. The 2015 report from Harvard Medical School titled, "Walking for Health: Why this Simple Form of Activity Could Be Your Best Health Insurance," discusses solid science that shows walking can lower your blood pressure, fight heart disease, reduce the risk for type 2 diabetes, and help you lose weight.

## Walking for Peace of Mind

It's clear we don't walk as much as we used to. In the past, we had no choice. Unless you owned a horse or canoe, walking was the only way to get around. With the rise of cars and a growing distance between home and work, walking has become quaint, almost obsolete. It is no longer a reasonable option when you have places to go and people to see.

Modern transit allows us to cover far more ground in less time. But while walking may not be practical for daily travel, it could help us better handle our hectic schedules.

One reason walking has become a priority for Sweeney is that it helps her work off anxiety.

"It's a way for me to calm down," she said. "I just need a little bit of the rhythm, not much, but I just feel better."

Clinical psychologist Dr. Carla Marie Manly, says that, psychologically speaking, "walking is simply amazing." She points to research proving that walking as little as 12 minutes can elevate your mood for several hours.

"When we walk, we are actually able to leave our troubles behind on physical and metaphorical levels," Manly said. "The psychological freedom that comes with walking can create an inner spaciousness and healing that is beyond compare."

Manly observed walking's healing power when she worked with juveniles on probation. She would often do "walk and talk" therapy with these kids, and saw them thrive with the sense of freedom that walking delivers.

"Their troubles and issues felt less pressing when they were outside walking with me," she said. "Adults can benefit in the same way."

Manly takes her own medicine. Her

Walking can relieve depression, reduce anxiety, and boost our creativity and cognitive function.

For me, a day without a walk is like a day without water.

Dr. Carla Marie Manly, clinical psychologist

All exercise is good but walking is the best.

Dr. Eugene Charles, director, Applied Kinesiology Center of New York

Walking as little as 12 minutes can elevate your mood for several hours.

ALMADAMI/SHUTTERSTOCK

mornings always begin with a walk in a nearby park. If there's a break in her client schedule, she'll grab another five- to 10-minute walk around the block to clear her head and move her body.

"For me, a day without a walk is like a day without water."

## The Best Exercise

We all know we should move more, but we may dismiss walking because it seems far too basic to be a viable or effective fitness option. It doesn't seem to provide enough of a challenge to make a difference.

Dr. Eugene Charles, a Manhattan-based chiropractor and director of the Applied Kinesiology Center of New York says his patients are usually more interested in Zumba, cross-fit, Pilates, hot yoga, or another exercise of the moment than they are with walking.

But Charles says walking should be everyone's primary exercise. He recommends 45 minutes a day for those who want to lose weight, 30 minutes for those trying to maintain their weight, and any time you're feeling down. Charles says walking will make all of your other physical endeavors that much better—even if you're already very active.

"I believe all exercise is good but walking is the best, because it really suits the human frame," Charles said. "Getting the arms and legs and moving like that is a neurological tonic. It is as close to a gosh darn panacea as we have."

If the goal of exercising is a more functional mind and body, Charles says walking accomplishes this better than anything else. He describes walking as a way to tune up your mind and body. Walking makes you stand up straighter, it increases circulation to the entire body and sets it to a soothing rhythm. It also improves balance and coordination.

Walking does all this by engaging what is known as the "cross-crawl" mechanism, where your right arm and left leg (and vice versa) move back and forth in tandem. This symmetrical crossover pattern is what babies develop as they learn to crawl, and is found to be essential to both their physical and cognitive development.

Charles says whether it's crawling, walking, or running, this cross-lateral motion helps align both your body's structure and your brain, by bridging its right and left hemispheres.

"My opinion is that walking stimulates the cerebellum, which helps with memory, cognition, and can prevent Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. I tell my patients, 'If you walk you'll get smarter. If I'm wrong, you're just going to be in great shape,'" Charles said.

Other aspects of walking also contribute to your health with every step. Proper heel to toe form stimulates the receptors in the bottom of your feet to relieve stress throughout your body and pump oxygenated blood up to your brain. The swinging of your arms stimulates your lymphatic system to pump waste out of your blood.

In short, regular walking makes you better equipped to handle life.

## Movement Motivation

One of the best things about walking is how easy and accessible it is. All you need is a dry path (or a treadmill) and a decent pair of shoes.

The hardest part, however, is getting started.

Sweeney says her depression and bipolar disorder can still hold her down, but if she can find some momentum for a walk, she knows things will get better.

"You just have to push back a little. It doesn't have to be that much," she said. "If I can just get myself moving at all, then everything else conspires to help me move wherever I'm heading."

Of course, there are also benefits from strenuous exercise that leaves you huffing, puffing, and sore the next day. But it doesn't have to be part of your walking routine. Charles says to take it easy, especially if you're in pain, weak, or just starting out.

"You can make it as sublime, peaceful, and rhythmic as you want. It's really up to you," he said. "Even if you walk at a snail's pace, it's still healthy for you."

Seasoned walkers often advise that you get more out of your walk if you leave your gadgets behind. Let your arms swing. Let your mind wander. Notice the details in the world around you. Enjoy the moment.

Caleb Backe, a personal trainer and wellness expert for Maple Holistics, says walking works best when we take the chance to unplug. He prefers to walk in silence.

"Walking in silence with yourself, ideally in a natural setting, allows for true introspection," he said. "You'll recognize a good walk when you get back home and feel like a better version of yourself."

Sweeney is part of a walking group to help keep her motivated and to provide a sense of community. But she says these group walks are no replacement for her quiet walks alone, which she considers "almost sacred."

"It's a special time with myself," she said. "I like walking with my husband, but there's something about just being out there alone that is a respite from the craziness of life."



Only five percent of adolescents in the United States meet recommendations for sleep, physical activity and screen time.

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

## How Much Sleep Do Teenagers Really Need?

Sleep deprived teens are at greater risk of everything: suicide, weight gain, and much more

## WENDY HALL

Parents worry about whether their teenagers are getting enough sleep. Research studies suggest that teenagers are suffering an epidemic of sleep deprivation globally—one that will have long-term health impacts.

So how much sleep do adolescents really need and how can parents help them achieve it?

The first thing to understand is that teenagers are still growing and their brains are still developing—so they need more sleep than adults. They also have different sleep-wake rhythms and release melatonin (a natural hormone to prepare for sleep) later, which means evening sleepiness takes longer to occur and they have a tendency to go to bed later and to sleep later in the morning. Though of course, they still have to rise early for school.

Peers also influence teenagers more than they influence younger children. Increased social demands—in the form of online chat, social networking, and web browsing—combine with greater academic pressures as children enter high school. At this age parents also tend to exert less control over teenagers' bedtimes.

## 8 to 10 Hours, Regularly

So what are optimal sleep times to support adolescent health? Experts reviewed 864 papers examining relationships between children's sleep duration and health. They suggested that those between 13 and 18 years of age should sleep eight to 10 hours per 24 hours on a regular basis to promote optimal health.

Unfortunately, worldwide studies show that in 53 percent of cases teenagers are getting less than eight hours of sleep per night on school days.

A recent report indicated that only five percent of adolescents in the United States meet recommendations for sleep, physical activity, and screen time. Older adolescents were less likely than younger adolescents (14 years or less) to achieve the recommendations.

## Sex Hormones and the Stress Response

A lot of action takes place in teenage brains due to their developmental stage. During adolescence, there are major changes to thinking, emotions, behavior and interpersonal relationships.

Changes to brain connections contribute to improvements in thinking abilities and changes in brain signaling. Shifts in the balance between brain systems create a period where teens may take increased risks or engage in more reward seeking.

Teenagers react harder to stress as their stress-response systems are still maturing. Sex hormones affect the neurotransmitters in their

brains and increase their reactivity to stress. When we add inadequate sleep time to the picture, there can be many implications.

A recent review found teens sleeping less than eight hours are at increased risk for suicide, being overweight, high rates of injury, poor sustained attention, and low school grades.

Sleeping nine or more hours, on the other hand, is associated with better life satisfaction, fewer health complaints and better quality family relationships for teens.

And a recent study in two high schools in the Seattle school district found that a later school start time led to an increase in teens' average sleep duration, which was associated with an increase in average grades and an improvement in school attendance.

## Drugs, Alcohol, and High Cholesterol

Teen drivers sleeping six or fewer hours per night reported riskier driving, sensation seeking, and greater drug and alcohol intake than those sleeping more than six hours.

Sleeping less than six hours per night increased the teenagers' risk for multiple vehicle crashes, after taking into account exposure to driving.

There is also evidence that teens who sleep longer and have better quality sleep have a lower risk for high blood pressure and cholesterol, insulin resistance, and larger waist circumference than teens with shorter sleep times and lower sleep quality. This is after taking into account other risk factors such as body fat, physical activity, television viewing, and diet quality.

Finally, a recent report has highlighted links between teens' sleep time, screen time and poorer mental health.

## Park the Electronic Devices

Parents can work with teens to set bedtimes. They should encourage the use of beds only for sleep and for relaxing before sleeping.

Using electronic technology before bed and during the night increases the risk for shorter sleep time. Research shows that daytime physical activity and avoiding screens before bed are both strategies to promote earlier bedtimes and protect your teenagers' sleep.

Parents can support screen downtime before bedtime and through the night by parking phones at a charging pad away from bedrooms.

Parents can also help their teens to achieve the recommended eight hours or more of sleep by engaging in relaxing family activities with them in the evening.

Wendy Hall is a professor at the school of nursing at the University of British Columbia in Canada. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.



# Luke Perry's Death Highlights Rising Stroke Risk for Younger Adults

Experts say poor lifestyle choices are raising the risk of stroke among Generation X as well as millennials

## BRIAN KRANS

When the television show "Beverly Hills 90210" first hit the airwaves on October 11, 1991, it was Luke Perry's 24th birthday.

That's when the nation was introduced to his character Dylan McKay, a high school rebel with a soft side and awe-inspiring sideburns.

Last Wednesday, studio executives announced the 1990s hit show would be getting a reboot. That same day, Perry—then 52 and playing Archie's dad on the CW's "Riverdale"—suffered a major stroke.

On Monday, it was announced that Perry had died at St. Joseph's Hospital in Burbank surrounded by his family.

Those who grew up with Perry as the epitome of '90s cool may wonder how someone of their generation could even be old enough to suffer a stroke.

Perry's death highlights that not only did the '90s end nearly two decades ago but also that younger people—or at least those under 55 years old—are at a higher risk of stroke than traditionally thought.

"It's not an uncommon thing to see in a young person," Salman Azhar, MD, director of stroke at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York City, told Healthline.

Experts have been warning of the rise of strokes in those once thought to be too young to have an elevated risk.

Stroke experts have warned strokes have become more common among younger people, namely in what's been dubbed the "Stroke Belt," an eight-state region across the southeastern United States with a higher rate of death from stroke than other parts of the country.

This means that Generation X is currently at an age where their risk of stroke begins to increase every year.

In addition, an increasing number of cases also involve millennials and even Generation Z, which includes today's teenagers.

## 'Stroke Belt' is Widening

Dr. Larry B. Goldstein, a professor and chair of the Department of Neurology at the University of Kentucky, as well as a volunteer medical expert for the American Heart Association, says the reasons for the increase in strokes in younger people aren't fully clear.

It may in part be related to a rise in various risk factors, such as diabetes, obesity, poor diet, and lack of exercise.

Then there's the Stroke Belt, which researchers have noted since the 1940s. It's an area of the country that has higher rates of stroke, even among school-age children. The states in the belt are Arkansas, Tennessee, the Carolinas, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana.

## Generation X is currently at an age where their risk of stroke begins to increase every year.

But as data has been collected on even a county-by-county basis, researchers say it might be best to think of the Stroke Belt with even wider-reaching areas, possibly including Kentucky, Missouri, and parts of other adjacent states, including Perry's home state of Ohio.

A 2016 study in the journal *Stroke* says these stroke-prone hot spots also follow a pattern.

These areas have greater proportions of African-American residents, higher rates of unemployment, more chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes, and higher hospital admissions and emergency department visits. They're also areas

typically lower in income and education. All of these societal factors typically result in poorer health outcomes.

With all of those factors mixed in, experts say young people in the Stroke Belt are increasingly unhealthy.

"The most recent data indicate that less than 60 percent of those 12 to 19 years old have ideal cardiovascular health measures and even fewer follow health lifestyle recommendations," Goldstein told Healthline.

But not all strokes end in death. If caught early and treated properly, survival and successful recovery are more likely.

"Stroke isn't only often preventable, but the possibility of treatment to reduce or reverse the effects of stroke in some people is now possible," Goldstein said.

## The Warning Signs

Strokes, no matter what kind, typically have similar symptoms because they're directly impacting brain function.

Experts say to spot the warning signs of a stroke, follow the BE FAST method:

- **B**alance: A loss of balance will be sudden.
- **E**yes: This can include double vision or vision loss in one or both eyes.
- **F**ace: One half of the face may be visibly droopy.
- **A**rms: They may be weak or unable to move.
- **S**peech: This includes difficulty speaking or slurring words.
- **T**ime: If a person is experiencing these symptoms, call 911 immediately, as the quicker they get treatment, the more likely they are to recover.

The worst thing a person can do, experts say, is ignore the warning signs and deny that they may be having a stroke.

"The first response is denial, but there's nothing

more disastrous than that," George P. Teitelbaum, MD, interventional neuroradiologist and director of the Stroke and Aneurysm Center at Providence Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica, California, told Healthline.

## Preventing and Treating Stroke

Experts say there are now drugs and procedures available to help people who've had a stroke, including clot-busting drugs such as tissue plasminogen activator (tPA), which can help blood flow through the clogged vessel quicker.

Using these drugs "and removing blood clots from large arteries supplying the brain with blood is now part of usual clinical practice in hospitals," Goldstein said.

Teitelbaum said specialists have a better understanding of stroke, thanks to recent large-scale studies. For example, he says, the thrombectomy—the physical removal of a blood clot from a vessel—has become "one of the most effective medical procedures in the world."

Inside or outside the Stroke Belt, the lifestyle choices associated with higher rates of stroke—a sedentary lifestyle, a diet high in processed foods, excessive drinking, smoking, drug use, and other unhealthy behaviors—can compound over time.

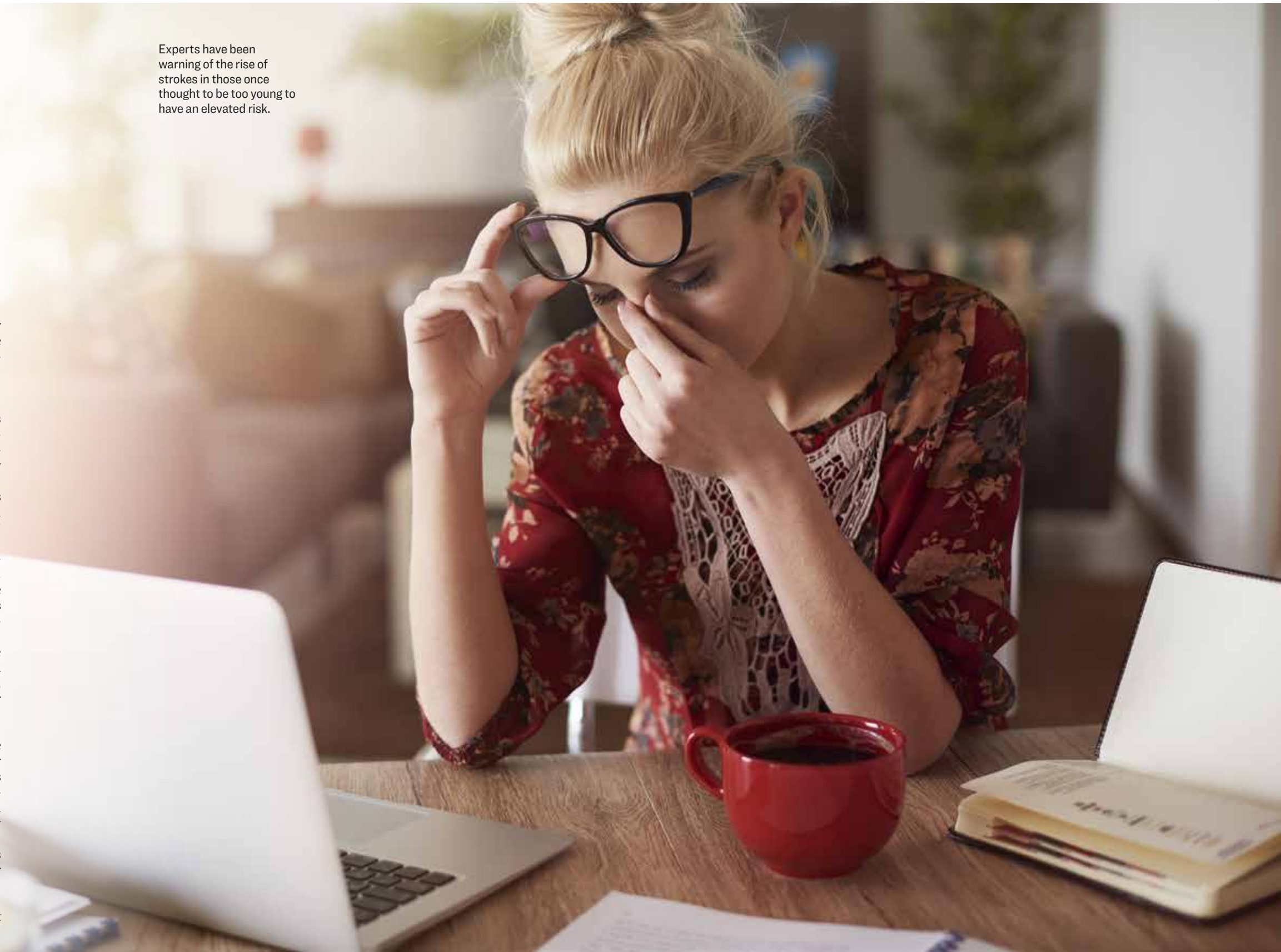
But these behaviors can also be reactions to stress.

Azhar said how a person reacts to stress is one lifestyle choice that can help lower the risk for stroke. That's because reacting poorly to stress typically means exercising less, eating more unhealthy food, and drinking alcohol, all of which increase inflammation in the blood vessels, thereby increasing the likelihood of stroke.

"Some people are better at dealing with stress than others," Azhar said. "You have to know your body and how to manage it."

*Brian Krans is a writer for Healthline, which first published this article.*

Experts have been warning of the rise of strokes in those once thought to be too young to have an elevated risk.



# Women Who Vape Around Pregnancy May Wrongly Think It Safe

Nicotine's harmful effect on fetal development not understood by many pregnant users

Health professionals advise against using any nicotine products during pregnancy, but some women using e-cigarettes before, during, or after pregnancy think it's safer than smoking, U.S. researchers report.

In a survey of more than 3,000 new mothers in Oklahoma and Texas, 7 percent said they had used electronic vapor products, including e-cigarettes, around the time of their pregnancy; 1.4 percent used them during pregnancy.

Nearly half of users said they thought e-cigarettes would help them quit smoking or would be safer than traditional cigarettes, the study team reports in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"It's important for people to know that e-cigarettes are not safe to use during pregnancy and that nicotine is harmful to fetal development and infant outcomes," said lead study author Martha Kapaya of the CDC's Division of Reproductive Health in Atlanta, Georgia.

"Among those who used e-cigarettes in this study, a substantial portion used them in an attempt to quit smoking cigarettes, suggesting a possible lack of awareness of, or access to, scientifically proven strategies," she told Reuters Health by email.

Kapaya and colleagues analyzed state-level pregnancy risk data from 2015, when Oklahoma and Texas asked survey participants about their use of electronic vapor products before, during, and immediately after pregnancy. Among the 3,277 women included in the analysis, 83 percent had never used the devices.

Overall, about 10 percent of women said they had used e-cigarettes, but not within the three months before becoming pregnant. About 7 percent had used the devices in the three months before pregnancy, and 2 percent had used them in the six months since delivering their baby.

While only about 600 women said they had smoked traditional cigarettes in the two years prior to pregnancy, these made up the majority of women who used e-vapor products around or during pregnancy.

Among those who used vapor products during the last three months of pregnancy, 38 percent used e-cigarettes with

nicotine, 35 percent used vapor products without nicotine, and 26 percent were unsure about the nicotine content.

"The research is unequivocal on how nicotine impacts the developing fetus and placental barrier, and some studies show that the concentrations can be even greater for the baby than for the mother," said Nick Wagner of Boston University, who wasn't involved in the study.

"Nicotine exposure early in development can cause damage at the cellular level," he said in a phone interview. "During the third trimester, it's associated with low birth weight, which has been linked to asthma, social and, emotional problems, and attention deficit disorder."

"These numbers are sobering since the use is likely higher today," said Cindy McEvoy of Oregon Health and Science University in Portland, who also wasn't involved in the study.

"In addition, smoking during pregnancy varies by state, so these numbers are likely higher in states such as Kentucky where smoking during pregnancy tends to be higher," she told Reuters Health by email.

Among women in the study who used e-vapor products close to or during pregnancy, 54 percent said "curiosity" was the reason. Forty-five percent believed the products would help them quit or reduce cigarette smoking and the same proportion thought the devices would reduce harm to the mother compared to smoking, while 41 percent looked for the ability to get products without nicotine.

"There needs to be more consistent messaging between healthcare providers and their patients," said Allison Kurti of the University of Vermont in Burlington, who wasn't involved in the study but has researched smoking cessation during pregnancy.

"Only about 50 percent of providers report screening patients for any type of non-combustible tobacco use," she said in an email. "Asking women about their use might signal an interest in quitting smoking and an openness to using other quit methods."

By Carolyn Crist

From Reuters



## MINDSET MATTERS

# How to Accept What We Really Don't Want to Accept

Why acceptance is the hardest and most important practice of them all

## NANCY COLIER

Right now there's something going on in my life that's very difficult. I definitely wish it wasn't part of my life and yet it's clear my wishing has done nothing to change it.

As is always the case: Fight with reality, reality wins.

And so it occurred to me (brilliantly) that this might be an auspicious time to practice acceptance.

When investigating an idea or practice, I like to start with what the thing is not. In this case, what are the myths and misconceptions about acceptance that get in the way of our being able to do it?

**MYTH NO. 1:** We're okay with what's happening. We can agree with it.

The biggest misunderstanding about acceptance is that it means that we're okay with the thing we're accepting, that we've somehow gotten on board with this situation that we don't want.

**REALITY:** Acceptance does not require that we're okay with what we're accepting. Acceptance does not imply that we now want what we don't want. It does not include feeling good or peaceful about what we're accepting. It does not mean we now agree with it.

**MYTH NO. 2:** Acceptance means we stop trying to change it.

We believe that acceptance is synonymous with agreeing to be passively surrendering all efforts to make things different. Acceptance is saying we agree that this situation will go on forever. It's deciding to pull the covers over our head.

**REALITY:** Acceptance does not mean suspending efforts to change what is.

Acceptance does not imply that we're giving up on reality becoming different. Acceptance is all about now and has nothing to do with the future. Furthermore, acceptance is not an act of passivity, but rather an act of wisdom. It means agreeing to start our efforts from where we actually are and considering what actually is.

**MYTH NO. 3:** Acceptance is failure. In our culture, acceptance is for the

meek, for losers. It's what we do when we've failed at doing everything else. We see acceptance as a choice-less choice, a disempowering and depressing end to a battle lost.

**REALITY:** Acceptance is not an act of failure. Acceptance can, with the right understanding, be experienced as an act of courage. It is for those who have the strength to face the truth and stop denying it. It can be the first step in a process of genuine success and movement.

So if it is not these myths, then what is this thing we call acceptance?

It might help to use a different word. Rather than asking, "Can I accept this?" I prefer, "Can I relax with this?" Or, "Can I be with this as it is?" Or, "Can I agree that this is the way it is right now?" These pointers feel more workable given what we associate with acceptance. Because the fact is, something inside us will never fully accept or get okay with what we don't want, and that part of us needs to be included in this process too.

To relax with what is means that we also relax with the part of ourselves that's screaming "no" to the situation.

It means that we make space for the un-acceptance in us. We accept the situation and also the fierce rejection of it at the same time. We don't ask ourselves to get rid of the resistance; that resistance is our friend. It's there to protect us from what we don't want. So we accept and allow the negative situation and also, the hating of it.

Secondly, acceptance is about acknowledging that this particular situation is indeed happening. It's not saying that we like it, agree with it, or will stop trying to change it, it simply means that we're accepting that it is what is. The primary element of acceptance is opening to reality as it is, not how we feel about it.

In my case, with the situation I have going on, I'm practicing relaxing with the reality

The primary element of acceptance is opening to reality as it is, not how we feel about it.

that I don't have an answer to this difficult situation. I accept this situation, even though I want it to be different and I don't know right now how to make that happen.

What's comical is that our refusal to accept a situation usually involves a fight against reality. We refuse to allow what's already been allowed. Seen in this light, our refusal to accept reality has a tinge of insanity to it.

When we practice acceptance, we're just saying "yes, this is happening." That's it. And paradoxically, that frees us up to start changing the situation or changing ourselves in relation to it.

As a good friend said, the situation will change or you will change, but change will happen.

We waste so much energy fighting reality that we don't apply our energy and intention to what we can do about it. We're stuck in an argument with the universe. Acceptance allows us at least to begin doing whatever we can do from where we are.

Acceptance is a profound and powerful step in our growth and development. It requires courage to be honest about where we are. Acceptance requires determination to feel what's true. This can be excruciating but is far more useful than avoiding such feelings by denying reality.

When we practice acceptance, which includes our initial "no," we give ourselves permission to join our life, to experience the present moment as it is. We allow ourselves to stop fighting with reality, which is exhausting and useless.

Acceptance is counterintuitive and yet supremely wise. When we're willing to say "yes, this is the way it is whether I want it or not," something primal in us relaxes. We can exhale; the hoax we've been conducting is up at last.

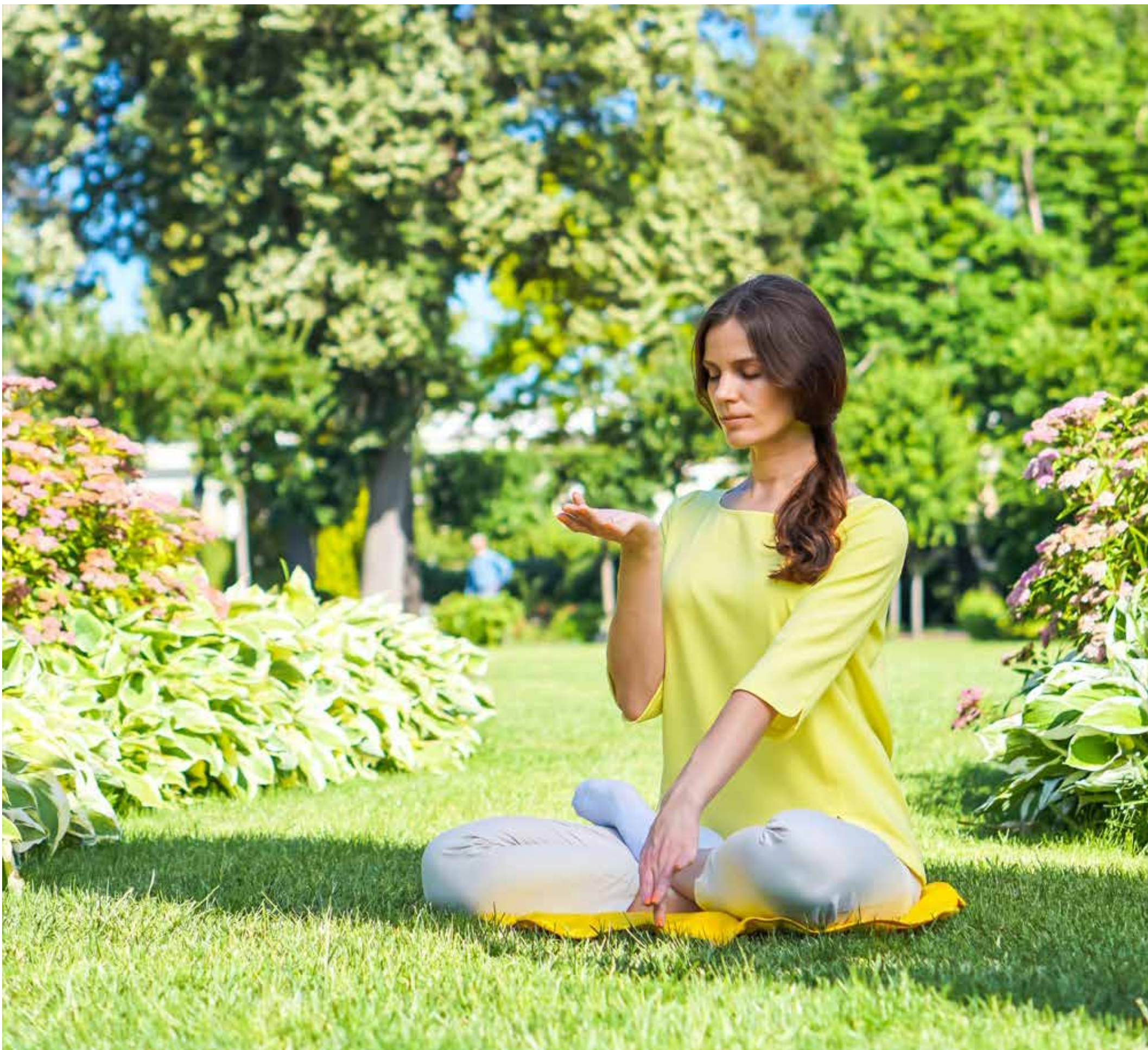
The funny thing is, we nearly always know what's true and only trick ourselves with our non-acceptance. To accept offers us permission to finally be authentic with ourselves, to be in our own company.

When we can say I accept that this is the way it is—even if I hate it and don't know what to do about it—then I can at least be in the truth, which ultimately, is the most empowering, brave, and self-loving place from which to create our life.

*Nancy Colier 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 NancyColier.com*



ALL ILLUSTRATIONS BY NOTIONPIC/SHUTTERSTOCK; PHOTO BY VLADIMIR BORODIN/THE EPOCH TIMES



## WISE HABITS

# Meditating in the Middle of CHAOS

Life is full of uncertainty, so why not embrace it

LEO BABAUTA

gusts of wind and rain swirled through my mom's tropical flower garden in Guam as I meditated.

A tropical storm was passing close to Guam, where I'm living at the moment, and I decided to go out into the torrential rain to meditate for at least a few minutes. Don't worry, it was safe.

The water kissed my face, the wind rocked my body into a sway as I practiced being present in the storm.

I was practicing stillness in the middle of chaos. Of course, we don't need to have an actual tropical storm (which turned into a super typhoon after it passed us) to practice with chaos. It's all around us, every day. Chaos is the uncertainty of our daily lives, the constant barrage of information, requests, tasks, and messages. It is the uncertainty of the global stage, national politics, our finances, the global economy, changing communities, and our ever-changing lives.

Chaos is all around us, and it can stress us out. It causes anxiety, depression, frustration, anger, procrastination, constant distraction, and the seeking of comforts like social media, food, shopping, games and more.

But what if we didn't need to run to comfort or fear the chaos?

What if we could find calmness with the uncertainty swirling around us?

A member of my Fearless Training Program said he would like to "dance with chaos." I think that's a beautiful idea. Embrace the uncertainty. Practice with it. Dance with it, and let this practice be joyful.

**A Joyful Practice in Chaos**

So how can we practice mindfulness in the middle of chaos? How can we make it joyful? For me, it looks something like this.

**First, you give yourself space to be present with the chaos.** I stood in the middle of the storm because I was excited to see what it was like. I intentionally called it "meditating" because my intention was to be as present as possible with whatever happened. In your daily life, that might mean stopping in the middle of your busy workday and dropping into the present moment so you can truly feel the chaos.

**Second, you find the courage to be completely present with the experience of the chaos.** In the storm, part of that was feeling the wind and rain on my skin. It meant noticing the dramatic light that filtered through the thick clouds and the amazing tropical jungle in the small valley below me. It was also the feeling of excitement in my chest, and noticing the small fear radiating in my chest that something could be blown and hit me on the head. It was also the feeling of my body swaying, my leg muscles tensing, my chest expanding as I breathed. All of this was the felt experience of that moment; not just my thoughts about it, but how it felt in my body. We can practice this at any moment.

**Third, you relax into the chaos and embrace it.** Noticing how the chaos feels, you might notice any tension you have around it. For me, in

**What if we could find calmness with the uncertainty swirling around us?**

the storm, there was tension around my safety even though it was actually pretty safe. I noticed this tension and relaxed those muscles. Relaxing my body, I let myself surrender to it. Embrace the chaos, as if it were an incredible gift. Again, we can practice this at any moment. Right now, in fact, if you'd like to try it.

**Fourth, you dance with it, joyfully.** Once we relax around the chaos and start to embrace it, we're making friends with it. The uncertainty is no longer a thing to run from, or to resist, but is just a part of the experience of this moment—of every moment. And so we can start to dance. We can let ourselves move through the chaos in a loving, joyful way. What would it be like to play right now, in the middle of your uncertain life? What would it be like to be curious and explore, like an adventurer? What would it be like to be grateful for this incredible moment of chaotic beauty?

We have the opportunity, every single day, even every moment, to be present with the storm of the world. To sit in stillness in the middle of the wind and downpour of life. We have the opportunity to be open to it, to dance with it, and find the joy in the immense uncertainty that is our lives. Let's dance, my friends.

Leo Babauta is the author of six books, the writer of "Zen Habits," a blog with over 2 million subscribers, and the creator of several online programs to help you master your habits. Visit [ZenHabits.net](http://ZenHabits.net)

# Eat Your Fruits and Vegetables

Studies show **plant-based diets** good for immunity and inflammation

YASMINE PROBST &amp; JOEL CRADDOCK

**P**ople choose to be vegetarian for ethical, cultural, or health-related reasons—and in the United States their numbers are growing. While not all vegetarians follow a healthy diet—potato chips are vegetarian, after all—research shows vegetarianism can have many health benefits, including the potential to strengthen our immune system.

Researchers are still working out how a vegetarian diet may do this. For instance, is it the lack of meat, the emphasis on plant-based foods, both, or something more specific.

But mounting studies indicate that eating more fruits, vegetables, and legumes, as vegetarians do, can be credited for any associated health benefits.

**What Do Vegetarians Eat?**

Vegetarian diets are comprised of combinations of fruit, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and seeds, legumes and, for some, dairy and eggs.

There are many types of vegetarian eating patterns, from vegan (no animal products) through to lacto-ovo (some animal products such as eggs and dairy). But each avoids eating meat.

There are also a few semi-vegetarian approaches which include eating small amounts of some meats. People who primarily follow a vegetarian diet but include fish are referred to as pescatarian, while those who occasionally eat other forms of meat are considered flexitarian.

Importantly, not all vegetarians follow a healthy and balanced diet. Many won't eat the recommended daily servings of fruit and vegetables and will consume too much junk food.

But studies show that balanced vegetarian eating patterns could be good for our immune system and the body's defenses.

**Defending From Attack**

Our bodies are faced with daily challenges such as getting rid of toxic chemicals and defending against nasty viruses.

The immune system is "switched on" in response to these attacks.

**Having a healthy immune system is important, as it prevents us from becoming sick.**

Having a healthy immune system is important, as it prevents us from becoming sick. A healthy immune system can be supported by a number of lifestyle factors including adequate sleep, healthy body weight, and regular physical activity. It can also be substantially affected by the foods we eat and drink.

People following vegetarian diets tend to have lower levels of white blood cells, our natural defender cells. This is the case for vegetarian diets including vegan, lacto-vegetarian and lacto-ovo vegetarian.

Having very low levels of these cells is not ideal as it can affect the body's ability to fight infection. Having too many can indicate an over-active immune response. However, having just the right number of white cells within a healthy range may reduce your chances of getting sick. Vegetarian diets can help people keep these counts in a healthier range.

**An Added Shield of Protection**

As well as helping the immune system, vegetarian diets may also help our body with a related process called inflammation. Vegetarian diets have been shown to prevent inflammation due to the antioxidant components within the foods.

Inflammation occurs when the body releases cells to attack unwanted pathogens or respond to injury. It may result in redness to an area of the body or the release of certain chemicals inside our bodies. Inflammation is a protective measure that the body uses to stay as healthy as it can.

People who follow vegetarian diets have lower levels of some of these chemicals (called C-reactive protein and fibrinogen) compared to people following a non-vegetarian diet.

This means people maintaining a vegetarian diet long-term are at a lower risk of getting type 2 diabetes, heart disease or even some cancers. Each of these chronic diseases is associated with increased inflammation in the body. This is shown in blood tests by increased levels of C-reactive protein, as this is a signal of systemic inflammation.

The reason why vegetarians have lower levels of inflammation

tion remains to be fully understood.

We suspect the high amount of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, and seeds are helping. These foods are full of important nutrients including fibers, vitamins, minerals and compounds called phytochemicals.

All of these nutrients have been shown to improve levels of inflammation in the long term and may influence the body's immune response as an added bonus.

**Should I Switch to a Vegetarian Diet?**

Going vegetarian may not be for everyone. And it's unwise to start a new eating pattern without understanding the potential impact it can have on your health.

Vegetarian diets that are inappropriately balanced can lead to an increased risk of iron, zinc, and vitamin B12 deficiencies. This can be detrimental to overall health, particularly if followed for extended periods of time.

The risks may be greater for certain groups of people who have added nutrient needs due to life stage, gender, or other health-related reasons.

A vegetarian diet should always be undertaken carefully and under professional guidance, preferably that of a dietitian, to minimize these risks.

Meanwhile, many people in otherwise healthy countries fall short of eating the needed volumes of fruits and vegetables.

For example, in the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that only 13 percent of people reported eating enough fruit and only 8.9 percent reported eating enough vegetables to meet the dietary recommendation.

So whether you're vegetarian or not, focusing on incorporating more plant-based foods into your diet is worthwhile. We're constantly learning more ways this is good for your health.

Yasmine Probst is a senior lecturer at the school of medicine at the University of Wollongong in Australia, and Joel Craddock is a doctoral candidate at the University of Wollongong.

This article was first published on [The Conversation](http://TheConversation.com).

Vegetarian diets have been shown to prevent inflammation due to the antioxidant components within the foods.





## Choose to Pursue Success but Don't Confuse It With Excess

**JOSHUA BECKER**

Our hearts and souls long for greater accomplishments than the accumulation of material possessions.

Think about it. Nobody sits across the table from another human being and declares their greatest goal in life is to own as much stuff as possible.

We dream much bigger dreams for our lives. We speak of significance and influence. We want to be known as good fathers and mothers, husbands and wives. We want to be loving parents, citizens, and contributing members to the people around us.

We dream of solving problems. We desire to use our gifts and talents and resources to make the world a better place. We want to know our lives matter—that they stand for something bigger than ourselves. We desire freedom and opportunity. We long to live our life in a way that is consistent with our personal values, engaged in the pursuits most important to us, and creating opportunity for others to do the same.

We think of love, hope, and joy. We desire to be fully known and fully accepted. We know the importance of hope in our own lives and desire to offer it to others. We pursue lasting joy in living a fulfilled life.

If asked to define “what does success look like in your life?” these are the attributes and descriptions many of us would use to answer that question.

We desire significance, influence, and impact. But then we turn around and spend most our time chasing things that don't matter.

We live in a world that has substituted excess for success. And we have too often fallen for the false substitute.

In a consumer-driven, possession-focused society, the demand for material possessions must continually increase. Our society works day-and-night to constantly manufacture discontent and need. The advertisements surrounding us each day serve



Social connection is often at the root of living a life that mattered to others in the world, and that can't be bought.

**Our society works day-and-night to constantly manufacture discontent and need.**

one purpose: Stir up discontent, hi-jack passion, and get us to consume more than we need.

Excess becomes our definition of success. We begin to spend our hours earning more and more money. We spend our money buying things we don't need. We waste our energy and our time caring for more than we need. And then we punch the clock on Monday morning just to start the process all over again.

But accumulating excess is a short-sighted goal. It is not what we desire most for the one life we get to live.

It is not a substitute for real success in life. In fact, most of the time it only distracts us from it. Excess material possessions steal our money, time, energy, and freedom. Along the way, our definition of true success gets lost in the noise and accumulation of things we don't need.

Rediscover your greatest goals in life. Reevaluate your most important pursuits. Define success for yourself.

Choose to pursue your unique version of success. And never confuse it with foolish excess.

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

## To Cut Calories Overall, Pick Dessert First

**EMMA HURLEY**

Choosing an indulgent dessert at the start of your meal may lead you to pick healthier meal options, according to new research.

Researchers conducted four experiments, both in a cafeteria and on a mock food-delivery website, to see if choosing a healthy or unhealthy dessert at the beginning of a meal would influence participants' main and side dish selections.

The researchers placed indulgent desserts, such as lemon cheesecake, and healthy desserts, such as fresh fruit, at the beginning of a university cafeteria line or as the first option on a website. The meals had a fixed-price so cost of the desserts wasn't a factor.

Researchers found that diners who chose indulgent desserts would then choose lower-calorie main or side dishes and consume fewer calories than diners who chose healthier desserts.

“We believe diners who chose the indulgent dessert first picked healthier main and side dishes to make up for their high-calorie dessert,” Martin Reimann said, assistant professor of marketing in the University of Arizona Eller College of Management.

“Diners who picked the healthier dessert may have thought they already had done a good deed for their bodies so they deserved higher-calorie food farther down the cafeteria line.”

Diners consumed an average of 30 percent fewer calories when they chose the indulgent dessert first.

The result was not consistent with individuals who had a lot on their minds. If a participant was distracted, they chose the indulgent dessert first and continued to make unhealthy choices for the rest of the meal.

“This research is the first to uncover the interaction effect of food type and food presentation order on individuals' sequential food choices and their overall caloric intake. This work showed that, when selecting foods in a sequence, individuals are influenced by the first item they see and tend to make their subsequent food choices on the basis of this first item. This notion can be utilized to nudge individuals into consuming less food overall,” the researchers write.

The research appears in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*. Additional co-authors are from the *Tecnológico de Monterrey*.

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### ELEVATE AND INSPIRE

## Teen With Lupus Donates Blankets to Those in Need

‘It’s a positive thing being able to donate and have a happy effect on people.’



**ROLYNE JOSEPH**

Meredith Kass was a high school junior last year when she found out she had lupus. It's news that can make a grown adult feel sorry for themselves, but Kass, 17, finds the time and energy to focus on others, making handmade blankets for those facing their own serious hardship.

Kass goes to Kellenberg Memorial High School in Uniondale, New York and enjoys going to the beach and playing outdoor sports such as lacrosse. Or she did. Then last year, she started feeling sluggish and not your regular teenage tiredness. Her muscles would become achy and stiff while playing lacrosse. It didn't get better.

“I would feel more tired than I would usually be,” she said. “I would come home from practices and my body would hurt.”

Kass visited pediatric care at NYU Winthrop Hospital. After tests, Kass was told she had low red and white blood cells and anemia. It was systemic lupus erythematosus, an autoimmune disease in which the body's immune system attacks healthy tissue.

“It was swollen,” she said. “I had like a rash. I was waking up extremely stiff and getting out of bed was very difficult.”

Kass now has to protect herself from the sun due to extreme sensitivity that would lead to skin rashes, itching, and burning.

And when her team takes to the field, she has to stay on the sidelines, undercover, rooting them on.

“I wore full sweatpants and crewneck,” Kass said. “We had pullovers and I wore a bucket hat.”

Not exactly the fashionable attire teens aspire to wear.

She also has to avoid physical stress, and take prescribed medications. Fortunately, her mother and other family and friends have always been there to support her.

◀ Meredith Kass, a senior at Kellenberg Memorial High School in Uniondale, N.Y., holds a Meredith's Favorite Blanket to help those in need.

“It was very difficult at first, but as we learned about the disease, we got more confident with managing it,” mother Maureen Kass said. “Then it was just supporting and encouraging her.”

But Kass didn't give in to the kind of self-pity that can get the best of us in her circumstances. Instead, she started Meredith's Favorite Blanket, a project designed to make blankets for those who are sick or have experienced loss.

“It's a blanket—it makes you feel warm, it makes you feel happy and cozy,” Kass said. “So it's a good thing being able to spread that warmth.”

During her downtime, Kass works in her living room with strips of fleece and other material making blankets she hopes can bring a smile to someone's face.

After Kass makes the blanket, people from her school, church, and elsewhere help personalize it, which takes about 20 minutes. She said the community's involvement is touching.

“There were so many people willing to donate their time and everyone was willing to get involved,” Kass said. “We were able to get a lot more done.”

Kass and company have made more than 450 blankets.

The blankets have gone to cancer patients, hurricane victims in Texas, survivors of the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting in Florida, and children at the Hospital for Special Surgery in Manhattan.

“It's something that makes you comfortable and it's also a reminder that someone is supporting you, too, even though they don't know who I am,” the teen said. “It's like someone was trying to do something for you and it's having a positive effect on people.”

“It's something that even if they're having a rough day, or if they're not feeling well, it can help bring a smile onto their face,” she said.

“It's something that makes you comfortable and it's also a reminder that someone is supporting you.”  
Meredith Kass



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## Embrace Life's Limitations to Unlock Life's Promise

If we live for meaning, rather than pleasure, our hardships become opportunities



There is a fine line between play and work. In one, we enjoy the challenge, in another, we lament it. But what if the difference is just in our heads?

**JAY HARRINGTON**

In 1944, a 39-year-old Austrian man named Victor Frankl and his wife Tilly were processed into the Auschwitz concentration camp.

He spent approximately 18 months in the shacks of the Nazis being shuttled from one camp to another before being liberated by American soldiers. Frankl survived the Holocaust, but his wife, mother, and brother did not.

Despite suffering such great trauma, Frankl went on to become one of the most influential neurologists and psychiatrists of the 20th century.

In fact, spending time in captivity, experiencing suffering and deprivation, and watching some prisoners transcend their circumstances while others succumbed to them, is what inspired Frankl to explore life's meaning and develop a renowned technique called “logotherapy.”

Frankl gained his most important insight during his lowest moment by observing human resilience. He then taught others how to find meaning in life even in the harshest conditions.

### Find Meaning Through Limitations

“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.” The search for meaning, Frankl believed, is the humanity's primary motivator.

Frankl, of course, is not the first to explore life's big question: Why are we here? For thousands of years, religious and secular scholars have attempted to answer this question. As Frankl observed, “Religion is the ultimate search for meaning.”

Frankl noted that finding the “ultimate meaning” of life “necessarily exceeds and surpasses the finite intellectual capacities of man.” But, as Frankl observed, the struggle to make sense of it all is what makes life meaningful. Sigmund Freud believed that humans are motivated by their desire for pleasure. Frankl disagreed with Freud—he believed that life's purpose is derived not from pleasure but from meaning.

### Discover Purpose in the Struggle

The Buddha described suffering as the most enduring of human conditions. This suf-

fering comes from limitations—in terms of health, happiness, relationships, and basic needs. Humans suffer, at times intolerably.

But in the face of these limitations, we can discover meaning.

We find meaning in the struggle, not in spite of it. As philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche said, “To live is to suffer, to survive is to find some meaning in the suffering.” In other words, the darker the shadows we experience, the brighter the sun on the other side.

We are “meant” to struggle because it's what leads us to learn and grow if we seek meaning rather than lament our lack of pleasure.

Self-awareness of our own limitations can give us insight and empathy. If our limitations aren't as severe as those of others, or if we've been fortunate enough to overcome them, we find the need to be of service.

“The world is full of suffering. It is also full of overcoming it.”—Helen Keller

### Turn Lemons Into Lemonade

A life without struggle, without a challenge, feels empty. Challenge is the resistance that makes us stronger, forces us to grow. It is the weight we curl to strengthen our mental biceps. A life without this is doomed to self-indulgence. Frankl observed that as societies increase their material comfort, they experience a deterioration of the mental and emotional state of their members. Frankl coined the term “existential vacuum,” which he described as “the feeling of the total and ultimate meaningless,” to describe this condition.

If we define ourselves by what we have, and not by who we are and what we do, we become trapped by our limitations, not set free by them.

Stoic philosopher Epictetus counseled us to, “Live so that our happiness depends as little as possible on external causes.” To the extent that we suffer hardship, Epictetus urged us to look back, find the positives, and make use of what happened.

“Every difficulty in life presents us with an opportunity to turn inward and to invoke our own inner resources. The trials we endure can and should introduce us to our strengths,” said Epictetus.

Frankl, in his seminal book “Man's Search for Meaning,” wrote, “When we are no longer

able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

### A Happy Life

Cognizance of limitations is what drives us to seek out new experiences.

There is a concept in psychology called the “mere exposure effect” that biases us toward familiarity. It's a survival mechanism built into us. Our ancestors were more likely to survive if they approached people and engaged in experiences that they perceived as non-life threatening, so they stuck with what they knew.

Mere survival is far less a concern in our modern world, but we still tend toward familiarity. It's what gets us stuck in the rut of routine, especially as we get older.

By recognizing these limitations, however, we can break free of them and pursue new and novel experiences that lead to a rich and rewarding life.

In a previous article, we discussed the importance of first moments. These provide the fuel for an interesting and happy life. If we recognize our tendencies toward the familiar, we then have the power to pursue the extraordinary.

“Life is the art of drawing without an eraser.”—John Gardner

Understanding and appreciating limitations is an important component of a happy life. It's important to dream big, but equally important to find as much contentment in the pursuit of dreams as you do in the realization of them.

Things rarely go as planned, so if you get too caught up in your vision of what an idyllic life should look like, you'll often find yourself trapped in a sticky web of unrealistically high expectations.

In other words, you need to learn to love the process of life—which is full of struggles and marked by obstacles—as much as you love dreaming up ideas about what an ideal life might look like. Happiness is found in life's journey, not necessarily in its destination.

*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.*

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# Boost Low Energy Without Caffeine



There are far superior sources of energy than a cup of coffee

ANDREA DONSKY

Are you tired of feeling tired? Does your energy level seem to drop throughout the day? If so, we have some suggestions on how to boost low energy without endless cups of coffee, energy drinks, or other sources of caffeine.

You should find several ways to fix your low energy levels naturally among the following suggestions. In fact, we suggest you combine two or more of these ideas to super-size your energy boost without caffeine.

## 1. Eat 'Live' Foods

When you focus on eating a balanced diet that is rich in fruits and vegetables, you can't help but feel energized. Raw fruits and vegetables keep their nutrients intact; that is, they have not been destroyed by cooking. Heating foods to 106 degrees F or higher for 30 minutes destroys enzymes, which are considered to be the life force of foods. Other examples of live foods are nuts, wheatgrass, and sprouted seeds, beans, grains, and legumes.

One of the easiest ways to enjoy live, raw foods is to make a smoothie.

## 2. Try Moringa

One of the most nutritious plants on the planet is moringa (*Moringa oleifera*). All parts of the plant (leaves, roots, flowers, bark, fruit, seeds) are used to make medicine to treat various ailments, ranging from anemia (characterized by fatigue), arthritis, cancer, constipation, diabetes, stomach ulcers, headache, high blood pressure, and thyroid disorders (also related to energy levels).

Moringa is an excellent source of antioxidants, protein, vitamins, and minerals, including iron, calcium, potassium, magnesium, phosphorus, and zinc. These nutrients are the main reason moringa is so good for boosting energy.

Although you can add Moringa leaves to salads and other foods, many people prefer to use a powdered moringa supplement. Moringa powder is easy to add to smoothies, sauces, dips, and soups and is readily absorbed and used by the body. A typical dose is 2 teaspoons. For a great morning pick-me-up, try a cup of moringa tea.

## 3. Keep Moving

As the old saying goes, energy begets energy. Once you begin moving, you have the momentum to keep moving. You don't need to run a marathon; simply get up from your sofa or desk and take a brisk walk. Use the stairs instead of the elevator. Even standing up from your desk and stretching for several minutes will enhance blood circulation, elevate your breathing, and give you a shot of energy.

## 4. Get Good Sleep

This seems like a no-brainer, but the secret word here is "good." A sleep cycle consists of four stages:

- Stage 1, the transition between awake and sleep
- Stage 2, light sleep when memories are consolidated
- Stage 3, which is the most restorative stage. Stages 1-3 last about 4 to 7 hours of your overall sleep time
- Stage 4, REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep, which is the dreaming stage. If you wake up or are awakened during REM, you will likely feel groggy or overly sleepy. This stage usually makes up 90 to 120 minutes of a night's sleep.

Typically, people go through a sleep cycle four to five times a night.

To help ensure you get through all the sleep cycles with few or no awakenings, here are a few tips:

- Establish a pre-bedtime routine that allows you to decompress. Take a hot shower or bath with lavender essential oil, listen to relaxing music, read something light, meditate, or have a cup of chamomile tea. Do not exercise before retiring.
- Stay away from electronic devices, including your cell phone, tablet, laptop, and TV at least 30 minutes before retiring. Wear a pair of blue blocker glasses as they help to block any blue light emitting from your electronic devices.
- Make sure your sleep environment is comfortable in terms of temperature, bed clothing, pillows and covers, and lighting. Complete darkness is best.
- Consider a natural supplement if you are having trouble getting to and staying asleep. Some options include magnesium, melatonin, theanine, passion flower, and valerian root. All are available as supplements, but the latter two are also available as teas.

## 5. Stay Hydrated

Few people realize that dehydration is the most common cause of fatigue. That's because when your body lacks sufficient fluid, your heart needs to work harder to provide your body with the nutrients and oxygen it needs to survive. Diuretic beverages such as coffee, tea, and soft drinks can cause you to urinate frequently and lose fluids. In addition, dehydration can cause cognitive problems such as problems with short-term memory and foggy eyes as well as dizziness.

Designate a special sustainable water bottle that you will fill with water (and lemon, mint, cucumber, or other natural flavorings) and carry it with you all day. Consume at least two 32-ounce bottles during the day.

## 6. Take Tulsi

Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum* Lin.) also known as holy basil, is an adaptogenic herb, which means it has special qualities that help balance energy levels and fight fatigue. Research has shown that Tulsi can help protect your body against environmental stressors such as heavy metals, air and water pollutants, excessive noise, prolonged physical exercise, and exposure to the cold, all of which can drain your energy.

Tulsi also plays a role in regulating blood pressure, lipid levels, and blood sugar levels, as well as providing antimicrobial activity against a wide variety of pathogens. All of these factors can have a positive impact on energy levels.

Choose tulsi supplements made from the leaf of the plant, as it contains various bioactive substances such as betacyanophyllene, eugenol, linalool, and ursolic acid. Tulsi is also available as a tea, which can be enjoyed both iced and hot and with lemon.

## 7. Embrace Wheatgrass

Wheatgrass (*Triticum aestivum*) is a living food and one of the best sources of chlorophyll, which is the basis of all plant life. This plant, which can be grown easily at home on your window sill, is a great source of oxygen and helps the brain and other tissues function at a high level.

If downing wheatgrass juice every day is unappealing, don't fret. Add wheatgrass juice or powder to a smoothie, which hides the flavor rather well. You also can use the juice or powder in pesto, soups, salad dressings, or guacamole.

## 8. Check Your Blood and Thyroid

Low energy can be the result of low iron in your blood (anemia) or a malfunctioning thyroid. You can address both of these conditions using natural means, but first, you need to have a blood test to identify the reason for your fatigue.

All types of anemia, including a deficiency of iron, vitamin B12, or folate, can cause chronic low energy. Once the deficiency is identified, you can work with a health care professional to reverse it. Generally, you will need to take a supplement and increase your intake of foods containing the necessary nutrient.

For iron-deficient anemia, a typical treatment course includes taking an iron supplement along with vitamin C (which increases the absorption of iron) plus including more iron-rich foods in your diet, such as leafy greens (e.g., spinach, kale, mustard greens), amaranth, tofu, dried apricots, figs, lentils, and beans. Because iron supplements can result in constipation, drink lots of water and eat at least 25 grams (and up to 40 grams) of fiber daily to help stay regular.

For vitamin B-12 deficiency, which is more common in older adults, your health care provider may recommend getting a B-12 injection if you have low levels of a protein that

helps B-12 absorption.

Oral supplements are sufficient for most people, however. The most effective oral dose is between 647 and 1,032 micrograms daily. Sublingual (under the tongue) or traditional oral dosing are believed to be equally effective at remedying a vitamin B-12 deficiency.

Most individuals with a folate deficiency take folic acid supplements for at least four months. Before taking folic acid, your health care provider will identify your vitamin B12 levels. If a B12 deficiency is present but goes undetected, taking folic acid may hide the lack of B12, and the result could be nervous system problems over time. You should also eat more foods rich in folate, including asparagus, broccoli, brown rice, Brussels sprouts, chickpeas, and peas.

## 9. Practice Deep Breathing

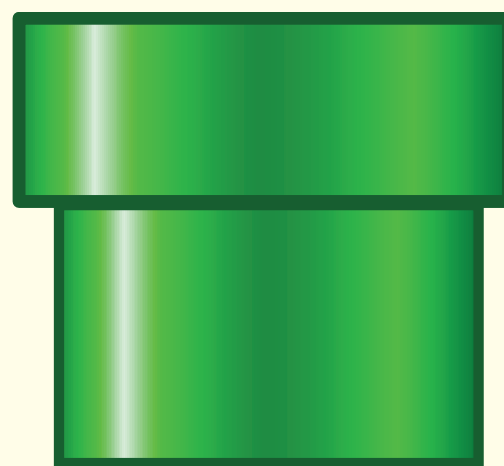
This remedy for low energy can be done just about anywhere, anytime, and costs nothing. It's likely you don't take full advantage of your lungs. Most of us are shallow breathers, which means we don't take full breaths in or completely exhale the air from our lungs. Deep breathing sends

your body's cells and tissues a rich gift of oxygen, which invigorates you and elevates your energy level.

You can find dozens of suggestions on how to practice deep breathing. Here is just one, but feel free to explore others. Practice deep breathing several times a day. Some suggested times are when you first get up in the morning, during a break at work, when watching television (commercials are a perfect time), while commuting on public transportation, in



1UP



a waiting room, and before you go to sleep. Here is a suggestion on how to do it:

- Sit with your back straight and your eyes closed (closing your eyes is optional).
- Focus on your breathing as you inhale slowly to a count of 5.
- Hold your breath to a count of 7 while you tense all of the muscles in your body.
- Slowly exhale to a count of 8 as you relax all of your muscles. Be sure to release all of the air that you can.
- Repeat this cycle several times. If you feel lightheaded, breathe normally for a minute before trying again.

## The Bottom Line

Lack of energy is a common problem but one that can often be remedied by practicing a few simple activities and making them a part of your lifestyle.

Andrea Donsky is an author, registered holistic nutritionist, editor-in-chief of [NaturallySavvy.com](http://NaturallySavvy.com), and co-founder of [The Healthy Shopper Inc.](http://TheHealthyShopper.com) and [Naturally Savvy Media](http://NaturallySavvyMedia.com). This article was first published on [NaturallySavvy.com](http://NaturallySavvy.com)

# Wood-Burning Stoves Add to Winter Air Pollution and Health Threats

MICHAEL D. MEHTA

It may be natural, but there's little that is safe or environmentally sound about heating your home with wood.

The World Health Organization has ranked air pollution and climate change as the top health threat for 2019. One in nine deaths around the world is due to air

pollution. In Canada and worldwide, more deaths per year are linked to air pollution than to automobile accidents. My own research shows that in rural British Columbia, Canada's westernmost province, the main source of winter air pollution is residential wood burning and that it is mostly being ignored and rarely monitored by the government.

## Health Hazard

Wood smoke may smell good, but it is not good for you.

The main threat comes from the cocktail of tiny particles and droplets that are about 2.5 microns in diameter (also called PM2.5). Due to their size, they easily work their way into our lungs, bloodstream, brain and other organs, triggering asthma attacks, allergic responses, heart attacks, and stroke.

Chronic exposure to PM2.5 is linked to heart disease, lung cancer in non-smokers, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, Type II diabetes, and dementia.

Wood smoke affects everyone, but children are especially vulnerable in part because their respiratory systems are under development. Pregnant women exposed to wood smoke may have children with smaller lungs, impaired immune systems, decreased thyroid function and changes to brain structure that may contribute to difficulties with self-control. Children who are hospitalized for lower respiratory tract infections are more likely to have a wood stove in the house, although other factors may also play a role.

The elderly are also at risk. A recent study of people living in British Columbia, in Kamloops, Prince George, Courtenay, and the Comox Valley, showed that wood stove pollution significantly increased the rate of heart attacks in people over 65.

And that nice smell? It comes from benzene, a carcinogen (cancer-causing substance), and acrolein.

With the dozens of toxic and carcinogenic chemicals in wood smoke, it's inconsistent for governments to ban smoking and vaping in public places while ignoring the smoke from wood stoves and fireplaces.

## Neither Sustainable Nor Carbon Neutral

Burning wood for energy releases more carbon than burning coal and it is speeding up climate warming. It also releases black carbon, a powerful short-lived pollutant, that can accelerate the melting and retreat of glaciers.

There are alternatives. For everyday heating, mini-split air source heat pumps are an excellent option. They are often three to four times more efficient than electric baseboard heaters and can work in colder climates. For example, the community of Skidegate in Haida Gwaii, British Columbia, placed heat pumps in every house, reducing the use of wood for home heating.

Efficient propane stoves and heaters are an excellent complement to heat pumps and can provide top-up heating on very cold days as well as backup heating during power outages.

Most regional and municipal governments in British Columbia have been reluctant to deal with these issues, and tend to focus on the solution. Based on my current research, the vocal response by the wood-burning industry and its customers often drowns out reasoned discussion.

The British Columbia Lung Association has also been a strong advocate of wood stove exchange programs. But even the cleanest, highest level of eco-certified wood stoves generate more particulate matter per hour than 18 newer diesel passenger cars—and the wood stove may be right beside you.

## Citizen Science Is a Game Changer

Concerned citizens have set up an extensive and growing network of low-cost air quality monitors made by PurpleAir. Kamloops, for example, with a topography that tends to trap air pollution from heavy industry and residential wood burning, has 30 of these WiFi-enabled, real-time sensors, as do hundreds of other communities around the world.

These monitors show a distinct and troublesome pattern. The clear "signature" of wood burning shows that many rural British Columbia communities often have winter air pollution levels that far exceed those seen in larger cities like Victoria and Vancouver. Some of the sensors register air quality readings that rival bad air days in China and India. Wood smoke is creating hot spots that expose people to levels of air pollution not normally recorded by provincial air quality monitors.

Wood smoke and the cultural and social practices that allow it to be generated without much regulation and control operates in a vacuum where preconceptions, origin stories, and strong emotions impair action. We need another narrative.

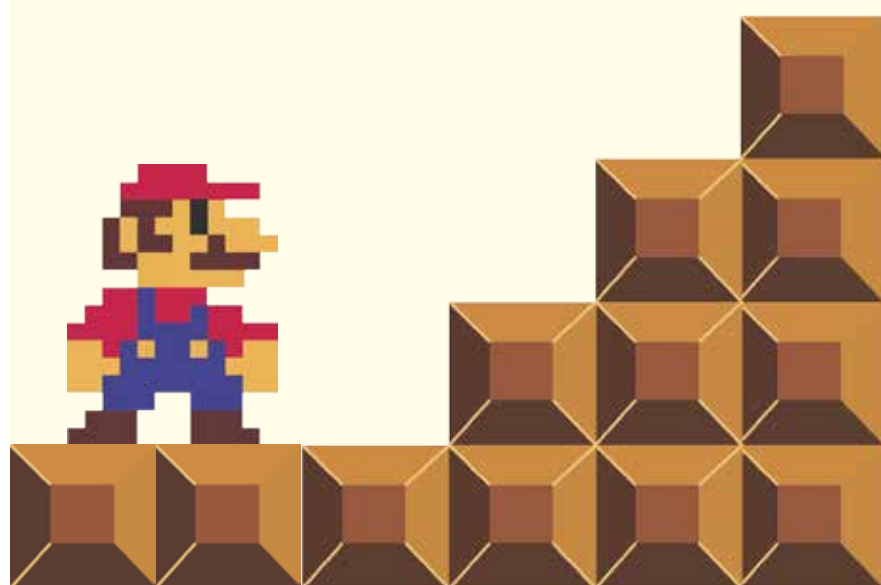
Lack of government action to deal with this problem encourages people to ignore this evidence and to underestimate the risk. Burning wood deprives people of the right to breathe clean air in their own homes, and it ultimately represents an uncontrolled form of secondhand smoke exposure with broad implications.

Michael D. Mehta is a professor of geography and environmental studies at Thompson Rivers University in Canada. This article was first published on [The Conversation](http://TheConversation.com).



Wood smoke may smell good, but it can also trigger asthma, allergies, and heart attacks.

THOMAS BSWALD/SHUTTERSTOCK





# Why I Dress Up for Therapy and Why You Should Try It, Too

What you wear to therapy might matter, in addition to what you talk about

## ALLYSON BYERS

I sat in my therapist's waiting room in my floral mini dress with wedge heels. Today was the day I was going to share something with my therapist that I had never shared with anyone else. And while I knew I would likely spend most of the session crying, at least I'd be doing it while wearing a cute outfit. It's the little things.

When I was younger, I couldn't wait until I was an adult and could wear suits and heels to an office. I always loved dressing up and would do so any chance I got. It made me feel confident and powerful—like I could take on anything.

After college, I learned that office life wasn't for me. Instead, I spend my days working from home as a freelance writer in comfy pants and big sweatshirts. But if I know I'm going to be having a particularly stressful day, I still throw on a cute top and jeans. It makes me feel like I can conquer the day and all of the challenges thrown my way.

When I first started going to therapy, I'd show up in my comfy clothes and start rambling the moment I sat down. I'd talk about my week and vent about any problems I was having. But once I started to really trust my therapist, I knew it was time to start opening up and sharing what was really going through my head.

One time, I had a work event after my ses-

**Putting on a cute dress or a new pair of jeans reminds me that I'm more than just my depression and anxiety.**

sion and wouldn't have time to go home and change. So I threw on a little black dress and my pumps and went to see my therapist.

It ended up being a really hard but insightful session. This may sound silly, but afterward, I realized that what I was wearing made a difference.

I went into the session with more confidence (even my therapist commented on this), and this, in turn, allowed me to open up more and really share with her what was going on. I felt like my head was clearer, and I was able to better communicate my thoughts and emotions.

Sarah Loughlin, who also goes to therapy, agrees. "If I look good, I feel good, and going into a session feeling good is more productive for me than going in with a [terrible] mindset."

The more I thought about this, the more it made sense.

For years people have been talking about how dressing up for work can change the way both you and others see yourself. And why should therapy be any different?

If I'm going to sit for an hour sharing my deepest, darkest thoughts, I might as well feel good about myself while doing it.

Plus, this is an hour every week where I get to focus on me. I consider the time spent getting ready for it as part of my self-care routine.

Melanie Sweeney, a mother of three, says that when she was going to therapy, she'd

spend a little extra time getting ready because it was the only time she had to really focus on herself.

"Taking more care in dressing well had to do in part with an outward signal (for myself) that it was time to focus on me. It was a similar feeling to dressing for work. It felt like a luxury to think of myself and to mark that time as mine, which was also necessary for the work of therapy."

Now, I don't have kids and don't really have an excuse for not getting dressed in proper clothes every day, but I do spend most of my day answering to others, including my dog.

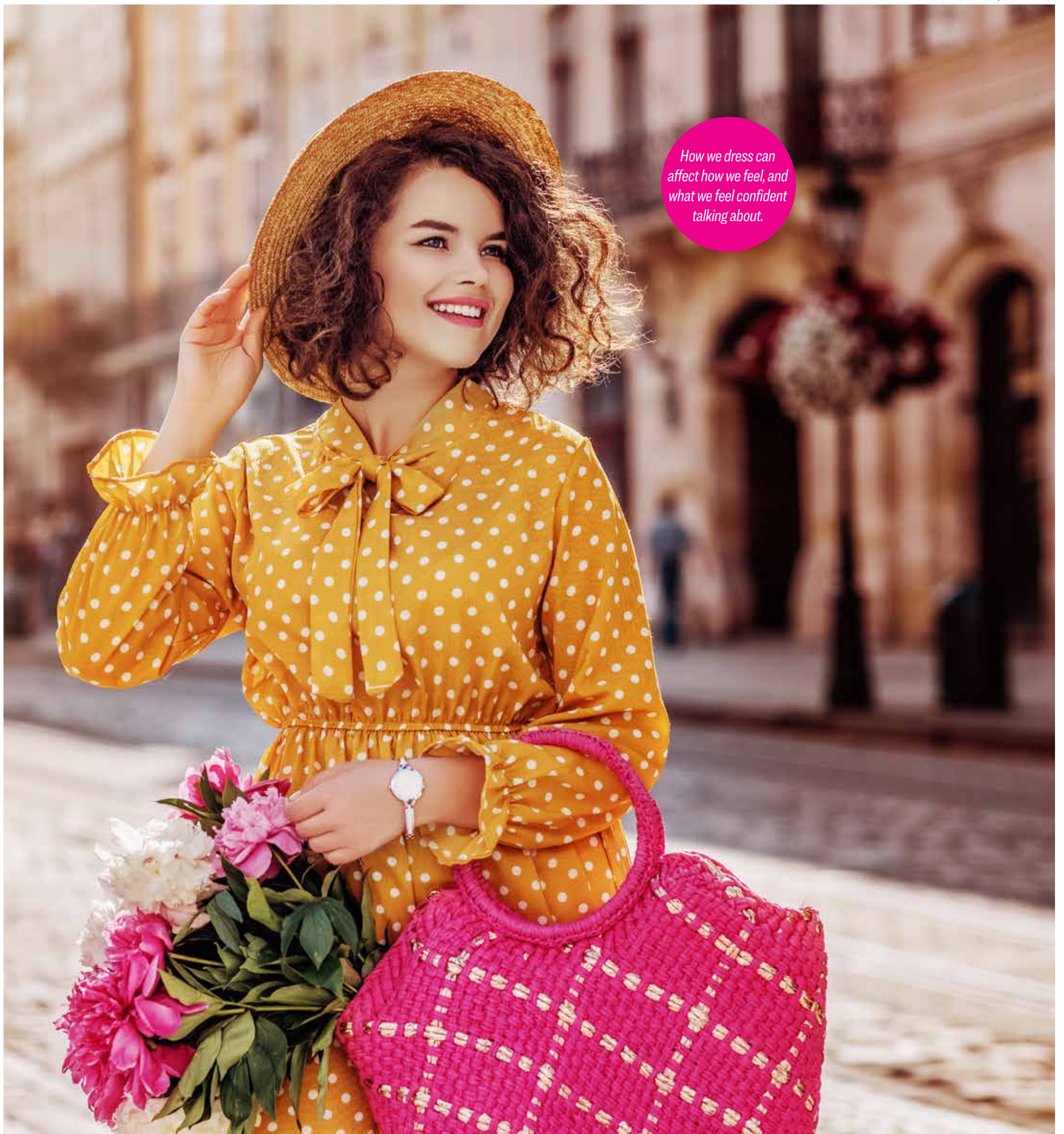
Dressing up for therapy has now become a habit, and I do it almost every time, even when I'm going through a major depressive episode. I still make sure to tell my therapist exactly how I'm feeling so that I'm not putting up a front—but putting on a cute dress or a new pair of jeans reminds me that I'm more than just my depression and anxiety.

My younger self probably didn't have therapy in mind when she dreamed about dressing up and heading to a big, corporate office.

But I'm dressing up and going somewhere where I am working on myself so I can reach all of my goals and live an authentic life. And I think that's even better.

*Allyson Byers is a freelance writer and editor based in Los Angeles who loves writing about anything health-related. This article was first published on Healthline.*

VICTORIA CHUDINOVA/SHUTTERSTOCK



How we dress can affect how we feel, and what we feel confident talking about.