

THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND & BODY

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Strengthen your body's
powerful detox systems **4**

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WEEKLY

The Top Workouts That Slow Aging on a Cellular Level

Exercise doesn't have to take long, if you know how to maximize results

EMILY GADD

New research has found that on top of all of the other health benefits you already know about exercise, it can help with aging, too.

But not all exercises are created equal—at least according to a new study in the European Heart Journal.

According to this study, you should add endurance and high-intensity interval training (HIIT) to your routine. These exercises keep your heart rate up and can keep your cells younger for longer. The researchers determined this by measuring the structures at the end of chromosomes, known as telomeres.

Thanks to older research, we know that our telomeres start to shrink as we age. Also, older people with longer telomeres don't experience vascular aging as rapidly as people with shorter ones. This means their veins are generally in better shape and they're less at risk for conditions like heart disease and stroke.

Details of the Study

- The study followed 124 people who exercised for 45 minutes, three times a week, for 26 weeks.
- The participants were split into four groups: the aerobic group (continuous running), the HIIT group (4x4 interval program), the resistance group (eight machine-based exercises), and the control group (no exercise at all).
- At the end of the 26 weeks, those in the control and resistance groups had no change in telomere length.

However, those in the aerobic and HIIT groups saw a "two-fold" increase in length.

The researchers also found that the people in the aerobic and HIIT groups experienced more telomerase activity. This is the process that caused their chromosomes to become longer.

The study didn't measure respiratory benefits, which is what allows you to not get winded when you walk up a set of stairs.

It is worth noting that telomere length isn't the only factor that accounts for aging.

It also wouldn't be accurate to say that it's aerobic or HIIT exercise alone that causes this change in healthy aging factors. These exercises help play a part in stimulating nitrous oxide, which helps keep your mitochondria healthy and maintain

the fight-or-flight mechanisms in your body. While the study didn't find anti-aging benefits from resistance training, it doesn't mean there's no benefit to weightlifting. As you get older, your body will have decreased muscle mass. This can increase your risk of falls, fractures, impaired function, osteoporosis, and death.

If anything, treat this study as a reminder to maintain a balanced approach to exercise. Try a mix of aerobic and resistance: Run on Tuesdays and lift weights on Thursdays.

Start Your Telomere-Friendly Routine Anytime

If you've never been a gym aficionado, aerobic and HIIT workouts are a great way to start. After all, the study saw growth in the telomere length of middle-aged participants even with no fitness background. Tip: Almost any workout can become HIIT workouts simply by creating intervals of intensity.

Aerobic Workouts

1. Swimming
2. Jogging
3. Low-impact cardio
4. Elliptical
5. Dancing

HIIT Version

1. Swim fast for 200 meters and rest for 1 min.
2. High knees for 30 seconds, rest for 10.
3. Perform reps for 30 seconds, rest for 1 min.
4. Pedal fast for 30 seconds, then slow for 2–4 min.
5. 4x4 (four exercises, four rounds).

HIIT involves short periods of intense exercise followed by a recovery or easier period. Seven-minute HIIT workouts are common, although you should perform the exercise according to your body's needs and capabilities.

As you get more comfortable with working out, focus on building your muscles with weight or resistance training.

Emily Gadd is a writer and editor who lives in San Francisco. This article was first published on Healthline.



Antibiotic use was associated with even higher risk for mental illness.

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Infections During Childhood Increase the Risk of Mental Disorders

Link between gut bacteria and mental health gets powerful boost from Danish registry

CHRISTINE BEAR

Hospitalization for infection might leave you at greater risk for mental illness, according to a recent study published in JAMA Psychiatry, which draws on data from youth in Denmark up to age 17.

The authors also found that antibiotic use was associated with even higher risk for mental illness. This connection is thought to be, in part, because antibiotics affect bacteria in the intestinal microbiome.

The study—which supports emerging theories about the functional interaction between infection, the gut microbiome, and mental illness—is one of close to 50 papers published using data from the Danish Psychiatric Central Research Register since the latter half of 2018.

This registry tracks the clinical data of more than one million people—in this case, data from 1995 onward on Danes who were treated for mental illness over their first 17 years of life, either in a hospital or as outpatients. Every measure of general and mental health status, including prescriptions and family histories, were documented for each individual as they aged.

The sheer size of this registry is providing international researchers with unprecedented opportunities to answer targeted questions about the links between life history and mental health status.

Antibiotics, Autism, and Depression

It has been suggested that the gut microbiome, the hugely diverse bacterial community that we host in our intestines, sends out signals to the brain, modulating our moods and, possibly, our susceptibility to mental illness.

Studies in animal models already have documented the association between bacteria and depression. One research group showed that mice treated with antibiotics showed alterations in the diversity of the gut microbiome and performed worse on memory tests.

Animals depleted of gut bacteria using broad-spectrum antibiotics exhibited changes in various disorders including autism spectrum, neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer's disease, and depression.

In another remarkable study, fecal samples from human patients suffering from depression and transplanted into rats conferred depression-like symptoms. In one study, transplants from patients with anxiety created anxious mice.

While these studies point to the link between the microbiome and mental health status, the nature, or molecular basis of this link remain unknown.

Bacteria as a Treatment for Depression?

A promising area of research that aims to define the links between the microbiome and the human brain, focuses on identifying neuroactive compounds produced or consumed by bacteria in the gut.

In work published in Nature Microbiology in December 2018, Philip Strandwitz and his colleagues at Northeastern University in Boston, studied a rare type of gut bacteria given the name KLE1738. These rare bacteria eat gamma-aminobutyric acid, also known as GABA. A different type of bacteria, Bacteroides, produces GABA, keeping the KLE1738 bacteria alive by feeding them.

These findings underscore how different types of bacteria work together in the gut. This matters to us because GABA is a neuroactive compound required for normal function of our central nervous system. Major depressive disorders are associated with reduced GABA levels.

Strandwitz hypothesized that microbiomes containing more of the GABA-producing bacteria would be associated with a happier human host. In a small pilot study of 23 patients, those with higher levels of fecal Bacteroides, the GABA-producing bacteria, also had relatively mild depression.

Though the results were not conclusive, the trend supports a possible role for the bacteria in modifying the severity of depression.

The Link Between Gut and Mental Health

The results from this small pilot study were ambiguous because the number of patients was small and the study was not controlled for medications taken by the subjects. A significant number of these patients were on antidepressants of varying kinds—all of which would be expected to have an effect.

On top of medication use, other characteristics of each patient, like age, gender, and genetic background would be expected to influence the dialogue occurring between the gut and the brain.

With its massive scale, the Danish psychiatry registry promises to change all this. By documenting every clinical aspect in the young lives of more than a million people visiting the hospital for mental illness, the registry provides the opportunity to isolate and study each clinical variable. Even after being classified on the basis of age, gender, type of mental illness, medication history or certain genetic variants, there will still be sufficient numbers of patients to permit meaningful comparisons.

Because of its size, the Danish registry could do more to clarify the link between the gut and mental health than anything before.

Linking With Other Large-Scale Databases

The immense value of the registry may be truly revealed when linked with other large-scale efforts, such as those that study bacterial interactions in the gut or genetic variants in patients with mental illness. For example, the pilot study of the gut microbiome in 23 patients described previously could be revisited using a much larger and better defined patient cohort, to generate convincing results that could eventually be translated to improvements in patient care.

The potential of the Danish psychiatry registry to improve the treatment of mental illness has inspired other countries to do the same. In November 2016, for example, the American Psychiatric Association announced the launch of a national mental health registry called PsychPRO.

Like the Danes, American psychiatrists anticipate that a national registry will help propel future research efforts and also stimulate the development of new and better ways to treat and prevent psychiatric illnesses.

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Understanding Loneliness in Older Adults—and Tailoring a Solution

Loneliness is a heavy burden with significant health risks, especially for seniors

JUDITH GRAHAM

Loneliness can have a profound impact on health and longevity. It is also widespread. This helps explain why a committee of the National Academies of Sciences is investigating loneliness and social isolation among older adults.

The committee's deliberations come amid growing interest in the topic. Four surveys (by Cigna, AARP, the Kaiser Family Foundation and the University of Michigan) have examined the extent of loneliness and social isolation in older adults in the past year. And health insurers, health care systems, senior housing operators and social service agencies are launching or expanding initiatives.

Notably, Anthem is planning a national rollout to Medicare Advantage plans of a program addressing loneliness developed by its subsidiary CareMore Health, according to Robin Caruso, CareMore's chief togetherness officer. United Healthcare is making health navigators available to Medicare Advantage members at risk for social isolation. And Kaiser Permanente is starting a pilot program that will refer lonely or isolated older adults in its Northwest region to community services, with plans to eventually bring it to other regions, according to Lucy Savitz, vice president of health research at Kaiser Permanente Northwest.

The effectiveness of these programs and others remains to be seen. Few have been rigorously evaluated, and many assume increased social interaction will go a long way toward alleviating older adults' distress at not having meaningful relationships. But that isn't necessarily the case.

"Assuaging loneliness is not just about having random human contact; it's about the quality of that contact and who you're having contact with," said Dr. Vyjayanthi Periyakoil, an associate professor of medicine at Stanford University School of Medicine.

A one-size-fits-all approach won't work for older adults, she and other experts agreed. Instead, varied approaches that recognize the different degrees, types and root causes of loneliness are needed.

Degrees of Loneliness

The headlines are alarming: Between 33 and 43 percent of older Americans are lonely, they proclaim. But those figures combine two groups: people who are sometimes lonely and those who are always lonely.

The distinction matters because people who are sometimes lonely don't necessarily say that way; they can move in and out of this state. And the potential health impact of loneliness—a higher risk of heart disease, dementia, immune dysfunction, functional impairment, and early death—depends on its severity.

People who are severely lonely are at "high risk," while those who are moderately lonely are at lower risk, said Julianne Holt-Lunstad, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham Young University.

The number of people in the highest risk category is relatively small, as it turns out. When AARP asked adults who participated in its survey last year "How often do you feel lonely or isolated from those around you?" 4 percent said "always," while 27 percent said "sometimes." In the University of Michigan's just-published survey on loneliness and social isolation, 8 percent of older adults (ages 50–80) said they often lacked companionship (a proxy for loneliness), while 26 percent said this was sometimes the case.

"If you compare loneliness to a toxin and ask 'How much exposure is dangerous, at what dose and over what period of time?' the truth is we don't really know yet," Periyakoil said.

Loneliness isn't always negative, and seniors shouldn't panic if they sometimes feel this way. Often, loneliness motivates people to find a way to connect with others, strengthening social bonds.

The potential health impact of loneliness—a higher risk of heart disease, dementia, immune dysfunction, functional impairment, and early death—depends on its severity.

Think about what you can offer as a friend or a colleague to help them feel valued.

Dr. Carla Perissinotto, associate chief for geriatrics clinical programs, University of California–San Francisco

More often than not, it's inspired by circumstances that people adjust to over time, such as the death of a spouse, close family member or friend; serious illness or injury; or a change in living situation.

Types of Loneliness

Loneliness comes in different forms that call for different responses. According to a well-established framework, "emotional loneliness" occurs when someone feels the lack of intimate relationships. "Social loneliness" is the lack of satisfying contact with family members, friends, neighbors or other community members. "Collective loneliness" is the feeling of not being valued by the broader community.

Some experts add another category: "existential loneliness," or the sense that life lacks meaning or purpose.

Dr. Carla Perissinotto, associate chief for geriatrics clinical programs at the University of California–San Francisco, has been thinking about the different types of loneliness recently because of her 75-year-old mother, Gloria. Widowed in September, then forced to stay home for three months after hip surgery, Gloria became profoundly lonely.

"If I were a clinician and said to my mother, 'Go to a senior center; that wouldn't get at the core underlying issues; my mother's grief and her feeling, since she's not a native to this country, that she's not welcome here, given the political situation,'" Perissinotto said.

What's helped Gloria is "talking about and giving voice to what she's experiencing," Perissinotto continued. Also, friends, former co-workers, family members and some of Perissinotto's high school buddies have rallied around Gloria. "She feels that she's a valuable part of her community, and that's what's missing for so many people," Perissinotto said.

"Look at the older people around you who've had a major life transition: a death, the diagnosis of a serious illness, a financial setback, a surgery putting them at risk," she recommended. "Think about what you can offer as a friend or a colleague to help them feel valued."

Listening to older adults and learning about the type of loneliness they're experiencing is important before trying to intervene. "We need to understand what's driving someone's loneliness situation before suggesting options," Perissinotto said.

Root Causes of Loneliness

One of the root causes of loneliness is the perception that other people have rejected you or don't care about you. Frequently, people who are lonely convey negativity or push others away because of perceived rejection, which only reinforces their isolation.

In a review of interventions to reduce loneliness, researchers from the University of Chicago note that interventions that address what they call "maladaptive social cognition"—distrust of other people, negativity, and the expectation of rejection—are generally more effective than those that teach social skills or promote social interactions. Cognitive behavior therapy, which teaches people to recognize and question their assumptions, is often recommended.

Relationships that have become disappointing are another common cause of loneliness. This could be a spouse who's become inattentive over time or adult children or friends who live at a distance and are rarely in touch.

"Figuring out how to promote quality relationships for older adults who are lonely is tricky," Holt-Lunstad said. "While we have decades of research in relationship science that helps characterize quality relationships, there's not a lot of evidence around effective ways to create those relationships or intervene" when problems surface.

Other contributors to loneliness are easier to address. A few examples: Someone who's lost a sense

of being meaningfully connected to other people because of hearing loss—the most common type of disability among older adults—can be encouraged to use a hearing aid. Someone who can't drive anymore and has stopped getting out of the house can get assistance with transportation. Or someone who's lost a sibling or a spouse can be directed to a bereavement program.

"We have to be very strategic about efforts to help people, what it is they need and what we're trying to accomplish," Holt-Lunstad said. "We can't just throw programs at people and hope that something is better than nothing."

She recommends that older adults take mental stock of the extent to which they feel lonely or socially isolated. Am I feeling left out? To what extent are my relationships supportive? Then, they should consider what underlies any problems. Why don't I get together with friends? Why have I lost touch with people I once spoke with?

"When you identify these factors, then you can think about the most appropriate strategies to relieve your discomfort and handle any obstacles that are getting in the way," Holt-Lunstad said.

Judith Graham is a writer for Kaiser Health News, which originally published this article. KHN's coverage of these topics is supported by John A. Hartford Foundation, Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, and The SCAN Foundation.

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People in the aerobic and HIIT groups experienced more telomerase activity.

Endurance exercises like jogging can stimulate cellular activity that can extend your life.

FULL BODY DETOX

9 Ways to Rejuvenate Your Body

Strengthen your body's powerful detox systems

Sugar and processed foods are thought to be at the root of today's public health crises.

GAVIN VAN DE WALLE

etoxification—or detox—is the latest buzzword of the health world.

It typically implies following a specific diet or using special products that claim to rid your body of toxins, thereby improving health and promoting weight loss.

Fortunately, your body is well-equipped to eliminate toxins and doesn't require special diets or expensive supplements to do so.

That said, you can enhance your body's natural detoxification system.

This article explains some common misconceptions about detoxing along with nine evidenced-based ways to rejuvenate your body's detoxification system.

You can optimize your body's natural detoxification system.

Common Misconceptions About Detoxing

Detox diets are said to eliminate toxins from your body, improve health, and promote weight loss. They often involve the use of laxatives, diuretics, vitamins, minerals, teas, and other foods thought to have detoxing properties.

The term "toxin" in the context of detox diets is loosely defined. It typically includes pollutants, synthetic chemicals, heavy metals, and processed foods—which all negatively affect health.

However, popular detox diets rarely identify the specific toxins they aim to remove or the mechanism by which they supposedly eliminate them.

Your body has a sophisticated way of eliminating toxins that involves the liver, kidneys, digestive system, skin, and lungs. Moreover, no evidence supports the use of these diets for toxin elimination or sustainable weight loss.

Still, only when these organs are healthy, can they effectively eliminate unwanted substances.

So, while detox diets don't do anything that your body can't naturally do on its own, you can optimize your body's natural detoxification system.

1. Limit Alcohol

More than 90 percent of alcohol is metabolized in your liver.

Liver enzymes metabolize alcohol to acetaldehyde, a chemical known to cause cancer. Recognizing acetaldehyde as a toxin, your liver converts it to a harmless substance called acetate, which is later eliminated from your body.

While observational studies have shown low-to-moderate alcohol consumption beneficial for heart health, excessive drinking can cause a myriad of health problems.

Excessive drinking can severely damage your liver function by causing fat buildup, inflammation, and scarring. When this happens, your liver cannot function adequately and perform its necessary tasks—including filtering waste and other toxins from your body.

As such, limiting or abstaining entirely from alcohol is one of the best ways to keep your body's detoxification system running strong.

Health authorities recommend limiting alcohol intake to one drink per day for women and two for men. If you currently don't drink, you shouldn't start for the potential heart benefits associated with light-to-moderate drinking.

2. Focus on Sleep

Ensuring adequate and quality sleep each night is a must to support your body's health and natural detoxification system. Sleeping allows your brain to reorganize and recharge itself, as well as remove toxic waste byproducts that have accumulated throughout the day.

One of those waste products is a protein called beta-amyloid, which contributes to the development of Alzheimer's disease.

With sleep deprivation, your body does not have time to perform those functions, so toxins can build up and affect several aspects of health.

Poor sleep has been linked to short- and long-term health consequences, such as stress, anxiety, high blood pressure, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and obesity.

You should sleep seven to nine hours per night on a regular basis to promote good health.

If you have difficulties staying or falling asleep at night, lifestyle changes like sticking to a sleep schedule and limiting blue light-emitted from mobile devices and computer screens—prior to bed are useful for improving sleep.

3. Drink More Water

Water does so much more than quench your

thirst. It regulates your body temperature, lubricates joints, aids digestion and nutrient absorption, and detoxifies your body by removing waste products.

Your body's cells must continuously be repaired to function optimally and break down nutrients for your body to use as energy. However, these processes release wastes—in the form of urea and carbon dioxide—which cause harm if allowed to build up in your blood.

Water transports these waste products, efficiently removing them through urination, breathing, or sweating. So staying properly hydrated is important for detoxification.

The adequate daily intake for water is 125 ounces for men and 91 ounces for women. You may need more or less depending on your diet, where you live, and your activity level.

4. Reduce Your Intake of Sugar and Processed Foods

Sugar and processed foods are thought to be at the root of today's public health crises.

High consumption of sugary and highly processed foods has been linked to obesity and other chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. These diseases hinder your body's ability to naturally detoxify itself by harming organs that play an important role, such as your liver and kidneys.

For example, high consumption of sugary beverages can cause fatty liver, a condition that negatively impacts liver function.

By consuming less junk food, you can keep your body's detoxification system healthy. You can limit junk food by leaving it on the store shelf. Not having it in your kitchen takes away the temptation altogether.

Focus on getting antioxidants from food and not supplements.

Replacing junk food with healthier choices such as fruits and vegetables is also a healthy way to reduce consumption.

5. Eat Antioxidant-Rich Foods

Antioxidants protect your cells against damage caused by molecules called free radicals. Oxidative stress is a condition caused by excessive production of free radicals.

Your body naturally produces these molecules for cellular processes, such as digestion. However, alcohol, tobacco smoke, a poor diet, and exposure to pollutants can produce excessive free radicals.

By causing damage to your body's

cells, these molecules have been implicated in a number of conditions, such as dementia, heart disease, liver disease, asthma, and certain types of cancer.

Eating a diet rich in antioxidants can help your body fight oxidative stress caused by excess free radicals and other toxins that increase your risk of disease.

Focus on getting antioxidants from food and not supplements, which may, in fact, increase your risk of certain diseases when taken in large amounts. Examples of antioxidants include vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin E, selenium, lycopene, lutein, and

zeaxanthin. Berries, fruits, nuts, cocoa, vegetables, spices, and beverages such as coffee and green tea have some of the highest amounts of antioxidants.

6. Eat Foods High in Prebiotics

Gut health is important for keeping your detoxification system healthy. Your intestinal cells have a detoxification and excretion system that protects your gut and body from harmful toxins, such as chemicals.

Good gut health starts with prebiotics, a type of fiber that feeds the good bacteria in your gut called probiotics. With prebiotics, your good bacteria are able to produce nutrients called short-chain fatty acids that are beneficial for health.

The good bacteria in your gut can become unbalanced with bad bacteria from the use of antibiotics, poor dental hygiene, and diet quality. Consequently, this unhealthy shift in bacteria can weaken your immune and detoxification systems and increase your risk of disease and inflammation.

Eating foods rich in prebiotics can keep your immune and detoxification systems healthy. Good food sources of prebiotics include tomatoes, artichokes, bananas, asparagus, onions, garlic, and oats.

7. Decrease Your Salt Intake

For some people, detoxing is a means of eliminating excess water.

Consuming too much salt can cause your body to retain excess fluid, especially if you have a condition that affects your kidneys or liver—or if you don't drink enough water.

This excess fluid buildup can cause bloating and make clothing uncomfortable. If you find yourself consuming too much salt, you can detox yourself of the extra water weight.

While it may sound counterintuitive, increasing your water intake is one of the best ways to eliminate excess water weight from consuming too much salt. That's because when you consume too much salt and not enough water, your body releases an antidiuretic hormone that prevents you from urinating and detoxifying.

By increasing your water intake, your body reduces the secretion of the antidiuretic hormone and increases urination, eliminating more water and waste products.

Increasing your intake of potassium-rich foods—which counterbalances some of sodium's effects—also helps. Foods rich in potassium include potatoes, squash, kidney beans, bananas, and spinach.

8. Get Active

Regular exercise—regardless of body weight—is associated with a longer life and a reduced risk of many conditions and diseases, including Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, and certain cancers.

While there are several mechanisms behind the health benefits of exercise, reduced inflammation is a key point. By reducing inflammation, exercise can help your body's systems—including its detoxification system—function properly and protect against disease.

While some inflammation is necessary for recovering from infection or healing wounds, too much of it weakens your body's systems and promotes disease.

It's recommended that you do at least 150 to 300 minutes a week of moderate-intensity exercise—such as brisk walking—or 75 to 50 minutes a week of vigorous-intensity physical activity—such as running.

9. Other Helpful Detox Tips

Although no current evidence supports the use of detox diets for removing toxins from your body, certain dietary changes and lifestyle practices may help reduce toxin load and support your body's detoxification system.

Eat sulfur-containing foods. Foods high in sulfur, such as onions, broccoli, and garlic, enhance excretion of heavy metals like cadmium.

Try out chlorella. Chlorella is a type of algae that has many nutritional benefits and may enhance the elimination of toxins like heavy metals, according to animal studies.

Flavor dishes with cilantro. Cilantro enhances excretion of certain toxins, such as heavy metals like lead, and chemicals, including phthalates and insecticides.

Support glutathione. Eating sulfur-rich foods like eggs, broccoli, and garlic also helps enhance the function of glutathione, a major antioxidant produced by your body that is heavily involved in detoxification.

Switch to natural cleaning products. Choosing natural cleaning products like vinegar and baking soda over commercial cleaning agents can reduce your exposure to potentially toxic chemicals.

Choose natural body care. Using natural deodorants, makeups, moisturizers, shampoos, and other personal care products can also reduce your exposure to chemicals.

The Bottom Line

Detox diets are said to eliminate toxins, in turn improving health and promoting weight loss.

But these diets—while seductive—are not needed as your body has its own, highly efficient detoxification system.

That said, you can enhance your body's natural detoxification system and improve your overall health by staying hydrated, consuming less salt, getting active, and following an antioxidant-rich diet.

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WISE HABITS

How to Do Your Scariest Tasks of the Day, With Joy

Turn procrastination into passionate action through practice in a 'sacred space'

LEO BABAUTA

In my Fearless Training Program, one of our members talked about how she gets a lot done during the day, but inevitably puts off her two scariest tasks, and doesn't get them done.

Does that sound familiar to you? Putting off the hardest tasks of the day is a common affliction for most of us.

That wouldn't necessarily be the worst thing, except that this often means the most important work doesn't get done. The most meaningful work, our passion project or dream, keeps getting pushed back to another day.

Our days are too precious for this. We treat them like an unlimited resource, but how many do we have left? None of us know. But we do know that it's a limited number, and they are incredibly valuable.

So how do we change this habit? We stop running from the fear and start moving toward it. We let it become our training ground.

Let's look at how to train.

Creating a Sacred Training Container

It's important not to take this lightly. We have age-old habits of putting off our scary, hard tasks, and just saying, "I'm going to change" is not enough.

We have to take this seriously. The way to do that is to create a container for our training. Think of it like a boxing ring where you train, or a yoga mat, or a meditation hall. It has boundaries that make it special and keep you in the training area.

Think of this as a sacred space. It's sacred because you have elevated it above all the other ordinary things you have to do for the day. In this special space, you are going to go toward your fear, and allow your habitual patterns to shift.

Here's how you might create that container:

1. Have a time of day when you train. Just as if you were going to go to a dojo to train—set a time. Will it be first thing in the morning, or right after lunch? Block it off on your calendar, set an alarm, and tell others that this is your training space.
2. Have a place set aside for this training. If it's computer-based work (like writing or doing your finances), move to a different space to work on your laptop—like at a coffee shop or a different room in your house than you use to do your usual daily activities. You should move into this space each day and feel that this is your training space.
3. Create a starting ritual, where you set your intention for the training session. As you start, instead of just rushing to get the task done, pause. Take a moment to be intentional about how you enter this space and start training. Think of it as a sacred space. Set an intention for how you'll practice during this training session—will you show up fully, and work with devotion?
4. Let there be only one thing you can do during this session. While you're in this training container, this sacred space, let yourself do nothing but the task you've chosen to do. For me right now, that's writing this article. I don't allow myself to switch to other tasks, to check my phone, to clean my house, to do anything but this single task. Let this be your most important rule. This sacred

space is for nothing but training in uncertainty, pushing into fear, opening up in the middle of chaos with joy.

5. Pour yourself into it, with devotion. Now do the task you've been putting off, pouring your entire being into it. Do it not only for yourself but for the love of those you serve. For example, I'm doing this out of love for all of you, my readers. You might do it for your team members, your customers, or your family. What would it be like to do this fully, with complete devotion? Do we ever pour ourselves into tasks like this?
6. Close out with a bow of gratitude. Set a timer for this session (it only has to be for 10 minutes, even 5 if that's too much), and when it goes off, allow yourself to close out the practice. Don't just rush into the next task in your day. Close it out as if this were the end of a special meditation or an important martial arts training session. Bow to the practice, and to yourself, out of gratitude. Make this feel special. Actually, we can bring this specialness to every activity.

That's the training container. Can you feel how this would elevate your training, to create a container like this?

How to Train, With Joy

Training in doing the things that scare you doesn't have to be torture. In fact, it can be joyous.

To start with, what's the scariest thing on your to-do list? Pick that for your training session today, and create the container as we talked about.

Then try these ideas to bring joy to the training:

7. Play some music. As you start, feel free to play some music. Brew some nice tea. Light candles if you like. Do what it takes to make this a pleasant experience. Music can even make the training fun.
8. Drop into your body. The training becomes a meditation if you drop your attention into your body. Notice the uncertainty you're feeling, the physical sensation of it. This is the training, to be present with the fear, the anxiety, the resistance, instead of running from it.
9. Stay with the sensation, with curiosity. Bring a sense of curiosity to the sensation, exploring it like it's the first time you've ever had this experience. What is it like, right now? Can you stay with it for longer? Can you find gratitude for it? Can you be open, relaxed, even joyous with it?
10. Dance with the chaos. Feeling this uncertainty, you can begin to dance. You can literally dance—letting your body move to the music as you do the work—or figuratively dance by playing with this uncertainty and having fun with whatever you normally run from. Let it be a game, let it be joyful, let it be an adventure.

Keep doing the task that you find scary and would normally put off, but do it with this sense of mindfulness, curiosity, and gratitude.

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



Create a starting ritual, where you set your intention for the training session.

MINDSET MATTERS

Why You Can't 'Figure Out' Your Way to Happiness



More thinking, as it turns out, is not the solution to what ails us

NANCY COLIER

We spend our early years learning how to walk, talk, read, play sports, have conversations and so on. We come to believe that knowing things is crucial for our happiness and survival. Knowing makes us valid, valuable, and powerful. Knowing makes us belong.

Knowing also gives us a sense of control. If we can know something, we believe we can control it. If we can control it, we feel less vulnerable to the ever-changing currents of life. And we come to believe if we can control life, we can be happy.

In our modern world, we know through our mind. We make sense of things, organize ideas into rational patterns and linear progressions. Causes and effects. Knowing involves stringing together our thoughts about what's happening, why it's happening and what we need to do about it. Whatever we want, whatever problem we think we have, we're convinced that thinking more about it will lead us to the answer we need. We think we can think our way out of and into everywhere, everyone, and everything.

We even imagine that we can mentally muscle our way to serenity, that more thinking about life will ultimately lead us to peace.

One of the inherent problems with our great faith in thinking, is that it relies on the premise that our thoughts are the truth. We confuse our subjective experience with objective reality. And because of this, we believe every narrative we construct from our thoughts is some form of absolute truth.

If I have a fight with a friend, I then make my own thoughts about what happened and how to solve the issue. The problem with that is that I'm basing the storyline on my subjective experience and my perception of the experience based on my past wounds, conditioning, history, and core beliefs.

I believe that my thoughts about what this other person was doing are what they were actually doing and perhaps even for the reasons I think they were doing it.

Therefore, what I think they need to stop or start doing in order for me to feel better is also an inarguable fact.

But the problem is, what I think this friend is doing may have nothing to do with what they think they're doing or what I'm doing for that matter.

Their intentions and inner reality are a universe unto themselves and different from that in which I reside.

The whole narrative I've constructed is irrelevant then. I'm operating in a universe (my mind) with rules and systems that make sense to me but which have little or nothing to do with what's happening in other minds. What makes the dots connect in my thought system is of little use when applied to someone else's reality.

Figuring out life, based on our personal narrative, is an exercise in futility and to some degree, absurdity.

This doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to understand our experience. But rather, that we need to be aware that our version of reality lives only in our own mind. Our truth exists within us, and only within us. And, it co-exists with billions of other truths that exist in other people's minds. We can still present our version of reality to another person but we can stop assuming that our subjective experience is true in some absolute way.

We don't have to work ourselves up into a lather believing that we know the way it all needs to go. And, we don't need to worry that if it doesn't go the way we've scripted it that something is wrong and we are being wronged.

It's profoundly liberating to realize that our version of the truth, which not coincidentally always places us at the center of what's driving everyone and everything else, probably isn't the same

Challenges become opportunities to grow and evolve.



Seek the serenity of not trying to control the situation...

Sometimes, if we're dealing with a difficult person, the best thing we can do is nothing.

truth for anyone else.

There is yet another flaw in our assumption that we can figure out our way to happiness. We can come to believe that thinking more about a challenging situation will automatically help us fix it. We believe that the mind is the proper tool for every situation, but it's not. In fact, it's often the worst tool we can pull out of the shed. In many cases, what's needed for actual improvement, growth, or change, is something else entirely.

Sometimes, if we're dealing with a difficult person, the best thing we can do is nothing.

That means that we do not try and understand their behavior or what we need to do about it. Instead, we just let it be what it is.

Often, when we stop trying to figure out what's wrong or how to fix everyone and everything and just let it be the way it is, our whole experience changes.

Because what we discover is that all our efforts to figure things out, and create narratives, can mislead us. We come to fixed understandings of reality that can often amount to little more than self-delusion. As a result, in trying to fix a problem, we may actually exacerbate it, and create a whole lot of mental and emotional suffering for ourselves in the process. This can even leave us fomenting anger and resentment.

Sometimes, when confronting a problematic person, it's wise to simply offer the generosity of compassion. Seek the serenity of not trying to control the situation and the wisdom of not trying to figure it out.

It can be helpful to realize that the other person's be-

havior probably comes out of their own suffering or ignorance. Remind yourself that they also want the same things you want—happiness, safety, and peace—even if the way they're seeking it may not seem wise to you.

Keeping our attention focused on kindness, while resisting the urge to form concrete interpretations, often improves the situation far more than any mental activity could. Wishing this person well, even if we cannot understand their behavior, can bring us change—and relief.

Whether or not we can find compassion for this person, it is an act of profound compassion—for ourselves—to stop trying to figure it all out. Few things let us feel better than letting go.

Knowing feels fundamental to our safety and control. But in the end, if what we really want is peace, then trying to understand a situation or person is not the wisest choice.

In place of figuring it all out (which I spent umpteen years doing) I now like to turn difficult people and situations into opportunities.

In place of trying to make sense, I focus on being the person I want to be in the situation. I turn my attention away from figuring out what's making the other do what they're doing and how to get them to change (according to my reality), and toward how I am being in the midst of this reality.

This profound turn from something I can't control to something I can give me back my power—and more importantly, my freedom.

What's ironic is that if my underlying desire is for my external world to change with regard to this difficult situation, I've had far more success when my focus is on my own behavior and than on others' behavior.

Taking my eye off the self-diagnosed problem and putting it on myself, how I'm acting and reacting in this difficulty, just plain works better. But even when the situation doesn't change on the outside, my experience of the situation on the inside radically changes when I shift my attention in this way.

Challenges become opportunities to grow and evolve; in moments I actually even look forward to them. I get to practice being who I want to be. I get to choose what my own participation in life will look like.

The process of taking care of my own side of the street has never failed to be a nourishing and rewarding choice. It always changes my experience even when it doesn't change a single thing on the outside.

If I had a nickel for every time I heard someone say something like "When I don't try and figure it out, I'm happier and things go better," I'd be a very wealthy woman. I sure know that that's it's been true for me.

Figuring it out may give us a sense of control and safety, but it doesn't make us feel better, which at the end of the day is what we really want.

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How to Reduce Depression

and Improve Your Mental State

A better mood can depend on a better brain, and that often means a better gut

MICHAEL EDWARDS

When the body is healthy, the brain is healthy. If the brain is impaired, it's pretty difficult to enjoy life. For those suffering from depression, there's situational depression and there's chronic depression. Situational depression is generally triggered by a traumatic incident like losing a loved one or being unable to find work. Chronic depression often starts with situational depression, but it can also seem to come out of nowhere. Either way, eliminating depression is much harder and often impossible without a healthy brain. For many who do not address health, the best they can hope for is situational happiness, where sadness or anxiety is the norm and outside influences are needed to trigger positive feelings. Addiction is common for such people.

A Healthy Brain Requires a Healthy Gut
A healthy gut is necessary to break down food, assimilate nutrients, balance hormones, and supply beneficial microflora throughout the body that keeps pathogenic activity from proliferating. An unhealthy gut prohibits proper nutrient assimilation, causes hormonal imbalances, and leaks unhealthy, infectious microbes and undigested food into the body. Pathogens, undigested food particles, hormone imbalance, and a lack of balanced nutrition all lead to inflammation. If the body is inflamed, the brain is inflamed. Studies have shown that people with depression have higher levels of inflammatory markers compared to people who are not depressed. Chronically higher levels of inflammation due to medical illnesses also are associated with higher rates of depression. Poor diet hurts brain function in other ways too. The refined sugars found in most processed foods spike insulin and trigger the release of inflammatory cytokines. Pesticides, herbicides, artificial colors and flavors, and other chemicals cause problems in many different ways as well. Each and every toxic ingredient harms our health in multiple ways, which is the nature of toxins. But, gut health usually is the best indicator of overall health. You can inhibit some of the effects of depression with drugs for a while, but to truly be well one must heal the gut. Healing the gut requires lots of raw vegetables and herbs along with the elimination of pharmaceuticals and other drugs, as well as refined and processed foods. Of course, fixing other issues that lead to depression may also be required, but due to the fact that key hormones that also function as neu-

Low tryptophan levels can lead to a depressive state and cause anxiety.

A healthy gut is necessary to break down food, assimilate nutrients, and balance hormones.

rotransmitters are produced in the stomach, gut health is a physiological prerequisite to a healthy brain.

Foods That Fight Depression
This is where articles typically go over the benefits of salmon, fresh whole fruits and vegetables, leafy grains, nuts, chocolate, oysters, etc. Readers are expected to pick out a few of their favorite foods that made the list and start eating more of those foods in a futile attempt to feel better about their lives. It doesn't work that way. Salads are the best thing anyone can eat to heal the gut and the entire body—except for those rare exceptions when someone suffers from things like histamine intolerance, but still, the goal for anyone healing from chronic disease should be to get on daily salads, even if one cannot start off that way. We're not just talking about lettuce and carrot shreds. Salads should have at least ten vegetables and a few herbs. Other than that, focus on whole foods and diversity. And don't let corporations make your food for you. In a nutshell, eat salads, eat whole foods, avoid processed and refined foods, make your own food.

Squats and Other Exercises
We were meant to squat. And the great thing about squats is you can do them almost anywhere. In nature we squatted to hide, to defecate, to pick things up, and we squatted instead of sitting. Squatting helps massage and activate organ and glandular function, releases positive hormones, aligns the spine, and helps to get the lymphatic system moving. If you can't squat, try assisted squats to work on the range of motion, and try "get-ups," which are done by laying on the ground and getting up. Alternate sides and alternate legs being used each time. Other exercises that are good for alleviating depression include:

- Running: We are also meant to run. The human body should be squatting and running every day. Studies show that aerobic exercise is often as effective as anti-depressants for treating depression. And if you manage to achieve that "runner's high" you'll want it again and again.
- Hiking In the Woods: Getting outdoors and in nature for some time has also been shown in studies to match or exceed anti-depressants for treating depression. While you're out there, do some earthing and connect to the earth with your bare feet.
- Yoga and Meditation: Studies also show yoga and meditation can alleviate depression. We can't recommend the Yoga with Adriene YouTube channel enough.
- Resistance Training: Weightlifting and other forms of resistance training have much less research regarding the benefits for depression, but the little bit of research that has been done looks promising. And anyone who can put more than their body weight on their back to squat can attest to how amazing it feels.
- HIT: If you want to squeeze the most out of the least amount of time, you can't beat high-intensity interval training. Try it once and you'll

know why it's a good routine for alleviating depression.

Breathe
Most of us are rapid, shallow breathers. We raise our shoulders, pull in our diaphragm, and take a breath that fills only the top portion of our lungs. When you breathe properly, your diaphragm, your stomach, and your ribcage expand, not the pectoral area. Fully exhaling is important, too. Remember, you are breathing in oxygen-rich air and releasing carbon dioxide and toxins. Proper breathing dramatically increases stamina and mental clarity, elevates your mood, and helps the body detoxify more efficiently (more toxins are released through breathing than through the pores, urination, and defecation combined).

Supplements for Depression
If you're looking at supplements to replace a healthy diet, that's going to work only a little better than skipping exercise for a protein shake. Supplements can certainly help improve symptoms but without the right diet, true health cannot be achieved. That said, chronic depression indicates a deficiency in the body and pathogenic activity. Most people who suffer from chronic depression also suffer from an abundance of the sometimes pathogenic gut bacteria called Candida. In fact, most people who suffer from any chronic issue have too much Candida. For anything regarding yeast, mold, or fungi, we recommend SF722, second only to a healthy diet with lots of salad.

Probiotics
As stated earlier, a healthy gut microbiome is imperative to brain health. Our symbiotic bacteria play a key role in nutrient assimilation, hormone production, immune system functionality, and science has just discovered that our gut bacteria also reaches our brain. Probiotics can help bring the gut into homeostasis and can help keep pathogenic microbes from flourishing. Probiotics are anti-inflammatory

ry, and some studies have indicated that probiotics may alleviate depression. Be careful though. Don't just pick up any cheap probiotic and expect good results. A high-quality probiotic along with a prebiotic diet (raw vegetables) can help build a healthy gut biome, while a cheap probiotic can actually feed pathogens and do more harm than good.

Fatty Acids
Our brain is 60 percent fat. Our brain, gut, and whole body need a variety of fats to function properly. We need saturated fats, monounsaturated fats (omega 9s), and polyunsaturated fats (omega 6s, 3s). A typical western diet is heavy in trans fats and rancid fats which cause inflammation. Some people don't get enough fats and most people get too many of the wrong types of fats. A large Norwegian study showed that people who regularly consumed cod liver oil were about 30 percent less likely to show signs of depression. The longer the participants took cod liver oil, the less likely they were to have high levels of depression. In another study with 49 patients who had a history of harming themselves, study subjects were randomly assigned to receive either a dose of essential fatty acids or a placebo. Both groups also received counselling. The study lasted 12 weeks. In the end, the group receiving the fat supplementation improved significantly more than the placebo group.

Many other studies have shown promise in treating depression and anxiety and other mental health disorders with beneficial fat supplementation. It's best to get your healthy fats through a healthy diet but supplementation can help speed up healing and have an almost immediate reduction in inflammation and brain health.

Tryptophan
Tryptophan is an essential amino acid because it can't be produced by our body. We need it for anabolic processes and the production of various hormones, including serotonin, and the liver can synthesize niacin from tryptophan. So there's a lot of competition for tryptophan. For those who are low in serotonin, supplementation may help (but low serotonin levels are an indication of poor gut health). Several studies have shown that low tryptophan levels can lead to a depressive state and cause anxiety. 5-HTP is generally recommended over L-tryptophan because it crosses the blood-brain barrier and gets converted into serotonin more efficiently than L-tryptophan. Studies have shown greater results in alleviating depression with 5-HTP supplementation.

Selenium
A study looked at selenium and depression with a total of 978 young adults aged 17 to 25. Participants filled out a questionnaire to track their mood daily for two weeks to determine their levels of depression. Blood tests were done to determine their selenium levels. The results showed



Gut health usually is the best indicator of overall health.

that when selenium levels are too low or too high depressive symptoms were much more likely. The study also showed that lower concentrations of selenium were found to be more detrimental than higher levels.

Vitamin D
Many studies have shown a link between vitamin D deficiency and depression. People with low vitamin D were at a much greater risk of depression. We recommend daily access to sunlight. For those who live in an area where it's not possible to get enough sunlight, and for those who are overweight, vitamin D supplementation makes sense.

B Vitamin Complex
According to some experts, one of the common causes of chronic depression is a lack of or imbalance of B vitamins. Vitamins B3, B6, B9, and B12 are all known to be imperative for proper brain health and hormone production. Taking just one B vitamin for a long period of time can cause an imbalance that can be more detrimental to health than being low in most or all Bs. Poor B vitamin assimilation is a sign of poor gut health.

Ashwagandha
Laboratory rats were administered imipramine (a common anti-depressant medication) or ashwagandha,

sometimes known as Indian ginseng, and the results were almost identical. In another study, ashwagandha also was found to work as well as diazepam with depression and anxiety caused by social isolation. Ashwagandha is an effective antidepressant without the serious side effects that medication comes with.

Eleuthero
Eleuthero has a mild sedative effect and supports the adrenals and inhibits stress hormones. While this herb can be a godsend to some, it also can be overstimulating and is contraindicated in some people, especially those with very high blood pressure.

Holy Basil
Holy basil is well known for its ability to reduce inflammation, stress, and anxiety and it can help manage depression. Research has shown that holy basil decreases the amount of cortisol released during stressful events.

Maca Root
Maca root, sometimes known as Peruvian ginseng, has been shown to help reduce depression and anxiety. A study compared postmenopausal women who took maca root versus those who took a placebo. The study revealed a significant reduction

in anxiety, depression, and sexual dysfunction after maca consumption.

St. John's Wort
Dubbed "nature's antidepressant," St. John's wort is a very popular alternative to antidepressant medication for those dealing with depression. Multiple studies have shown that this herb can be as effective as medication for mild to moderate depression. It could likely help with severe depression as well but there have not been enough studies done on this yet.

Conclusion
No medications will work to treat chronic depression forever, and the same is true for supplements. There are also many different nutrient deficiencies that can lead to depression. Taking one or two supplements may help for a little while, but the root cause will not be addressed without lifestyle changes. If you suffer from depression, stop letting corporations make your food for you, heal your gut, get outside, and put in the hard work to get well. I know that's easier said than done. I've been there. I'm prone to depression and I've had some catastrophic losses in my life. I recommend baby steps. And gut health is paramount!

Michael Edwards is the editor-in-chief of Organic Lifestyle Magazine, where this article was first published.



In a nutshell: eat salads, whole foods, avoid processed and refined foods and cook for your yourself.



Feeling better can often be a direct result of eating better.

Simple Food Choices

That Help You Lose Weight and Stay Healthy

Losing weight doesn't mean eating less, it means eating better

YASMINE PROBST, ELIZABETH NEALE & VIVIENNE GUAN

It's difficult to lose weight. And it's even harder to keep it off. Many people achieve short-term weight-loss only to return to their previous lifestyle choices—and their previous weight—over time. This can lead to yo-yo-ing between weight loss and weight gain. One of the problems is that weight-loss diets aren't sustainable. They leave dieters feeling hungry and aren't giving them the essential nutrients they need to maintain their long-term health.

But certain food choices can promote weight loss and provide the nutrients you need to function well and thrive. These four food choices are a good place to start.

1. Whole Grains Help Us Feel Full

Many of us choose bread as part of our lunchtime meal. Switching from white to whole grain bread for your sandwich can help you feel full for longer, so you're likely to eat less during the following meal.

The whole grain is made up of three major parts: the bran, endosperm, and germ. This structure helps some of the energy to escape during the digestive process, leading to the body absorbing fewer kilojoules.

Whole grains help protect against chronic diseases including heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and some can-

cers. The grains exert their benefits by regulating bowel function through increased fecal bulk and by feeding healthy gut bacteria.

Whole grains are easy to include in a weight-loss diet. In addition to bread, they can also be found in oats for breakfast, or popcorn for a snack.

2. Colorful Veggies Provide a Range of Nutrients

Vegetables are full of essential nutrients including folate, vitamin C, various B vitamins, potassium, and fiber. They are also low in energy, providing approximately 100 to 350 kilojoules per 100g (24 to 84 calories per 100g).

When trying to lose weight, people tend to eat greater quantities of vegetables, but they don't tend to choose a wide variety of vegetables beyond those they normally eat.

To aid weight loss, make sure you're getting a high proportion of your kilojoules from vegetables and try to have as many different colors on your plate as you can.

If you feel like you don't have time to cook, frozen vegetables are a quick and easy option, and they are just as nutritious as fresh vegetables.

3. Snack on Nuts

When trying to lose weight, high-fat foods are often the first to go. But while nuts are generally high in fat and related kilojoules, they are also high in fiber, helping us to feel full

for longer

Nuts contain a number of beneficial vitamins and minerals for our health including healthy fats, protein, various B vitamins, zinc, magnesium, and other minerals. Eating nuts has been shown to be beneficial in reducing the risk of heart disease and managing Type 2 diabetes.

We're also beginning to realize we don't absorb all the kilojoules from nuts when we eat them. In fact, research suggests we absorb up to 30 percent less fat from nuts than we originally thought.

Try eating a handful of nuts (around an ounce) as a snack or adding them to your meals throughout the day.

4. Quench Your Thirst With Water

Listening to your hunger and thirst signals can make a big difference when trying to lose weight.

Throughout the day, our bodily signals for thirst may be greater than our feelings of hunger. When you think you're hungry, see if you are actually thirsty by having a glass of water first.

If you're used to reaching for a soft drink or cordial rather than water, start the switch slowly. Replace half of each glass you drink with water and increase the water component over time. Eventually, your preferences will shift.

Our bodies need water for fluid balance, body temperature regulation, cognitive performance, as well as gastrointestinal, kidney and heart

function. Drinking plenty of water also improves the complexion of the skin and can reduce the likelihood of getting headaches.

A Final Word

Although some food choices can promote weight loss and prevent subsequent weight gain, your total eating pattern is the ultimate predictor of body weight. Exercise and physical activity also play an important role.

A healthy eating pattern for weight loss should be based on the dietary guidelines, which are general recommendations for healthy eating. Aim for five servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit a day, alongside whole grain bread and cereals, lean meat, and low-fat dairy. While this may sound like a lot of food, studies have shown these combinations will aid weight loss.

Although there will always be easier ways of losing weight, small changes toward healthier eating habits will help you to not only lose weight but will provide you with the right habits to avoid regaining weight in the future.

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Certain food choices can promote weight loss and provide the nutrients you need.



STEPHEN COOK PHOTOGRAPHY/SHUTTERSTOCK

The Best Way to Deal With Failure

Dwelling on the feelings caused by our mistakes can be useful—sometimes

SELIN MALKOC

Failure is a part of life, and we make mistakes pretty much every day. How do we cope? Or better yet, how should we cope?

Academics and the mainstream media tend to offer a simple solution: Don't let it get to you and think about how things could have been worse.

These self-protective thoughts usually make you feel better. You move on.

But is it possible that popular wisdom is missing a bit of the puzzle? Does setting aside the negative emotions make you any less likely to repeat the mistake? Noelle Nelson, Baba Shiv, and I decided to explore possible upsides of feeling bad about failure.

Feeling the Pain

Even though they're unpleasant, we feel negative emotions for a reason. Negative emotions tell us to pay attention, signaling that something's wrong—with our body, with our environment, with our relationships.

So if you avoid negative emotions, you also might be avoiding the thing that needs your attention. Could deciding to focus on the negative emotions associated with failure lead to thoughts about self-improvement—and, with time, actual improvement?

We designed a series of experiments to test this question.

In the studies, we used something called a two-stage paradigm: First participants attempted a task in which they failed; then—after a series of unrelated tasks—they would have the opportunity to redeem themselves.

In one, we asked our participants to search the internet for the lowest price for a particular blender brand and model (with the possibility of winning a cash prize if they were successful). In reality, the task was rigged. In the end, the participants were simply told that the lowest price was \$3.27 less than what they had found. We then asked half the participants to focus on their emotional response to having failed, while the other half were instructed to focus on their thoughts about how they did. Then we asked them to reflect, in writing, on how they felt.

After a few unrelated tasks, we gave the participants a chance to redeem themselves. In this seemingly unrelated task, we told participants to imagine that they were going to

the birthday of a friend who wanted a book as a gift. We also told them that the book they should be a bargain.

We found that participants who were previously instructed to focus on the negative emotions following their failure in the blender task spent nearly 25 percent more time searching for a low-priced book than those who had been instructed to focus on their thoughts.

When we examined the written responses, we also found some important differences.

Those who had focused their thoughts on how they did, on their failure—rather than dwelling on how they felt—tended to have defensive responses: "I didn't care much about this anyway"; "It would have been impossible to find that price."

In contrast, the participants who had spent time parsing their emotions produced thoughts oriented toward self-improvement: "If I'd only searched longer, I would have found that price"; "I gave up too quickly."

Regret feels awful, but taking a moment with our feelings after failure can give us important motivation to do better.

Not All Mistakes Are The Same

It appears that focusing on the emotions of failure can trigger different thoughts and behaviors. Perhaps when you reflect on how bad you feel after failing, it motivates you to avoid experiencing that feeling again.

But could this improvement migrate into other endeavors—for tasks unrelated to the original?

To test this question, we added a variation of the second scenario. Instead of telling the participants to find an affordable book (which involved a price search like the original task), we asked them to find a book that they thought their friend would like. In this case, it didn't matter whether participants had focused on their emotions or thoughts after the first task; they spent similar times searching for the best gift. It seems as though the improvement only happens if the second task is somewhat similar to the original, failed one.

While "feeling your failure" can be a good thing, it doesn't change the fact that this can hurt. There's a

reason people tend to instinctively rationalize or have self-protective thoughts after they've made a mistake.

It would be debilitating if you were to focus on how bad you felt after each failure, big and small. So it's up to you to decide which failures to try to improve upon, and which failures to shield yourself from. Clearly, one-off events or inconsequential mistakes—taking the wrong turn in a foreign city or being late to a party with friends—don't make the best candidates (hence the saying "don't sweat the small stuff").

But if you've failed at something that you know you're going to have to confront in the future—say, a task for a new role at work—pause and feel the pain. Use it to fuel improvement. If you focus on how bad you feel, you'll probably work harder to ensure you don't make the same mistake again.

Selin Malkoc is an associate professor of marketing at Ohio State University. This article was first published on *The Conversation*.

ANATOLI KARLYUK/SHUTTERSTOCK



This Common Preservative in Processed Food May Be Making You Tired

Phosphate is a cheap preservative that can add flavor but may sap your energy

In general, if you can purchase fresh or nonpackaged foods, all the better.

Dana Hunnes, senior dietitian, UCLA Medical Center

BRIAN MASTROIANNI

Is it hard to motivate yourself to get off the couch and go exercise?

Well, a common food additive you're unknowingly consuming in large quantities might be to blame.

New research sheds light on inorganic phosphate—an additive and preservative found in up to 70 percent of the foods in the common diet in the United States—and the impact it could be having on your health.

The study, published in the journal *Circulation*, aimed to look at the adverse effects of consuming too much phosphate by examining lab mice that were given a high-phosphate diet.

The researchers measured the rodents' oxygen uptake during exercise, showing not just less capacity for movement but also the inability to produce enough fatty acids needed to feed their muscles.

While the mice were being observed for a 12-week period, the researchers wanted to draw a comparison to humans, so they looked at the data of people who were enrolled in the Dallas Heart Study.

These individuals ranged from 18 to 65 years old, were not on any medications, and had no history of kidney or heart issues.

They wore physical activity monitors for seven days, which tied higher phosphate levels in their diets to less time spent carrying out moderate to vigorous exercise.

As with the mice, inactivity increased when phosphate levels were higher.

Lead researcher Dr. Wanpen Vongpatanasin, professor of internal medicine and director of the Hypertension Fellowship Program at UT Southwestern Medical Center, told Healthline that she was struck by how closely the human and mice response to phosphates mirrored one another.

"Study in humans provides support for the animal studies by showing that people with high phosphate in the blood tend to spend less time in working out and more time in sedentary activity," she wrote in an email.

What Exactly Are Phosphates?

Phosphate is the charged particle that contains the mineral phosphorus, which the body requires to help repair and build your teeth and bones, make your muscles contract, and assist in nerve function,

according to the Merck Manual.

Phosphates are found naturally in a wide range of healthy foods like meat, fish, dairy, fruits, and vegetables.

However, it is the inorganic form, saturated in many of the processed foods and drinks Americans consume, that is the problem.

"The average consumer would not know to be aware of this commercial food additive," said Dana Hunnes, a senior dietitian at the University of California—Los Angeles (UCLA) Medical Center. "It is commonly used to prolong the shelf life of many foods, and also may enhance the flavor of some others. It is likely a very inexpensive ingredient/additive which would explain its nearly ubiquitous usage."

It is estimated that between 40 and 70 percent of the best-selling grocery items out there like cola drinks and prepared frozen foods contain these inorganic phosphates, she told Healthline.

"That is a huge proportion of foods many Americans buy. In fact, I remember a recent Nutrition Action Newsletter article that said that even bottled orange juices—such as 'Simply Orange'—contain added inorganic phosphates," Hunnes said. "In many instances, food additives are used either to provide a nutrient (like a vitamin or mineral), flavor (like MSG or salt), or some other non-nutritive property including inorganic phosphates."

She added, "We don't know about them because phosphates are not usually a nutrient we are told to be concerned about. Most people, unless they have kidney disease, tend to be aware of or worried about calories, fats, and types of fats, carbohydrates, and protein."

Tamika Sims, director of food technology communications at the International Food Information Council Foundation, said even though inorganic phosphates might be unfamiliar to many, they should be something people should have on their radar.

"In healthy adults, inorganic phosphate is metabolized as needed, but phosphate is also used in the body for nerve, bone, and muscle function. The amount of phosphate in the body is regulated by kidneys. People with kidney disease or malfunction can be at risk of phosphate level irregularity," Sims told Healthline.

When it comes to the study, Vongpatanasin wrote that while it is necessary that our bodies process energy in the normal amounts, if that energy is

used too much, it can limit the ability to burn fat into useful fuel needed during exercise.

The average consumer may be unaware that an overabundance of these particles is even in many of the foods on their dinner table. They might be an-

noyed to hear that not much comprehensive information has been made available by food regulators.

On current food labels, check out any mention of "phos-" like "calcium phosphate," for example.

Vongpatanasin added that there are no official mandates or regulations for the food industry to label exactly how much inorganic phosphates are out there circulating in the food chain.

The Food and Drug Administration and the U.S. Department of Agriculture are the ones who set requirements for food labels throughout the nation, and Vongpatanasin asserted that it is clear much more comprehensive research needs to be done.

"Although it is well known that high-phosphate diet is dangerous in patients with kidney failure, the impact of high-phosphate diet on cardiovascular health in normal population without kidney failure has not been widely studied or recognized until now," she wrote.

What You Can Do

If you're reading this and hearing about inorganic phosphates for the first time, what should you do when you go shopping for this week's groceries?

"In general, if you can purchase fresh or nonpackaged foods, all the better—you will not have to fear that inorganic phosphates have been added to the foods," Hunnes said. "Otherwise, just like everything else, it seems we need to be cognizant

of this ingredient in foods. Look at food labels, and search for anything containing added phosphate. You would find it in the ingredient list, anything with the word 'phos,' or 'phosphate' in it."

She added that she would caution consumers about eating these kinds of foods, especially if they're athletes or someone hoping to maintain an exercise regimen.

"It sounds like this would hamper your progress, work against you, and may make your workout session that much harder," she said.

Vongpatanasin said similar thoughts are also on her mind as she moves forward with her research.

She stressed that a person should not consume more than 700 mg of inorganic phosphates per day. She and her team are planning on carrying out a randomized study next, to see if lowering the phosphate content in the diet to 700 mg each day could be helpful in lowering blood pressure and boosting physical activity.

The Bottom Line

A new study published in the journal *Circulation* aimed to look at how the prevalence of inorganic phosphates in America's processed food-heavy diet could be lowering a person's willingness to stay physically active.

Over a 12-week period, lab mice were given a phosphate-heavy diet, with the mice's activity levels declining once inorganic phosphates were increased. This was compared to data on healthy adults enrolled in the Dallas Heart Study.

As with the mice, adults with a more phosphate-rich diet saw exercise and activity drop off as phosphate levels were increased.

Experts recommend that people look for "phos" or "phosphate" on food labels, steer away from processed foods and choose fresh, nonpackaged foods, instead.

Brian Mastroianni is a New York-based science, tech, and health journalist. This article was originally published on Healthline.

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Make Your Everyday Place Your Happy Place

Our choices decide whether we get to live the life we truly want

JAY HARRINGTON

During years of urban and suburban living, my wife Heather and I would look for chances to escape to our “happy place.” When the stress became too much and we just needed a moment to catch our breath and spend time in nature, we’d head north. Most often, Traverse City, Michigan, was our destination. We would spend a long weekend recharging, hiking the trails and exploring Sleeping Bear Dunes, eating fresh food, and breathing in the crisp air. After a few days, we would begin the trek home and spend much of the four-hour drive fantasizing about how nice it would be to spend all of our time in our happy place while lamenting how unrealistic the whole idea was. After all, we had a family to raise, businesses to run, and responsibilities to look after. Maybe after we retire, we’d conclude, while exiting off the highway. But year after year, the allure of our happy place would keep pulling us back, and that nagging desire to make our intermittent escapes our everyday existence persisted. The obvious and irrefutable logic of the truth we were denying was inescapable: We only have one life to live, so why wait until retirement—an uncertain, future outcome—to live how we want, where we want?

The Fisherman and the Businessman
There’s a story, attributed to many different cultures, about a businessman on vacation who comes across a fisherman on the beach of a small coastal

village who is lazily casting his line into the sea. The young, ambitious businessman, puzzled as to why the fisherman was “wasting” his time rather than grinding away to make a real living, chastises the fisherman to scale his operation, hire others to work for him, and buy a fleet of boats. The fisherman replied, “And then what?” Frustrated, the businessman said, “You can get rich, retire, and spend your days fishing on the beach and enjoying the sunset!” The fisherman, with a bemused smile on his face, nodded at the businessman, who failed to grasp the irony of it all. The fisherman then turned his attention back to the sparkling sea. Like the fisherman, who spends his days doing what he finds fun and fulfilling, our move was motivated by a desire to stop putting our dreams on layaway and instead incorporate more of what we hoped to be doing into what we actually did. For us, that meant moving closer to the lakes, beaches, trails, and hills that would allow us to swim, paddle, bike, hike, and ski as much as we wanted. Making this transition required a lot of work. At times, we looked back at our decision with angst and doubt. “Did we make a big mistake?” we’d ask ourselves. “Should we have been more responsible about our future?” These types of questions are natural with any life transformation. We learned that bucking notions of conventional wisdom is hard because every step involves grappling with societal norms that suggest that we were doing it wrong. Now, on the other side, I can unequivocally say that

we did the right thing for us. Sounds pretty stark, right? So what to do? **Your Happy Place Can Be Any Place** Is there an unlive life inside of you? Is the voice in your head calling you to something more? Are you postponing happiness for an uncertain future? I shared our journey toward happiness not because it’s the right journey for everyone—far from it. We found our happy place, which required a physical move, but a happy place can be any place. In almost every circumstance, it’s possible to incorporate more joy into life through everyday intentional living. Indeed, fulfillment is much more about how one lives than where one lives. Finding your happy place begins with answering some tough questions: What do I want? What brings me joy? What am I putting off that I should be doing now? Then: What hard choices must I make to make it happen? Everyone is different. Everyone’s circumstances are different. But we are all alike in the sense that our lives consist of a never-ending series of choices, and our happiness and fulfillment derive from the consequences of those choices. Not making a choice is a choice itself. It’s easy to go through life on autopilot. Too often, people’s lives consist of two contradictory

stories, one playing out in their heads and another through their existence. The untold story is one of passion and adventure, the other a melancholy tale of suppressed desire. The point is, if you don’t write your own story, someone else surely will. As Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, “The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be.” Yes, of course, it’s important to plan for the future. It would be irresponsible to throw caution to the wind and live only for the moment. But isn’t it just as foolish to forego what you truly want, now, on the chance that it will be waiting for you later? The average person lives 27,325 days. How many days do you have left? As the old saying goes, this is not a dress rehearsal. Find your happy place, wherever that may be. Make choices that bring you closer to tapping your life’s unfulfilled potential. Make it count. 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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