THE EPOCH TIMES

MIND & BODY

MARIA LUPAN/UNSPLASH

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KEY WAYS SLEEP IS GOOD FOR *Your Relationships*

New research highlights how sleep benefits our social lives

JILL SUTTIE

I'm a sleep lover. I like going to bed at the same time every night and getting a full night's sleep. Deprive me of just one hour of blessed sleep, and things quickly go downhill–just ask my husband. I become bad company–snarky and irritable, hardly able to keep up my end of a conversation, let alone negotiate difficult issues. Sleep is important for our health and helps our bodies function at their best. It's also key to our productivity, helping us stay fresh and focused the following day. But does getting a good night's sleep affect our relationships, too? In line with my own experiences, some relatively new research suggests that sleep does have positive social consequences. What we're learning about the connection between sleep, our brains, and our social selves offers yet another reason to safeguard your Zzzs.

Sleep Helps Us Approach Others and Avoid Loneliness

It's been long known that loneliness is associated with poor sleep. But is the opposite true? Can poor sleep lead to loneliness?

In a recent study published in Nature, researchers scanned people's brains after they slept normally or had a night of sleep deprivation to see how they reacted to strangers. Participants were asked to watch videos of a stranger approaching them from a distance and to push a button when they felt the stranger was too close, while the researchers monitored what was happening in their brains.

When participants had suffered abnormal sleep, they wanted the person to stop at a much greater distance than they did after a night of normal sleep, and their brains reflected a particular pattern: Circuits associated with social repulsion lit up more strongly, while circuits involved in theory of mind–our ability to gauge the intentions of others–were diminished.

"A lack of sleep leads individuals to become more socially avoidant, keeping greater social distance from others," the researchers from the University of California, Berkeley conclude.

The participants who slept poorly also reported feeling lonelier. And, when video of them was analyzed by independent raters, the raters thought they looked lonelier and were less interested in interacting with them, too.

Sleep Helps Us Empathize With Others

Emotional empathy is our ability to feel what another person is feeling. So, if my friend is feeling sad, her sadness resonates with me to some extent, helping me to care about how she is doing.

But, when we sleep poorly, the parts of our brain devoted to emotional empathy don't function as well, according to one recent study published in the European Journal of Neuroscience.

In the study, college-aged participants kept track of their sleep quality for two weeks and then performed a task while having their brains scanned.

When we sleep poorly, the parts of our brain devoted to emotional empathy don't function as well.

The task involved viewing photos of people with different expressions–some neutral, some distressed.

Participants were asked to note how concerned they were about the people depicted, and the researchers measured differences in how they responded to distressed versus not distressed people to arrive at an empathy score. The researchers also recorded their brain activity patterns while viewing the different photos, to see how this might correspond to feelings of empathy.

Those who'd reported better sleep were significantly more empathetic toward people in distress, and they showed increased activity in parts of the brain associated with emotional empathy when viewing distressed people.

Supporting prior research, this finding may help explain why we read people's emotions more accurately and empathize better in romantic conflicts when we sleep well.

Sleep Helps Us to Be Less Angry and Aggressive

A lack of sleep certainly makes me more irritable. But could it cause you to be angrier or more aggressive?

A recent study suggests yes. Participants who were randomly assigned to maintain or restrict their sleep over two days were then asked to do a difficult task while listening to very aversive noise, bound to make them irritated.

Those who'd restricted their sleep became much angrier during the task and didn't adapt well to the noise–meaning, they didn't cease to be bothered by it over time–compared to those who'd had normal sleep.

Though experiments haven't confirmed that lack of sleep causes aggression, people who report sleep disturbance do tend to be more aggressive and violent. Women who sleep poorly are more frequently aggressive toward their partners. One study also found that children who were victimized by their peers at school often became bullies later on if they had sleep problems.

And many risk factors for aggression are aggravated by lack of sleep, according to a review. For example, our ability to turn down emotional upset is compromised when we don't get enough sleep. That means our anger can get out of control, making us more likely to blame and target others.

Additionally, a lack of sleep makes us less able to use techniques like reappraisal–thinking about upsetting events from a more helpful perspective–as a means for tamping down anger and aggression.

We may experience other cognitive impairments, too, like becoming hyper-vigilant of danger or having trouble with decision-making, which could impact whether or not people seem threatening to us. And our reactions to threats are more intense when we don't get enough sleep.

Clearly, not being able to control our aggression would be a bane to our relationships. Sleeping better allows us to have more self-control, which means we're less likely to lash out at others even if provoked.

Sleep May Help Us Be Less Prejudiced Toward Others

Does sleep affect how prejudiced we are? This may seem far-fetched, but when you think of the mental processes involved in interacting with those who are different from us–and how those processes, in turn, are affected by a lack of sleep–it makes more sense.

Certainly, being more willing to approach others, more empathic, or less prone to anger could all have an impact on prejudice. After all, these factors have all been tied to less discrimination in other studies.

Additionally, research suggests we're less prone to feeling rejected when we sleep better. That means that if we fear others may not like us–a common problem to overcome in cross-group interactions–we might be less likely to see rejection where there is none, as long as we get enough sleep.

Sleeping better also makes us less likely to stereotype others, according to a study published in the Journal of Applied Social Psychology. Meanwhile sleeping less does the opposite–particularly if we already have strong negative implicit biases toward certain social groups. Perhaps that's why research has shown that "morning people" adhere to stereotypical thinking more at night when they're fatigued, while the reverse is true for "night people."

The Interaction of Sleep and Social Relationships

Of course, it's not just that sleep has an effect on our relationships. Our relationships can affect our sleep, too. If we're fighting with our loved ones, facing discrimination, or feeling rejected, our sleep will likely be worse. That means that sleep problems can become cyclical, with social problems causing poor sleep and vice versa.

Luckily, we can break that cycle by getting enough sleep regularly. And, since there are all kinds of evidence-based tips out there for getting a good night's sleep, it's at least worth trying to do so. After all, we could all use people in our lives who are better rested and, as a result, more willing to connect in compassionate ways.

I'm sure my husband would concur.

Jill Suttie, holds a doctorate in psychology, a Greater Good's book review editor, and a frequent contributor to the magazine. This article was originally published on Healthline.

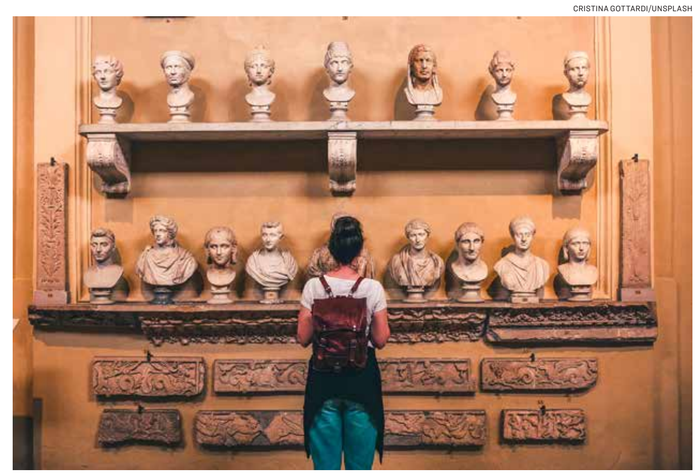
Women who sleep poorly are more frequently aggressive toward their partners.

AFRICA STUDIO (BOTTOM), RTEM (RIGHT)/SHUTTERSTOCK

Getting a good night's sleep is the first step to better relationships the next day, research finds.

Art Psychotherapy Can Help People Explore Themselves Through Museum Exhibits

CRISTINA GOTTARDI/UNSPLASH



Museum objects can evoke powerful emotions.

ALISON COLES

The idea of receiving psychotherapy in a museum might seem unusual. However, art psychotherapists are increasingly looking toward the rich resources of museums and galleries to aid them in their clinical work.

Art therapy, or art psychotherapy, sees people express their feelings and experiences through art, as well as (or instead of) through words. It can be used to help people of all ages, living with a wide range of emotional or physical conditions.

The United Kingdom's National Health Service (NHS) art psychotherapists usually work in designated therapy rooms in hospitals or outpatient centers, but for our recent study we wanted to explore how conducting art psychotherapy in a museum could be beneficial to a group with complex mental health difficulties.

Research has found that people "see themselves" in museum objects and that reflecting on our responses to objects can tell us something about ourselves.

For example, an object can evoke powerful emotions, or symbolize an aspect of our current or past experiences. So we wanted to tap into museum objects to help our participants develop greater self-understanding. To our knowledge, this was the first time that museum objects would be used for this kind of art psychotherapy for adults accessing NHS mental health services.

We predicted, based on findings from arts in health and art therapy case studies, that a museum setting could help to inspire creativity among the group members. There is also evidence that a non-clinical space can help people feel more connected to each other and their local community, and less "set apart" by their mental health difficulties.

Working for 2gether NHS Foundation Trust, we delivered a program for seven adults aged 18–25 at two museums in Gloucester over 18 weeks. Each session lasted for 90 minutes and started and finished in a private education room at the museums.

The group members explored the museum exhibitions and then made some art using a variety of different materials. In the beginning, we suggested some tasks (such as finding three objects to represent their past, present, and future) but as the weeks went on, they increasingly found objects they connected with. At the end of each session, there was time for verbal reflections, as a group.

Speaking to the group members after the final session, and having observed the sessions as they went along, we discovered just how effective the use of museum objects can be, particularly for self-exploration.

Susie (all names have been changed to protect identities) saw her desire to "wipe away the past and start again" reflected in a Victorian writing slate, and drew a modern-day device for making images and then erasing them. She also took inspiration from a model of a cross-section through the earth, drawing herself as a person with three layers and labeling it "what I show to others", "what those close to me get to see", and "what I feel about myself that hardly anyone knows."

Another person who attended the sessions, Ellie, was inspired by a repaired Roman pot. She made a collage which expressed her sense that she was "piecing together bits in my life." Caroline, meanwhile, made a timeline of her life (including some very traumatic experiences), saying that "I wouldn't have done it if I hadn't seen the timeline in the exhibition, but it felt very significant to do it–like putting things in place before moving on."

Art therapy, or art psychotherapy, sees people express their feelings and experiences through art.

Although not all the group members made artwork during the sessions, they still found therapeutic value in their encounters with the objects in the museum. Tasha, for example, was not always able to create art in the group but still reported that "using objects for self-reflection was useful."

Several of the group members said that the exhibitions encouraged playfulness, as well as inspiring their creative work and that this "meant that the group loosened up." Some said that they felt less defined by their mental health difficulties because the group was not held on NHS premises. Our museum sessions also encouraged independence and helped participants to feel valued and connected to the world outside mental health services.

As one participant put it:

You feel like you are a real person working on your own personal goals rather than just a patient going through treatment…You wouldn't necessarily have thought that pulling objects out of museum boxes and wandering around looking at artefacts would help you feel better or make progress in recovery, but you would be surprised.

Building on this work, art psychotherapists from the 2gether Trust have since delivered two more museum-based therapy groups, for adults of all ages, and we have written about our experiences of how we worked in these settings. We are keen to continue to "flex" our practice, stepping out of the usual therapy spaces, and to encourage fellow art psychotherapists to explore how this rich therapeutic resource can help other people too.

Alison Coles is a lecturer in art psychotherapy at the University of South Wales in the UK. This article was first published on The Conversation.

Living Healthy: 8 Reasons to Drink 8 Glasses of Water a Day

Sixty percent of the adult human body is comprised of water. Our bodily fluids: blood, lymph, digestive juices, urine, tears, and sweat are predominantly made up of water. Living healthy must include conscious water consumption.

Water is critical to almost every bodily function–circulation, digestion, absorption, and elimination of wastes, just to name a few. When toxins from our environment or food make their way into our bodies, they are carried out in our urine (95 percent water) and our sweat (99 percent water).

The amount of water required can vary from person to person. Where we live, our activity level, and our diets will influence how much water our bodies need. As our body uses energy, we lose water, so it's important to constantly lubricate ourselves. Turns out that to avoid even moderate dehydration, 8 cups of water is a pretty good starting point for living healthy and staying hydrated.

Some suggest 8 (8 oz) glasses a day, while others suggest taking your body weight (in pounds), dividing it in half and drinking that many ounces. Depending on your diet, this could give you slightly more water than you need. Most people receive about 20 percent of their daily hydration needs from their food, according to the Mayo Clinic. But a little bit of extra water won't do any harm.

If you're exercising, you will need to compensate for the water lost from sweat. For a typical workout, lasting about 30 minutes, about two cups of extra water should be enough.

Here are eight reasons to keep drinking water:

1 **Keeps your mind sharp:** Our brains are mostly water. Drinking it keeps your mind "hydrated"and helps you think, improves concentration, and keeps you alert.

2 **Moisturizes skin:** Forget expensive and chemical-laden skin moisturizers. Let nature do its work. Water keeps your skin soft and supple and reduces wrinkles. Need we say more?

3 **Prevents headaches:** Did you know, most headaches are caused by mild hydration? If you are prone to headaches, try upping your water intake. Staying hydrated can even help eliminate or reduce the incidence of migraine headaches.

4 **Decreases muscle cramps:** Water is the body's natural lubrication system. Proper hydration will keep your joints lubricated and your muscles more supple and elastic, which will reduce pain.

5 **Removes toxins:** Our bodies use water to flush out waste through sweat and urination, ensuring better system balance. If you suffer kidney stones or chronic Urinary Tract Infections–water is your best bet.

6 **Boosts immune function:** Considering the important role that water plays in so many of our body systems and processes, it is no wonder that someone who drinks water regularly is less likely to get sick. Staying hydrated can help protect you from everything from the common cold and flu to more serious diseases like cancer and heart attacks.

7 **Supports healthy weight:** Water helps keep our appetite in check by giving us a sense of fullness so we feel satisfied.

Also, during periods of weight loss, the body will break down more substances that require elimination. Toxins that have been stored in fat tissue can be released in greater amounts during this time. Water helps to flush these out of our bodies.

Water is especially important for people who follow low carb/high protein diets, which tend to put extra stress on our kidneys due to nitrogen buildup. It takes a bit more water to process this excess nitrogen byproduct.

8 **Improves digestion:** Perhaps most important is the role that water plays in digestion. Good health is dependent on good digestion. Water is critical to food digestion and absorption. Water also helps to prevent constipation, which can inhibit good digestion and elimination.

So, remember, the next time you need to quench your thirst, choose water. Your body will thank you with good health.

This article was originally published on NaturallySavvy.com

HEKLA/SHUTTERSTOCK

THE TWO LEVELS Of Happiness

To find true happiness, first we have to know what it is

CONAN MILNER

Happiness seems like a simple idea until you consider that this single word covers concepts as diverse as quiet contentment and ecstatic joy.

And how we define happiness will decide how we seek it. But not all happiness is created equal. In fact, some forms of happiness aren't even good for us. Some paths to happiness lead us to deep satisfaction, but others leave us with a fleeting feeling that is followed by a hunger for more.

For our ancestors, guidance for a happy life came from stories and sages that taught the right way to live. Now, modern science has also made a serious study of happiness, and it begins with an understanding of how we determine our sense of well-being.

A Happiness Heuristic

One very common way that psychologists believe we assess our reality is through something called the peak-end rule.

According to this theory, we judge any given experience by how we felt at its most intense point and how we felt at its end. We don't tend to care about the total sum of our feelings during the course of the experience, or how they may average out.

Instead, we just focus on the highlights: the best parts, the worst parts, and the last parts. The moments that made the strongest impression during our experience tell us whether it was good or bad, and how good or bad it was.

Nobel laureate Dr. Daniel Kahneman is a researcher and psychology professor at Princeton University who helped coin the peak-end rule in 1999, through studies demonstrating evidence for it.

But that's just part of the story.

Hidden Happiness

In a later observational study that Kahneman and his team conducted, a group of 800 women was asked about their happiness with daily activities as well as a specific aspect of happiness: their satisfaction with life.

Time spent with their children was reported among the least enjoyable activities. But a contradiction emerged. When Kahneman analyzed the data he found that, despite the frustration associated with raising kids, mothers reported a higher level of life satisfaction than women without children.

Why didn't the peak-end rule hold up? According to Dr. Talya Miron-Shatz, a psychologist who worked alongside Kahneman, there are limits to this rule. One is that the end only has an effect on experiences that have a distinct end. The other is that the rule only applies to a single level of happiness.

"Satisfaction with life is a higher concept than happiness that is experienced on a day-to-day level," Miron-Shatz said. "When it comes to evaluating life satisfaction, you think of the big picture: your career, home, marriage, family, etc. It's more of a check-the-boxes activity."

Life on Two Levels

In labeling these two tiers of happiness, psychologists draw inspiration from ancient Greece. The day-to-day level is called hedonic happiness and the big picture level is called eudaimonic happiness.

Hedonic happiness (derived from the Greek word "hedone" meaning "pleasure") refers to the feelings we get from creature comforts. It's the thrill that comes with buying new shoes or eating a decadent dessert. Hedonic is whatever feels good in the moment.

Eudaimonic happiness, on the other hand, fulfills our need for meaning and purpose. Aristotle was the first to describe the virtuous pursuits of Eudaimonia—a word that translates to being in line with good divine beings. Later philosophers promoted this idea as the ultimate goal of life.

There are several paths to Eudaimonia, and there's also nothing wrong with enjoying some hedonic moments (provided they're not immoral or excessive). Both levels can give us joy, but a key point is that we can never replace one level with another.

"If I look to hot chocolate for happiness, it's not going to give me the gratification I need on a eudaimonic level," Miron-Shatz said.

But that doesn't stop us from trying. In fact, we live in a world where we're constantly encouraged toward such futility. Advertising woos us to buy, not just a product, but a sense of transcendence and self-empowerment that no trinket could possibly deliver.

JON CELLIER/UNSPLASH

Advertising woos us to buy a sense of transcendence and self-empowerment that no trinket could possibly deliver.

Hedonic Treadmill

In terms of the amount and intensity of hedonic experiences at our disposal, life has never been better. We have easy access to a variety of pleasures that were unattainable to even the greatest kings of the past. So why aren't we the happiest culture in history? Modern malaise, anxiety, and depression aren't just linked to a lack of Eudaimonia. It's also because we have worn out the hedonic.

Psychologists call it the hedonic treadmill. It describes the pleasure you initially get from a thing or activity that wanes with time. Eventually, we adapt, so that once-reliable happy trigger no longer gives us a thrill. As if on a treadmill, you're running after a feeling you'll never reach. Heroin addicts refer to this dynamic as chasing the dragon. But whether it's drugs, sweet treats, or some other compulsive thing we rely on for our sense of well-being, the principle is the same.

And it doesn't just apply to vices. Say you get a better paying job, a bigger house, or a fancier car. These upgrades make you happy for a while, but then, it becomes the new normal. You no longer get a gratifying feeling from them because our perception is geared toward grasping changes. Remember—we recall the peak moments—so the positives that once punctuated our lives eventually become the things we take for granted.

Transcendent Pursuits

Yet there are peaks we can seek that have shown to be reliably sustainable in the pleasure we get from them. In a study of her own design, Miron-Shatz asked a cohort of women from Ohio to report the remarkably high points of their day. When her team analyzed all the peaks people had in common, religious activity, prayer, and hobbies came out on top.

"I think it's because these things transcend you. They take you beyond the everyday," she said. "Another thing they have in common is that they're voluntary."

Having a sense of freedom ranks high in happiness research. Perhaps that's why something so confining—commuting—ranks so low. In one of Kahneman's studies, the daily back-and-forth to work was an activity that people reported hating most.

Nagging Negativity

Another thing that researchers have found when figuring out the happiness equation is that bad experiences have an even greater bearing on how we assess our experience than the good. A 2001 article in the Review of General Psychology, titled "Bad is Stronger than Good," by psychology professors from Case Western Reserve University explores this pattern.

"This is not to say that bad will always triumph over good, spelling doom and misery for the human race. Rather, good may prevail over bad by the superior force of numbers: Many good events can overcome the psychological effects of a single bad one. When equal measures of good and bad are present, however, the psychological effects of bad ones outweigh those of the good ones," they wrote.

Some psychologists explain this phenomenon as a survival mechanism. It's nice to feel good, but our feelings are more influenced by the bad moments, so that we pay attention, and avoid this pain in the future.

This phenomenon could also be linked to a disposition towards negative thinking rather than positive.

Whatever the reason, there are things we can do to tip the happiness equation in our favor.

Turning Toward Happiness

A big one is gratitude. Miron-Shatz, who now heads Buddy&Soul, an online platform for personal development, says learning to count your blessings can really help with seeing a brighter day. So even when you're hit with something bad, seeing all the good in your life can soothe the sting.

But don't just turn to gratitude when times are tough. With practice, we can learn to perpetually empower our perception.

"With a gratitude journal, we condition ourselves to look for things that we're grateful for, rather than looking for things we're going to complain about," she said.

Another way that research has shown we can lessen the burdens that lead to unhappiness is financial security.

This may at first seem to contradict the old saying that money can't buy happiness. But consider that this trope is really about the unfulfilling nature of hedonic purchases. The real power of wealth is that it can help you avoid the stress and hard times that can grind down your mood.

It's nice to buy yourself a little something when you're feeling low. But if you have less money, you need to limit luxuries and impulse buys in favor of more practical pursuits. Being able to pay your bills without going deeper into debt will leave you happier in the long run, or at least less unhappy.

A third powerful tool for making a happier life is learning how to better interpret events as they unfold. For example, if you feel your day is ruined simply because a restaurant got your order wrong, examine how you came to this conclusion. It's likely that the mixup was an honest mistake and not the personal attack that you may at first perceive.

It can also help to put negative events into a wider context. For example, something that seems terrible now, like a challenging project at work, may become a source of pride in the future. Or an embarrassing incident may seem trivial if we consider how we will think of it in a year's time.

This tool isn't about changing reality, merely reframing it, and considering your problem from another angle.

"Ask yourself, 'could I be looking at it any differently?' It's going to help if you do," Miron-Shatz said. "You don't have to sugarcoat it, but how you perceive the events around you and if you can brush it off can make a big difference."

Finally and above all, don't neglect Eudaimonia. Our pursuit for meaning, belonging, and doing the right thing may not provide the quick fix and cheap thrills of our hedonic pursuits, but it's the higher-level fulfillment that really makes our spirit soar.

DIEGO CERVO/SHUTTERSTOCK

ELEVATE AND INSPIRE

I Lived on the Brink of Death for Decades, and Then Everything Changed

Suicide seemed the only answer to this ailing mother until one fateful day a miracle began

FENGYING MAO

Before moving overseas and relocating to Toronto in 1997, I was a nurse in China, yet also a patient—I suffered endlessly from devastating illnesses. This is the story of my medical miracle: from living on the brink of death for nearly 20 years to getting a second chance at life.

If you've never suffered from a long-term chronic disease, it can be difficult to understand the soul-crushing suffering that is involved.

For 18 years I suffered from hepatitis C—known by doctors as one of the most difficult illnesses to cure. My body felt like a cage and my life was reduced to hospital visits, taking medication, searching endlessly for cures and specialists and fantasizing of a way to alleviate my symptoms.

Sometimes I was hospitalized for up to six months, but despite being treated by China's most renowned doctors, they could only manage the symptoms and couldn't control the disease. Desperate, I added every alternative method I could find—qigong, traditional Chinese medicine, herbal remedies, praying to Buddha, and on and on. Nothing worked.

Every day I could expect to feel constant pain in my liver and spleen as my liver turned to scar tissue from cirrhosis. This caused abdominal swelling that made it look like I was several months' pregnant; even wearing a belt was excruciating. I also experienced crippling nausea, extreme fatigue, depression, bleeding gums, and endless other symptoms. Not only did the old diseases get worse, but new ones also developed: atrophic gastritis, pyelitis, nephritis, and low blood pressure. My body was extremely weak and my legs were swollen and heavy. Walking up the stairs to my apartment felt like climbing a mountain. To add to the agony, my daughter, who was diagnosed with hepatitis from birth, was also diagnosed with liver cirrhosis by the age of six. Watching her suffer was unbearable.

I worked as a surgical nurse in China, and had easy access to medication and saw some of the best doctors in the country. We tried every conceivable treatment and exhausted all options, yet my illness could not be brought under control. I had worked on and off as I could manage but by 1996 I was forced to quit my job permanently due to my failing health. Since I had some medical knowledge, I knew that my situation was critical. One day I drew up the courage to ask my doctor how long he thought I would live. He looked at me with pain in his eyes and said softly, "I think at least one more year."

Despite being in my early 30s, I appeared thin and frail and could easily be mistaken for someone twice my age. Due to my advanced illness, my father, already in his 80s, was forced to care for my daughter and I when my husband went to study in the United States. Overwhelmed by pain, loneliness, and depression, I was so miserable that I couldn't control my temper, lashing out at everyone around me. Even though my father and daughter were also in poor health, I often screamed at them and beat my child. I had truly lost control. Sometimes I stared at myself in the mirror, thinking, 'who have I become?'

One afternoon, as I struggled to endure the pain in my body, I had the thought to jump out the window of my fourth-floor apartment. I could end it all right now, I thought. No more pain, no more hospitals, no more loneliness. Then I looked over at my father and daughter sitting on the couch. They looked so pitiful, how could I abandon them? Tears streamed down my face as I contemplated my life—how could I have ended up here? I cursed God for my misfortune, and for forcing me to live on the brink of death. My hopelessness felt like a pitch-black well that I constantly tried to crawl out of.

The surprising part was that through almost two decades of pain, tears, and heartbreak deep down I still had a sense of cherishing life. I desperately wanted to watch my daughter grow up with my beloved husband by my side. My heart ached for a resolution so that I could finish my life's to-do list: go back to my fulfilling career, move overseas to be with my husband, and care for my father and child like nature intended.

A Second Chance

July 22, 1996, is a day I will never forget—a day that my fate changed. That morning, I happened to run into an elderly lady who used to live in my neighborhood. Her eyes filled with pity and compassion as she looked at me—broken, frail and in pain. She told me about how she too had suffered from chronic illnesses but when she started a new qigong practice called Falun Gong, also know as Falun Dafa, her diseases—cholecystitis and hepatitis B—disappeared.

FENGYING MAO

UNSPLASH

Fengying Mao with her husband, daughter, and son.

FENGYING MAO

Fengying Mao with her daughter and son, after she started to practice a qigong practice called Falun Gong.

If you've never suffered from a long-term chronic disease, it can be difficult to understand the soul-crushing suffering.

It was like being placed in a brand new body.

I had tried other forms of qigong in the past, and they did nothing to help me. I didn't believe in qigong but I was desperate, and curious about how this woman had overcome all her health problems, so I decided to give it a try. After all, I didn't have anything to lose and the practice was taught for free.

At six o'clock the next morning I went to a local Falun Gong practice site with my 9-year-old daughter. We learned the exercises and borrowed the book "Zhuan Falun," which describes the philosophy of the practice.

I found the book very interesting—it answered so many of the questions I had: the root causes of illness, the connection between body and mind, and how to elevate the body physically by elevating your character.

Over the next few days, I continued going to the practice site and reading Zhuan Falun and completely forgot about curing my illnesses. Yet, every day my symptoms improved. I was able to stop taking my medications yet I felt better and better. I felt light when I walked, it was easy to climb the stairs. My mood completely transformed. The relief and excitement I felt are hard to describe. It was like being placed in a brand new body.

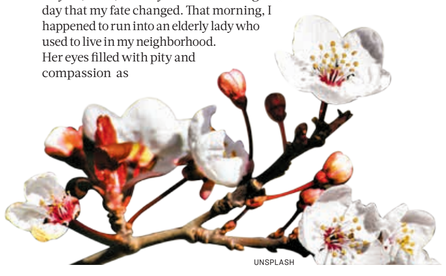
One month later my daughter and I had a general physical exam. The results were beyond my wildest dreams: all the abnormalities in my body had returned to normal. My daughter also got a clean bill of health. The illnesses that had held me hostage for 18 years were gone in a matter of weeks. My doctor was shocked and didn't know what to say. Having no medical explanation, and afraid to acknowledge the medical miracle, he left the room and didn't come back.

A New Life

As it turned out, my physical changes were just the start of my change in fortune. Now that I was healthy, I could join my husband in the United States and raise our daughter in a free country. Seeing my dramatic change, my husband started practicing Falun Gong as well.

I felt like the most fortunate woman in the world, and then I received the most incredible news yet—I found out I was pregnant. Due to my previous illnesses, I hadn't had a menstrual period for years and it was impossible for someone with my condition to conceive. Yet now, my body was so strong and healthy that I delivered a beautiful baby boy in 1997. When they got the news, all my relatives in China found it too incredible. Even now, they think I must have adopted my son.

If I hadn't experienced all of this myself, I would have found it hard to believe. Yet there is no other way for me to explain the dramatic changes in my body after practicing Falun Gong. I feel so grateful for the second chance at life.



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Perfectionism often develops in childhood, is impacted by parenting and can lead to mental health struggles in later life.

Young People Drowning in a Rising Tide of Perfectionism

The perfect lives we share on social media can have toxic side effects for perfectionists

SIMON SHERRY & MARTIN M. SMITH

We recently conducted one of the largest-ever studies on perfectionism. We learned that perfectionism has increased substantially over the past 25 years and that it affects men and women equally.

We also learned that perfectionists become more neurotic and less conscientious as time passes.

Perfectionism involves striving for flawlessness and requiring perfection of oneself and others. Extremely negative reactions to mistakes, harsh self-criticism, A nagging doubt about performance abilities, and a strong sense that others are critical and demanding also define the trait.

As perfectionists grow older, they appear to unravel.

We are a clinical psychologist in the department of psychology and neuroscience at Dalhousie University and a lecturer in research methods at York St John University. Together we have extensive experience in understanding, assessing, treating, and studying perfectionism.

We are greatly troubled by what we see.

We believe there is an urgent need for prevention efforts—to reduce the harsh and controlling parenting practices and socio-cultural influences, such as unrealistic media images, that contribute to perfectionism. Interventions for distressed perfectionists are also clearly needed.

Millennials Are Suffering

To gain a more complete understanding of perfectionism, we conducted a large-scale meta-analysis involving 77 studies and nearly 25,000 participants. Around two-thirds of these participants were female and many were Caucasian university students from western nations (such as Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom). Our participants ranged in age from 15 to 49.

We found today's young people are more perfectionist than ever before. In fact, we found perfectionism has increased substantially since 1990. This means millennials struggle with perfectionism more than previous generations—a finding that mirrors past research.

The causes of perfectionism are complex. Increases in perfectionism come, at least in part, from today's dog-eat-dog world, where rank and performance count excessively and winning and self-interest are emphasized.

Controlling and critical parents also hover too close in raising their children, which fosters the development of perfectionism. With social media posts showcasing unrealistically "perfect" lives and glossy advertisements depicting unobtainable standards of perfection, millennials are surrounded by too many yardsticks upon which to measure their success and failure. Keeping up with the Joneses has never been harder.

This epidemic of perfectionism in modern western societies is a serious, even deadly, problem. Perfectionism is robustly linked in the research to anxiety, stress, depression, eating disorders and suicide.

As Perfectionists Age, They Unravel

We also found that, as perfectionists grow older, they appear to unravel. Their personalities become more neurotic (more prone to negative emotions like guilt, envy, and anxiety) and less conscientious (less organized, efficient, reliable and disciplined).

Pursuing perfection—a goal that is intangible, fleeting and rare—may result in a higher rate of failures and a lower rate of successes that leaves perfectionists more likely to neurotically stew about their imperfections and less likely to conscientiously pursue their goals.

Overall, then, our results suggest life does not get easier for perfectionists. In a challenging, messy and imperfect world, perfectionists may burn out as they age, leaving them more unstable and less diligent.

Our findings also revealed men and women report similar levels of perfectionism.

This suggests modern western societies do not involve gender-specific pressure to be perfect. Gender roles appear to allow (or to encourage) both men and women to strive for perfection.

Future research should test if men strive for perfection based more on achievement motives (such as competing for resources) and women strive for perfection based more on relationship motives (such as pleasing other people).

Unconditional Love Is an Antidote

Perfectionism is a major, deadly epidemic in modern western societies that is seriously underrecognized, with many distressed perfectionists concealing their imperfections from those who might be able to help, such as psychologists, teachers or family doctors.

Perfectionism is robustly linked in the research to anxiety, stress, depression, eating disorders and suicide.

We need to respond to the perfectionism epidemic at the parental and the cultural level.

Parents need to be less controlling, critical and overprotective of their children—teaching their children to tolerate and to learn from their mistakes while emphasizing hard work and discipline over the unrealistic pursuit of perfection.

Unconditional love—where parents value children for more than their performance, rank or appearance—seems as good an antidote to perfectionism as any.

Perfectionism is a myth and social media is its storyteller. We need to teach a healthy skepticism toward the suspiciously "perfect" lives promoted through social media posts and mainstream media advertisements. Unrealistic images achieved through photo-shopping, airbrushing and filters are less compelling once you learn the game is rigged.

Simon Sherry is a professor, clinical psychologist, and director of clinical training in the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience at Dalhousie University in Canada. Martin M. Smith is a lecturer in research methods at York St. John University in Canada. This article was first published on The Conversation.

Why We Love 'Tidying Up' Like Marie Kondo

The new Netflix series that teaches people how to declutter their lives is more than just entertainment

Author and series host Marie Kondo.

> **There's nothing more stressful than searching for your keys as you're trying to get out of the house on time.**
>
> *Ellen Delap, certified professional organizer*

CATHY CASSATA

Netflix's new series "Tidying Up" is all the rage.

Viewers can't get enough of host Marie Kondo helping people declutter their homes and get their lives back.

But can living a clutter-free life really bring about mental, physical, and even financial benefits?

Ellen Delap, certified professional organizer and president of the National Association of Productivity and Organizing Professionals, says absolutely.

"People can feel so overwhelmed by their stuff. When they start to declutter, the initial feeling is hope that their life will be changed by doing this work," Delap told Healthline. "They also begin to feel a greater sense of control and well-being by lowering their stress levels. After all, there's nothing more stressful than searching for your keys as you're trying to get out of the house on time."

The biggest benefit of decluttering, she adds, is creating more time to spend on what's meaningful to you.

Joshua Becker, author of The Minimalist Home, discovered this about 10 years ago as he was spring cleaning.

"I decided to clean out my garage because I thought my 5-year old son would help me, but he helped for 20 seconds, and then was off," Becker told Healthline. "I kept working on the garage and my neighbor happened to walk over. I complained to her about the time I had spent on the garage and she said, 'That's why my daughter decided to become a minimalist.'"

As Becker looked over at his son on their swing set, the idea resonated with him.

"In that moment, I realized that not only were my things not making me happy, but even worse they were actually taking me away from the very thing that did bring me happiness and purpose and fulfillment and joy in my life," he said.

On that day, Becker set out to declutter and minimize his family's belongings. He's been a minimalist since, and shares his journey and tips on his blog Becoming Minimalist.

Why Clutter Happens

Delap says oftentimes people inherit stuff from loved ones who have passed away and the sentimental value they bring makes it difficult to let those things go.

Transitions in life is another common reason she sees.

"Someone that has a new baby, or moved into a new house, or got a new job or is taking care of a loved one might be overwhelmed. They're really focused on that and don't have time to organize their home, so it becomes a very low priority, and things just keep piling up as a result," she said.

The ability to shop online plays a part too.

"People buy a lot of things on Amazon and don't necessarily return them or they buy them because they couldn't find that exact thing in their house yet it's tucked away under stuff," she said.

While hoarding disorder is a mental illness related to the inability to give up possessions, Delap says not everyone whose home is cluttered has this condition.

"Rarely do people actually have a hoarding disorder. It's just more likely that a situation has come up or they're going through a grieving process. There are a lot of reasons that lead up to this," Delap said.

Less Stuff Brings More Clarity and Appreciation

When you have less stuff, Delap says you have more clarity because you don't have to think about your stuff.

Becker agrees, noting that with that clarity comes the realization of what you want out of life.

"There are different motivations for decluttering or becoming a minimalist. Some people want to spend more time with their family or travel the world or want to change jobs or save money," he said.

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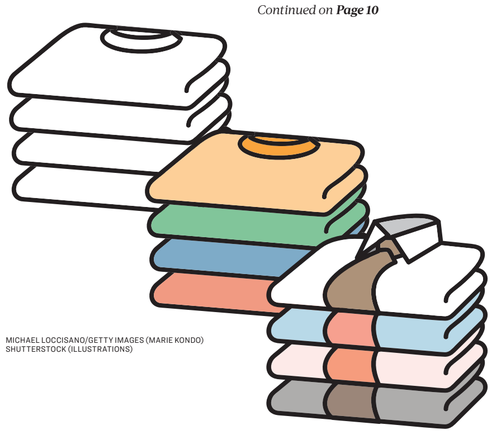

MICHAEL LOCCISANO/GETTY IMAGES (MARIE KONDO)
SHUTTERSTOCK (ILLUSTRATIONS)

THE CONTROVERSIAL TEA THAT Trumps Coffee

A tiny fungus could give you the energy you need—without the comedown

FORTYFORKS/SHUTTERSTOCK

DEREK HENRY

Coffee has become a morning ritual for approximately 80 percent of people in North America. There is virtually no other food or beverage that continues to sustain such popularity. Without their morning java, many people struggle to get their brain and body going for the day.

However, like any drug (caffeine is psychoactive), coffee has its drawbacks. Most people try to ignore these due to their blind love for this invigorating beverage. Some of these drawbacks include:

- Caffeine jitters and crash—like any drug, the withdrawal symptoms can be painful, which encourages you to continue consuming the beverage.
- Poor sleep quality—the forced stimulation of your hormonal system artificially overrides your natural circadian rhythm, causing sleeplessness at night.
- Adrenal fatigue—prolonged use of caffeine can lead to hormonal imbalance and can cause more serious issues like prostate and breast cancer.
- Kidney and bladder problems—caffeine has diuretic effects that can put stress on the urinary system.
- Triggering of stress hormones—increased stress makes muscles tense, elevates blood sugar, speeds up pulse and respiration rates, and increases your state of panic and alertness.
- Depletes the body of B-vitamins.
- Prevents iron absorption (can contribute to anemia).

Ironically, coffee doesn't add energy to the body like most people think it does. It actually burns up your energy reserves at a faster pace, which means you get a short term boost for long-term jitters and fatigue, which is usually combatted by drinking more coffee or looking for other energy enhancers. To understand the adrenal impact of coffee, consider the following analogy by Stephen Cherniske, author of "Caffeine Blues":

"Imagine you lived in a country that was always under threat of attack. No matter where you went, there was a perpetual state of alert. Not only that, but your defenses were constantly being depleted and weakened. Does that sound stressful? Caffeine produces the same effect on your body, like fighting a war on multiple fronts at the same time."

Cherniske calls this state of constant physiological alert "caffeinism," which is characterized by fatigue, anxiety, mood swings, sleep disturbance, irritability, and depression. Of course, as long as you keep taking the drug or upping the dosage, the true effects aren't felt until a serious health issue crops up. And rarely does that issue seem connected to the common habits which cultivate the issue, like coffee.

Fortunately, there are ways to enhance your energy each day, without any of the drawbacks of coffee or any other caffeinated beverage. Although there are a few suitable substitutes, one of the most recently revered teas for energy and stamina, is one created from cordyceps.

Coffee doesn't add energy to the body ... it actually burns up your energy reserves at a faster pace.

Like any drug (caffeine is psychoactive), coffee has its drawbacks.

Get Functional With Fungus

Cordyceps is a fungus that has been used in traditional Chinese medicine for centuries. The focus is now on two of the 400 species: Cordyceps sinensis and Cordyceps militaris. The former is a genus of parasitic fungi that grows on the larvae of insects, and the latter is from the fruiting bodies of medicinal mushrooms. Regardless of which one you choose, they both have been adorned with health qualities that make them well worth considering. Some of the noted capabilities cordyceps are said to possess include the following:

- Increased energy and endurance
- Promotes a healthy aging process
- Helps fight inflammation
- Supports healthy kidney function
- Supports healthy adrenal function
- Supports healthy blood sugar levels
- Improves memory and cognitive function

One of the biggest controversies around cordyceps comes from long distance female runners from China who smashed records in the 1993 Olympics in the 1500 m, 3000 m events by a full two seconds, and 10,000 m event by 42 seconds. Their coach attributed their success to a diet that included cordyceps, suggesting that it improved exercise capacity in these Olympic athletes through its antioxidant effects. This certainly raised the ire of other athletes and doping officials, who couldn't fathom that cordyceps alone could have been largely responsible for their remarkable results.

Cordyceps will not impart the same flavor as coffee. This fungus has a fairly neutral flavor which means it can be easily made into a delicious beverage. If you like a latte, add some coconut milk and coconut oil to the tea and blend gently to add a frothy and creamy texture. If you like a little sweetener, coconut sugar will do perfectly. Regardless of how you make it, it helps provide the same desired benefits of coffee—energy and brain stimulation—without the side effects.

That alone makes it worth looking further into.

Derek Henry is a holistic health coach. This article was originally published on HealingtheBody.ca

SONG_ABOUT_SUMMER/SHUTTERSTOCK

A happy outlook, exercise, and restrained diet are among the more reliable ways to slow aging.

Anti-Aging Wisdom

Facts and fiction about living longer and looking younger

JONI RAVENNA SUSSMAN

On our grandmother's day, a 36-year-old woman was at the threshold of old age. Today, Christie Brinkley, who turned 65 last month, proves that female sensuality has a longer shelf-life than ever thought possible, while Betty White and Dick Van Dyke (the former turns 97 this month, the latter turned 94 last month) are proving that Hollywood careers can last longer than ever thought possible.

Yet, our obsession with aging—or rather, not aging—is more intense than ever before. New advertisements for the latest time-trapping cream or supplement crop up monthly adding to the pressure to look and feel young while helping to plump up anti-aging industry profits. But which products really work and which just have clever marketing strategies?

What's more, since the latest studies prove something we all know anyway—that smiling more and worrying less equate to a long, healthy life—do we really need to spend our hard-earned cash on expensive supplements and exotic juices we can barely pronounce?

Well, if you're like most of us, your game plan includes both smiling and paying out of pocket occasionally—as long as it's worth it. So, read on to find out what really works in the chase for better health and longer life, and what's just hype. While you're at it, find out which anti-aging products might actually be harmful and what you might be avoiding that may be good for you.

Anti-Aging Facts and Myths

Human Growth Hormone
Myth: HGH (Human Growth Hormone) is a safe, natural way to slow the hands of time and stave off signs of aging.
Fact: Human studies involving HGH supplements do report an increase in muscle mass, strengthening of the immune system, and increased libido. But while humans report feeling better, the results in studies with mice suggest that higher GH levels will not prolong life. Furthermore, human studies suggest a sort of supernova effect: HGH makes you feel great but might actually diminish your lifespan since it has been proven that HGH will cause cancerous cells to grow and spread faster.

"I've seen obvious differences in people's appearance," says Dr. Catherine Arvantely, an anti-aging specialist in Newport Beach who is listed in Susanne Sommers' books. "Less wrinkles, a more youthful appearance, people have even reported gray hairs turning black," she says. "But I don't prescribe HGH for my patients. You're playing with fire."

Dr. Helen Pensanti, a holistic anti-aging specialist, also of Newport Beach, agrees. "There's a disease that is caused by the body producing too much HGH called acromegaly," she says. "Your ears, nose, and chin continue to grow."

Resveratrol
Myth: Regular consumption of red wine will provide the body with enough resveratrol to slow the aging process.
Fact: While a study conducted by the National Institute on Aging found that mice fed resveratrol had better heart health, bone health, balance, motor coordination, and fewer cataracts; and ongoing human studies show increased cognitive function and athletic prowess among people supplementing with resveratrol. In order to get enough resveratrol from wine to see these effects you'd have to drink dozens and dozens of bottles per day. A typical bottle of red wine contains only 5 mg of resveratrol at best, far short of the 250 to 500 mg recommended to see beneficial results. Luckily, resveratrol can now be purchased over-the-counter in most drug stores.

"I prescribe small doses of resveratrol for my patients," says Catherine Arvantely, "Generally, 250 mg. per day, mostly for older patients reporting memory loss."

The Sun
Myth: The Sun's harmful rays should be avoided at all cost.
Fact: While it's true that both UVB and UVA rays age the skin, doctors are now finding that insufficient levels of Vitamin D (produced in the body in the presence of sunlight) may likely contribute to the onset of diseases like breast cancer and multiple sclerosis. Rates of both have risen in recent decades, perhaps, doctors now fear, as an inadvertent byproduct of a successful national dermatological campaign to reduce skin cancer by promoting the use of sun-screen.

"Wear sunscreen on your hands and your face if you're concerned about aging," says Dr. Mehmet Oz, author of "You staying Young." "Fair skin needs only ten minutes in the sun to create 10,000 IU (international units) of Vitamin D. Darker skin needs more time."

If I can offer any single piece of advice to people regarding the mind-body connection, it would be to practice self-acceptance.

Dr. Catherine Arvantely, anti-aging specialist

Telomerase Therapy
Myth: Telomerase therapy is far off in the future. I'll never live to see it work for me.
Fact: Telomeres are to DNA strands what plastic tips are to shoe-laces. They keep the chromosomes in our cells from unraveling. As we age our telomeres become shorter and shorter. Telomerase is an enzyme that, at least in some cell lines, appears to overcome cellular senescence or aging. Some have reasoned that if telomerase can stop aging in cells, maybe it can stop human aging too. There are now serious efforts to develop telomerase-based therapies to fight aging and at least one product, a telomerase activator called TA-65, is already available.

Acai Berry Juice
Myth: The Acai berry and its juice contain large amounts of disease-preventing antioxidants that can't be found in other fruits and vegetables.
Fact: The acai berry is an inch-long reddish, purple fruit. It comes from the acai palm tree (Euterpe oleracea), which is native to Central and South America. It is a relative of the blueberry, cranberry, and other dark purple fruits.

Acai contains several substances called anthocyanins and flavonoids which are powerful antioxidants that help defend the body against life's stressors. They also play a role in the body's cell protection system. Free radicals are harmful byproducts produced by the body. Eating a diet rich in antioxidants may interfere with aging and the disease process by neutralizing free radicals.

While the acai is good for you, so are lots of other dark purple fruits, most notably the prune, and it's a lot less expensive. The USDA has a way of rating foods based on their antioxidant properties. The Oxygen Radical Absorption Capacity scale rates prunes, not acai, at the top of the list.

What We Know Now
So far, the only known method able to delay human aging is caloric restriction (CR). "Calorie restriction is one thing we know can lead to greater longevity," says Pittsburgh neurosurgeon Joseph Maroon, author "The Longevity Factor".

Researchers at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis have found that CR appears better than exercise at slowing aging. Previous research on mice and rats has shown that both calorie restriction and endurance exercise protect them against many chronic diseases including obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some types of cancer. However, this most recent research has shown that only CR increases the animals' maximum lifespan by up to 50 percent. These animal studies suggest that leanness is a key factor in the prevention of age-associated disease, but reducing caloric intake is needed to actually slow down aging.

But perhaps the most exciting news of late is that our biology is only partly responsible for how fast we age. Environment is just as important. Interestingly, environment includes our thoughts and feelings according to the latest findings, and what we know is that positive, happy thoughts and moods decrease the rate at which we age.

"If I can offer any single piece of advice to people regarding the mind-body connection, it would be to practice self-acceptance," says Dr. Arvantely. "Say something nice to yourself every day. Love yourself when you look in the mirror, at least once a day. Forgive yourself, for one thing, every day." Whether it's forgoing the gym or indulging in the occasional slice of pie.

While the acai is good for you, so are lots of other dark purple fruits—like prunes.

MAMA_MIA/SHUTTERSTOCK

More Aging Facts
- 25 is the age at which a person's short-term memory slowly begins to weaken.
- The amount of light entering the eye decreases by one-half every 13 years, so a 45-year- old requires four times as much light as a 19-year-old to see properly.
- While our eyes remain the same size from puberty, our nose and ears never stop growing.
- Thyroid hormone levels, which control metabolism, decline with age and skeletal muscle wasting is inevitable with age. Since muscle burns 4 calories more per pound than fat, aging in the absence of strength training, equals the wrong kind of slow burn.

Joni Ravenna Sussman is a freelance writer specializing in health and wellness. Her articles have appeared in dozens of national and regional publications over the years. She is also a playwright and TV writer.

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Why We Love 'Tidying Up' Like Marie Kondo

The new Netflix series that teaches people how to declutter their lives is more than just entertainment

ALL PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK

Continued from ***Page 7***

When Becker and his wife went through the process 10 years ago, they got rid of 60 to 70 percent of their stuff.

"At one point it really forced me to do some soul searching. I asked myself why I had all this stuff in the first place and what did I wish my life looked like instead," he recalled.

In her show, Kondo suggests that people ask themselves if an item sparks joy. Becker says his approach is similar but that he recommends people ask if the item will help them live the life they want.

"If an item does help you accomplish what you want to accomplish then we actually tend to take better care of it, but when we have a whole bunch of stuff that we don't need then we tend to get careless with it," he said.

Over time, the Beckers got really good at determining what mattered most to them, and they moved into a smaller house.

"We didn't need the space anymore," he said.

While Delap appreciates the less is more sentiment, she doesn't always agree.

"I think everybody should have what they love and appreciate, so I don't necessarily think less is more unless that is your goal. Everyone has to establish their own perspective on what does organized look like because each of us could have a different view of that and still feel organized," she said. "For some people it's having many things and taking care of those things and some people it's having virtually as a little as possible so they can live in a trailer and tour the country. There's a continuum."

She says it comes down to practicality, too. She'll have clients figure out how many of something they actually need.

"It's a process of keeping what you really love and then creating a way to store it. For instance, in the kitchen, I might create a coffee zone that has a Keurig and only enough mugs that the area has space for," Delap said. "It's about what functions well."

Less Means More Money and Better Quality

When you know what you have, you're less likely to spend money on buying more.

"Oftentimes, people aren't aware of how much money they're spending on duplicate things," says Delap.

She sees duplicates of office supplies most often, as well as pantry items, such as sugar.

"People will say they didn't think they had sugar yet they actually have 15 pounds of sugar but can't find where they put it," she said.

Becker says that selling some of his family's things and buying fewer things allowed him to save money.

However, he adds that knowing exactly what he has encourages him to take better care of all his belongings and that owning less allows him to buy higher quality things.

"Minimalism and frugality are not necessarily the same thing. If I don't own 30 pairs of pants, I can buy three or four really good pairs," he said.

Tips To Start Decluttering

Decluttering can be overwhelming. To make the process easier, Delap recommends putting a date on the calendar to start.

"Getting started is often the biggest obstacle. People know they want to do the work, but because there's only so much time in a day, it doesn't become a priority. [Blocking out] two hours on the calendar for your first day is a good start," she said.

Becker suggests beginning by asking yourself why you desire to own less.

"Be very clear on why, whether it's to save money and travel, be more active in church or community, or whatever. Stating this clearly will keep you motivated," he said.

As far as which room to tackle first, Delap recommends choosing either the most cluttered part of your house or the least.

"Sometimes the most frustrating part of the house is super compelling because people want to alleviate the pain of that spot. But the easiest spot is often the gateway to doing more work, so it just depends on what will motivate you more," she said.

Becker sides on tackling an easier part of the house first, particularly one that is lived-in rather than an area you don't go into much.

"Start in the living room or car or bedroom or bathroom. Somewhere you can finish the project and notice how it makes you feel," he said. "For instance, you might notice right away how much more peaceful your bedroom is when it's clear," he said.

> **It's a process that takes time, effort, and energy, but it is always worth it.**
>
> *Joshua Becker, author of "The Minimalist Home"*

When it comes to clothes, Delap prefers a different approach than Kondo, who tells clients to throw all their clothes in the house into one, big pile. Delap suggests keeping a bag next to your closet and when you decide that you don't want a piece of clothing, place it in the bag.

"While some people might be super motivated to make more decisions more quickly when they see a big pile, others will shut down," Delap said.

Instead of worrying about finding the perfect person to donate your clothes to, she suggests donating all your items to a charity or organization that matters to you.

Becker agrees.

"Giving your stuff to an organization in your neighborhood that helps, say, battered women or refugees can be rewarding and motivating to keep going," he said.

However, as you go through the process, remember that it will take time.

In fact, Becker says it took his family nine months to declutter their home.

"It's a process that takes time, effort, and energy, but it is always worth it because your possessions have become a burden to you and the more you get rid of, the more you can begin living the life you want to live," said Becker.

Investing the time to declutter will also give you a sense of accomplishment.

"There's so much value placed on being an organized person in the world we live in right now, yet there's so many things working against us—time and access to things we don't need," Delap said. "When we get our homes in order, we have a great sense of accomplishment, we have confidence, we feel good about ourselves. We have a sense of serenity."

Cathy Cassata is a freelance health and science writer. This article was first published on Healthline.

PR IMAGE FACTORY/SHUTTERSTOCK

People Diagnosed With Cancer Often Don't Embrace the Term 'Survivor'

Many object to calling those who are still fighting the disease or eventually succumb to it 'survivor'

KENNETHSPONSLER/SHUTTERSTOCK

Cancer survivors are honored at a Relay for Life Event in Twinsburg, Ohio, in June 2009. Researchers found that many survivors do not like that label.

LEONARD L. BERRY, ANDREA FLYNN & SCOTT DAVIS

"Cancer survivor" has become a catch-all phrase to refer to living individuals diagnosed with cancer at some point in their lives. Cancer clinics and clinicians, patient advocacy organizations, and media reports commonly use the term.

Using cancer survivor as a descriptor is certainly an act with good intentions. After all, people diagnosed with cancer have a diverse array of physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs and the language of survival can be empowering to many of them. For this reason, institutions that focus on cancer have framed the term broadly. For example, the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship has defined cancer survivor as "any person diagnosed with cancer from the time of initial diagnosis until his or her death."

Nevertheless, as marketing professors who study how to better serve patients, we were struck by the notion of applying the term "cancer survivor" so broadly that it would even include people who ultimately died of cancer.

Should the same term be used for the entire spectrum of living people who have experienced cancer, which represents more than 100 distinct diseases affecting approximately 14 million people in the United States?

A Complex Issue

Indeed, the published research on this question reflects its complexity. An analysis of 23 studies of how people diagnosed with cancer view the term "cancer survivor" shows that although many embrace it, others see it as inappropriate. Some of them fear not surviving if cancer recurs; others think the term itself is disrespectful to people who die of cancer or believe the term better fits people with cancers more serious than their own.

Still, others simply don't want to live with the "survivor label" or don't think the term reflects who they are. In studies that ask patients to make a discrete yes-no choice about whether they identify as a cancer survivor, the percentage who say "yes" ranges from about 31 percent to 78 percent, depending on the type of cancer and other individual factors, with breast cancer patients generally showing greater affinity for the term than patients with other types of cancer.

Recognizing that forcing a yes-no choice on this delicate question is not ideal, we partnered with Dr. Katie Deming, a radiation oncologist at Kaiser Permanente, and Dr. Jeffrey Landercasper, clinical adjunct professor of surgery at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health, to conduct our own study of how current and former patients perceive the term "cancer survivor."

We measured reactions to the term in three ways: a seven-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, a 100-point allocation exercise from 0 (negative) to 100 (positive) on a continuous scale, and an open-ended question, "What is your personal opinion about the phrase 'cancer survivor' and why do you feel as you do?" We analyzed more than 1,400 surveys completed by patients, primarily with breast cancer, who belong to the Dr. Susan Love Research Foundation's Army of Women, an organization that connects researchers with people who want to participate in breast cancer research. About three-quarters of our respondents were currently undergoing cancer treatment.

> **We were struck by the notion of applying the term 'cancer survivor' so broadly that it would even include people who ultimately died of cancer.**

Our findings reinforced the concern that motivated our study. Overall, about 60 percent of the comments were negative, 29 percent positive, and 11 percent neutral.

Among the negative responses to the term "cancer survivor," the most common theme had to do with its disregarding the patient's fear of recurrence. One woman's response captures the essence of this concern: "I feel like I'm tempting fate when I say I've survived it."

Other women who felt negatively about the phrase made statements such as "I don't deserve to carry the title proudly because I didn't 'suffer' enough to earn [it]"; "I prefer not to define myself by my cancer diagnosis or status"; and "it erases the experience of those who [still] have or will die of the disease."

Patients who felt positively about being called a cancer survivor often said they took pride in the accomplishment of surviving cancer, as one woman put it, "of winning the battle against this life-threatening disease." Another said the term made her feel "empowered, instead of victimized." Others cited the sense of community conferred by the phrase, specifically a "personal connection to other cancer patients."

Our statistical analysis comparing respondents with negative perceptions versus positive perceptions of the term indicates that undergoing active cancer treatment, advanced cancer stage, and older age at diagnosis or study participation are associated with less positive perceptions.

Health Care Language Should Do No Harm

The key takeaway from our study, and from other published research on the topic, is that using a single label to describe a diverse population of cancer patients in blanket fashion inevitably leaves a substantial percentage of them feeling unrepresented, perhaps even alienated, by the term—even though many others derive positive benefits from using and hearing it.

In short, because the group of people typically described by the term is far from a monolith, a single phrase that is subjective rather than factual is unlikely to be up to the task.

Why not let patients choose the language of their cancer-related identity so that it best reflects their own individual experiences and preferences? Existing research, including our own, suggests that the question is worth considering.

Leonard L. Berry is a university distinguished professor of marketing at Mays Business School and a senior fellow at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement at Texas A&M University. Andrea Flynn is an associate professor of marketing at the University of San Diego. Scott Davis is an assistant professor of marketing at the University of Houston-Downtown. This article was first published on The Conversation.

To Achieve What You Want, Try Checking in With Your Future Self

Our short-term failures may break our will, but long-term success comes inch by inch

JAY HARRINGTON

In the moment, change can seem impossible, because change takes time. You may have a strong desire to lose weight, start a new career, move to a new place, or start a movement around new ideas, but the enormity of the outcome you seek gets lost in the everyday craziness of your life.

In short, there's such a large gap between who you are and who you want to become that it seems foolish to even try.

Most people who desire a future result want to get there as fast as possible. They set an ambitious goal and try to accomplish it quickly, which typically leads to failure, burnout, and frustration.

Because their plans are so audacious, they can't possibly keep up. They start off on the right track but soon veer off course. A slip-up here and there, and pretty soon they give up altogether. They retreat to their old identity and relinquish their dreams to inertia. Despite any progress they may have made, they look back at who they were, feel ashamed for having failed to be perfect in their quest to become someone different, and settle for the inevitability of the status quo.

Instead of looking backward at your former self, and fixating on the things you want to change, try checking in with your future self in order to visualize and appreciate who you can become.

Your future self will reassure you that all of those slip-ups, mistakes, and bad choices were just speed bumps. That change happens incrementally not all at once. That the effort, resilience, and grit you must put in is worth it, because you're worth it.

If you can envision—really feel—what it's like to be your future self, you'll start to act as if you are your future self. You'll claim your new identity, not your old one. You'll start to plant seeds and make investments for the future, and not merely act in-the-moment. You'll harness the power of continuous improvement and one percent, incremental change.

Rather than fixating on huge change over the long-term, you'll focus on making slightly better decisions on a daily basis. You'll count that 10-minute run you squeezed in because you couldn't make it to the gym for an hour as a win instead of a failure.

> **You'll harness the power of continuous improvement and one percent, incremental change.**

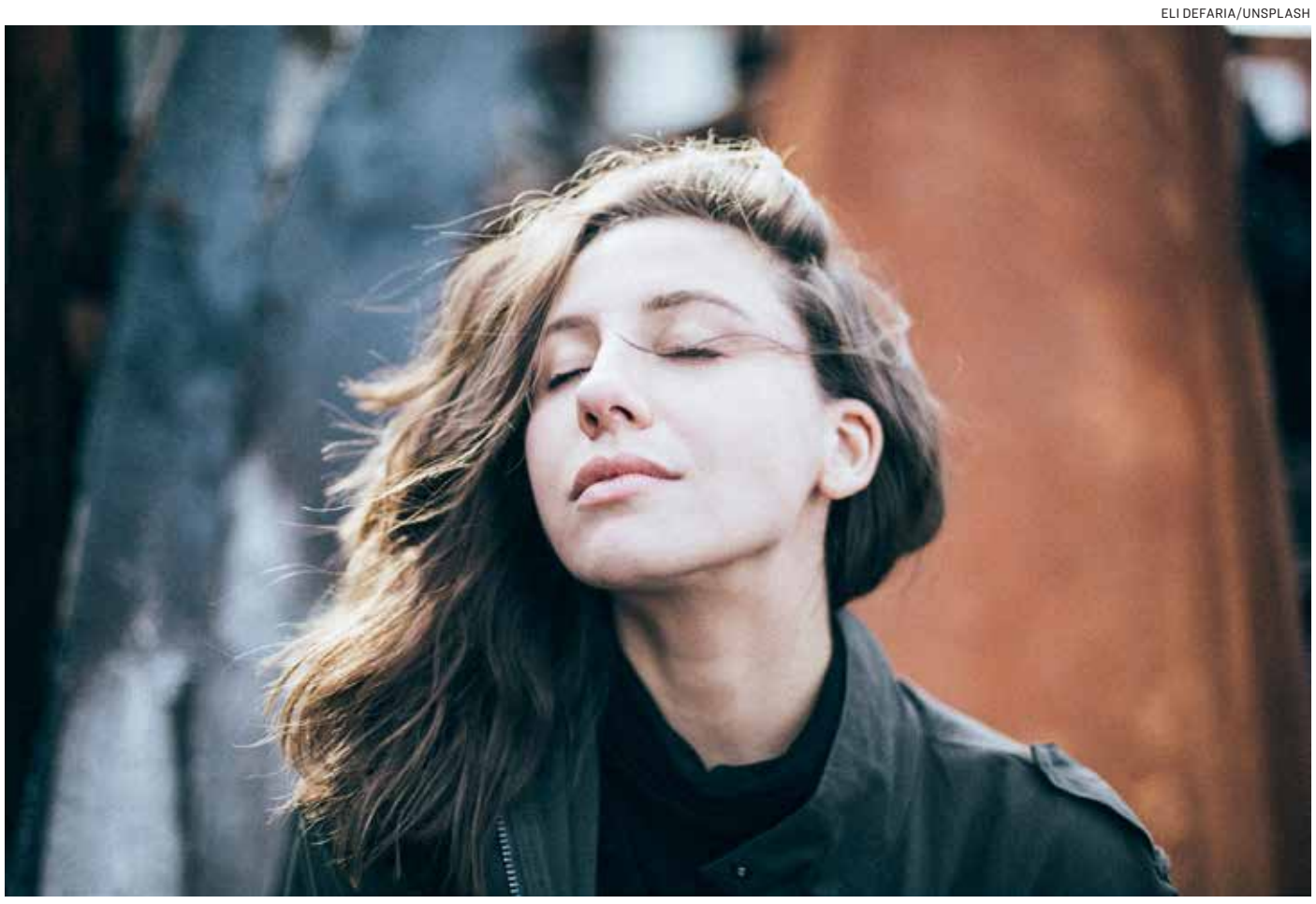
Small choices don't have much effect in the short-term but lead to big things over the long-term.

So, yes, have big dreams. But, no, don't beat yourself up for not being able to achieve them immediately. Your future self will tell you that these things take time—and will thank you for sticking with it when things get tough.

ELENA KOYCHEVA/UNSPLASH

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.

ELI DEFARIA/UNSPLASH



Taking the time to notice our fixed mindset and then release it can give us peace and possibility.

WISE HABITS

The Practice of Letting Go

Releasing our fixed viewpoints can open our minds to a world of possibility

LEO BABAUTA

There are a number of times when our mind clings to something tightly, and it is rarely helpful.

Some ideas will run circuits through our mind, like "I am right, the other person is wrong," "My preference is the best way, others are wrong," "I really don't like this, it sucks," or "I shouldn't be however I am."

In such cases, our minds are fixed in a certain viewpoint. We may judge others, complain or become fixated on what we do or don't want.

This can lead to stress, unhappiness, anger, self-righteousness, aloofness, and more.

Caught in our own fixed thinking, we miss the beauty of the moment and its possibilities.

Whatever is tight in your central column, relax. Try it right now.

If you'd like to work on letting go, I would like to offer a simple practice.

The Practice of Letting Go

You can practice letting go throughout the day, because even if we don't realize it, we're hardening to fixed viewpoints constantly.

Here's how to practice:

1. Start by realizing that you're hardened. Notice that you are stressed, upset at someone, feeling like you're right, complaining about something, not open to other viewpoints, putting something off, or tense. These are common signs that you are holding on to a fixed viewpoint. Get good at noticing this.
2. Notice the tension in your body. It's a tightening from your stomach muscles, through your chest, into your throat, up to your forehead. Think of this as your central column, and it tightens up when you think you're right, or someone else is wrong, or you really want something or don't want something.
3. Start to relax those tightened muscles. This is the heart of changing from holding on to letting go. Whatever is tight in your central column, relax. Try it right now. Soften.You might have to repeat this process multiple times.

Caught in our own fixed thinking, we miss the beauty of the moment and its possibilities.

4. Open your awareness beyond yourself. Open your awareness from just your own body and your self-concern, to the world around you. Become aware of the space around you, the people, objects, light, and sound. Open your awareness to the neighborhood around you and as far as your mind can reach.
5. Become aware of openness & possibilities. With your mind opening, you can start to release those fixed viewpoints. Your mind is no longer closed. You have created space for possibilities. There is now the potential for the unknown.
6. Open to the beauty that is before you. Now you can take in the actual moment before you. You've emptied your cup, and made room for seeing things as they actually are, and appreciating the beauty of other people, yourself, and the world you are within.
7. Step forward with a not-knowing openness. From this place of an open mind, you can move forward with not-knowing. You don't know how things should be, so find out. You don't know if you're right or wrong; you can explore. You don't know the answers, you just hold the questions in your heart, and move into open possibilities.

It's that simple. And of course, it takes a lot of practice. You can do this at any moment, but it's helpful to have a short time of day when you set a reminder and then take a few moments to sit still and practice with whatever you've been clinging to.

When we practice like this, we are shifting from our habitual patterns of self-concern and close-mindedness, to an open mind that can accept not-knowing and the unlimited possibilities that could exist. From here, we can begin to see the breath-taking beauty of the world in front of us.

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

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