

THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND & BODY

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MINDSET MATTERS

Why ‘HAVING IT ALL’ Is a Big Fat Lie

Ignoring that choice includes loss is a delusion that creates unneeded suffering

NANCY COLIER

“I want it all, I want it all, I want it all, and I want it now.” These were the words of a television jingle I heard this weekend, just as I was contemplating a piece on the pressure we (both women and men) face to have it all.

Working with Jane, a mom/physician, I was struck by how tortured she was because she couldn’t spend as much time as she wanted to with her young child.

I was not struck by the fact that time away from her child was painful, but rather by what seemed to be the real source of her suffering.

Specifically, she felt that she was supposed to be able to have the great career she wanted as a doctor and also be able to be the loving and present mom to her child. As she saw it, she was doing something wrong because she couldn’t have both.

Another client, Rachel, told me that she wanted to have a more intimate relationship with her husband, to feel more connected. She talked about their less-than-juicy date-night dinners. She shared that her husband was upset because she left her phone on during their dinners in case the kids called (healthy teenagers).

Apparently, as is usually the case, the tech interruptions were breaking the connection between them.

She was in my office because she wanted me to design a strategy or digital program that would make it possible for her to be on call all the time to her family, and also intimately connected to her husband in their private time.

On another front, in just the same week, Peter was telling me about his romantic relationship of nine years. He shared that he was deeply nourished by the unconditional love and stability of their bond and how much he loved his life with his partner.

Simultaneously, he was unable to tolerate the fact that when he went to parties or was surrounded by new women, he couldn’t behave like a single person. He was at war internally with the idea that being in a monogamous and committed relationship would mean that his life felt constrained in certain other ways. But underlying his despair, the real suffering was once again coming from his belief that he shouldn’t have to give up anything he wanted.

And then there’s MK, a college student who is obsessively angry because of the deep confidence his friends have earned through their mastery in sport or other passions and academic pursuits.

MK acknowledges that he loves to socialize and party and that he’s chosen to spend his

Having it all in this society also means not have to give anything up.

time doing just that, as opposed to achieving excellence. And yet again, this young man is confused and frustrated by my inability to devise a plan to give him the social life he wants and also the self-confidence that comes with focused hard work, time, and effort.

We’re conditioned to believe that we should have it all—everything we want. Having it all in this society also means not have to give anything up.

Technology encourages this belief. With the touch of a button, we can, in fact, get a lot of things we want without much effort. Media and advertising also support our belief that everything is possible, and, that if we don’t have everything we want, we need to try harder.

The powers that be want us to believe that we can have it all because it keeps us chasing the dream, a dream of endless acquiring and achieving. Ultimately, having it all (as an idea) is good for business while accepting not having it all is bad for the bottom line.

If we stop chasing it all, the profit margin shrinks.

When I told Rachel that being available 24/7 to her kids might mean not being as available to her husband, and perhaps not enjoying the intimacy she desired, she was disappointed and seemingly not convinced. Similarly, when I advised Peter that his choice to be in a committed relationship—and enjoy the jewels of such a choice—would mean that his experience of socializing would have to change and be perhaps less exciting than if he were single, it seemed as if he had never considered such a concept. So too, when I laid out the hours that Jane’s career in New York required and juxtaposed that against her young daughter’s wake-and-sleep schedule, she seemed to be seeing the information for the first time, as a scientist almost, recognizing the math of her reality, and thus the real truth of her choices.

Life has limitations, which we are oddly not taught. Accepting this truth, however, frees us from the fantasy that keeps us chasing and suffering.

When we believe that we can and should have it all, we end up paralyzed, stuck between choices, and unable to pull the trigger or settle into any path. We’re unwilling to accept the reality that, like it or not, choice involves loss, not occasionally, but always.

When we stick with our storyline that we are the problem, that we are why we can’t have everything we want, we actually end up with nothing. Loss and gain go hand in hand.

Furthermore, when we reject the fact that we have to give up something we want in order to get something we want, we deny ourselves the opportunity for self-compassion. Accepting the loss that comes with choice means also

accepting the feelings that come with that loss. It means offering a place for the sadness or disappointment that comes as a result of not being able to enjoy that other path.

With every choice, one door opens and another closes. There is an experience of that door closing, which also needs to be included and treated with empathy.

I often find myself simply saying “yes” to people who come to see me with such dilemmas of choice. Yes, it’s true that if you choose this you will not get to have that. The fact that you can’t figure out a way to have both doesn’t mean there’s something wrong with you; it means you’re living with the reality of being human.

There is only so much time, energy, motivation, and attention for some of what we want—not all of it. Some wants, by their very nature, eliminate the possibility of other wants.

When I lay it out matter-of-factly in this way, people sometimes look at me as if I have three horns, as if they had never considered such a basic truth.

When we’re willing to accept that life includes non-negotiable limitations, then the value of the choices we make, the meaning in the path we do choose, increases exponentially.

Recognizing and being honest about what we get, and what we choose to give up, intensifies how much what we get actually matters to us.

It’s not your fault if you can’t have it all; it’s not a failing on your part. The idea that we should be able to get everything we want, have every experience we desire, is false.

It’s an idea that keeps us handcuffed, stuck, and suffering.

Time, energy and attention are malleable at one level, in that they feel like they can expand and contract. But they’re also finite at another level. When we give something our time and attention, it means that we cannot give as much time and attention to something else we may also value.

These are the hard choices that come with life. Approaching our choices with a mature and sober sense of reality, one that takes into account the losses that all choices include, allows us to live a life of deeper intention and meaning. We can feel even more grateful for what we do choose to experience.

When we stop busying ourselves with what we should have and what’s wrong with us that we can’t have it, we get on with the business of determining what we really want. We can choose what’s most important to us. Accepting the reality of choice and its partner, loss, encourages us to get clear about what we really want our life to be about and get on with living it.

SUZANNE TUCKER/SHUTTERSTOCK



We are hounded by a belief in our unlimited potential to do things, but the reality is we need to treasure what we actually can do because our time and energy are limited.

WISE HABITS

Focus as an Antidote for Wanting to Do EVERYTHING

You have limited time and energy, so make the choice to do what you can and let go of the rest

LEO BABAUTA

I have a problem, and I think most people do as well: I want to do everything.

OK, not actually every single thing, but I want to do more than I possibly can:

- I want to do everything on my long to-do list, today.
- I want to take on every interesting project.
- I want to say “yes” to everyone else’s requests, even if I know I’m already too busy.
- I want to travel everywhere, and see everything that’s interesting.
- I want to try every delicious food, and I always want more of it—and I always eat too much.
- I want to watch every interesting TV show and film.
- I want to read everything interesting online.
- I want to take on a lot of interesting hobbies each of which would take hours to master.
- I want to spend time with everyone I love, and have a lot of time for solitude!

Obviously, this is all impossible. But I bet I’m not alone in constantly wanting all of this and more.

There’s a term for this in Buddhism that sounds judgmental but it’s not: “greed.” The term “greed” in this context just describes the very human tendency to want more of what we want.

It’s why we’re overloaded with too many things to do, and overwhelmed in general. It’s why we’re constantly distracted. It’s also why we are overeating, over shopping, and addicted over and over again. It’s why we have too much stuff, and too much debt.

Once we’re aware of the tendency, we can work with it.

Greed is so common that we don’t even notice it. It’s the foundation of our consumerist society. It’s the ocean that we’re swimming, so much a part of the fabric of our lives that we can’t see that it’s there.

So what can we do about this tendency called greed? Is there an antidote?

There absolutely is.

The traditional antidote to greed in Buddhism is generosity. And while we will talk about the practice of generosity, the antidote I’d like to propose you try is focus.

If your greed isn’t material, but experiential, or a greed for achievement, then the solution is to narrow things down.

Focus is a form of simplicity. It’s letting go of everything that you might possibly want, to give complete focus on one important thing.

Imagine that you want to get 20 things done today. You are eager to rush through them all and get through your to-do list. But instead of indulging in your greed tendency, you decide to simplify. You decide to focus.

The Practice of Complete Focus

This practice can be applied to all of the types of greed we mentioned above—wanting to do everything, read everything, say “yes” to everything, go everywhere, and eat all the things.

Identify the urge: The first step in this practice is to recognize that your greed tendency is showing itself. Notice that you want to do everything, eat everything, and so forth. Once we’re aware of the tendency, we can work with it.

See the effects: Next, we need to recognize that indulging in the greed tendency only hurts us. It makes us feel stressed, overwhelmed, and unsatisfied. It makes us do and eat and watch and shop too much, to the detriment of our sleep, happiness, relationships, finances, and more. Indulging might satisfy a temporary itch, but it’s not a habit that leads to happiness or fulfillment.

Practice refraining: Third, we can choose to refrain—to not indulge. The practice of refraining is about not indulging in the greed tendency, and instead pausing. Notice the urge to indulge, and mindfully noticing how the urge feels as a physical sensation in your body. Where is it located? What is it like? Be curious about it. Stay with it for a minute or two. Notice that you are actually completely fine, even if the urge is really strong. It’s just a sensation.

Focus with generosity: Then we can choose to be generous and present with one thing. Instead of trying to do everything, choose just one thing. Ideally, choose something that’s important, meaningful, and will have an impact on the lives of others—even if only in a small way. Let this be an act of generosity for others. Let go of everything else, just for a few minutes, and be completely with this one thing. Generously give it your full attention. This is

your love.

Clear distractions: If necessary, create structure to hold you in this place of focus. That might mean shutting off the phone, turning off the Internet, going to a place where you can completely focus. Think of it as creating your meditation space.

Practice with the resistance: As you practice focus, you are likely to feel resistance towards actually focusing and doing this one thing. You’ll want to go do something else, anything else. You’ll feel great aversion to doing this one thing. It’s completely fine. Practice with this resistance as you did with the urge: notice the physical sensation, meditate on it with curiosity, stay with it with attention and love. Again, it’s just a sensation, and you can learn to love it as you can any experience.

Indulging might satisfy a temporary itch, but it’s not a habit that leads to happiness or fulfillment.

Let go of everything, and generously give your complete focus to one thing. Simplify, and be completely present.

You can do this with your urge to do all tasks, read all things, do all hobbies, say “yes” to all people and projects. But you can also do it with possessions: choose just to have what you need to be happy, and simplify by letting go of the rest. You can do the same with travel: be satisfied with where you are, or with going to one place and fully being there with it.

You don’t need to watch everything, read everything, eat everything. You can simplify and do less. You can let go and be present. You can focus mindfully.

If you’d like to train in this kind of focus, train with me in my Mindful Focus Course online.

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



IMTMPHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK

The real suffering was coming from his belief that he shouldn’t have to give up anything he wanted.



Finding Life Change Through VISION and MINIMIZING

The most important benefit of the minimalism movement presents itself when other things are out of the way

JAY HARRINGTON

In case you haven't noticed, minimalism and the tidying up movement are having a moment. "Less is more" has gone mainstream.

New shows on Netflix. New York Times best-selling books. Donation centers bursting at the seams. Photos of neatly rolled garments taking over Instagram. A new verb, "Kondo-ing," entering the lexicon.

It's not that the idea of living with less—and realizing the attendant benefits—is a newly discovered concept. Thousands of years ago, Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus came to the conclusion that "Wealth consists not in having great possessions, but in having few wants." It's just that today's culture, or at least some meaningful corner of it, is finally catching on.

A Journey Toward a More Minimal Life

My own family's journey toward a more minimal lifestyle has been marked by fits and starts.

Four years ago, we began the shift toward a life motivated more by chasing meaning and purpose than accumulation and consumption.

When we first learned about the concept of minimalism, we were intrigued. The idea of shedding possessions and living lighter appealed to us.

But after a weekend of giving things to thrift stores or throwing them out, we'd find ourselves back where we started: with a few less things but without making much of a dent in our desire for broader change.

What led us to transformational change and greater happiness was trying to understand the larger purpose and vision we had for our lives. We focused on the "end" we had in mind and pursued it through the "means" of minimizing.

Minimalism as a Means to an End

Consumption requires a trade-off, and its greatest cost is time.

The cost of a new coat or pair of shoes isn't measured only in dollars and cents because it takes time and effort to acquire those dollars and cents.

Consuming social media means giving up moments that could be spent doing something more meaningful.

Organizing and reorganizing mounds of stuff robs one of the ability to apply mental and physical energy to more productive pursuits.

As one of the original minimalist writers, Henry David Thoreau, once wrote, "The cost of a thing is the amount of what I will call life which is required to be exchanged for it, immediately or in the long run."

In other words, those "things" that are dominating our time and attention are stifling the one thing we can never replace, which is "life."

All of this is to say that it's easy to get caught up in the whirlwind of the minimalism movement and miss the bigger picture. And in this case, the big picture is using minimalism as a means to a more fulfilling, intentional, and purposeful life, rather than treating it as an end in itself.

In my personal experience, I've found that merely focusing on the tactic of minimalism, without a larger purpose in mind, makes it hard to stick with it. Just as calorie counting diets, measured only by the restriction of calories, rarely work, minimalism quests marked only by the dispossession of objects are hard to sustain.

It's difficult to stay motivated to stick with the means without an end in mind that lights you up inside. Having a larger purpose helps you persevere through challenges—and minimizing one's lifestyle, in the face of societal pressures to do otherwise, certainly qualifies as a challenge.

We still have too much stuff. Still sometimes get caught up in "keeping up with the Joneses." Still succumb to temptation despite knowing better. But for the last several years, with a more clearly defined mission in mind, every time we have

fallen down we've been able to get up and get back on track, happier and ready for what's next.

For us, being more minimal-minded allows us to elevate and prioritize experiences over things. Having less stuff in our home enables us to spend more time outside in nature. Our minds are less encumbered so we have more capacity to pursue creative endeavors that, while not always financially remunerative, bring us great contentment.

That said, it's not always easy, because the siren song of "more" is seductive. If you're not careful, more stuff, more commitments, and more mental clutter can easily seep back in. If you're trying to focus on less, there's lots of cultural messaging that will suggest to you that your priorities are misplaced and you're missing out on the (false) promises of largesse.

Having endured some of the tug and pull of more and less, we've firmly determined that, yes, less is more. We're girded by the knowledge, born of experience, that the path to fulfillment lies in doing the hard things. With a purpose in mind, you can learn to love the process of minimalism, even if it's difficult at times.

As Fyodor Dostoyevsky once wrote, "The mystery of human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for."

Minimalism is not a magical cure-all. An organized sock drawer doesn't scale beyond fleeting satisfaction. But for those who want to pursue a mission in life that is challenging and fulfilling, following the foundational principles of minimalism is a step toward finding purpose. Happiness is not guaranteed, it's hard-won. And the struggle for happiness begins inside, with a commitment to be unrelenting in directing your actions in alignment with your life's purpose.

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.

Being more minimal-minded allows us to elevate and prioritize experiences over things.

ELECTRIC BIKES Can Boost Older People's WELL-BEING

Getting out on the open bike path, with some batteries, can recharge the brain and body

LOUISE-ANN LEYLAND, BEN SPENCER, CARIEN VAN REEKUM & TIM JONES

Getting on your bicycle can give you an enormous sense of freedom and enjoyment. It can increase your independence and knowledge of the local area and improve your access to the natural (or urban) environment. It can also be highly nostalgic—reminding you of your childhood cycle rides and the joy of being young.

It seems then that e-bikes have the potential to re-engage older adults.

But beyond the feel-good factor, can cycling actually make any difference to mental abilities and well-being? This was something our new study aimed to investigate—specifically looking at the written among older adults.

While most studies incorporate exercise in a gym situation, our study wanted to examine the impact of cycling in the real world—outside a controlled

environment. So older adults, aged 50 and above, were asked to cycle for at least an hour and a half each week for an eight-week period.

Participants either cycled on a conventional pedal bike, on an electrically assisted "e-bike" or were instructed to maintain their regular non-cycling exercise routine as a comparison group. Mental abilities, mental health, and well-being were measured before and after the eight-week cycling period.

Mental Boost

Exercise is thought to improve mental functioning through increased blood flow to the brain, as well as encouraging regrowth of cells, specifically in the hippocampus. This is known to be an area associated with memory. So it was expected that the greater physical exertion required for pedal cycling, compared to cycling an e-bike with a motor, would result in greater benefits to mental functioning.

One of the tasks we used to measure mental ability is the "Stroop test." The task involves participants being shown the name of a color printed on a card in a different color script. For example, the word "blue" would be printed in red ink. Participants are asked to say the color of the ink that the word is printed in, rather than reading the name of the color. The Stroop test measures how accurately someone is able to minimize distraction from the written word when reporting the ink color.

We found that after eight weeks of cycling, both pedal and e-bike cycling groups were better at ignoring the written word, indicating that their mental

function had improved. This was not the case for non-cycling control participants.

Pedal Power

Aside from the benefits found to some mental abilities, we also saw a trend for mental health improvement for the e-bike cyclists, but pedal cyclists did not change on this measure. This could be because e-bikes may be more enjoyable and easier to ride than normal pedal bikes—helping to improve mental well-being.

We also found e-bike cyclists spent more time cycling on average each week than the pedal cyclists. Many of the participants commented that they felt they could go further on the e-bike as they could rely on the motor to get them home if they could not manage it by themselves.

Mental abilities, mental health, and well-being were measured before and after the eight-week cycling period.

This research, to some extent, provides support for many bike-related motivation quotes, including the following from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle:

When the spirits are low, when the day appears dark, when work becomes monotonous, when hope hardly seems worth having, just mount a bicycle and go out for a spin down the road, without thought on anything but the ride you are taking.

It seems then that e-bikes have the potential to re-engage older adults with cycling and provide a great opportunity to increase physical activity and engagement with the outdoor environment. So given that more than 13 million older people in the United States live alone, it might just be that the use of an electric bicycle could help to improve older people's lives by increasing independence and mobility—all of which can have a significant impact on their well-being.

Louise-Ann Leyland is a research associate in the faculty of brain sciences at the University College London. Ben Spencer is a research fellow at Oxford Brookes University in England. Carien van Reekum is a professor of psychology and neuroscience at the University of Reading in England. Tim Jones is a reader in urban mobility at Oxford Brookes University. This article was first published on The Conversation.



ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK



Superheroes Create Pressure for Unrealistic Male Bodies

It's not just about weight and muscle, male body image affects the whole person

RAJ CHANDER

About 40 blocks north of Spring Studios, where chic, slender models walk the runway for New York Fashion Week's biggest showcases, there's another kind of fashion event taking place. The Curvy Con is the brainchild of two fashion bloggers who wanted to create a space where "plus-size brands, fashionistas, shopaholics, bloggers, and YouTubers" could embrace the curvy female figure.

The event is one of the many examples of recent efforts to lift the long-running stigma associated with having an "imperfect" body. The female body positivity movement is stronger than ever: Brands like Dove and American Eagle have launched campaigns to help women learn to be appreciative of their bodies, regardless of how they compare to media standards.

The movement's intent seems well-meaning, but it also raises a question: Is there a body positive movement for men? While there's a plethora of evidence that women are judged more by their looks than men are, research shows that body image issues facing men are just as complex.

Celebrities like singer Sam Smith and actor Robert Pattinson have opened up about their struggles with the way they look in recent years, providing more confirmation that body image is a problem for men. And similar to women, research shows men are often caught feeling either too thin or too heavy to meet the male ideal.

But what's causing men today to feel so much pressure about their appearances? What specifically are they unhappy with and how can they deal with it?

One thing is for certain: Just like the challenges faced by women, male body image issues are deeper than just weight.

The Superhero Effect: Why Do Males Feel Pressure to Look a Certain Way? Research by psychiatrists at UCLA shows that overall, people today feel worse about the way they look than they did in the 1970s. The problem goes beyond a college guy hitting the gym to try to get a date: 90 percent of boys in middle and high school exercise at least occasionally with the specific goal of "bulking up."

Most celebrities, scientists, and average guys agree that there's one major contributing factor we can credit for the rise of negative body perception for men and boys: the silver screen. Stars like Hugh Jackman and Chris Pratt pack on muscle to transform into superheroes to join the likes of Dwayne Johnson and Mark Wahlberg. This increases male public interest in obtaining their recipes for chiseled abs and bulging biceps. A vicious cycle ensues.

A 2014 feature about today's fitness-

crazy world of Hollywood is especially eye-opening. When famous celeb trainer Gunnar Peterson was asked how he'd respond to a male actor trying to succeed on acting talent alone without being in great shape, he responded: "All of a sudden you go, 'Oh, maybe you can be the friend.' Or: 'We'll do an indie film.'"

For the last three years, at least 4 out of the top 10 grossing movies in the U.S. have been superhero stories, according to data observed from Box Office Mojo. In these films, "ideal" male physiques are shown constantly, sending a message: To be brave, dependable, and honorable, you need big muscles.

"These bodies are attainable for a small number of people—maybe half a percent of the male community," says Aaron Flores, a registered dietitian nutritionist from Calabasas specializing in male body image. "Yet they're associated with the idea of masculinity—the notion that as a man, I have to look a certain way, act a certain way."

“These bodies are attainable for a small number of people—maybe half a percent of the male community.”

Aaron Flores, registered dietitian nutritionist

The Rise of #Fitness The big screen isn't the only place guys are being exposed to unrealistic bodies. A recent GQ feature about Instagram's influence on fitness reported that 43 percent of people take photos or videos at the gym.

So thanks to the prevalence of Facebook and Instagram, whose combined monthly user count represents over 43 percent of the global population, our younger—and soon to be largest—generations are exposed to images and videos of others working out every day.

Some find the uptick in social fitness content motivational, but there's a degree of intimidation involved—particularly for those new to exercise. "Social media shows us all these folks hitting the gym, losing weight, getting ripped... you'd think it'd inspire me, but most times it makes me want to hide in a corner," a friend told me.

It's estimated that the average American adult now spends over \$110,000 throughout their lifetime on health and fitness costs. The Anytime Fitness franchise alone has added 3,000 new gyms worldwide in the last 10 years.

Between our Instagram feeds, TV shows, and movies, it's difficult for guys to avoid images of muscular, built

men. But how much you can bench is far from the only body image concern—male body image is far more complex than just muscle.

It's More Than the Shape of Our Bodies

The media tells men that we should be lean, strong, and muscular. But the male body image struggle is about more than the shape of our bodies. Among other concerns, men are figuring out how to deal with hair loss, height perception, and skin care.

The hair loss industry alone is estimated to be worth \$1.5 billion. No thanks to the stigma, men with thinning or no hair may face the stereotype that they're less attractive, less agreeable, and not as assertive. Research has also found that hair loss is linked to feelings of inadequacy, depression, stress, and low self-esteem.

As for height, data indicates that people associate taller men with higher levels of charisma, education, or leadership qualities, increased career success, and even a more robust dating life.

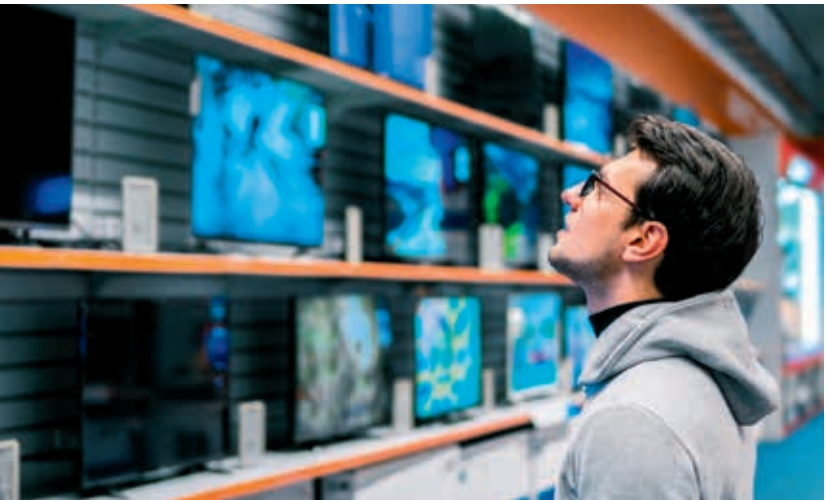
Male-targeted skin care brands are also increasingly marketing products that target the same concerns as female-targeted brands:

- wrinkles
- skin discoloration
- face symmetry, shape, and size

Male cosmetic procedures have increased by 325 percent since 1997. The top surgeries are:

- liposuction
- nose surgery
- eyelid surgery
- male breast reduction
- facelifts

Another sensitive area of judgment for the male body that incorporates all the above is the bedroom. A 2008 study reported penis size as one of the top three body image concerns for heterosexual men, along with weight and height.



Remind yourself that media-portrayed body images aren't realistic.

"It's an unspoken thing, but if you don't look a certain way or perform a certain way [sexually], it can really challenge your masculinity," Flores says.

Research shows that a majority of men feel their penises are smaller than average. These negative feelings about genital size can lead to low self-esteem, shame, and embarrassment about sex.

It's totally normal to feel some insecurity about the way you look.

And it's no surprise that brands have already caught on. Hims, a new wellness brand for men, heavily markets itself as a one-stop shop—from skin care to cold sores to erectile dysfunction. According to Hims, only 1 in 10 men feel comfortable talking to their doctor about their looks and health.

How Can We Deal With Male Body Image Issues?

The darker side of the recent increase in male cosmetic surgeries, social media posts about fitness, and celebrity "transformations" is the underlying notion that guys need to improve their bodies. The corporate marketing race to embrace body positivity can also lead to negative self-perception and may be rapidly becoming trite and unnecessary.

Even knowing the problems, body image is tough to address. One of the main challenges is relatively simple—not enough people are talking about the self-image issues that men face.

"While the issue [of male body image] is no longer surprising, there's still really no one talking about it or doing work to make it better," says Flores. He told me he frequently takes female-centric social media posts about body positivity and makes them into male-friendly versions.

Step One: Accept Your Body for What It Is

Flores said deciding to be happy with your physique and not devoting your entire life to "fixing it" is in itself an act of rebellion since our society is so focused on achieving the ideal body.

It's also helpful to adjust your social media sites to only show content that will inspire positive feelings about your body.

"I'm very discerning about what comes into my feed," says Flores. "I'll mute or unfollow people who exhibit a lot of diet or fitness talk, just because it's not how I interact. I don't care if my friends are doing keto or Whole30, or how many times they can squat—that's not what defines our friendship."

Other ways guys can cope with body image issues:

- Talk about it in the real world. Commiserating with a male friend can help ease the pressure to look a specific way. Online groups for body positivity are great, but it's also valuable to get away from social media and spend time in places with realistic images of people, like your local coffee shop or restaurant.
- Embrace your body. It doesn't matter if you're an athlete or totally out of shape—try to be happy with the way you look. If you're taking active steps to be healthier through exercise or diet, embrace the journey. Instead of focusing on what you don't like, be proud of yourself for trying to change what you can control.
- Don't be afraid of vulnerability. "It's not a challenge to your masculinity," says Flores about being open and honest about body image struggles. "If we can learn to share our experiences, both negative and positive, that's where healing comes from."
- Remind yourself that media-portrayed body images aren't realistic. The media is really good at portraying unrealistic bodies and misrepresenting the average physique—and that includes male bodies. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that there's no significant difference in the prevalence of obesity between men and women. It's OK to challenge the pictures you see. Confidence should be built in yourself and your efforts, not what other people say.

Above all, remember it's totally normal to feel some insecurity about the way you look. Be kind to yourself, develop positive habits, and do your best to accept what you can't change. With that, you can have a healthy outlook on your body.

Raj Chander is a consultant and freelance writer specializing in digital marketing, fitness, and sports. This article was first published on Healthline.

JODYHONGFILMS/UNSPLOASH



LEAH CAMPBELL

Rich Karlgaard was, as he put it, a late bloomer.

He told Healthline he spent much of his 20s "incapable of holding a job greater than dishwasher or security guard."

However, things began to change for him after he took a job with a company as a temporary typist. It was there he began exercising after work with several of his colleagues, a group of engineers and project managers who would go on early evening runs together.

While on one of their group runs, an engineer asked Karlgaard if he aspired to do anything more than being in a temp typing pool.

"I said I did, but I had no clue what. I felt like I'd never figured out the whole job thing," he said.

Though Karlgaard couldn't give his co-worker much of an answer at the time, the engineer saw potential in Karlgaard and offered him some work doing technical typing. That's when something changed for Karlgaard.

"It was like a lifeline from heaven, working with engineers and project managers, that opened my brain up to a world I'd never been exposed to," he said.

Today, Karlgaard is the publisher of Forbes magazine, a noted author, television commentator, private investor, and board director.

He believes he wouldn't have accomplished any of these things if the opportunity he was given by that engineer had been offered to him when he was "21 or 22."

"I wouldn't have made any use of it," he said. "I was lucky in a sense."

Karlgaard knows his story isn't as unique as some may think. Many people bloom later in life when they're given the room they need to

grow. That's why he's made it his mission to help people understand that late bloomers simply have different paths of discovery. In fact, a new book titled "Late Bloomers," written by Karlgaard, is due to be released by Penguin Random House on April 16. It chronicles Karlgaard's own late-blooming trajectory and compiles years of research to discuss the psychology of late blooming.

How Early Blooming Became the Gold Standard

"The conveyor belt we've created that drives kids and teens to get great test scores rewards a different set of skills. There are so many more different kinds of human gifts that will flower in their own time. I want to start a national conversation around that," Karlgaard said.

As Karlgaard sees it, the problem is that our current society still views early achievement as a marker of success.

"I have a theory about why that is," he explained. "If you look at the two most lucrative fields, they have been software and financing—the Googles and Goldman Sachs of the world."

While he acknowledges there are obviously other paths to success, he sees these fields as the most lucrative and stable—the fields that have minted the most millionaires and billionaires.

Continued on Page 8

America's Obsession With Early Success Is Hurting Late Bloomers

The tech and finance-dominated economy has created a new pressure for young people to succeed—at a younger age

Continued from Page 7

"These two industries are really quite ruthless about who they screen for and the kinds of employees they want. They want people coming out of elite colleges with STEM backgrounds. The kid who may have had latent brilliance doesn't get discovered," Karlgaard said.

As these industries have taken over, so has the pressure kids face to achieve as much as possible, as early as possible, to have the best options for the future.

Most of that pressure comes from their parents, intentionally or not, as they're also feeling the pressure to see their kids succeed.

This can often be because they either see that success as a representation of how they performed as parents, or simply because they want to know their children are going to be capable of taking care of themselves later in life.

Just how far are some parents willing to go?

The recent college admissions scandal, in which celebrities like Felicity Huffman and Lori Loughlin were charged for paying large amounts of money to bribe their kids into elite schools, proves some parents will go to great (and illegal) lengths.

Stories like these highlight just how immense the pressure to be an early bloomer is today.

The Downsides of Early Achievement

John Mopper is an adolescent therapist with Blueprint Mental Health in Somerville, New Jersey. He also happens to consider himself a late bloomer.

After bouncing around between jobs in his 20s, he told Healthline it wasn't until he was 30 that he decided to pursue becoming a therapist.

Mopper called that decision a game changer and said, "Every day I'm having these conversations with my clients about what it means to be successful, and how society's version of success right now really boils down to a career path and money. But there are a lot of people who are 'successful' who aren't actually happy with their lives."

He wants parents to recognize that most teenagers aren't ready to make long-term career decisions.

"I think a very small percentage of 18-year-olds actually know what they want to do with their lives. Then there are some who think they know, but who will change their minds several times. And the majority don't have a clue," he said.

“

We've created this early-bloomer pressure cooker that I think has gotten really out of hand.

Rich Karlgaard, publisher, Forbes magazine



Kids are being expected to achieve at younger and younger ages.



ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

Mopper said he was recently having a conversation about this topic with a client who happens to be a high school student.

His advice to that client, and to all high schoolers who may be battling with uncertainty about their next steps, is to go to community college and just take four or five classes they're truly interested in before committing to a degree.

"I think a lot of people get stuck in the failure," he said. "They go to college too soon, before they're really ready, and it doesn't work out. They've tried, and going to school now comes with a negative consequence. They feel like they've failed, and that really becomes a part of their identity. They don't want to experience those feelings again, so they can't bring themselves to try again."

By allowing teens the time to truly discover what it is they're interested in, what it is they want to do, his hope is that more can find the kind of success that extends far beyond a paycheck.

Escaping the Pressure Cooker

Dr. Margaret Stager is director of the Division of Adolescent Medicine at MetroHealth Medical Center in Cleveland. She's also a spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics.

She told Healthline, "The pressure is great for teens to not only succeed but also super-succeed. That pressure has moved down from college to high school and now even a little into middle school."

She said that kids are being expected to achieve at younger and younger ages.

"I'm seeing kids taking AP classes their sophomore year. That used to be something that didn't happen until senior year. It's really taken the fun out of high school for these teenagers who are having to accept that it's just a lot of hard work."

She said she often tries to talk to parents

about pulling back from those AP classes and rounding out the academics with something the student loves, whether that be sports or music or something to do with their church or favorite nonprofit.

"That's just as important to their development as AP chemistry," she said.

Redefining Success and Failure

For his part, Karlgaard simply wants parents to know that it's not the end of the world if a child doesn't know what they want to be at 18 years old.

In fact, he'd love to see our society start to recognize the benefits of alternative paths for young adults, to include community colleges, skilled trade schools, gap years, and perhaps even the adoption of national service programs and requirements.

"I really feel fortunate that it was easier to be a late bloomer when I grew up," he said.

"Today we are typecasting kids earlier and earlier and putting extraordinary pressure on them to get great grades and make great test scores, and when you look at the price we're paying for that—the rise in student debt, depression, and suicide rates—we've created this early-bloomer pressure cooker that I think has gotten really out of hand."

Though it may seem that society's definition of success is shrinking, there are countless examples of successful adults who, like Karlgaard and Mopper, found success later in life.

By telling their stories, perhaps we can begin to shift perspective and realize that what many in society see today as a failure to launch may simply be a late bloomer who needs more time to grow into the success they're meant to be.

Leah Campbell is a freelance health and wellness writer. This article was first published on Healthline.com

Many people bloom later in life when they're given the room they need to grow.

The Nordic Diet Is the New Mediterranean Diet

The Mediterranean diet has been promoted for decades but now the Nordic diet is getting some love

JULIA RIES

You may have noticed there's a new diet creating a lot of noise in the health and wellness scene.

It's the Nordic diet, and some nutritionists think it may be one of the healthiest ways to eat.

The diet was constructed when health experts set out to find why, exactly, Northern Europe had lower obesity rates than the United States. The Nordic diet was developed based on the traditional cuisine found in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

What is the Nordic Diet?

There's no calorie counting or crash dieting—rather, the Nordic diet promotes a lifelong approach to healthy eating. It focuses on plant-based, seasonal foods and is packed with lean proteins, complex carbohydrates, and healthy fats.

The new diet, which has actually been around for centuries, was adapted from the Baltic Sea Diet Pyramid in 2004 to include more flavors and nutritional value. The new version promotes more food from wild landscapes, fewer food additives, organic produce whenever possible, and more home-cooked meals.

Additionally, it places an emphasis on planning each meal around winter vegetables—such as kale, cabbage, broccoli, and Brussels sprouts. Eggs and fish are more of an aside.

How Does It Stack Up Against the Mediterranean Diet?

The Nordic diet is quite similar to the well-known Mediterranean diet. Both include plenty of fish, root veggies, fruit, and whole grains—such as oats and barley—and limit the consumption of red meat, dairy, sugars, and processed foods.

One major difference is in the oily fats. While the Mediterranean diet suggests olive oil, the Nordic diet opts for rapeseed oil, aka canola oil. Both oils promote a healthy heart by boosting good cholesterol and trimming away bad cholesterol.

"Both are plant-based oils with high amounts of omega-3. Since canola oil has less saturated fat than olive oil, it is considered healthier, however, both have a different recommended use in the kitchen," Dr. Nancy P. Rahnama, a bariatric physician based in Los Angeles, told Healthline.

For example, olive oil, which is higher in antioxidants, is more flavorful and is typically used for salads and toppings whereas canola oil can withstand more heat, so can be used when cooking and baking at higher temperatures.

The Long List of Health Benefits

One of the main reasons dietitians have been so fond of the Nordic diet is because of all the research-backed health benefits it's been linked to.

The World Health Organization found that both the Mediterranean and Nordic diets reduce the risk of cancer, Type 2 diabetes, and heart disease. Other studies have revealed that the Nordic diet can lower systolic and diastolic blood pressure levels, normalize cholesterol levels, and help people lose weight or maintain a healthy weight.

Additionally, because the diet is quite similar to anti-inflammatory diets—which traditionally consist of fruits, vegetables, lean protein, and healthy fats—it's been shown to reduce inflammation in fatty tissues and, consequently, obesity-related health risks.

Because the Nordic diet focuses on consuming what's in season, it doesn't break the bank.

It may even help women who are trying to get pregnant.

"This lifestyle falls in line with the recommendations I give my clients when [they're] trying to conceive," Lauren Manaker, a registered dietitian and owner of Nutrition Now Counseling, said. "A diet that is low in processed foods and refined carbohydrates, along with eating mostly plant-based and seafood-based proteins along with high consumption of fruits and vegetables, is correlated with increased chances of pregnancy."

It's Good for the Planet Earth, Too

Additionally, the Nordic diet is environmentally sustainable, as it focuses on the consumption of fresh, local ingredients. As a result, fewer greenhouse gases are emitted.

"Plant-based diets create less pollution because they use fewer natural resources than meat-heavy diets," fitness expert Lauren Cadillac, a registered dietitian and certified personal trainer, said. "We can also reduce energy consumption and food waste by eating locally produced food."

"A large reason I like this diet is that it takes the focus off of calories and puts it on quality food," Cadillac added.

A Well-Balanced, Affordable Option

While the Mediterranean diet has been more heavily researched, growing interest in the Nordic diet has already found that the diet is just as healthy, if not more.

Not to mention, because the Nordic diet focuses on consuming what's in season, it doesn't break the bank. Seasonal produce tends to be a bit cheaper, as it's more widely available.

So, if you're looking to do some good for your body, the Nordic diet may be well worth a try. It's packed with a ton of nutrients, vitamins, and minerals your body needs to survive and thrive.

Julia Ries is a freelance health and wellness writer. This article was first published on Healthline.



IVANNA PAVLUN/SHUTTERSTOCK

How Our Sense of Taste Changes as We Age

Like our eyesight and hearing, our sense of taste is also subject to the ravages of time

ANITA SETAREHNEJAD & RUTH FAIRCHILD

Taste is a complex phenomenon. We do not experience the sensation through a single sense (as we would when we see something using our sense of sight, for example) but rather it is made up of the five senses working together to allow us to appreciate and enjoy food and drink.

Initial visual inspection of food indicates if we would consider consuming it. Then, when eating, smell and flavor combine to allow us to perceive a taste. Meanwhile, the mix of ingredients, texture, and temperature can further impact how we experience it.

Unfortunately, this means that losing any of our senses, particularly smell or taste, can reduce our enjoyment of food. Think of the last time you had a cold or a blocked nose. It's likely that the temporary loss of smell changed the way you tasted food, lowered your appetite, or might even have caused you to overconsume as a means of seeking satisfaction and satiation.

A similar phenomenon happens when we get older. The way we perceive taste starts to change by the age of 60—when the sensitivity of our sense of smell also starts to diminish—becoming severe from the age of 70.

Contributing Senses

As set out above, when our sense of smell functions less and is not able to detect and discriminate between different smells, it affects our taste perception. The decline in sensitivity of sense of smell with age is due to several factors, including a reduction in the number of olfactory receptors—which recognize different odor molecules—in the back of the nasal cavity, as well as a declining rate of regeneration of the receptor cells.

Another reason for the impairment of the sense of taste with aging is due to structural changes in the taste papillae. These bumpy structures host taste buds in the mouth, on the tongue and palate.

One type of these papillae, fungiform, which contain high levels of taste buds, decrease in number as we age and also changes in shape, becoming more closed. The more open the papillae, the easier it is for chemicals in food to come into contact with the receptors to create

taste. Closed papillae reduce the contact surface between food compounds and receptors resulting in less perception of food tastes.

Changing Tastes

Poor chewing is another factor that contributes to the low detection of tastes.

Due to aging or poor oral health, some people lose their teeth, with many resorting to dentures. But dentures, particularly if ill-fitting, can affect the quality of chewing and breaking down of food compounds. This can then reduce the dissolution of the food compounds in saliva and reduces the contact levels with the sensory receptors in the taste buds.

In addition, saliva secretion also can decline as a result of aging. This means that there is less fluid to carry food compounds to the taste receptors, and less liquid available to help food compounds to dissolve, so the taste is more poorly received.

General health also plays an important role in our sense of taste at any age. Head injuries, medicinal drugs, respiratory infections, cancer, radiation, and environmental exposure such as smoke and particulates can all contribute to an impaired sense of taste. Exposure to many of these factors increases as we get older.

Not everyone's sense of taste declines in the same way, however. Changes are known to be diverse among different people and sexes, and not everyone shows the same level of impairment as they age. Though some things are inevitable, there are things that we can all do to at least reduce the loss of taste.

Our preliminary research has indicated that keeping a healthy diet, an active lifestyle, and ensuring a low to moderate consumption of the five tastes—sweet, sour, salt, umami, and bitter—could help to slow down the changes in papillae.

Anita Setarehnejad is a senior lecturer in food science and technology at Cardiff Metropolitan University in the UK. Ruth Fairchild is a senior lecturer in nutrition at Cardiff Metropolitan University. This article was first published on The Conversation.



MASTER HANDS/SHUTTERSTOCK

The way we perceive taste starts to change by the age of 60.

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Drug Companies Shouldn't Help Decide Who Is Sick

We shouldn't treat people as an ever-expanding marketplace for diseases.



We need new rules on how to define illness, so healthy patients don't suffer from overdiagnosis

RAY MOYNIHAN & PAUL GLASZIOU

Did you know the definition of high blood pressure (hypertension) in the United States was recently greatly expanded? Overnight, tens of millions of people were reclassified, leaving one in every two adults with a diagnosis of hypertension.

The move has been welcomed by some but also widely criticized amid concerns the expanded definition may bring more harm than good to many people, from unnecessary illness labels and unnneeded drugs.

What about the condition called "chronic kidney disease" (CKD), diagnosed by measuring blood levels to estimate kidney function? Because it does not account for normal aging, the current definition labels up to one in two older people as having CKD.

But many of those labeled will never have any kidney symptoms, chronic or otherwise, and there's been repeated criticism of this issue within the medical literature. That broad new "disease" was created at a conference sponsored by a major drug company.

Then there are the recent changes to the definition of gestational diabetes, which mean up to one in five pregnant women may now be diagnosed. But it's unclear whether many among the newly diagnosed mothers or their babies will benefit from this expansion.

It's time for a major change in how disease definitions and diagnostic thresholds

are set. We outline a proposal for how this might happen today in the journal BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine.

The Growing Problem of Overdiagnosis

In all these examples, the danger is that more and more people may be overdiagnosed. Overdiagnosis means receiving a diagnosis that isn't likely to benefit you.

Supporters of expanded definitions often have the best of intentions, motivated to diagnose ever milder problems and treat them early.

But early detection can be a double-edged sword. For some people, you prevent serious illness, for others you overdiagnose and overtreat things that would never progress and never cause any harm.

One common example is prostate cancer. Researchers recently estimated that more than 40 percent of all the prostate cancer now detected via testing healthy men in Australia may be overdiagnosed. In other words, those cancers would not have caused symptoms or problems during a man's lifetime, yet they are now being detected and treated with surgery or radiotherapy, often with major complications.

Our research a few years ago studied the panels of experts who actually change the definitions of common conditions, such as high blood pressure or depression.

We found three things. When they made changes, panels tended to expand definitions and label more previously healthy people as ill.

Second, they did not appear to rigorously investigate the downsides of that expansion.

And third, these panels tended to be dominated by doctors with multiple financial ties to drug companies with interests in expanding markets.

Panels tended to be dominated by doctors with multiple financial ties to drug companies.

ing disease definitions. Published in BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine, our proposal is for new processes and new people.

The new processes include rigorously examining the evidence for benefits and potential harms, before reclassifying millions of healthy people as diseased. This was proposed in a world-first checklist for groups seeking to change definitions, developed by the Guidelines International Network.

As for new people, today's article suggests new multidisciplinary panels led by generalists, rather than specialists. It calls for strong representation from consumer or citizen groups, and all members being free of financial ties to drug and other interested companies.

Where to From Here?

Responding to overdiagnosis remains a complex and uncertain challenge, both for individuals, and those who run health systems.

But it's clearly being taken more and more seriously. The World Health Organisation is co-sponsor of the Preventing Overdiagnosis conference in Sydney this year, where the science of the problem and solutions will be debated.

And just last week, the leadership of the Nordic Federation of General Practitioners endorsed this proposal to reform the way diseases are defined. It's likely others will follow suit, against strong resistance from vested interests.

But as we conclude in today's BMJ Evidence-Based Medicine article, the time for change is now. We shouldn't treat people as an ever-expanding marketplace for diseases, for the benefit of professional and commercial interests. We can no longer ignore the great harm to those unnecessarily diagnosed.

Ray Moynihan is an assistant professor at Bond University in Australia. Paul Glasziou is a professor of evidence-based medicine at Bond University. This article was first published on The Conversation.



To Accomplish Big Things: Think Big but Act Small

Getting the good work done takes a few simple practices, and many small steps

JAY HARRINGTON

It's only through hard work that we can realize our dreams, so we might as well make the most of our time spent on the road, in the field, on the site, and in the office.

The good news is that hard work can be deeply satisfying. It feels good to do a job well done. Accomplishment gives us meaning. Hopefully, this resonates, because it's a feeling you've experienced before. But it's not just me making this assertion about the connection between hard work and happiness—academic research backs it up.

In the early 1980s, well-known psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi conducted a series of studies meant to understand the psychological impact of common behaviors we engage in every day. One of the major insights of his work was to show that depth generates meaning.

He found that people are actually happier doing deep work than they are relaxing. Based on his findings he concluded: "The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult or worthwhile."

Csikszentmihalyi popularized the term "flow state" that is used to describe the effortless feeling experienced by high achievers—from authors to athletes—operating at peak performance during periods of hard work.

It's called "hard" work for a reason. Any time you're trying to learn a new skill, or attempting to build something worthwhile, it's hard. Most of us start enjoying something only after we get good at it. And it takes practice and hard work to get good.

Success is sequential.

Take playing the guitar, for example. Practicing guitar is painful (physically and emotionally) and frustrating for several months until enough work has been put in to build up calluses and learn the basics. Once someone earns their calluses and their skills improve, however, guitar starts to become fun and satisfying.

Resilience is built up during the painful periods of any worthy endeavor and serves as a bridge to the other side.

Practice: the Precursor to Passion

If you want to do something that's sat-

isfying, most times you have to do it when it's not.

The point is that the type of intense work that leads to high achievement is not only remunerative, it's also psychologically rewarding. In light of work's holistic benefits, it makes sense to work in the most productive manner possible in order to realize the greatest benefits.

To get things done, it is critical to minimize as many distractions as possible. Only then can you create space and time to work intensely and consistently on your most important priorities.

Notice that this formulation consists of three elements which can be summarized and categorized as follows: (1) minimize distractions, (2) do intense, consistent work, and (3) establish important priorities.

and 15 seconds for us to return to our original task after an interruption. Do the math on that during the course of an 8 hour day, and you'll see why interruptions aren't some trifling annoyance—they're productivity killers.

To avoid the "work, distraction, work, distraction" cycle that leads to unproductive days, you need to set firm boundaries for yourself and others. You need to create a work environment that fosters the type of focused work required to achieve big things.

Identify your most important priorities.

Intense, Consistent Work

Thinking big is expansive thinking. Thinking small is restrictive thinking. Thinking big is all about possibilities. Thinking small is all about limitations. Have big dreams? You need to think big.

However, the size of our dreams is what often stops us from pursuing them. The task ahead seems so momentous that we don't even start. We assume we need long blocks of uninterrupted time to make progress, and because we're busy and don't have long blocks of time, we just give up instead.

It's okay—in fact, it's necessary—to think big, and have big dreams, if you want to accomplish big things. But the

way to get there is not by acting big—it's by acting small. Success is sequential. It results from tackling lots of small things on a consistent basis, not trying to tackle everything at once. Dominoes fall one at a time.

In practical terms, what this means is that it's necessary to break big, unwieldy tasks into a bunch of small and manageable tasks, and then work intensely and consistently to accomplish each one. You've probably heard this one before because it's timeless: How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.

Establish Important Priorities

There's never enough time in the day, and you probably can't work longer hours (at home or at the office) than you already do, so it's important to work smarter. No matter how skilled a manager you may be, it's tough to manage through the chaos of a typical day without understanding the hierarchy of your priorities. This is why productive, effective people practice "time curation" as opposed to "time management."

They discern. They pick and choose. They don't multitask, they prioritize. And then they ruthlessly honor, defend and work in accordance with those priorities. In other words, when it comes to how they structure their days, they're "essentialists."

This is the central argument of Greg McKeown's excellent book "Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less." It's a book that espouses the importance of focusing on the most important, essential tasks

on your plate. McKeown describes his methodology as the "disciplined pursuit of less." At its core, essentialism is about setting priorities. According to McKeown: "Essentialism is not about how to get more things done; it's about how to get the right things done."

For example, if you have a business idea, there's no point worrying about what your logo and website will look like, or what your domain name will be, before you've nailed down far more essential priorities, such as what product or service you're selling, to whom, for what price, and what your expenses will be, so you know if the idea is even financially viable in the first place.

You can work hard, but hard work matters little if you're working on the wrong thing. As Henry David Thoreau wrote: "It is not enough to be busy. So are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?"

Before worrying about eliminating distractions and developing a deep work habit, the most important step in accomplishing big things is spending the necessary time to identify your most important priorities.

Think Big and Act Small

It's not all of the big, bold things we do during our lives and careers that lead to success. It's the small actions taken every day that make the difference and lead to compounding results over time.

Author and marketing guru Seth Godin wrote on his blog: "The thing is, incremental daily progress (negative or positive) is what actually causes transformation. A figurative drip, drip, drip. Showing up, every single day, gaining in strength, organizing for the long haul, building connection, laying track—this subtle but difficult work is how culture changes."

It's how lives and careers change too.

Clear goals. The right priorities. Small, consistent actions. This is the formula to leverage the power of progress in order to make big things happen.

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.



WISE HABITS

The Underestimated Importance of Encouragement in Habit Change

Focus on what you’ve accomplished so far when you inevitably fall down in your effort to improve yourself



LEO BABAUTA

When we’re trying to change a habit—whether its exercise or meditation or writing or quitting smoking—there are two key factors whose power most people don’t understand.

The 2 Factors Are Encouragement and Discouragement

Let me walk you through an example. Michael wants to change his diet, and so he creates a healthy meal plan for himself and commits to sticking to that plan for a month.

Here’s are some typical key points within that month of habit change:

1. He starts the first day and has a healthy breakfast as planned. He feels encouraged by this good start!
2. He has a healthy lunch too and feels encouraged. But then eats a couple of donuts that were in the office, and feels really discouraged. This might cause him to eat a burger with fries in the evening, which will get him further discouraged.
3. He asks some family and friends to keep him accountable in a private Facebook group, and they agree. He feels encouraged! He starts again.
4. When he eats a healthy breakfast, not only does he feel encouraged, he gets even more encouragement when he gets to post his success to his Facebook group. From this point on, every time he posts his successes, he feels encouraged, and it helps him to keep going.
5. The weekend comes, and he goes to a couple of parties and does not stick to the meal plan. He feels discouraged. He stops posting for a few days on the Facebook group because he feels bad.
6. Not posting to the group makes him feel even worse. He is discouraged. He keeps eating bad and gets more discouraged with every meal.

When you’re overwhelmed and feeling discouraged, focus on the smallest next step.

As you can see, the factors of encouragement and discouragement are the two key elements of the journey above. The more encouragement he gets, the better he’s likely to do. The more he feels discouraged, the less likely he’ll be to stick to things.

Luckily for us, we can do things that increase encouragement and decrease discouragement!

Ways to Increase Encouragement and Drop Discouragement

It’s not important to get this all perfect. We can all tolerate a bit of discouragement, and overcome the struggle. But the more we can move in the right direction of getting more encouragement, the better our chances of success.

So let’s look at some great ways to increase encouragement:

1. Get support from others (including joining my Sea Change Program) for your change—report to them regularly, ask them to encourage you.
2. When things go astray, talk to yourself with encouragement. “You can do this! Get back on track, take the smallest step.” And so on. It’s a key skill.
3. Put up motivational quotes, inspiration, success stories.
4. Chart your progress. Show how far you’ve come.
5. Reward yourself (don’t use food if you’re trying to change your diet, don’t use buying things if you’re getting out of debt).
6. Mindfully enjoy the actual habit (like finding mindful gratitude as you exercise).
7. Do the habit with others (go for a walk with other people).

As you can see, these can be small encouragements. But they make a huge difference.

Some ways to decrease discouragements:

1. When you mess up or go off your plan ... note when you’re feeling discouraged. Reframe this moment as less of a “failure” and more of an opportunity to practice two key habit skills: encouraging yourself and starting again. If you work on these two skills, you’ll get really good at changing habits.
2. When you miss reporting to people, note your discouragement. Reach out to one person and ask for support and encouragement. Tell them you’re embarrassed you haven’t been reporting, and commit to doing one small step.
3. When you’re overwhelmed and feeling discouraged, focus on the smallest next step.
4. When you have a habit streak going (which is encouraging when it is happening), but then the streak breaks (it goes from 47 days in a row to 0!) ... notice the discouragement. Instead, think of the cumulative days you’ve been doing the habit, instead of the streak. Notice how much progress you’ve made.
5. When you feel like you’ve let yourself and others down, practice self-compassion. This is a truly great habit skill to practice.

There are other good ways to decrease discouragement, but the main method is to notice when you’re discouraged and find ways to encourage yourself, to reframe it as an opportunity, to practice self-compassion, to ask for support, to pick one small step and start again.

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