

## What Wild Animals Can Teach Us About Stress

Learning to relax out of a stress state is critical to our long-term health.

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## Defining Your Mission Essential Task List

What must you or your organization do to make money and meet your mission?

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WEEKLY

# MIND & BODY

THE EPOCH TIMES

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Imposter syndrome seems to afflict people of any background with little in common except that they are high achievers.

## Feeling Like A Fraud: Exposing *Imposter Syndrome*

An affliction of the able that can be cured with a new self image

**S** CONAN MILNER

ince he was six years old, Greg Pignataro had a passion for soccer. He grew up with dreams of going pro or at least earning a college scholarship.

At a soccer camp during his senior year of high school, Pignataro began to see his dream come true. He caught the eye of university coaches who offered him a scholarship and a spot on the team.

Pignataro was overjoyed. But after a few weeks among top tier athletes, serious doubts started to creep in.

"I was playing against people playing at a higher level than I had before, so there were definitely days where I felt I was the worst player on this team," Pignataro said. "I thought, 'I don't deserve to be here. How soon until they figure me out?'"

Then he had another thought: the guys who got injured were lucky because they didn't have to come to practice. As luck would have it, the very next practice he tore the arch of

his left foot in a non-contact incident. He was out for six weeks.

Because he was a freshman, coaches granted Pignataro another chance to prove himself next season. Once again, he earned a spot on the team. But he hardly played once he got there. He was haunted by the specter of self-doubt.

"I think I had solidified the perception of the coaches and teammates' minds that I wasn't good enough to be there," he said. "I spent the longest time wondering what was wrong with me."

### More Than Women

Years later Pignataro discovered that many people suffer a similar experience. It's called imposter syndrome. It causes people who, despite possessing great skill and accomplishment, feel like they're frauds.

This thought pattern was first discovered in the 1970s, as researchers were studying high achieving women. These subjects worked hard to get where they were at, yet for some reason

**Initially, researchers believed that imposter syndrome was something that only impacted women.**

felt like they didn't deserve to be there. They reported living in constant fear of exposing the incompetence they'd somehow managed to hide from the people who hired them.

Dr. Jennifer Hunt has known many who fit this profile. Hunt is Chair of Pathology at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences, but she began studying imposter syndrome through her side gig: leadership development for women in health care. When she discovered how many of her colleagues suffered from this affliction, she created a program to help them overcome it.

"I designed it specifically for women physicians, but the tools are probably applicable to almost any group of people," Hunt said.

Initially, researchers believed that imposter syndrome was something that only impacted women. But recent findings show that men may suffer from it even more. The defining factor, however, has nothing to do with whether you're male or female. In fact, there may only be one variable that binds these cases together.

"These women come from all walks of life, all kinds of childhoods. I don't see any themes," Hunt said. "But the one thing I see over and over again is that they are high achieving people."

People with imposter syndrome strive for excellence, but in their minds, they always fall far short of their goal. It's this dynamic of high standards combined with crushing self-defeat that makes this problem so painful. Friends, family, and co-workers are often impressed by your skill and drive, but you don't value yourself as the world values you. Your inner world doesn't match your outer world, and yet the source of this discrepancy remains elusive.

"Whose standards are you trying to live up to?" Hunt asks the doctors she coaches. "It's really interesting to see people's eyes open when they realize that it's actually nobody's standard—nobody is telling them that they ought to be living up to this."

Continued on Page 4

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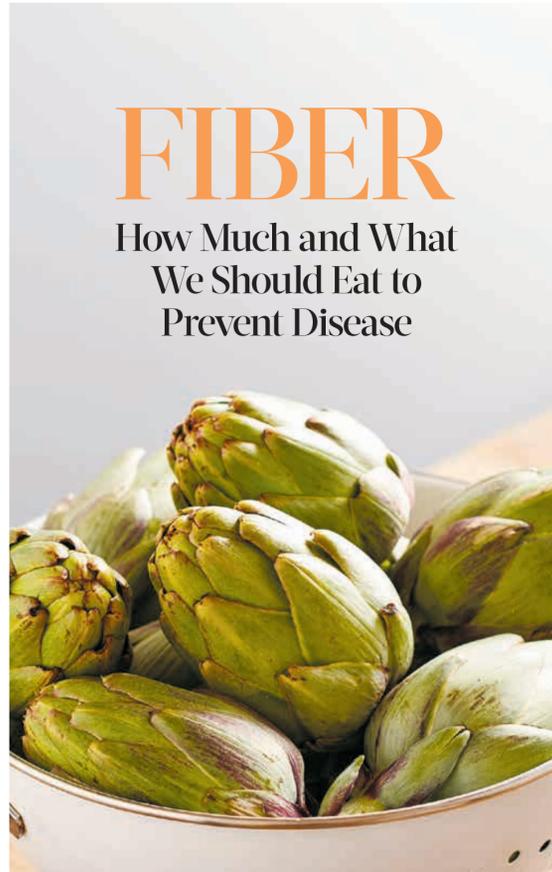
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# THE EPOCH TIMES

TRUTH AND TRADITION



Researchers say diets rich in fiber can help you live longer and avoid disease

#### BRIAN KRANS

You've probably already been told this before, but you should try to get some more fiber in your diet.

No matter the reason why it's been recommended—even if it's just to make your daily digestive habits more regular—new research suggests those who consume more fiber are more likely to ward off a whole bunch of diseases.

But this time, it's not just another study telling you to do one thing this week and the opposite the next.

This research involved 40 years' worth of information and the World Health Organization and the World Health Organization, the collective global unit dedicated to making sure we don't suffer or die prematurely from preventable conditions.

The study looked at past research and found there's at least one common thread among those who have diets that incorporate more fiber: They're more likely to live longer and avoid common diseases in the process.

“Fiber is naturally abundant in nutritious foods, which trump supplements every time.”

Catherine Brennan, registered dietitian nutritionist

The researchers came to that conclusion after they examined what's been studied—and found—regarding health outcomes in populations with low to higher than average fiber consumption.

The study, published earlier this week in *The Lancet*, was a meta-analysis of virtually all studies available in major research databases—and some searched by hand—totaling more than 135 million person-years of data. It came from 185 prospective studies and 58 clinical trials with 4,635 adult participants.

Overall, the research over the years pointed to one thing: The population at large is better off consuming more fiber, as it reduces the risk of chronic diseases that are affecting humans en masse.

Those include deaths from any cause and incidences of preventable diseases, such as coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and colorectal cancer.

**How Much and What You Should Eat**  
Researchers found that consuming 25 to 29 grams of fiber a day is ideal.

Considering there are about 5.5 grams of fiber in your average-sized pear and 10 grams in a cup of avocado, that might not seem like a lot. Or a lot if you dislike those foods.

But there are plenty of different high-fiber foods you can incorporate into various parts of your diet. They include fruits such as bananas, apples, and strawberries, as well as vegetables like carrots, beets, and artichokes. There's also

lentils, kidney beans, oats, and sweet potatoes.

Even a bowl of popcorn and a few handfuls of almonds while bingeing Netflix can help you fiber-load. But just go easy on the salt (and butter). It's these little changes that make a big difference.

In essence, we'd all be a little better off with more fiber in our diets. Or, as the study authors concluded, “Implementation of recommendations to increase dietary fiber intake and to replace refined grains with whole grains is expected to benefit human health.”

The study was funded by the World Health Organization and the Health Research Council of New Zealand, Riddet Centre of Research Excellence, Healthier Lives National Science Challenge, University of Otago, and the Otago Southland Diabetes Research Trust, all out of New Zealand.

New Zealanders, on average, live two years longer than people in the United States. They rank third in the world for adult obesity. The United States is number one.

**Optimizing Your Gut Environment**

Mindy Haar, assistant dean of undergraduate affairs at the New York Institute of Technology School of Health Professions, agrees with the study's findings.

She says it's backed by a “plethora” of other research that demonstrates the long-term effects of fiber-rich diets.

“In the past few years, increasing attention has been on the microbiome, the intestinal flora,” Haar told *Healthline*. “Fiber acts as a prebiotic, boosting the proliferation of probiotics in the intestine. There are many kinds of probiotics that promote good health, so consuming a variety of high-fiber foods optimizes the gut environment.”

Haar says those foods include fresh fruits and vegetables, whole-grain bread, cereals, pasta, brown rice, quinoa, beans, and chickpeas.

If the study's findings suddenly inspire you to start bingeing fiber, Catherine Brennan, a registered dietitian nutritionist who writes for *FeelingFullNutrition.com*, would like you to know a few things.

The first is to think twice before reaching for fiber supplements. (The recent study purposely didn't include them in their research.)

“Fiber is naturally abundant in nutritious foods, which trump supplements every time,” Brennan told *Healthline*. “Some studies have found that fibers found in food can be more beneficial than supplements, such as helping us feel satiated and satisfied after a meal.”

If you're going to start adding fiber to your diet, Brennan recommends doing it gradually and with plenty of water. Fiber works like a sponge as it digests, so it needs more water to pass through smoothly.

You're also more likely to fill up quickly during a meal, which could cause discomfort and possibly flatulence.

“Aim to slow down at mealtimes,” Brennan said, “and pay attention to your fullness cues to avoid discomfort.”

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

ALL PHOTOS BY DANIEL GOODRICH

#### ELEVATE AND INSPIRE

# Two-Time Adolescent Cancer Survivor Helps Children Battling Illness

Tracy Vicere knows how cancer can devour years of youth and the gift that compassion offers

Tracy Vicere, a two-time adolescent cancer survivor, sits at her desk, updating information on survivors' treatments in Farmingdale, N.Y.



#### ROLYNE JOSEPH

Doctors and nurses surrounded the bed of then 16-year-old Tracy Vicere with comforters and balloons to give her some comfort after she learned there was a lump on her neck in June 1989.

Vicere was at Cohen Children's Hospital, in Queens, about a half-hour's drive from her home in Farmingdale, a suburb of New York City. It was the day after her birthday.

The youngster loved going shopping and swimming with her friends. The news she was about to get threatened to change all that.

Now 45, the special-education teacher at Woodward Parkway Elementary School in Farmingdale, wants to give back to the hospital that made a difficult time in her life bearable.

#### Chemotherapy

After celebrating her spectacular sweet 16 party in June 1989, Vicere visited a doctor for a preoperative check to remove a cyst she developed during a Disney World trip with family. The physician then spotted a mass on her neck.

She was diagnosed with two different types of cancer: Stage 3A Hodgkin lymphoma, a cancer of the white blood cells, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma Stage 1A in June 1989.

“It was right before my 16th birthday and we had to get it biopsied,” she said. “So the day after my 16th birthday, I was admitted into the hospital. What I had was kind of rare, not a lot of people have two cancers at once.”

It was a few months after her sister, Amy Vicere, then 14, went into remission in November 1988, after treatment for Stage 2A Hodgkin lymphoma. Vicere knew, from watching her sister, what was coming.

Vicere underwent staging laparotomy, a surgical procedure that allows surgeons to visualize the abdominal contents and remove any suspicious masses.

“They biopsied all your liver, all your organs, and when they opened me up, they found out my left ovaries had a mass on it—the size of a grapefruit,” she said. “The cancer had spread to other parts of her body all the way to the reproductive system. Physicians removed her left ovary and spleen.”

#### Socializing

The young fighter didn't let cancer stop her from enjoying life. “My parents were amazing,” she said. “They still let me do all the normal 16-year-old kid stuff. I still lived my same life.”

Vicere wasn't supposed to be around groups of people due to the risk of infection, but she still attended parties and events with her friends and family.

While the teen tried to enjoy her childhood, she had a difficult time with the effects of her radiation treatments.

“I never looked at myself as being a child with cancer until the moment I lost my hair,” she said. “I used to find pieces of my hair everywhere. You're so worried about what you look like and how you represent yourself.”

There were events she missed however, memories she never got to make. Like prom. Vicere was at the intensive care unit while her friends were dancing. “I was sick and I needed a lung biopsy,” she said. “I had the dress. I had everything ready to go, but I couldn't go.”

However, The Marty Lyons Foundation (MLF), which tries to grant the wishes of children between three and 17 years old facing a life-threatening illness, threw a party for Vicere.

It was a prom of her closest friends, held at the hospital, thanks to the foundation and staff.

“It was kind of cool,” she said. “It was all the people that I liked.”

#### Remission

Soon after the occasion, she started to feel better. “I was so happy that that was my last day of radiation,” she said.

But the chemotherapy and radiation therapy took their toll. Vicere was left with multiple sclerosis, a condition in which the immune system eats away at the protective covering of nerves.

But it's hard to not be grateful when you are still alive. “If it wasn't for my remission, I wouldn't be celebrating my birthday,” she said.

“I had an amazing group of friends that were there to support me every step of the way,” she said. “No one ever looked at me like I was sick.”

Regular visits from her loved ones contributed to her well-being. The hospital had a play-room, containing toys, games, books, and crafts.

Staff members planned trips and getaways with the patients. Vicere took advantage of those opportunities and went to dinner and circuses, among other destinations.

And she also made her own memories, and new friends, including staff at the hospital who helped



Vicere talks to a cancer survivor at the annual Les Nelkin Pediatric Cancer Survivors Day at Jones Beach.



Vicere takes a look at items during the annual Les Nelkin Pediatric Cancer Survivors Day at Jones Beach, N.Y.

ease her way through cancer.

#### Teaching

One of her favorite childhood memories was placing dolls on chairs and teaching them. “When I was a kid, I asked my parents for a chalkboard, I would line-up my dolls and I would teach them,” she said.

The experience sparked an interest in teaching. After her remission, Vicere attended Wagner College with a Bachelor's degree in education from Staten Island, N.Y.

“I just love teaching,” Vicere said. “I love the kids that I work with. I love that it's unpredictable. You can be in the worst mood that day and one of your kids says something to you and it could be like the cutest, funniest thing.”

She has watched her students go from not being able to spell their names to knowing math calculations at Woodward Parkway Elementary School.

“I'll see my kids from September to June—just the growth they make each year—it's amazing,” Vicere said.

#### Foundation

It's been more than 25 years since her last radiation treatment and Vicere is focused on others who could face what she did.

Vicere established Friends & Angels: The Tracy Vicere Foundation, to provide normalcy to patients and brighten the lives of children battling a terminal illness.

The foundation has donated more than \$125,000 to programs that keep patients' joy and comfort high during this difficult time in their lives.

They have helped support patients receiving treatment in the Division of Hematology/Oncology and Stem Cell Transplantation at Steven & Alexandra Cohen Children's Medical Center of NY.

The foundation has provided patients with essentials including hospital scrapbooks so they can document their journey. It has also decorated rooms for bone marrow transplant patients to make the experience more pleasant.

Donations have ranged from gift cards, stuffed animals, or video games to a flat screen TV.

Vicere is inspired by the help she received from medical professionals, family, and friends during her own cancer experience.



Vicere stands among donations for her foundation's fundraiser.

“There are so many people that want to help, whether it's the teachers that I work with or other staff or families,” she said.

“Our mission is to improve the quality of life. We try to do things to make their stay at the hospitals as easy and fun as possible and to make life easier for the parents.”

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# Feeling Like A Fraud: Exposing *Imposter Syndrome*

An affliction of the able that can be cured with a new self image

Continued from Page 1

## Frozen Self-Image

So how does such a warped view of one-self take root? According to John Graden, author of "The Impostor Syndrome: How to Replace Self Doubt with Self Confidence and Train Your Brain for Success," people get stuck seeing themselves at a certain age or incident.

"Parental insults and bullying can freeze your self-image and self-talk at that age until you do some research and uncover this," he said.

For Graden, his self-image was shaped by a violent and unpredictable father. As a result, he was a painfully shy kid who always did his best to blend into the background.

Kung fu movies brought him out of his shell. Graden was motivated to learn the martial arts moves he saw on screen because it made him feel much less vulnerable. He trained intensely to get his black belt. And within just a few years he became a well-respected karate instructor with his own local television show.

But despite his accomplishments, Graden said his hard-earned success still felt false. Eventually, someone would find him out and take it all away.

Graden believed he was the only person to suffer this inner conflict until he saw actor Paul Newman in a television interview confessing to a similar worry: One day someone was going to come out of nowhere, grab him by the elbow, and tell him, "It's over, Newman. It's all been a mistake."

As Graden came to better understand impostor syndrome, he found that many celebrities share the same feeling of fraudulence. And the more successful they get, the more conflicted they feel.

“

**Parental insults and bullying can freeze your self-image.**

*John Graden, author, "The Impostor Syndrome: How to Replace Self Doubt with Self Confidence and Train Your Brain for Success"*

**Many celebrities share the same feeling of fraudulence.**

"People who are super ambitious become A-list movie and television stars. They work so hard. They get there, and then they sabotage it with drugs and alcohol because there's a lack of congruency there. There's a lack of internal belief that they belong here," Graden said.

## Dysfunctional Humility

Hunt believes that people cling to self-doubt because at one point in their lives it served a purpose.

At its best, self-doubt is a protective mechanism that can keep you alert and help you avoid dangerous situations. However, you lose clarity when self-doubt becomes your default response. You can set yourself up for failure, and your best never has a chance to shine through.

Thankfully, impostor syndrome is not a disease, but a frame of mind. So Hunt recommends tools to change perception.

"I see it all time in the groups that I coach," said Hunt. "It doesn't matter if 98 percent of the feedback is positive. If two percent is even remotely negative, or even imaged negative, then that's what you remember."

People with impostor syndrome are humble to a fault, yet they often fear they might come off as the polar opposite: arrogant. But Hunt says it shouldn't be a concern. These people don't vacillate from one extreme to the other. In fact, they have to work really hard just to reach an appropriate level of self-confidence.

"I want to rename impostor syndrome as self-deception syndrome. We depreciate ourselves just like investments," Hunt said. "The opposite is self-deception syndrome, where we are deceiving ourselves about how valuable we are. In the middle is self-appreciation."

## Compliments and Criticism

Both Graden and Hunt say one of the major hurdles in addressing impostor syndrome is learning how to take a compliment. It seems like a small thing, but it can be extremely difficult to reply with a simple "thank you" when you habitually devalue yourself. You can't help but lace it with an excuse. "Thank you, I had a lot of help," or "Thanks, but I should have done better."

"There's a difference between being humble and not allowing yourself to enjoy the fruits of your labor," Graden said. "Saying 'thank you' doesn't mean that you're cocky. You're recognizing someone's compliment, and showing your appreciation for it."

Another common theme with impostor syndrome is a difficulty accepting criticism. For people who suffer a harsh inner critic, any external judgment gets amplified.

"I see it all time in the groups that I coach," said Hunt. "It doesn't matter if 98 percent of the feedback is positive. If two percent is even remotely negative, or even imaged negative, then that's what you remember."

One of the tools Hunt employs in getting people to take criticism without turning it into a personal attack is to look at the experience for what it is, not what they imagine it to be.

"If my original thought is my boss hates me, decide if it's really true," she said. "Force the argument with your inner critic into defending the truth of that statement. It never can."

Graden tames his inner critic by getting control over his internal talk. When that inner voice keeps dwelling in negativity, turn the message around. "You have to work very hard to not let

the past define you," Graden said. "I've learned that when I start to go that road, I cancel that line of thinking and start thinking, 'What's next? What's the most positive thing I can do? How can I build my business? How can I get in better shape? How can I help the community?' Anything to stop from dwelling on the past."

## Self Acknowledgement

Part of the pain of impostor syndrome is that it can feel so isolating. Just knowing that there are others who suffer the same strange cognitive disconnect can help. Almost everyone in Hunt's coaching group says the best part is hearing that other people share this problem.

"One person said it so well: 'I looked around and saw all these amazing women who thought they were imposters. If they could be wrong, maybe I could be wrong too,'" Hunt said.

Even if self-doubt is your gut reaction, with enough awareness and practice at recognizing your self-worth, you can keep it from controlling your life.

Today, Pignataro works full time as a personal trainer, and a strength and conditioning coach. It's a job he's passionate about, but making it work meant confronting the doubts in his head: "Do I know enough? Am I good enough?"

But Pignataro has become familiar enough with the impostor dynamic to keep his self-defeating thoughts in check.

"Through all the people I've trained and worked with professionally, all the certifications I've received, all the reading I've done, and all the experience I have, I was able to determine, 'Yes, I am good enough and I can make a difference for these people,'" he said.

## MINDSET MATTERS

# Do You Have the Courage to Stop Doing?

To go from a human doing to human being, a little stillness is a essential

## NANCY COLIER

For many of us, our basic state of wellbeing is hidden from us by a misunderstanding we live by, a false paradigm that we are human doings, not human beings.

We see ourselves as the sum total of our experiences and accomplishments.

Many people grow up with parents who, in trying to do right by their kids, constantly show them how to improve and find better ways to be productive.

There's nothing wrong with that, but children subjected to too much of this can grow up feeling that they are loved because of their ability to accomplish and succeed. Some develop a fear that if they stop being productive, they will stop being loved.

Many of us believe our external actions are the very substance of our being.

Our identity becomes defined by what we accomplish. If we're productive, we matter. I have seen countless people living on the anxious treadmill of productivity, terrified to step off and pause for fear of losing their basic sense of worth.

Our obsession with productivity is a powerful notion. It convinces us that if we stop doing, we're bad.

We have not been taught to trust the basic truth that something in us longs to do and create; it doesn't need to be threatened and corralled into productivity to save us from worthless sloth.

Our life, as we experience it, is created through the accumulation of experiences we generate.

Stillness, on the other hand—not getting somewhere, not getting something done, not being productive—is imagined as a kind of void or absence, a place where we don't experience life.

This is false.

We live as human doings in part because we're not taught that our own presence is a destination. Our own body with a clear mind is a place of value, a place to inhabit that has its own sensory aliveness.

From the time we're very young we learn that our head holds the throne of life. It is the king/queen of all domains.

Our body, on the other hand, is viewed as an entity that exists to provide us with pleasure or pain. It is an object we use to accomplish things. We take it for granted until it is indirectly stimulated or ejected from its basic invisibility due to illness, injury, or aging.

But the problem is that when we don't value the body, we lose contact with our inherent sense of worth.

The productivity prerogative can make us forget that we have an inherent worth completely outside of our accomplishments.

FABRIZIO VERRECCHIA/UNSPLASH

**Joining with the body and experiencing how it is right now ... is a courageous and profoundly radical choice.**



Disconnected from the body, we become untethered from a sense that we matter not because of what we do, but just because we are.

The body is our portal to experience life. It precedes and outlives all other experiences. It's through the body that we directly experience a sure sense of our own wholeness, and the knowledge that we are already everything we need to be, and we already matter.

When we drop out of the head, stop thinking, and exist in the body, we immediately feel a sense of just being. Inside the body, we experience the hum of life, something that's happening on its own without our having to do anything.

Through meditation, body practice, or simply choosing to experience the body from the inside out, we can learn to ride the waves of breath and connect more deeply with our innate being. This practice of just encountering what's here, what we are and exist within without any effort, builds a trust in us that there exists a life force bigger than us. This is a life force we exist within and are made of.

Joining with the body and experiencing how it is right now, feeling what's actually happening inside you, without constructing a story about what it says

about you or anyone else, is a courageous and profoundly radical choice.

When we make our body a destination and inhabit the body with kindness and curiosity, we can know a direct experience of being. This is a sensation of our own existence and doesn't require any action to create or maintain.

It takes courage to leave the mind and drop into the body, a willingness to reject or still the constant movements of the mind.

But if we do, we are rewarded with a deeper trust in our own being, and a knowledge of its inherent worth. What we find in the body, away from the mind, is presence.

Tuning into the hum of just being, we uncover a sense of wholeness and worth that is inherent, unmanufactured, and effortless. It is utterly unrelated to accomplishment.

We discover a sense of our own value—the gift of being alive.

*Nancy Collier is a psychotherapist, Interfaith minister, public speaker, workshop leader and author of The Power of Off: The Mindful Way to Stay Sane in a Virtual World. For more information, visit NancyCollier.com*

# Elderly Who Don't Want Dialysis Often Pressured to Get It

Patients that decline dialysis often abandoned by kidney specialists, researchers find

Doctors tend to steer elderly people with failing kidneys toward dialysis even when patients say they'd rather avoid such treatments, a new study finds. And when patients decline dialysis, which wouldn't buy much more time for a frail, elderly patient, doctors often try to convince them to change their minds, the study shows.

"Dialysis is an amazing technology that has extended the lives of many people," said study leader Dr. Susan Wong, an assistant professor at the University of Washington and a core investigator at the VA Health Services Research and Development Center. "But the benefits are less certain in older, frailer patients."

To take a closer look at what happens when elderly patients with end-stage renal disease (ESRD) decline dialysis, Wong and her colleagues tracked down the records of 851 veterans, with an average age of 75, who had successfully opted to skip the treatment.

In the United States, the leading causes of ESRD are diabetes and high blood pressure, according to the National Kidney Foundation (NKF).

In reviews of physicians' notes, Wong's team found three major dynamics in patient/doctor relations.

Some physicians repeatedly returned to the dialysis question using a variety of strategies to get patients to change their minds and when patients stuck to their guns, doctors questioned the competency of the patients to make the decision.

In another dynamic, physicians concluded dialysis wasn't appropriate without discussing that decision with their patient. In a third, patients who declined dialysis were told that their doctor had little to offer beyond dialysis—in this case, kidney specialists often signed off from the case with few recommendations other than a referral for hospice care.

In their report in JAMA Internal Medicine, Wong and her colleagues include quotes from the doctors' notes, such as: "Had numerous family meetings with patient and his family in an attempt to accept dialysis but the patient has always stated without fail that he did not want dialysis."

Wong suspects physician training may explain the difficulty in accepting patients' desires to avoid dialysis, a therapy that can take 12 to 30 hours a week or more, depending on whether the patient receives hemodialysis or peritoneal dialysis.

Without dialysis, people with ESRD "may survive days to weeks . . . depending on the amount of kidney function they have, how severe their symptoms are, and their overall medical condition," according to the NKF.

"Physician values are very much entrenched around longevity being the most important thing," Wong said. "But that's not always in line with patient preference. Most say quality of life is more important. And that butts up against medical training, which says we should keep people alive for as long as possible."

And that can make things difficult for people who want to avoid dialysis.

"It's very difficult for a patient to resist the system," Wong said. "The training physicians get all revolves around getting patients ready for dialysis. So it's a real jolt when they refuse. I think these results signal that we really need to change the model of care for patients with kidney disease."

The new study underscores the need for doctors to take the patient's age into consideration when making dialysis recommendations, said Dr. Albert Wu, an internist, and professor of health policy and management at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

"It's clear that dialysis can be lifesaving, but physicians may not be familiar with evidence that suggests that while there may be a survival benefit in patients over 75, it is quite slender," Wu said.

Wu was particularly disturbed that kidney specialists often chose to bow out once patients refused dialysis. "There are always alternatives beyond the most intensive technological treatment, and saying 'I have little to offer you' is tantamount to abandonment. That is regrettable. Doctors should never abandon a patient."

By Linda Carroll  
From Reuters



Doctors struggle to balance the quality-of-life priorities of their patients against their own overriding priority to maximize longevity.

# Fight or Flight: What Wild Animals Can Teach Us About Stress

Learning to relax out of a stress state is critical to our long-term health

## KEVIN ROSE

Stress hits us from all sides and affects everything we do. Constant stress loads create an underlying tension and keep us feeling on-edge, ready for the next shoe to drop. This can lead to serious anxiety issues and pull us away from leading a peaceful and happy life.

When we are confronted with challenging situations, our bodies react with the fight, flight, or freeze response. The response helps us decide whether we should stay and fight, run, or remain still during a threatening situation. Raising our heart and respiratory rates and heightening our senses, this primal response occurs to keep us vigilant. While the fight, flight, or freeze response is important, we often get stuck in this revved up state and feel continuously anxious and uncomfortable.

Animals, however, don't have this problem.

Animals in the wild must always remain alert to their surroundings. Predator and prey alike are always vigilant to the subtleties of environmental changes like scents in the air, vibrations on the ground, sounds, sights, and tastes of geographical locations. These stimuli carry messages that allow animals to react and respond, maintaining a balanced existence, exerting energy only when necessary.

When an animal hunts or defends its territory, it enters into a high-stress or survival state only as long as needed to resolve the situation. Once a threat or opportunity has been addressed, the animal returns to a natural, calm, relaxed state. Returning to a relaxed state allows the animals to conserve energy and maintain optimal health.

Human beings, on the other hand, often stay in high-stress states long after an initial survival trigger has passed. Remaining in this stressed state requires enormous amounts of energy and

**When we are confronted with challenging situations, our bodies react with the fight, flight, or freeze response.**

eventually overloads the body, breaking down the operating system. Eventually, the body succumbs to the heavy stress load.

However, if we can clearly tune into the fact that the threat has passed, or become more aware of our senses to relax ourselves, we can mimic the stress and calm cycle seen in nature.

Bringing awareness to the five senses interrupts high-stress states that drain our energy. By simply engaging our senses, our minds become focused on the present moment and cannot continue to ruminate about past or future events. Much of the ongoing stress we feel is self-inflicted, a physical response to the mental activity of creating worrisome stories in our heads about what could happen, or reacting with stress to things that have already passed.

So instead of getting riled up about an insult at work and imagining a confrontation that feels real enough to stimulate your fight or flight response, tune into your body and relax.

When we become present, we remove the drama associated with past events and the "scenario building" we use to predict future outcomes. Making the simple, conscious choice to engage the senses and become present in the moment shifts our perceptions and quiets our minds. When the mind is quiet, we feel at ease. When we feel at ease our bodies use less energy and operate more efficiently.

Pain and stress are the only ways our bodies can communicate about a problem in our systems. If we ignore these messages, the stress and pain will simply increase until we are forced to pay attention. But if we use our rising pain or stress levels to direct us towards our senses and present moment awareness, we attune ourselves to our body.

The next time you feel yourself stressing or in pain, try these steps in rapid order:

- 1 Wiggle your toes** and bring your awareness down through your body. Move your fingers, hands, arms, and legs a little. Roll your neck and feel your head connected to your neck as you move.
- 2 Consciously focus your mind** on the stress-inducing subject. As you bring the subject into your awareness feel where the stress goes. Do you begin tightening your jaw, neck, shoulders, chest, or some other body part?
- 3 Quantify the stress level**, in this moment, on a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being no stress and 10 being immense stress.
- 4 Pick up an object around you**, and really concentrate on your finger tips as you feel the texture and temperature.
- 5 Look closely** at the object, what are its shape, color, and size?
- 6 Hold the object** to your nose, does it have a smell?
- 7 Tap the object** and listen to the sound it makes.
- 8 If the object** is something you can taste, notice what it feels like on your tongue.
- 9 Once again**, feel the object in your fingertips.
- 10 Measure the stress level** again, 0 to 10. Do you notice a change?

When we listen to our bodies' urgings and respond with an effective reaction, we are able to resolve stress responses quickly. If we ignore the urgings or begin overreacting to them, we lose the ability to think clearly or respond effectively. So, next time you feel stress or pain rising, simply pick up an object and focus the senses. You will be amazed by the results.

## CONNECT TO LEAD

# Defining your Mission Essential Task List

What must you or your organization do to make money and meet your mission?

SCOTT MANN

I have a friend, Jerry, who works with leaders all over the country. He helps corporate leaders and Fortune 100 companies prepare to win and win on purpose. He is really talented in that. Right out of the gate, he sits down with the leadership and he says, "What is it that rings the bell for your organization? What are the things that if you don't do, money doesn't come in? You don't achieve your mission."

He asked me that same question as I was coming out of the military six years ago. "What rings the bell for Rooftop Leadership?"

That really struck me because, at that point, my wife and I hadn't really discussed it. And it took me back to a very similar term that we use in the military. Until then, I had not brought this term forward into the civilian world. We call it the METL, the mission essential task list.

Every organization in the military has one at the higher levels. The 7th Special Forces Group where I served had a METL. That mission essential task list is reduced to a handful of absolutely critical tasks that you must do to be successful at your mission.

For example, 7th Special Forces Group must be able to conduct unconventional warfare. 7th Special Forces Group must be able to conduct foreign internal defense and direct action missions. These are critical tasks that we must do down range in Central and South America as well as rural Afghanistan. If we don't do, the nation suffers. They're that important.

Everything else is built around those tasks. The supporting tasks for the METL would be transporting our equipment and our people overseas, training support, securing supplies and resources. There are all kinds of supporting tasks that are extremely important, but the mission essential task list is at the epicenter of what our organization does. And as my friend Jerry says, these things "ring the bell."

As I worked with Jerry on this, what I found was that in order to achieve our mission of "restoring responsible servant leadership to America," Rooftop Leadership must:

1. Help corporate clients and entrepreneurs find a way to make better human connections.
2. Present from the stage.

**The mission essential task list is at the epicenter of what our organization does.**

3. Consult with coaching clients.

That's our METL. Those are the things that ring the bell for our company.

Getting clear on that changed everything in our business. It helped me determine where my focus had to be and the focus of my team had to be. Identifying your METL can change your business as well.

I want you to build the METL for your organization. Whether you're a nonprofit, a small business, or a Fortune 100 company, ask what are your core tasks that feed your mission? What are the things that ring the bell?

I believe you should be collaborative in the development of your mission essential task list. I've found that the development of your mission essential task list is not as effective if you do it alone. You need your key leaders in the room. You need the

thoughts and ideas of the relevant people in your organization.

Does it make the conversation harder? Absolutely.

But if you leave them out of this process, then they're not going to buy into the METL.

Ask them this question: "What rings the bell for our organization? What must we absolutely do at the highest level to ensure that we are successful as an organization?" If you have a mission statement, look at it. Put it on the wall where it's staring back at you. Nesting into that mission, what are the mission essential tasks that you must do?

I suggest you keep it at three to five. Anything beyond that becomes a supporting task of your METL.

Under each task of your METL, note those supporting tasks that must be accomplished to achieve your METL. What are the things that need to happen to deliver on your three to five ring-the-bell tasks? Build those out.

For example, if one of my METL tasks is that we must be able to deliver keynotes from the stage on leadership, then what are the supporting tasks? We must have an effective marketing plan. We must be able to have audiovisual in place. We must be able to coordinate in real time with the hosts. All of those supporting tasks need to be nested in a sequenced way for us build out our METL. That becomes how we operate and everybody can rally around that.

My "try this" challenge for you is to develop, in a collaborative way, your own organizational METL. Early in the year is a great time to do it. You'll be amazed at the conversation that comes out of that, the connection that you make with your team, and the unified vision that you have.

A mission essential task list can really add clarity and purpose to where you're going with your organization.

Give it a try. Determine what "rings the bell." Thanks for what you do. And I'll see you on the rooftop.

Scott Mann is a former Green Beret who specialized in unconventional, high-impact missions and relationship building. He is the founder of Rooftop Leadership and appears frequently on TV and many syndicated radio programs. For more information, visit [RooftopLeadership.com](http://RooftopLeadership.com)



OFLS/SHUTTERSTOCK

# The Most Important Factor in Leading a Fulfilling Life

A cluttered life can make it hard to focus on what really matters

JAY HARRINGTON

Working out at the gym got a lot easier the day I realized the sweat served a higher purpose. I'm 43, and have three kids under 8 years old, so if I want to be around—healthy and active—for my grandchildren, I better put the work in now or face regret later.

Activities that aren't inherently joyful, like clocking time on a treadmill, get better when done in service of something bigger.

The same can be said of cleaning out one's closet. Satisfying, yes, but the buzz is too fleeting to be self-sustaining. It's only when decluttering is reframed as a piece of a larger, more significant puzzle that it sticks.

Without a bigger picture in mind, our actions are often dictated by "What's more pleasurable in the moment?" rather than "What's better in the long term?" In the moment, the consequences of most choices are insignificant. It makes little difference, on a particular day, if you opt to stay on the couch rather than hitting the gym, but over the course of a year, the

**First, decide what you want. Then, decide—every day, in ways big and small—how to get there. Have the ends in mind, and the means will become clear.**

negative results from this repeated decision will compound.

An intentional life is one marked by long-term thinking that leads to beneficial short-term decision-making. First, decide what you want. Then, decide—every day, in ways big and small—how to get there. Have the ends in mind, and the means will become clear.

Determining the ends, however, is not always easy.

What makes Netflix so appealing—the quantity of programming—also makes it hard to decide what show to watch. The same quandary applies to life, but the stakes are obviously far greater. There are countless ways to live, values to prioritize, and experiences to optimize. However, because there's no clear path to follow despite the abundance of options, it's easy to bounce aimlessly through life like a tumbleweed.

One of the best ways to live a fulfilling, intentional life, and direct one's actions toward a beneficial end, is to adopt an "ism" operating system. Some "isms," such as materialism and consumerism, have proven to be harmful and should be avoided. Others, such as minimalism, lead to smart decision-making, contentment,

and happiness.

Years ago, when I first stumbled across the notion of minimalism, I bought into the idea that a life with less could lead to more. Like many, I began my journey by eliminating the low hanging fruit of plentiful and obvious excesses from my life. Over time, despite how satisfying purging could be, I came to realize that minimalism is not an end in itself. The process of decluttering, detaching, and de-emphasizing materialism is simply a step on the road toward something more significant. Minimalism is a mechanism to create space and time for what really matters.

**The Real Secret to Happiness**

For thousands of years, people have grappled with the big question of "What really matters?" What, among the many alternative ways we can choose to spend our finite time, will bring us happiness?

Recently, another batch of smart people have attempted to answer these eternal questions, and their conclusion reinforces something that most of us intuit.

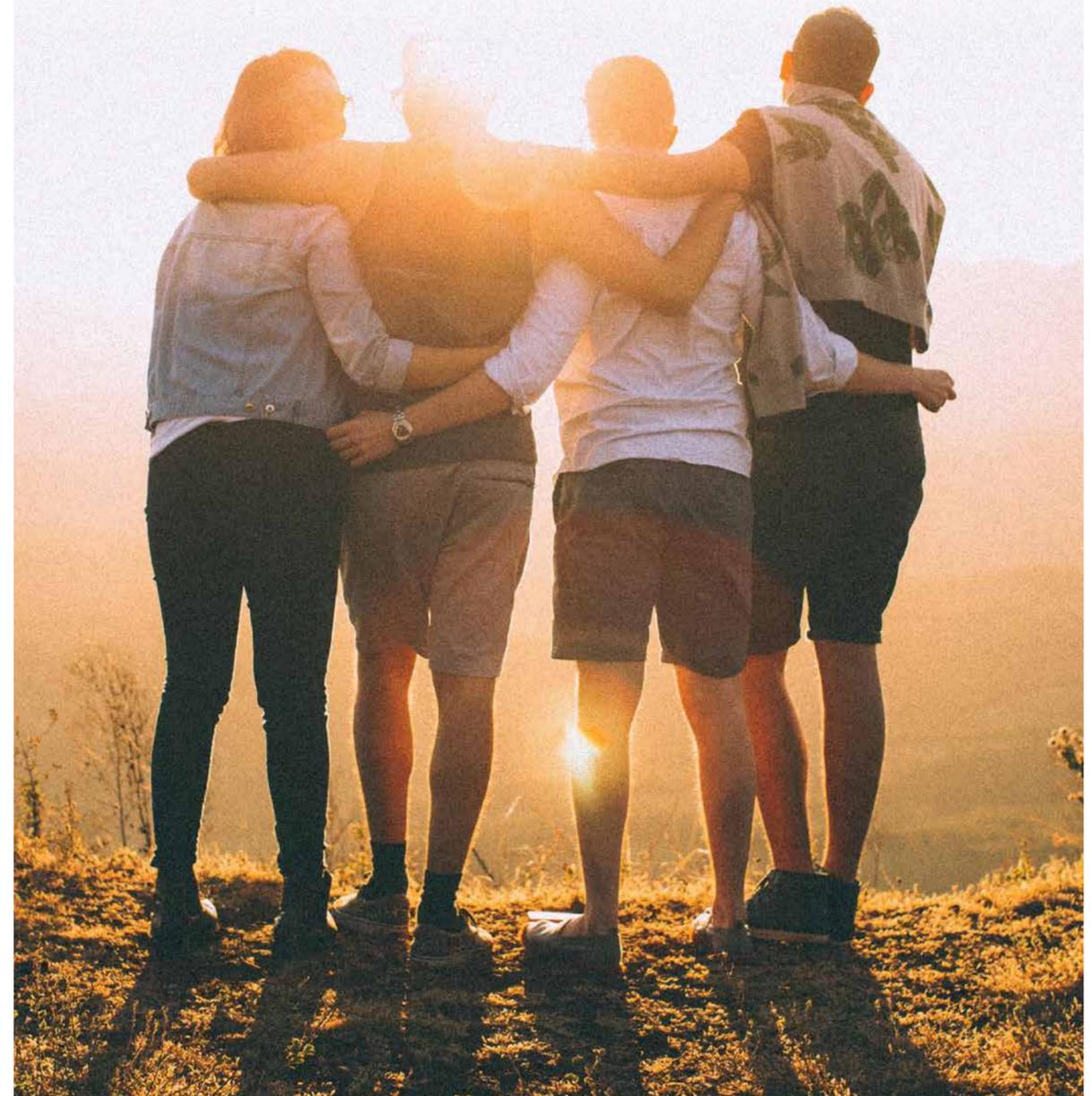
Continued on Page 9

Cultivate a group of friends in which your desired behavior is the normal behavior.

What kind of person do you want to be?

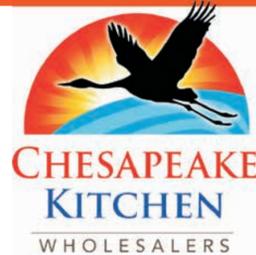
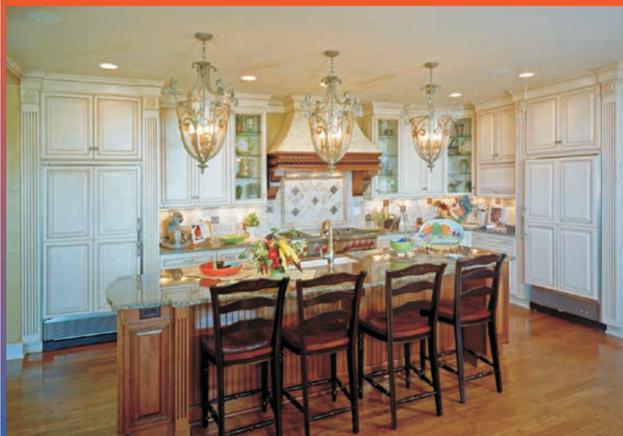
Find people who exemplify the values and lifestyles you aspire to.

HELENA LOPES/UNSPLASH



Moving toward your highest goals in life goes much better if the people around you want the same things.

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TRUTH AND TRADITION

## Exercise Can Fast-Track Your Workplace Well-Being

TYLER OLSON/SHUTTERSTOCK



Exercise can give us the positive emotions, mental engagement, and accomplishments that are crucial to well-being.

### RHI WILLMOT

Exercise has been found to reduce stress, increase positive mood, decrease anxiety and alleviate depression. But you may not know that the emotional well-being associated with exercise is also linked to key attributes that can help us while we work.

One of the most established of well-being frameworks, PERMA, states that of the many ways to experience happiness, five areas are most important: positive emotions, mental engagement, strong relationships, meaning in life, and accomplishing goals. At face value, achieving all five may seem a colossal task. But many activities from tennis to triathlons, squash to swimming, can help us clinch all five at once. Evidence suggests that, as a result, we are more likely to avoid job burnout, sleep more easily and be more engaged at work.

### The 'runner's high' is at the peak of positive emotion.

#### 1. Positive Emotions

The "runner's high" is at the peak of positive emotion. While this euphoric feeling is most typically linked to pounding the pavements, it can be experienced via any activity which works both muscles and heart.

The high comes from endorphins—the body's natural painkiller—being made available in the areas of the brain which process mood and emotion. Understood as an evolutionary advantage, the high enables us to keep moving even when our muscles are tired, and even a short burst of this positive feeling can help us feel more energized. So next time you're feeling low, try squeezing in some physical activity around work. It could give you a morning boost or stave off the post-lunch crash.

#### 2. Mental Engagement

Being in the zone is no easy task in a distracting workplace. Scientifically known as "flow", this engagement level is the optimal amount of challenge required for personal growth. The Goldilocks of arousal, flow occurs when a task is sufficiently difficult to avoid boredom, but not so hard that we become overwhelmed. The flow experience is associated with decreased activity in the posterior cingulate cortex—an area of the brain responsible for our sense of self. So flow literally allows us to lose ourselves in the moment.

Physical activities which provide a just-manageable challenge are great for getting into the flow. Water-based sports, like sailing, swimming or rowing, have the added benefit that they prevent the use of distracting technology. Detaching from work in this way gives us time to recharge, meaning we can return with maximum productivity.

#### 3. Strong Relationships

While competitive sport can seem cut-throat, the

shared pain of limit-busting events can stimulate compassion, and the more we suffer personally, the better we empathize with others. This not only strengthens our social skills but also manifests in directing greater kindness to ourselves. Research indicates that self-compassion is a more effective strategy than self-criticism when we face difficulty. So, practicing kind self-talk during sport can enable a more positive response to previously unbeatable workplace challenges.

#### 4. Meaning in Life

A philosophically foggy concept, meaning in life has been scientifically pinned down as having three components: purpose (core goals and aspirations), significance (impact beyond the trivial and immediate), and coherence (understanding own values and life story). Meaning in life can provide a stable foundation when we face adversity, and helps us to make sense of troubling events. Importantly, some studies have found that a stronger sense of purpose is associated with moving more.

#### 5. Accomplishments

The value of feeling competent and successful is well known, but greater attention has recently been devoted to the manner in which we interpret success. Research into growth and fixed mindsets suggests that whether we believe ability can change (growth) or not (fixed) is central to our well-being.

Those with a growth mindset are more likely to work on developing their skills, embrace feedback as an opportunity to learn, and use setbacks to adapt and thrive. On the other hand, those with a fixed mindset fear failure, take feedback personally, and are discouraged by bumps in the road.

But this can change. Researchers have found that a person's mindset can be influenced by something as simple as greater self-awareness. All kinds of physical activities can objectively show us we can achieve goals that at first seemed out of reach.

You might think that you'll never be able to lift a certain weight, for example, but persist, and you will see how strong—both mentally and physically—you truly are.

Whether we believe ability can change or not is central to our wellbeing.

You don't need to be super fit, or even a regular gym-goer to benefit from the well-being perks that come with exercise. Getting active a few times a week can be enough to not only transform your physical fitness but also boost your mood and performance, inside and outside of work.

Rhi Willmot is a researcher in behavioral and positive psychology at Bangor University in the UK. This article was first published on The Conversation.

## The Most Important Factor in Leading a Fulfilling Life

Continued from Page 7

According to Harvard's Grant and Glueck Study, which tracked more than 700 participants over the course of 75 years, the key to long-term happiness and fulfillment comes down to a single factor: the quality of our relationships.

The root of happiness is not money, fame, or good looks—it's the people we choose to surround ourselves with and how well we nurture our relationships with them.

Robert Waldinger, director of the Harvard Study of Adult Development, explained that: "The clearest message that we get from this 75-year study is this: Good relationships keep us happier and healthier. Period."

As with most things in life, when it comes to building good relationships, quality is more important than quantity. Indeed, practicing minimalism is as important in curating relationships as it is in decluttering a closet.

In the 1990s, British anthropologist and researcher Robin Dunbar determined that we are only capable of having a finite number of people in our social sphere—150 at most—due to the size of our brains. Any more, and it becomes impossible to manage one's social network. This theory is known as "Dunbar's Number."

Dunbar went on to conclude that while we can form, at most, 150 loose relationships, we only have the capacity to form close, meaningful relationships with approximately five individuals.

The takeaways from the Grant & Glueck Study, and Robin Dunbar's research are both hopeful and daunting. Hopeful in the sense that our capacity to lead happy, fulfilling lives rests on our capacity to forge close bonds with merely five individuals. Daunting in that most can appreciate the challenge posed by nurturing just one close relationship over a lifetime.

Nonetheless, despite how hard it may be, the reward is worth it. As Booker T. Washington once said, "Nothing ever comes to one, that is worth having, except as a result of hard work."

### The Payoff From Positive Relationships

The benefits of having close, healthy relationships with members of one's immediate family are self-evident. A safe, secure, and loving family results in happy, independent children and parents who derive the satisfaction of having completed a job well done. The payoff from social and professional relationships may be less obvious, but are no less important. Consider the following historical examples of people leveraging close relationships into meaningful success:

In the 1920s, Ernest Hemingway moved to Paris to join a group of expatriate, "Lost Generation" writers, including Gertrude Stein and F. Scott Fitzgerald, who had taken up residence in the Left Bank. They hung out at cafes, argued about politics, caroused late into the nights on the streets of Paris, and produced some of the greatest works of literature of the 20th Century.

In the 1970s, young and brash directors Francis Coppola, Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, and Brian

An intentional life is one marked by long-term thinking that leads to beneficial short-term decision-making.

De Palma, known as the "Movie Brats," took Hollywood by storm. They competed, collaborated, shared resources, worked on each other's films, gave critical feedback, and formed friendships. They transformed an industry because of, not despite, one another.

A "tribe" of inspiring and supportive people can lift you up, hold you accountable, and inspire you to live to your greatest potential. As motivational speaker Jim Rohn famously observed, we are the average of the five people we spend the most time with. So choose wisely.

Implicit in this principle, of course, is the fact that it works both ways. If you fail to choose wisely, and surround yourself with people who exhibit behaviors and habits that are inconsistent with your own desires, you'll have a hard time bucking the group's standards—as unappealing as they may be.

For example, if you desire to lead a healthy and active lifestyle, you'll be hard pressed to do so if your inner circle consists of couch potato friends who spend their days playing video games and eating junk food. On the other hand, if your friends are physically fit, you stand a much greater chance of being fit yourself because the cultural norms of your group will influence your own behavior. Who you spend the most time with is who you are.

### Find the Tribe that's Right for You

Our instincts to fit in have ancient roots. For thousands of years, humans have lived in tribes in which it was essential to conform. To buck the tribe was to be shunned or cast out altogether, leading to great hardship. Modern culture is different, but from fraternities and sororities to sports teams and social groups, tribes still exist and still enforce social norms.

In this environment, faced with the expectations of a tribe, you have a few options: (1) conform to the rules of the tribe, (2) resist, or (3) find a new one.

There's nothing inherently wrong with conforming to a tribe's social norms—so long as those norms align with your own desires. If you're living out of alignment with your desired values, and those around you are exemplifying the lifestyle you want to live, then the quickest way to get what you want is to surrender to the group's standards. But often the opposite is true—you want something different than what the group demands. In this scenario, surrendering to the group is sacrificing the life you desire.

Another option is to resist the group, but this path is perilous. It's hard enough to change one's own thoughts and behaviors. Why take on the nearly impossible task of trying to change someone else's?

The third way is to practice relationship minimalism, which is not always the path of least resistance but is certainly the path of greatest benefit. Most people enter into relationships too haphazardly or maintain existing ones by default. They rely on proximity or convenience to guide relationship decision-making, or are gripped by the inertia of the status quo.

Finding the tribe that's right for you is not always easy. It requires careful consideration. Often it means making difficult decisions to part ways with those

who don't align with your values. But isn't the payoff of lifelong happiness and fulfillment worth it?

There are people out there who can bring real joy to your life, who you can share meaningful experiences with, and who will be there to lift you up when you need it. Cultivate a group of friends in which your desired behavior is the normal behavior. Surround yourself with people who are leading lives you want to live.

First, use minimalism to shed the extraneous excesses that clutter your home and your mind. Cast aside harmful "isms" that are detracting, not adding, value to your life and the lives of those around you. This will create the space and time necessary to tackle life's more important issues.

Second, leverage your newfound mental bandwidth to think deeply about how you want to live your life. How do you want to spend your time? What makes you happy? What kind of person do you want to be?

Third, make the hard decisions necessary to part ways with toxic people in your life, and scale back ambivalent relationships to make room for new,

better-aligned ones.

Fourth, find people who exemplify the values and lifestyles you aspire to. Clusters of such people may already have formed each other and formed groups—centered around the activities and experiences that are consistent with your desires. Begin to engage.

Fifth, take frequent, consistent steps to strengthen budding relationships with members of your newfound tribe. Show up. Give back. Express gratitude. Let your guard down. Be generous. Find your people, then never take them for granted. You'll become a transformed and better person when you surround yourself with people who push, prod, and encourage you to reach new heights.

Give of yourself to others who inspire you and a delightful thing will happen: you'll get so much more than you could ever imagine in return.

Jay Harrington is an author, lawyer-turned-entrepreneur, and runs a northern Michigan-inspired lifestyle brand called Life and Whim. This article was first published on *Becoming Minimalist*.

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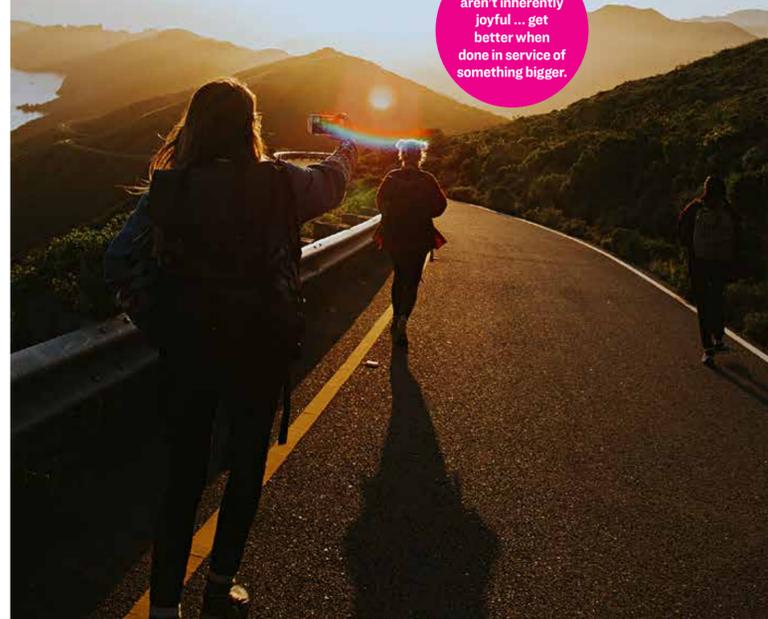
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Activities that aren't inherently joyful... get better when done in service of something bigger.



# CocaCola's Vitaminwater Is a Bad Idea

ADDA BJARNADOTTIR

Vitaminwater has become increasingly popular. It contains added vitamins and minerals and is marketed as healthy.

However, some Vitaminwater products are loaded with added sugar, which can be unhealthy when consumed in excess.

Additionally, few people are deficient in the nutrients added to Vitaminwater.

Here are 5 reasons why Vitaminwater may be bad for your health.

## What Is Vitaminwater?

Vitaminwater is a beverage brand owned by the Coca-Cola Company.

There are many varieties, each with an attractive name like "focus," "endurance," "refresh," and "essential."

As its name indicates, Vitaminwater is water enriched with vitamins and minerals. Coca-Cola claims it adds natural colors and flavors as well.

However, Vitaminwater is also loaded with added sugar—particularly fructose, which is linked to various health problems when consumed in excess.

Vitaminwater also has a "Zero" product line that has no added sugar. Instead, it is sweetened with erythritol and stevia. The first three sections of this article do not apply to Vitaminwater Zero.

## 1. High in Harmful Component of Sugar

One 20-ounce (591-ml) bottle of Vitaminwater contains about 120 calories and 32 grams of sugar—about 50 percent less than a regular Coke.

However, the type of sugar used varies between countries.

In the United States, Vitaminwater is sweetened with crystalline fructose and sucrose, also called cane sugar—while sucrose is the main sweetener in other countries.

Crystalline fructose is worse for your health, as it's almost pure fructose—over 98 percent. On the other hand, sucrose is half glucose and half fructose.

A closer look reveals that a bottle of Vitaminwater in the United States may harbor the same amount of fructose as a bottle of regular Coke. That is because the majority of the sugar in U.S. Vitaminwater is in the form of pure fructose, while fructose comprises only half of the sugar content of Coke.

Many studies suggest that fructose—not glucose—is the main harmful component of added sugar.

## 2. Highly Fattening Due to Added Sugars

When it comes to weight gain or weight loss,

what you drink is just as important as what you eat.

When you consume calories from liquid sugar, your body does not compensate by making you eat less of other foods.

The calories from these sugar-sweetened drinks then pile on top of everything you eat. Over time, this can lead to weight gain, increased risk of obesity, and other related diseases.

Consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is among the world's strongest risk factors for obesity, with some studies showing up to a 60 percent increased risk of obesity in children for each daily serving.

There is no reason why Vitaminwater should be any different. It is just another sugary beverage.

## 3. Increased Risk of Many Diseases

Health experts agree that added sugar plays a key role in modern epidemics of obesity and chronic diseases.

It's recommended not to consume more than 10 percent of your total daily calories in the form of added sugars—preferable less than 5 percent.

For a 2,500-calorie diet, this equals 62 or 31 grams of added sugar, respectively.

As one bottle of Vitaminwater supplies 32 grams of added sugar, it's 50–100 percent of your recommended upper limit.

Added sugar is strongly associated with type 2 diabetes, tooth decay, heart disease, metabolic syndrome, and even cancer.

This applies mainly to fructose, which can only be metabolized in significant amounts by your liver.

Excess fructose consumption may increase your blood cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure, insulin resistance, fat buildup around your organs, and risk of fatty liver disease.

These are major risk factors for heart disease, diabetes, and obesity.

Keep in mind that this does not apply to small amounts of fructose you get from fruit. Due to its water and fiber content, fruit has a low energy density—making it difficult to obtain too much fructose from food.

## 4. Doesn't Supply Necessary Nutrients

All types of Vitaminwater contain B vitamins at 50–120 percent of the reference daily intake (RDI) and vitamin C at 50–150 percent of the RDI.

Some types also boast smaller amounts of vitamins A and E, as well as the minerals potassium, magnesium, manganese, zinc and chromium.

Vitamins B and C are water-soluble vitamins that are almost never lacking in the average person's diet.

Consuming excess amounts of these vitamins does not provide any health benefits. Your body does not store them but simply excretes them via urine.

That said, certain subgroups of people may be lacking in some of these vitamins and minerals—especially B12 and folate.

However, it's counterproductive to drink unhealthy, sugary beverages to get these nutrients.

If you're deficient, eat whole foods or take supplements instead.

## 5. Excess Micronutrients May Cause Harm

When it comes to nutrition, more is not always better.

Vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants are absolutely crucial as part of a healthy diet.

They may improve health and help prevent a range of diseases, including heart disease and cancer.

However, supplementing with vitamins or antioxidants has not been linked with the same health benefits.

In fact, supplementing with some antioxidants and vitamins, such as vitamins A and E, may increase your risk of premature death.

Although Vitaminwater does not have excessive amounts of these vitamins on its own, it does provide considerable amounts; 25–50 percent of the RDI for each vitamin.

When you add 25–50 percent of the RDI on top of what you're already getting from food, you could reach excessive amounts.

Not only are the micronutrients in Vitaminwater unnecessary for most people, but they may also be dangerous if they're bumping your intake to harmful levels.

## The Bottom Line

Though Vitaminwater may seem like a great beverage to add to your diet, it's no more than a dangerous fad.

When the Coca-Cola Company was sued for deceptive and unsubstantiated health claims about Vitaminwater, its lawyers suggested that "no consumer could reasonably be misled into thinking Vitaminwater [is] a healthy beverage."

The problem is that many people do fall for marketing claims.

Most people don't read ingredient labels and don't realize how unethical and ruthless junk-food conglomerates can be.

Despite the marketing tactics, Vitaminwater is an unhealthy beverage that you should avoid or only drink on special occasions.

At best, it is a slightly less bad version of Coke.

Adda Bjarnadottir holds a bachelor's and a master's degree in human nutrition from the University of Iceland. This article was originally published on Healthline.

A bottle of Vitaminwater in the United States may harbor the same amount of fructose as a bottle of regular Coke.



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# Food Then and Now: How Nutrition Has Changed

A loss of nutrients and processed food has transformed our diets

JILL ETTINGER

Within the last half century, our food has drastically changed. Things we eat now are not the same as they once were. What happened? How has our nutrition changed?

## Meat, Eggs, and Dairy

Factory farmed animal products, a huge industry today, were essentially inconceivable fewer than 100 years ago.

If you didn't live in a rural setting where you likely raised your own animals, the milkman delivered dairy products from a not so far away dairy.

Meat and poultry could be purchased from a

local butcher who may have even known the animals personally. Growth hormones, antibiotics, and genetically modified feed were never fed to animals. Our recent ancestors were eating the healthiest kinds of animal products, those raised on grass, outdoors and hopefully, with a lot of human love too.

Nowadays, of course, that's not the case. More than 10 billion animals will be raised in American factories this year. Most will never see daylight, except on their way to slaughter. They'll live in dark, tiny, and unsanitary conditions where diseases spread rapidly. They'll eat unnatural foods, like genetically modified corn, that are then loaded with chemicals and drugs that directly impact the humans who eat those animals.

While some farm animals have been bred for "tastier" cuts of meat or sweeter milk, the drugs they are pumped with diminish their nutrient absorption which also decreases our ability to extract those nutrients. To eat like your grandparents, look for organic, grass-fed meat, eggs, and dairy. It's even better if you can find a local source, too.

## Fruits and Vegetables

Conventionally raised produce contains far fewer vitamins and minerals than it did a half-century ago. You can credit pesticides and chemical fertilizers with disrupting soil quality, and mono-crop industrial agriculture for depleting it of vital nutrients. Run-off from those gnarly animal factory farms pollutes soil

and water making foodborne illness risks more severe, too.

Even organic options are still battling 50 years of depleted soil. It's an uphill battle, but not a losing one. One farmer, Biounitrient Food Association director, Dan Kittredge, hopes to change the criteria for success in farming from high yield to higher nutrient content. He's working with farmers directly to help them battle depleted soil while improving product yields and flavor.

Our grandparents and great-grandparents grew up when organic farming was essentially the norm. Crops were cycled to ensure the soil stayed healthy. Now farmers rely on chemical fertilizers, not healthy soil, to make crops grow. That's why it's so important that we support organic farmers, local growers and grow our own. Because dependence on these inputs isn't just unhealthy, it's also a food security risk.

## Processed Foods

Meals were cornerstones of our culture in a much different way back in the old days, and you see a lot of that in old films. But what you don't see is any junk food. Not in the sense that we eat it today. Even when there is a soda fountain scene—the drinks are considerably smaller, and you had to go to the pharmacy or soda shop to get one. People still ate real food. It was made from scratch. Ingredients were pronounceable.

Things began to change after the 1950s when the idea of shortcuts and faster foods became the norm. Today, our processed foods resemble anything but their original ingredients. Nearly 80 percent of all processed foods in the United States contain genetically modified ingredients. They're also full of artificial colors, flavors, and sweeteners. They're stabilized with trans fats (at least until a proposed FDA ban takes hold) and chemical preservatives and then packaged in plastics that have been known to cause cancer and birth defects.

In his book "Food Rules", author and food expert Michael Pollan writes that the only junk food we should eat should be what we make ourselves. If we can make that type of commitment to eliminate processed fast junk food except for the occasion that we want to make a Twinkie from scratch, we should be able to maintain the healthy relationship with food our ancestors took for granted.

Jill Ettinger is a freelance journalist and marketing specialist primarily focused on the organic and natural industries. This article was originally published on NaturallySavvy.com



PABLO MERCHAN MONTES/UNSPLASH

A dinner out will often be the kind of processed industrial food most of us would be better off avoiding.

# Thoughts of Love Buffer Blood Pressure Against Stress

New research provides more evidence that committed relationships good for health

ALEXIS BLUE

When facing a stressful situation, thinking about your romantic partner may help keep your blood pressure under control just as effectively as actually having them in the room with you.

For a new study, researchers asked 102 participants to complete a stressful task—submerging one foot into 3 inches of cold water ranging from 38 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Researchers measured the participants' blood pressure, heart rate, and heart rate variability before, during, and after the task.

Researchers randomly assigned the participants, all of whom were in committed romantic relationships, to one of three conditions when completing the task. They either had their significant other sitting quietly in the room with them during the task; or they had to think about their romantic partner as a source of support during the task; or they had to think about their day during the task.

Those who had their partner physically present in the room or who thought about their partner had a lower blood pressure response to the stress of the cold water than the participants in the control group, who had been instructed to think about their day. Heart rate and heart rate variability did not vary between the three groups.

The effect on blood pressure reactivity was just as powerful whether the partner



CHRISTIANA RIVERS/UNSPLASH

The power of love can combat stress, even if a loved one isn't there, researchers have found.

was physically present or participants merely thought of them.

Although previous studies have suggested that having a partner present or visualizing a partner can help manage the body's physiological response to stress, the new study suggests that the two things are equally effective—at least

when it comes to blood pressure reactivity.

The findings may help explain, in part, why high-quality romantic relationships are consistently associated with positive health outcomes in the scientific literature, says coauthor Kyle Bourassa, a psychology doctoral student at the University of Arizona.

“One way being in a romantic relationship might support people's health is through allowing people to better cope with stress.”

Kyle Bourassa, coauthor, University of Arizona

“This suggests that one way being in a romantic relationship might support people's health is through allowing people to better cope with stress and lower levels of cardiovascular reactivity to stress across the day,” Bourassa says. “And it appears that thinking of your partner as a source of support can be just as powerful as actually having them present.”

The study participants in Bourassa's research were college undergraduates in committed relationships. Future studies should look at members of the general community in varying age ranges, Bourassa says.

If researchers can replicate the findings, they could have implications for those facing everyday stressful situations, says Bourassa.

“Life is full of stress, and one critical way we can manage this stress is through our relationships—either with our partner directly or by calling on a mental image of that person,” Bourassa says. “There are many situations, including at work, with school exams, or even during medical procedures, where we would benefit from limiting our degree of blood pressure reactivity, and these findings suggest that a relational approach to doing so can be quite powerful.”

The research appears in the journal *Psychophysiology*.

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# How a Healthy Gut Can Help Manage Your Anxiety

One writer shares her tips for managing her mental wellbeing through gut health

MICHELLE HOOVER

Ever since I was young, I've struggled with anxiety.

I went through periods of unexplainable and utterly terrifying panic attacks; I held onto irrational fears; and I found myself holding back in certain areas of my life due to limiting beliefs.

Only recently did I discover that the root of the majority of my anxiety was related to my undiagnosed obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). After receiving my OCD diagnosis and undergoing cognitive behavior therapy, I've seen dramatic improvements. However, though my ongoing therapy has been a crucial part of my mental health journey, it's only one piece of the puzzle. Looking after my gut health has also played a tremendous role. By adding certain foods to my diet, like probiotics and high-fiber foods, and focusing on good digestion, I've been able to work toward balancing my anxiety and looking after my overall mental well-being.

Below are my top three strategies for supporting my gut health, and, in return, my mental health.

## Revamping My Diet

Knowing which foods can contribute to a healthy gut and which can potentially cause problems is a great place to start. Try replacing highly processed, high-sugar, and high-fat foods with various whole foods that offer myriad benefits. These foods include:

- Collagen-boosting foods. Foods like bone broth and salmon can help protect your intestinal wall and improve digestion.
- High-fiber foods. Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, oats, peas, avocados, pears, bananas, and berries are full of fiber, which aids in healthy digestion.
- Foods high in omega-3 fatty acids. Salmon, mackerel, and flax seeds are packed with omega-3s, which may help reduce inflammation and in turn help improve your digestion.

## Eat Probiotics and Prebiotic-Rich Foods

In the same vein, adding probiotics and prebiotic-rich foods to your diet can also help you take care of your gut. These foods can help influence the balance of good bacteria in your microbiome, otherwise known as gut flora.

Probiotic foods can help add diversity to your gut, while foods high in prebiotics help feed your good gut bacteria.

## Focus on Good Digestion

Good digestion is a crucial piece of the puzzle when it comes to gut health. In order to digest, we need to be in a parasympathetic, or “rest and digest,” state.

Without being in this relaxed state, we're unable to produce the gastric juices that properly absorb our food. This means we aren't absorbing the nutrients, vitamins, and minerals needed to support a healthy body and brain.



PABLO MERCHAN MONTES/UNSPLASH

Eating whole foods like fruits and vegetables can foster good gut health and help with mental well-being.

In order to get to this restful state, try taking a few moments to practice some deep breathing before eating. And if you need a bit of guidance, there are apps, websites, and books that can help.

## The Bottom Line

Gut health is important for a number of reasons, including your mental health. For me, while attending therapy has helped immensely with my anxiety, OCD, and overall mental well-being, looking after my gut health has also helped me manage my symptoms.

So, whether you're working toward a

healthy gut or improving your mental well-being, consider adding one or all three of these suggestions to your diet and routine.

Michelle Hoover is a nutritional therapy practitioner. After being diagnosed with Hashimoto disease as a teen, Hoover turned to nutritional therapy, a real-food paleo/AIP template, and lifestyle changes to help manage her autoimmune disease and naturally heal her body. She runs the blog *Unbound Wellness*. This article was originally published on Healthline.

## TRY ADDING SOME OF THE FOLLOWING FOODS TO YOUR DAILY DIET:

### Prebiotic-Rich Foods

- dandelion greens
- jicama
- asparagus
- chicory root
- onions
- garlic
- leeks



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### Probiotic Foods

- sauerkraut
- kefir
- kimchi
- kombucha
- apple cider vinegar
- kvass
- high-quality yogurt



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WISE HABITS

# The Rule of the Edge

Growth can require pushing ourselves toward our limits—most of the time

LEO BABAUTA

In all of my many challenges, habit changes, book writing, and learning, I've found one thing to be the most powerfully beneficial to all growth.

I call it the "Rule of the Edge."  
Here's the rule: practice at your edge most of the time.

Go to the edge of discomfort, just to the edge of what is difficult for you, to where you are pushing your boundaries a bit.

If you're practicing music, and you only practice the scales, after awhile doing the scales is too easy. Sure, it's still good practice, but you will have to push to something that's more challenging to keep progressing.

If you exercise, easy exercise is a good thing, but you also need to push yourself. Just a bit.

Your edge isn't pushing yourself until you're ready to collapse. It's not pushing to injury, or to where you can't practice tomorrow. It's not studying until your brain melts.

Go to the edge, but don't dive off.  
And when I say, "Practice at your edge most of the time," notice the phrase "most of the time." You shouldn't be at your edge all the time. It's exhausting, and can take a lot of focus. Instead, try to be there more than half the time. Don't be lazy, but also give yourself some easy practice.

There's a lot of value in easy practice—it cements your learning, and keeps you sharp and in shape. It locks in the easy stuff and can be a lot of fun.

You can also experiment with pushing a little past your edge, if you have the experience to know that it's safe. It might be best to do this under supervision of a teacher or trainer if you're unsure.

So mix it up. More than half of your practice should be at your edge, but anywhere from 20-40 percent of your practice should be easy stuff. A blend is best.

**What Edge Training Looks Like in Practice**

Here's how this kind of edge practice might work in real life:

- If you're practicing yoga, you might do an hour-long practice where about 60 percent of the poses (roughly) are challenging for you (but not so challenging that you'll be injured or exhausted), and the



rest are easy ones that allow you to focus on your breath and recover from the edge poses.

- If you're running, you'll mix up your running days—four days will be challenging but not crazy, and some with easy ones thrown in between. And a rest day or two, of course.
- If you're learning chess or go, you'll do problems or drills that are hard for you, and also a bunch of easy ones. The easy ones cement the patterns. The edge ones teach you new patterns.
- If you're creating a habit, like learning to meditate, start with just short meditations of 2-5 minutes. Eventually, you'll want to do longer meditations of 10 minutes, 20 minutes, or even more. Find the spot that's your edge. Mixing in some shorter, easier



With practice, your edge can even be a place where you find comfort. A sense of ease and joy at the deliciousness of the groundlessness.

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

Easy exercise is a good thing, but you also need to push yourself. Go to the edge, but don't dive off.

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