

March/April 2020

The art of growing young[®]

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In this Issue...

How does your
garden grow?

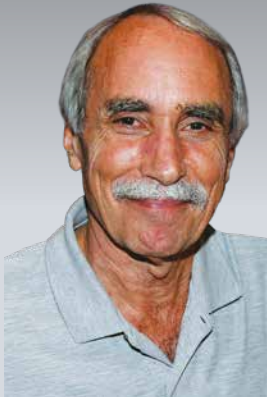
Balancing work
and life

International
Women's Day



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Letting Go of Hard Feelings

For many people, one of the hardest things to do in life is forgive someone else. But for the sake of your health and happiness, it is important to not harbor hard feelings about people, things, and situations.

I'm sure everyone reading this has at some point harbored hard feelings for another person after a disagreement or bad encounter. We've all let our negative thoughts about a situation swirl around for hours, days, or even longer after the event occurred. A friend of mine once described this as going home and sipping on a cocktail of resentment. Why do we do it? Maybe because in the short term we think it feels good to dwell on coming up with the perfect comeback. But in the long term, it will only cause more negative emotions and experiences to come into our lives.

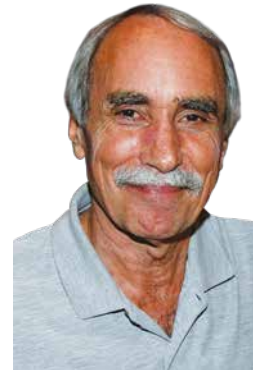
Our thoughts and the things we tend to focus on the most have a profound impact on not only us individually but the world around us. And there is a lot of newer understanding that when several people within a certain group such as a family, organization, or community continue in this mode, the whole is affected. When we dwell on negative experiences and hold on to hard feelings, we are more likely to attract more negative experiences and people into our lives. This, in turn, causes us to focus on them even more. Before we know it, we are in a negative spiral.

But if we can let go of hard feelings and forgive those who we think did something wrong, we are more able to fully embrace the positive things, people, experiences, and

circumstances that bring joy and happiness into our lives. When we do this, we will attract even more positives into our lives.

If you are not used to forgiving others, it is so easy to fall into the trap of dwelling on thoughts such as "I should have told her this," or "why did I do that?" When we spend too much time focusing on such thoughts, we simply don't have enough time left to forgive and get into the present with good feelings. There is power in forgiving. It allows you to open your heart and mind, and it breaks negative thought patterns before they can spiral.

Today, let's all take the first step and forgive just one person. It may be a co-worker, friend, family member, or even yourself. Whoever it is, let go of your hard feelings and make more room in your thoughts for positive reflection. I guarantee that if you forgive one person today, you will wake up feeling better tomorrow. And more importantly, let's get into the habit of forgiving ourselves, because that is often our biggest problem of all.



Dwight L. McKee M.D.

Dwight L. McKee
Scientific Director

Nutritional News



Boost Mood with an Anti-Inflammatory Diet

Adding to the mounting evidence that there is a connection between emotions and inflammation, a new meta-analysis of 30 randomized controlled trials suggests that anti-inflammatories can help mitigate major depression. Inflammation affects the body in many ways, including the immune system, metabolism, sleep, stress responses, cognitive thinking, memory, expression, impulse control, mood, clarity, and more—all of which can play a role in depression and mood disorders.¹ Anti-inflammatory diets include lots of fresh fruits and vegetables, plant-based proteins (such as beans and nuts), fatty cold-water small fish (nothing bigger than a salmon, as otherwise environmental contaminant levels may be high), and fresh herbs and spices. Pressure-cook beans and other legumes if you are sensitive to lectin proteins and/or have increased intestinal permeability (“leaky gut”).

Sleep Better by Dimming Lights

It has long been suspected that evening exposure to blue light from computers, televisions, and phones is negatively impacting our sleep/wake cycles. However, a team of scientists studied the effects of different colored lights on sleep and made a startling discovery: bright white or yellow light is more likely to disrupt sleep. It's best to avoid all bright lights before bed. Of course, turning off phones, computers, and TVs will help too, as it reduces stimulation that keeps the brain active and alert instead of calm and relaxed. For best results, try reading a light book with warm reddish light before bed.²



Mindfulness Improves Learning

New scientific research published in the journal *Memory & Cognition* found just 10 minutes of mindfulness meditation can improve verbal learning and memory processes. Participants in the study who listened to a 10-minute mindfulness exercise tended to be better at recalling newly learned words. Researchers believe that practicing mindfulness may help improve a person's ability to learn new verbal information and then be able to remember it later.³

The Hotter, The Better

A series of studies looking at chili peppers and health have found that not only does regularly eating spicy foods lower the risk of death from any cause, but the hotter the foods, the greater the benefit. The health-boosting benefits of a diet filled with hot peppers likely comes from capsaicin, the active compound in nearly all chili peppers. Eating hot peppers at least four times a week was recently shown to decrease the risk of death from cardiovascular disease by 34 percent.⁴ Sweet peppers that have very little capsaicin offer a little protection, but the hottest chilies with the highest amounts of capsaicin display the largest benefit.



Sunshine Boosts Gut Health

Spending more time in the sun might help make your gut healthier, according to a study published in the journal *Frontiers in Microbiology*. Researchers studying people with low vitamin D saw that increasing UV exposure (which prompts the body to produce vitamin D) didn't just raise levels of the bone-building compound, it also boosted the participants' gut microbiome health.⁵



¹ Bai, Shuang, Wenliang Guo, Yangyang Feng, Hong Deng, Gaigai Li, Hao Nie, Guangyu Guo, et al. “Efficacy and Safety of Anti-Inflammatory Agents for the Treatment of Major Depressive Disorder: a Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomised Controlled Trials.” *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry*, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jnnp-2019-320912>.

² Roberts, Michelle. “What’s the Best Colour Lighting for Sleep?” BBC News. BBC, December 17, 2019.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/health-50807011>.

³ Lueke, Adam, and Niloufar Lueke. “Mindfulness Improves Verbal Learning and Memory through Enhanced Encoding.” *Memory & Cognition* 47, no. 8 (2019): 1531–45. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13421-019-00947-z>.

⁴ Bonaccio, Marialaura, Augusto Di Castelnuovo, Simona Costanzo, Emilia Ruggiero, Amalia De Curtis, Mariarosaria Persichillo, Chiara Cerletti, Maria Benedetta Donati, Giovanni De Gaetano, and Licia Iacoviello. “Abstract P224: Chili Pepper

Intake and Risk of Total and Cardiovascular Mortality in Italian Adults: Prospective Findings From the Moli-Sani Study.” *Circulation* 139, no. Suppl_1 (May 2019).

https://doi.org/10.1161/circ.139.suppl_1.p224.

⁵ Bosman, Elise S., Arianne Y. Albert, Harvey Lui, Jan P. Dutz, and Bruce A. Vallance. “Skin Exposure to Narrow Band Ultraviolet (UVB) Light Modulates the Human Intestinal Microbiome.” *Frontiers in Microbiology* 10 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmicb.2019.02410>.

Mindful Movement in Spring

Spring is a time for rebirth, renewal, and rejuvenation. Nature is blooming and it helps uplift our spirits, but especially our bodies. People are out and about on walks and bicycle rides. Children are frolicking in the park.

Recently, more fitness-focused festivals have become popular in the spring and early summer months. Think of them as a sort of inauguration to more physical activity. Often the daylong festival will start with a sunrise meditation, followed by a healthy breakfast. There can be a leisurely 5K run and musically infused yoga sessions. Many fitness festivals feature talks, sessions, and demonstrations that include everything from setting goals to mindful cooking.

Sometimes there are bonus activities such as massages and other bodywork such as Reiki or individualized chiropractic sessions.

There may be more explorative workshops and sessions that include sound healing, chakra work, or even aromatherapy experiences. Many festival days end with some sort of sending off activity that is focused on joy—most often a body-positive dance party!

Aside from yoga-focused festivals, other fitness-focused retreats are geared toward activities such as running, hiking, or even rock climbing. Search online for your preferred activity. Many retreats are geared to all skill levels (including the beginner), and some are for the seasoned buff who wants additional coaching or knowledge.

Some retreats are for those who want a more focused weekend to get back into the routine of whatever it is—be it jogging, dancing, or tai chi.

Before participating in a fitness festival or a fitness retreat, perhaps a detoxification retreat is more appropriate.

Coming out of the winter, many of us feel (and actually are) a bit heavy or weighed down. Foggy minds may come from decreased activity during the winter or increased sugary and starchy foods. A cleanse or a detox for the body is a fantastic place to begin to let go of the more slumbering and slow winter vibe, but without the complete 180-degree switch that an energizing festival may invoke.

Retreats are an example of these slow and restorative options. The idea is that you go to a place where the retreat is designed to meet your personal nutrition needs in order to sort of restart your body.

These are good options because the organizers and staff create specific detox programs that help you begin to kick your body's addiction to sugar and starch.

Often these retreats are set in picturesque locales with inspiring views and comfortable accommodations (which helps keep your mind off unhealthy food and habits). Several retreat locations are in exotic places where unique flavor combinations make for flavorful juices, smoothies, and high-quality nutritious foods.



If cost or time is a prohibitive factor for you, consider creating your own wellness retreat. You can do this either alone or with a friend who may also need some intentional time to reorient themselves to more movement and mindfulness.

Some key ideas in planning a stay-at-home (or in-town) fitness and wellness retreat is to mark off the time (either take a weekend or schedule some time off work), delegate familial and professional responsibilities to someone you trust, and set a goal.



Plan the personal retreat in advance and schedule appointments that are necessary.
An example of a daylong itinerary could be as follows:

6:00 A.M.

Wake up slowly and calmly; meditate for 20 minutes.

7:00 A.M.

Slow and energizing yoga or other soft and easy exercise.

9:00 A.M.

Green juice of spirulina, chlorella, nettle leaf, spinach, watercress, dandelion leaf, parsley, Moringa, and matcha.

10:30 A.M.

Run or walk briskly for 45 minutes to an hour.

11:30 A.M.

Stretch and breathe; do breath work. Shower and exfoliate your skin.

1:00 P.M.

Juice of papaya, lemon, cayenne, and mango with a touch of honey.

2:30 P.M.

Have a long and restorative massage.

5:00 P.M.

Meditate for 20 minutes.

5:30 P.M.

Cold shower followed by a hot bath with aromatherapy.

7:00 P.M.

Juice of chamomile, ginger, mint, spirulina, greens.

8:00 P.M.

Slow and calming yoga with lots of child's pose and a long "corpse pose" (Savasana) at the end.

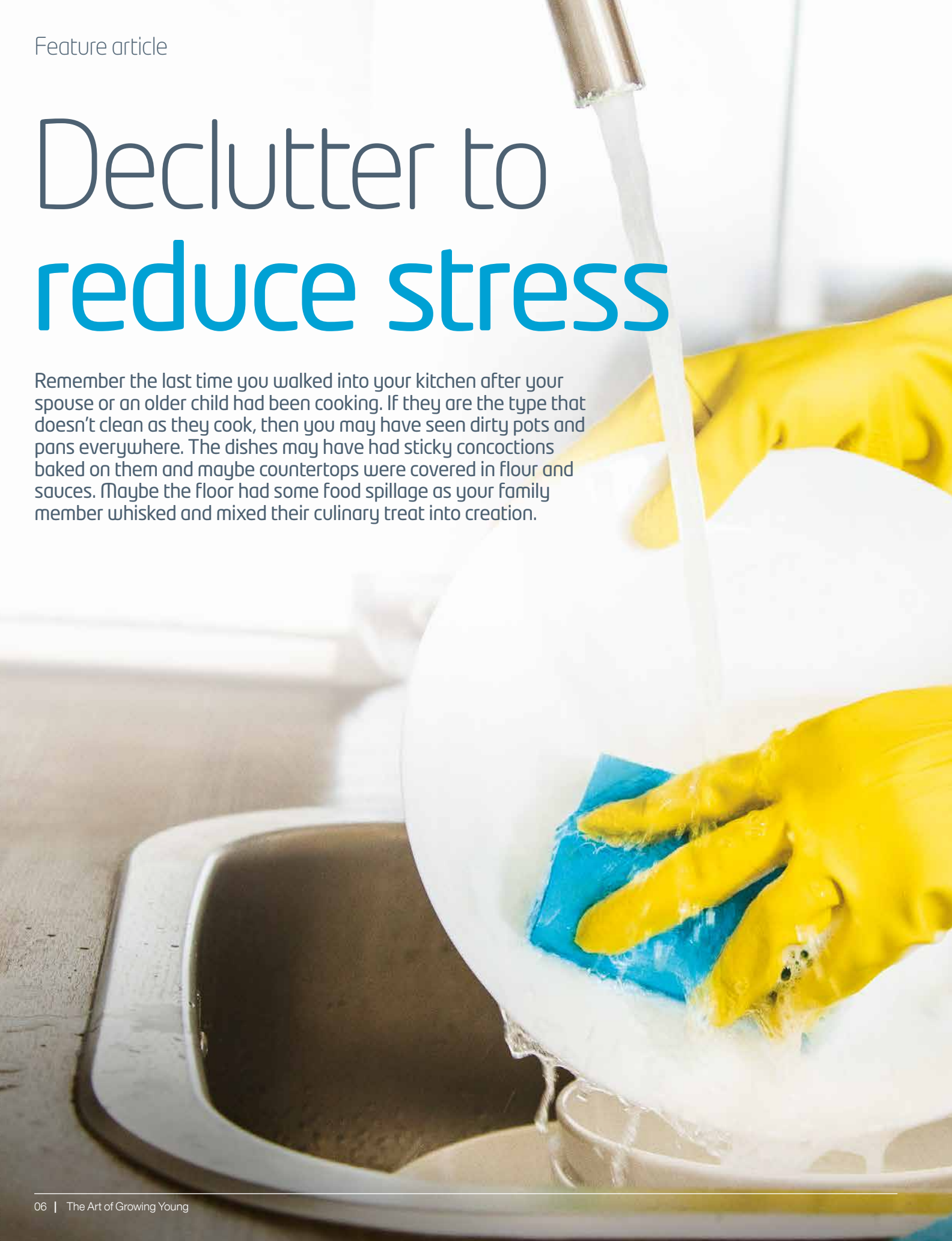
8:45 P.M.

Go to sleep! (Yes, that early!)



Declutter to reduce stress

Remember the last time you walked into your kitchen after your spouse or an older child had been cooking. If they are the type that doesn't clean as they cook, then you may have seen dirty pots and pans everywhere. The dishes may have had sticky concoctions baked on them and maybe countertops were covered in flour and sauces. Maybe the floor had some food spillage as your family member whisked and mixed their culinary treat into creation.





How did that make you feel seeing that chaotic kitchen? For many of us, that scene (even thinking about it) can create anxiety and stress. Yes, we know (or at least hope) that he or she will tidy and clean it all up, but the mess makes for a pretty tense moment until it is resolved.

Over the past several years, the trend of minimalism has taken hold in the mainstream. Television shows feature people downsizing to smaller houses or doing away with a large chunk of their material belongings. Social media accounts focus on tips for paring down.

Parenting experts have started to exalt the need for children to have less stuff and fewer activities and instead to focus their energy on uninterrupted and unstructured play.

It's no wonder that there is increased contentment associated with less stuff. Evolutionarily our ancestors owned considerably less stuff. A chaotic homelife filled with things contributes to our own disorganization.

This may be contributed to by the fact that “stuff” contributes to our mental load. Yes, we may love a given sweater or a piece of art hanging on the wall. But when we are attached to so many different objects, is that attachment healthy for our soul?

Don't organize—declutter.

You could hire a professional organizer to come to your home and help you sort through and categorize all your things.

While that is a worthy investment, prior to doing that you could downsize and focus on doing a lot of it yourself.

How many of your things in your home do you rarely or never use? Taking a weekend to go through your things to determine whether you still truly need or want it can help you decrease stuff.

Does it spark joy?

Famously, Marie Kondo first wrote a book and then was featured on an internationally successful television show during which she worked with various people to sort through their things. The beauty of the show is that these were ordinary humans, not pack rats or people who hoarded due to their mental perspective. Many of us could relate to several of the real-life people featured.

Kondo encourages people to put all their earthly belongings in a pile and go through each one to decide whether it sparks joy or not.

If it does not, put it aside, while thanking it for its role in your life, and then give it away (or throw it out).

Capsule closets.

Capsule wardrobes have been trending in the eco- and ethical fashion realm for the past several years. The basic premise is to curate a small closet full of high-quality clothes that are classic and the pieces all mix and match. Pinterest, blogs, and Instagram accounts are great places to look in order to get started. Some closets are as small as ten pieces for year-round use!

If whittling down to a dozen items of clothing seems a bit much, or if you don't like the idea of only having a couple of colors of clothes in your closet, then consider another activity. Similar to Kondo's “does it spark joy” practice, try on every single piece of clothing and look in the mirror to see if it sparks joy. We can see a skirt or a dress jacket on the rack and love it. But do we love it as much when we see it on ourselves?

Go out less.

Decluttering our social lives may be a daunting task, while many of us may have the opposite concern of loneliness. But taking an inventory of our social engagements and friendships can clear our calendar for more soul-enriching activities (stay in and read by candlelight, anyone?) and help us focus on the relationships that truly feed our soul. One idea is to only go out once or twice during the workweek.

One extracurricular activity per person (or child).

Children of all ages, but particularly young ones, need unstructured, uninterrupted play. What that means is that they have space to create and imagine with their toys (or household items, or nature, or the boxes that the toys came in!) without an adult coming in and placing their expectations on the child. Some childhood development experts have reported that when an adult gives an item (toy, tool, etc.) to a child and tells or shows them how to use it, the child uses it just that one way. Whereas when an adult doesn't give the input, the child comes up with four different ways to use or play with the item. Fewer toys also contribute to greater imagination.





Library over bookshelves.

How many books do you have? And how many of those books have you read once? And how many of those books that you have read, have you read many times over?



Instead of buying books, utilize the wonderful and underappreciated resource of your local library.

Use your shelves for other things rather than books collecting dust; or better yet, get rid of those shelves to declutter even more! When you rely on your library you are also investing in the community. E-books are another option to read good books without increasing clutter.

Out of sight, out of mind.

It can be hard to know whether we should hold on to something we use once or twice a year. Take the examples of your fondue set you got for your wedding or the ice cream maker you bought several summers back with the determination to make culinary desserts. Consider alternatives.

Create a community sharing resource. If you have a good relationship with some of your neighbors or with a close-knit group of friends, discuss the idea of group ownership of some items. Exchange the use of that fondue pot or ice cream maker to whoever participates in the group share.

Maybe you could use someone's tall ladder for your yearly roof gutter cleanup. Or you could use the lace tablecloth that someone owns for that once-a-year special dinner party you host.

Maybe think of minimizing as the intermittent fasting of materialism. People who practice intermittent fasting attest that the human body evolved and thrived during times of extended hunger and then followed with satiation. Food was not always in abundance, particularly sugar and sweets. Similarly, our ancestors lived with less stuff in order to focus their energies (as well as their resources) on more important needs.

How does your garden grow?

For avid gardeners, or people just wanting to momentarily escape the white, grey, and darkness of winter, the February mailings of seed catalogs offer the perfect fantasy of the greening of spring to come.

But gardening is more than a hobby reserved to retirees, pensioners, and grandmothers; it has caught on with younger adults, and a growing number of school-based programs are expanding into gardening and the benefits it carries. Popular smart phone apps such as Plant Snap, blogs like You Grow Girl, and viral hashtags like #citygarden and #growyourfood engage younger adults to get their hands in the dirt.



Gardening is good for your physical, mental, and social health—and science proves this is true!

A meta-analysis highlighted the benefits of gardening to include reductions in feelings of anxiety and depression. People who gardened had lower body mass indexes (BMI), which is the gold standard of healthy weight analysis. Gardeners saw increased overall life satisfaction, improved quality of life, and a deeper sense of community.¹

Cognitive and brain health improvements are just one of the benefits that gardeners see.

Researchers in Australia followed nearly 3,000 seniors over 60 years old for the duration of 16 years in order to better understand what lifestyle factors contributed to the onset or avoidance of dementia. Daily gardening was among the more notable protective factors for participants.²

Aside from brain health, gardening contributes to improved mental health. It helps combat stress and even has been shown to be more relaxing than reading or other hobbies. It also brings aesthetic beauty to a space. When our homes, neighborhoods, and cities are beautiful, it affects our quality of life.

This also contributes to better environmental ethos. The resources used in mass farming—accompanied with the fuels utilized to transport food, the plastics for containers, the pesticides of questionable safety, and the nutritional quality of produce picked unripe, shipped long distances, and stored for much longer periods between picking and consuming than in generations past—contribute to global environmental degradation. They also contribute to fundamental changes in the nutritional content of fruits, vegetables, grains, seeds, and nuts. If you can offset some of that with even a kitchen window herb garden, you are helping the environment as well as your and your family's nutritional foundation.

¹ Soga, Masashi, et al. "Gardening Is Beneficial for Health: A Meta-Analysis." *Preventive Medicine Reports*, vol. 5, 2017, pp. 92–99. doi:10.1016/j.pmedr.2016.11.007.

² Simons, Leon A, et al. "Lifestyle Factors and Risk of Dementia: Dubbo Study of the Elderly." *Medical Journal of Australia*, vol. 184, no. 2, 2006, pp. 68–70. doi:10.5694/j.1326-5377.2006.tb00120.x.



And there is the added benefit of knowing where your food is coming from. It provides the comfort of knowing your farmer at a micro level.

The lack of exposure to nature is of epidemic proportions in the developed world. Advocates for getting more "vitamin N" (the "n" stands for "nature") name even going to small city parks as an important activity for getting outside—no need to take a long trek to a distant forest preserve. Gardening is a small microcosm of the natural world and has the added element of interactivity. While a walk in the woods is wonderful for the senses of sight, smell, and sound, gardening adds the element of touch.



Another reason being outside and gardening can help health-wise is it provides more exposure to vitamin D, which helps boost your immunity and contributes to better mental health. In addition, non-insulated direct body contact with the earth connects us to the natural electromagnetic field of our planet, which is very likely the best antidote to the “electrosmog” of Wi-Fi, cell phone RF, and 5G, as well as the non-native EMF generated by our massive global electrical grid and the circuits that bring it into nearly everyone’s home.



While most sorts of gardening aren’t going to make you break a sweat the way a run or swim will, gardening can help keep you in shape by maintaining flexibility and agility.

Squatting down to pull weeds, bending over to plant a seed, and twisting your torso to pile dirt around a plant are just some of the functional movements that planting promotes.



Eating to energize

Ugh, the dreaded afternoon slump—low energy, difficulty staying focused, decreased concentration. Perhaps this always happens to you. Or perhaps you just didn't get a good night's sleep and your day has been one in which you keep daydreaming about going back to dreamland. Often, we reach for a coffee, or sometimes a caffeinated soda or "energy drink," but these items can contribute to a quick boost—a sugar surge in our bodies—and then a slump, or keep us awake at night when it's time to go to sleep.

Fortunately, there are foods that can help boost energy and help sustain that boost longer and more healthfully.

If you are not gluten sensitive, quinoa is a superfood with staying power because it truly delivers what it promises. It is rich in protein and complex carbohydrates. Its nutty flavor and pillowy texture with a bit of snap at the center make it a good option to mix with or substitute in place of oatmeal in the morning.



For a satisfying afternoon snack, you could make a small bowl of warm quinoa and top it with a drizzle of olive oil and a small pinch of sea salt.

If you are lectin sensitive, or are recovering from "leaky gut" issues, pressure-cooking quinoa inactivates the lectin proteins completely.

Another protein-packed option is whole sardines, which contain 100-fold less mercury than tuna.

You can mince sardines and substitute them in a traditional tuna salad sandwich recipe with yogurt replacing part of the mayonnaise, and add several leaves of spinach to add more greens.

Protein in the form of lentils or beans helps stabilize blood sugar. The fiber in beans and lentils helps keep you satiated longer. Toast up your own spiced garbanzo beans with curry, lime, and some salt. Or plan on a midafternoon lentil soup packed with vegetables. Again, pressure-cooking all these foods in the legume family inactivates their lectin proteins, which can cause inflammatory immune reactions in people with excessive intestinal permeability (leaky gut).

Flaxseeds and hemp hearts have good ratios of protein, carbohydrates, and fat, and are the lowest lectin-containing seeds. This combination aids in preventing the dreaded postprandial slump. Top full-fat Greek yogurt with freshly ground flaxseeds, hemp hearts (the seeds of hemp), and some ripe berries to give you a boost of energy in the morning as breakfast or as an afternoon snack.

Citrus is a great pick-me-up in part due to its sugar content, but also the antioxidant powerhouse of vitamin C. Citrus season is coming to a close with the end of winter, so some spring and early summer seasonal options include strawberries and cherries. During midsummer opt for blueberries, which are also packed with antioxidants and are especially nourishing to and protective of our central nervous system.



Nuts are nature's convenience food. They don't need refrigeration and can be packed for on-the-go snacking.

Add walnuts to a salad or sprinkle sliced and toasted almonds on top of sautéed vegetables. Or simply have a handful of nuts in your car for the times when you are out and about longer than you anticipated. Overall, walnuts are probably your best option, followed by macadamia nuts and then almonds; it is a good idea to limit cashews and peanuts.

When you truly need caffeine, reach for green tea or small amounts of matcha. Green tea is a caffeinated option that has a more sustainable effect compared to coffee. And yerba mate is a popular drink in South America; it is available as a tea in tea bags or loose. If it's not too late in the day, coffee is a good option in moderation. Aim to stop drinking caffeinated beverages at least six-to-eight hours prior to your bedtime.

And let us not forget the humble glass of water. Severe dehydration can cause fatigue, but even being mildly dehydrated can cause a slump in energy. Dress your water up with energy boosting additions such as lemon slices or splashing in some ginger tea. It has been demonstrated that sometimes hunger can be depressed by drinking plenty of water, and it is great to support your kidneys to help detoxification.

Personal Empowerment

Sometimes life can feel so entirely out of our control. The circumstances in which we were raised, the norms and limits of our given societal culture, and the dynamics we share with other people can often feel like insurmountable obstacles given our lack of control in so much. The truth of the matter is that there is very little that we can control in life, yet we have the capability of deep and profound personal empowerment.



How are these two seemingly extreme differences possible? The only thing you can control in life is yourself. But doing that can often feel overwhelming. We are imperfect and complex creatures with so many layers of biological, sociological, and psychological dynamics dancing all together. Here are some ideas on creating a mindset of self-empowerment in the midst of a largely complicated life.

Begin with who you are.

Knowing yourself may take a lifetime as you change and mature. Many great minds believe that knowing yourself is exclusively a journey with no “destination” of complete understanding. It is important to know some basics about who you are. Start by asking yourself what brings you the most peace? When are you feeling your best—doing what activity, in what sort of environment, with which people? What are your triggers that make you feel anxious, angry, sad, or hopeless? Keep in mind that the answers to these questions may change as you get older and have had more life experience.

Embrace self-grace.

Practicing grace—toward yourself and others—is one of the most important forms of kindness. Self-awareness can lead to some truly uncomfortable and difficult realizations of who we are or how we behave. Self-grace is not denying or downplaying the “ugly side” of who we are.

Instead it is recognizing it, breathing deeply, and then forgiving oneself for whatever it is.

Know your strengths.

We can live more fully in our own power when we know what we are good at. This is not an exercise in self-aggrandizement or boastful behavior. Instead, this should be a humble inventory of what we do right or how we are whole. Your strengths do not need to be productivity-oriented. Yes, you may be good at building things or creating a vision for a project at work. Or maybe you are an exceptional baker. Try to also identify your strengths from an emotional, spiritual, or social perspective. Perhaps you listen well, or you are good at making people feel welcome when they come to your house. Maybe you are really good at time management. Or you have an intentional (and technology-free) way of connecting with others.

Know your shortcomings.

It is important to approach knowing yourself with some humility. Making a mental (or physical) list of what you aren't so great at doesn't necessarily need to mean that you then start ticking off a list of what you need to get better at. Instead it is a way to recognize areas in which you can lean on others or simply let go. Of course, self-improvement does require the need to address and improve upon our shortcomings.

However, using our strengths to greatest advantage can help ourselves, those we love, and the world at large more than spending too much time trying to improve our weaknesses.

Stop comparing.

Social media creates a farce of reality. Images of perfectly filtered photos and a never-ending onslaught of people's supposedly happy moments can and does create a lot of self-doubt and even anxiety and depression. Stop following people on Instagram who do not bring you joy. Recognize when something is curated versus reality. Limit your time on platforms or spending time with people who you feel triggered to compare yourself to.

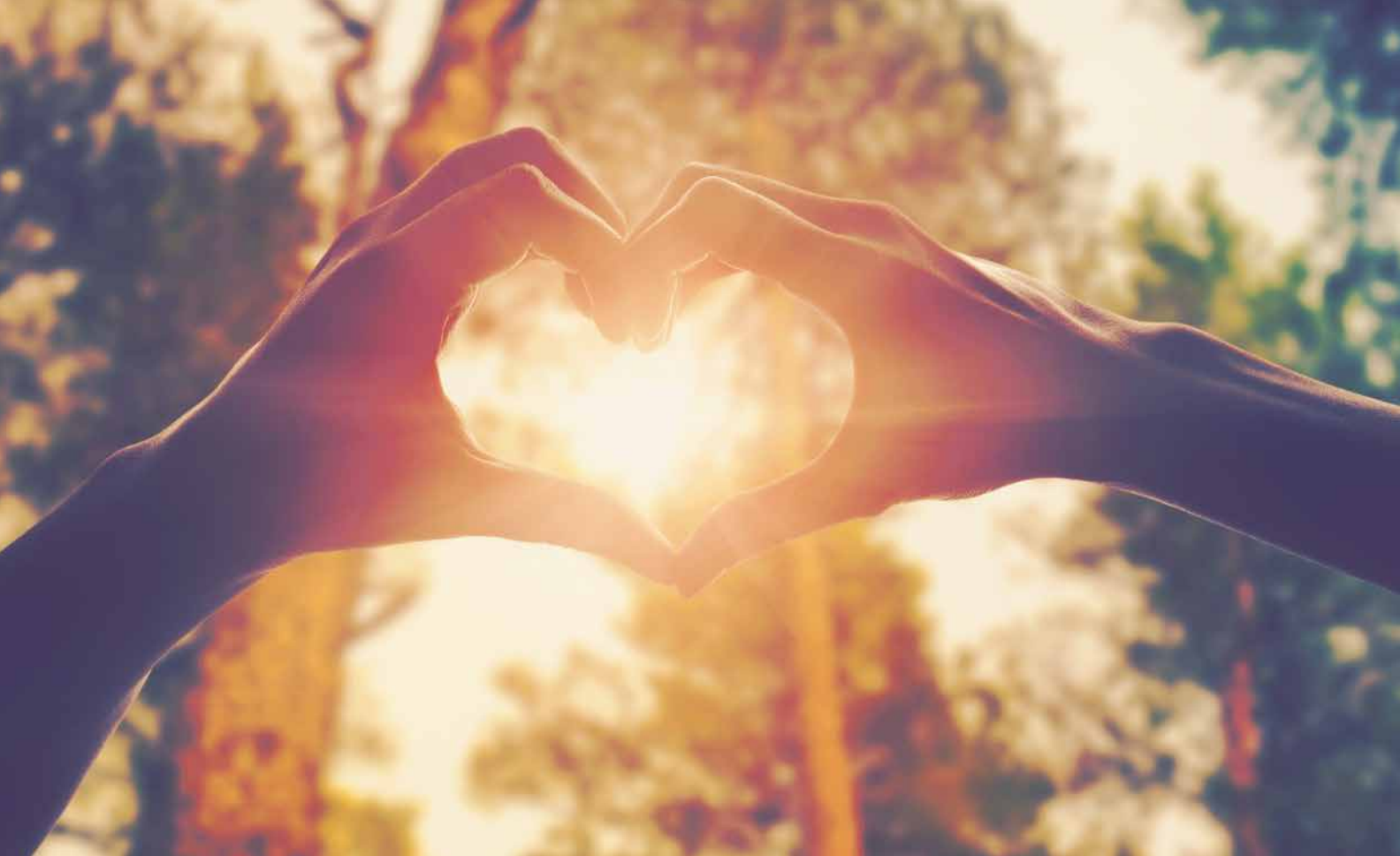
Define your own idea of success.

Embrace what success means for you. You may have a friend who loves the work she does and has risen to the top of her company with promotions and pay raises. That may be something you aspire to. Or perhaps you are content working in your position with less responsibility and the ability to make a comfortable enough wage to live more slowly. Large homes, new cars, luxurious vacations, and a house full of stuff most likely will not be sustainable for feeling self-empowered. Somehow you have to define what success means for you.

Lower your expectations.

Pessimists often say they are truly realists! That said, there is a different mindset between someone who recognizes that life has its limits vs. someone who thinks that life is horrible! When you set your goals high, perform a reality check to make sure that these are indeed outcomes you want (complete with the work it takes to get there) and whether they are truly attainable.





Open yourself to change.

Accepting yourself and others as well as the current circumstances for who and what they are and practicing embracing gratitude and acceptance for the present experience is essential to self-peace. But that doesn't mean we need to stubbornly cement ourselves into resistance of change. Notice when you are given an opportunity for change. If you get laid off at work, experience the sadness, anger, and distrust you may feel in the midst of that difficult change. But also look at the opportunity it presents to change yourself and your situation. There is a great deal of truth in the saying "when one door closes, another one opens." The rhythm of a fulfilling life is often one of letting go and giving away, then being gifted, without expectation.

Practice self-care.

Gone are the days of celebrating the martyr. Now are the days to shift your actions into "putting on your own oxygen mask before helping others." Self-care need not be extravagant or fancy. Simple acts such as going to bed at an early hour or getting up to watch the sunrise outside with a warm mug of tea can bring us more meaning and grounding. Nothing is more important to self-empowerment than taking care of yourself.

Surrender.

The serenity prayer urges people to recognize when they cannot change something. Sometimes letting go of the need for control—or indeed the lack of control—frees us to accept the present circumstances and empowers us to act within the context of that reality.

Here are some simple, everyday exercises for self-empowerment.

Journaling. You need not write a novel-worthy prose of your life. Simply jotting down a quick list of what happened or how you felt that day can help you take an inventory of what you are experiencing and help you clear your mind.

Affirmations. Sometimes people are reluctant to affirm themselves because they think it is being insincere or speaking false accolades. You need not think or speak affirmations that do not feel true to you. Perhaps begin with basic ones such as, "Today I will practice kindness in my words," "I am capable of breathing deeply when I have to interact with so-and-so at work," or "I act with integrity when people are gossiping at this social gathering."

Changing your map (cognitive behavior modification). Our thoughts, feelings, and actions form an interconnected triangle in which each influences the others.

While many feelings or thoughts cannot be controlled, when we practice embracing calmer and collected feelings and thoughts, this practice can influence our actions. When our actions are healthy in mind, body, and spirit, they then affect our feelings and thoughts.

Exercise. When we make time for physical fitness, chemicals are released in our bodies that lead to feelings of positivity. When our bodies are strong, we can more easily lean in to our personal power.

Sleep. As basic as water, food, and shelter, sleep helps our neurological, indeed, all our systems to repair. We cannot be actualized human beings without a calm body system and peacefully minded spirit.



Flaxseed

Superfoods come and go in the grand food trend. Long before chia seed was being heralded as a rediscovered ancient food with innumerable health benefits, and before the hemp heart fad became mainstream, there was the humble flaxseed.

Flaxseed—also called simply flax or linseed—is an oily seed that is known for its high levels of omega-3 fatty acids and fiber. It was originally cultivated in the Middle East but is now primarily grown in North America.

Flaxseeds are nutritional powerhouses.¹ As previously mentioned, flaxseeds are rich in omega-3 fatty acids.

They are rich in ALA, alpha-linolenic acid, a plant-based source of omega-3. The ALA in flaxseeds or flaxseed oil has to be converted by the body into EPA and DHA (which are the kinds of omega-3 fatty acids found in fish oil). Flaxseeds are a good option for vegetarians and vegans who opt not to take fish oil. However, the ability to make EPA and DHA from ALA is limited (though greater in women than men); supplementation with algae-derived EPA and DHA is a good idea, especially for vegetarians and vegans who don't eat fish.

The health benefits of flaxseed comprise a lengthy list. Flaxseeds are heart healthy and studies have attributed them to lowering cholesterol levels in blood.^{2,3} Daily consumption of flax has been correlated with a significant decrease in blood pressure.⁴ In one study, participants with elevated blood pressure took 30 grams of flax daily for six months.

On average, the study subjects saw a decrease in systolic blood pressure of 10 mmHg and diastolic blood pressure of 7 mmHg. Those with systolic pressures over 140 mmHg experienced a decrease of 15 mmHg.

Flax is also good for the gut and can be part of detoxing the digestive system. Flax regulates bowel issues to improve constipation and diarrhea, but through different mechanisms.⁵

Flaxseeds have a nutty taste and a crispy texture. They are best consumed freshly ground—consuming them whole often ends up with them remaining whole through the entire digestive process. You can buy already ground flaxseed, but the nutritional benefits begin to deteriorate once it's been ground. Instead of buying them ground, a quick buzz in your coffee grinder can make them much more digestible.



Almond milk has become quite popular as an alternative to cow's milk.

However, recent media investigations have alleged that the environmental impact of almonds and almond milk are having undesired effects.⁶ Cultivating 16 individual almonds takes over 15 gallons of water—that is nearly a gallon of water per almond! Instead, consider flaxseed milk, and you can make your own at home.

Simply blend one part whole flaxseeds to four parts water with a pinch of salt in a high-power blender for about three to five minutes.

Then strain through a nut milk bag or a fine sieve. Add vanilla extract or honey for flavoring if you desire.

People who avoid eggs (or if you happen to not have an egg on hand and you have a baking recipe that calls for eggs) can use flax as a binding ingredient in baked goods.

Other ways to incorporate more flax into your diet is to keep a bottle of flaxseed oil on hand in your refrigerator (it must be kept there once opened in order to preserve freshness). Substitute flaxseed oil for olive oil in salad dressings and marinades. Or drizzle the nutty oil on top of popcorn or toast. In order to maintain its nutritional qualities, use it more as a finishing oil (like a good quality olive oil).

¹ Goyal, Ankit, et al. "Flax and Flaxseed Oil: an Ancient Medicine & Modern Functional Food." *Journal of Food Science and Technology*, vol. 51, no. 9, Sept. 2014, pp. 1633–1653. doi:10.1007/s13197-013-1247-9.

² Kristensen, Mette, et al. "Flaxseed Dietary Fibers Lower Cholesterol and Increase Fecal Fat Excretion, but Magnitude of Effect Depend on Food Type." *Nutrition & Metabolism*, vol. 9, no. 1, Feb. 2012, p. 8. doi:10.1186/1743-7075-9-8.

³ Edel, Andrea L, et al. "Dietary Flaxseed Independently Lowers

Circulating Cholesterol and Lowers It beyond the Effects of Cholesterol-Lowering Medications Alone in Patients with Peripheral Artery Disease." *The Journal of Nutrition*, vol. 145, no. 4, Feb. 2015, pp. 749–757. doi:10.3945/jn.114.204594.

⁴ Rodriguez-Leyva, Delfin, et al. "Potent Antihypertensive Action of Dietary Flaxseed in Hypertensive Patients." *Hypertension*, vol. 62, no. 6, Dec. 2013, pp. 1081–1089. doi:10.1161/hypertensionaha.113.02094.

⁵ Palla, Amber Hanif, and Anwarul-Hassan Gilani.

"Dual Effectiveness of Flaxseed in Constipation and Diarrhea: Possible Mechanism." *Journal of Ethnopharmacology*, vol. 169, July 2015, pp. 60–68. doi:10.1016/j.jep.2015.03.064.

⁶ Buchanan, Larry, et al. "Your Contribution to the California Drought." *The New York Times*, 21 May 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2015/05/21/us/your-contribution-to-the-california-drought.html>.

Nature's Child

In Sweden (as well as its neighboring Scandinavian countries, Norway and Denmark), there is a popular phrase that “there is not bad weather, only bad clothing.” This is precisely the premise of the book of a similar name by author Linda Akeson McGurk. In her book *There's No Such Thing as Bad Weather*, she writes extensively about her culture shock as a Swedish mother raising her children in her American husband's country and culture.¹

McGurk describes the societal difference of getting out in all sorts of weather—after all, Sweden and other Northern European countries are not known for their temperate climates. She writes that from birth, babies are bundled up in their strollers and encouraged to nap outside under down blankets.

She notes that Scandinavian parents exploring preschools for their little ones place the amount of time the children play outside as a top priority.

Instead, her experience in a small town in the Midwest of the United States is that she is seen by her American neighbors as odd or silly for walking around town in all weather, while others take pity on her, assuming she is too poor to own a vehicle and insist they give her a ride to wherever it is she is going. She speaks of going on daily walks with her newborn baby in 15 degrees Fahrenheit (that's -9 Celsius) and the locals being scandalized. The irony is that the area where she was living in the United States shares a very similar four-season climate with just as shocking cold temperatures as her native Sweden!

But the Scandinavians are onto something. Think of some of your best childhood memories. How many of them involved you playing freely in some sort of natural settings—be it your backyard or a family vacation to a national park? The sad truth is that we have sanitized childhood, and that in turn means children are playing inside. A lot, in fact.



We can blame video games and screens, but really the big change may be more attributed to the perspective of adults.

The fear seems to be around safety—both in terms of getting hurt outside and possible abduction. But in the United Kingdom, more children have to go to the hospital for falling out of bed and being injured than falling down from climbing trees.² In the United States, child abduction is at the same rate as it was in the 1950s, and crime is roughly the same or lower. However, perception of crime is up.³

The health, social, and emotional benefits to children playing daily outside—and in all weather—is irrefutable. Physically, outdoor play means more vitamin D, which supports immunity. Children who are exposed to dirt and soil often have more robust microbiomes and immune systems. They also get so much more exercise.



Not simply from just running around, but all the different positions they warp their bodies into—crouching down to snatch a few blades of grass, reaching up to grab a tree branch, crawling around in the mulch and dirt.

¹ McGurk, Linda Akeson. *There's No Such Thing as Bad Weather: a Scandinavian Mom's Secrets for Raising Healthy, Resilient, and Confident Kids* (from *Friluftsliv* to *Hygge*). Touchstone, 2017.

² Henley, Jon. “Why our children need to get outside and engage with nature.” *The Guardian*. *Guardian News and Media*, 16 Aug. 2010.

³ Skenazy, Lenore. “Crime Statistics.” *Free-Range Kids*, <http://www.freerangekids.com/crime-statistics/>.



Keep in mind that humans lived outdoors during the daytime as long as there have been humans on planet earth, until about 200 years ago, when the beginning of manufacturing jobs began to move people inside during the days. There are very likely many aspects of human metabolism that depend on exposure to the elements—particularly sunshine, as well as breezes, humidity fluctuations, atmospheric pressure changes, and dirt—the outer “skin” of our Mother Earth.

Outdoor play is more creative and imaginative. Limited toys and no screens mean that children use their incredible imaginations. They explore grass and trees, rocks and pebbles, touch flowers and insects. They are able to use all their senses to experience their surroundings.

Socially, children who play outside are more likely to interact with peers. On playground equipment they must navigate the social nuances of things such as taking a turn to slide down the slide or sharing a ball. They learn how to deal with conflict and work out social norms of behavior.

Emotionally, being outdoors reduces stress. Green spaces help calm our nervous systems, and children are no different.

Lead by example! Invest in some good rain boots and warm winter clothes—but also let go of your concern about getting dirty or hurt. Children who spend time outside reap tremendous benefits, and you may see that instantly!



Lifelong learning

If you are retired or toward the end of your career, chances are you haven't been in a classroom in a very long time. For many of us, our last official teacher may have been in high school or college.

Teacher and chalkboard or not, from the time we are fetuses in our mother's uterus until we are in advanced old age, we are always learning. And there is good reason to embrace being a lifelong learner well into your 70s, 80s, and beyond.

Lifelong learning is good for our brain health. When our minds stay active, we stay sharper and more mentally agile.

Evidence shows that lifelong learning helps delay or even prevent dementia and helps ward off depression.

Education at all ages helps us feel relevant and current. It connects us to society, and we can more easily feel included in family dinners or intergenerational conversations. We take social risks to meet new people and see new ways of life.

Many of us have fantasized about the dream job that we would have preferred to pursue.

Maybe you were a letter carrier, but you really dreamed of being a pastry chef. Or perhaps you wish you had always learned to play the piano. You don't have to be a school-age child to take piano lessons.

Turn that unfulfilled interest into something new to learn or improve on. You don't have to pick up a passion or hobby that is completely new. Maybe you already know how to dance the waltz very well; you could expand your dancing repertoire and go to a salsa class.

Seniors have a lot of options to find classes and opportunities to learn. Start with the local senior center, library, or retirement center. See if they have senior-specific classes. Or venture into the local college to see if there are classes that non-students can sit in on. Check out resources online or call your municipality to learn about talks and lectures in the area.

Some ideas for new skills and knowledge:

- Take a woodworking class, or maybe a class on gemstones or plants or gardening.
- Learn a crafting skill such as sewing, needlepoint, or knitting.



Enroll in a lecture class at a local school on history, art, science, or health.

- Explore new ways to exercise at group classes. Check out local gyms or municipal recreation centers to see their class lineup. Depending on your mobility level, ask which classes would be best for your physical needs.

- Host a foreign student or new immigrant family to your home for dinner to learn more about their culture and country. It will also help you teach them about your area. It builds personal relationships and goodwill in general.
- Go to the library and check out a textbook on any subject and learn something completely new. You may find that a lot of information has been updated since you last studied about biology, space, or history.
- Participate in a storytelling activity. This helps you share your experiences and stories and promotes being a better listener.
- Find a local cooking class in a cuisine you've never tried, or explore an ethnic market and ask shoppers what they use certain ingredients for.
- Travel with an educational tour to an area of your country you've never been to. Many tours have broad themes such as the art, history, and culture of the area and its people.
- Check the local museums for their free docent tours.
- Ask your grandchildren to share more with you about their favorite hobbies. You could learn how to edit photos in Adobe or Instagram, or learn about their favorite sport or television series.

Focus on your passions and interests. Be brave in your imperfection. Embrace humility to be a "student" again. And enjoy the ability to learn precisely what you want to learn right now in life.



Balancing work and life

Modern masculinity is helping men live into their full selves. Nowadays, particularly for younger generations, it is common for men to cry, express emotions, practice self-care, and communicate their personal needs in a more direct way.

Gone are the days of men not participating in domestic life or only being the breadwinner of a family. Now men are not only expected to be involved in home and family life, they are embracing it.

Given that the demands of jobs, lengthy commute times, and career competition are still major issues in the modern work culture, it is essential that men start changing the conversations about work-life balance to recognize and realize their full humanity.

Paid parental leave with job protection is something that all developed nations require by law, with the exception of the United States. In many countries, such as Canada, the Nordic countries, the United Kingdom, and Germany, there is a specific allotted paternity leave carved out and reserved exclusively for fathers of infants. Not only should men take this time, but they should also push for equality in time for mothers and fathers.

The demands of an infant and young child are incomparable—sleepless nights (and days!) from frequent feedings and diaper changes—but more so children and society do better emotionally, socially, and healthfully with attentive, involved, and tuned-in fathers.

See if your workplace supports a culture of working from home. In our digital age, many workplaces are able to support remote employees, and many jobs can be largely remote. Unfortunately, the work world has to still catch up with this potential.

If your company allows for remote work—even one day a week—take advantage of that. This saves time on your commute and allows you to do other personal things during that time. Instead of a morning commute, you could exercise, walk your dog in the middle of the day, or even join your children at school during lunchtime. But a word of caution: working from home can be a slippery slope. When you don't have a clear divide between when you work and when you are at home, then the blurred lines could lead to work bleeding into your home life during other times (evenings and weekends).

Shortened workweeks are uncommon even though evidence suggests that they lead to increased productivity and job contentment. If you don't work for the extraordinarily few that have taken up the cause of a shortened workweek, perhaps you could work out a flexible schedule. Instead of a five-day week, see if you could condense your hours to work four days a week. If you work overtime one week, hopefully you are able to make up those extra hours with some time off the next week.

It is not always easy to do if you have a supervisory position, but while on vacation do your best to leave work out of "your personal time."

Instead of short getaways, aim for a longer vacation every year and communicate with your team well in advance that you will not be available during that time.





If you are in a position of leadership, this sets a strong and positive example for your workers that you take work-life balance seriously!

Perhaps also keep your office social life at the office or the occasional work-related happy hour or dinner.

Consider limiting your social media connections to your friends and family—maybe skip the friend requests from your boss or coworkers. This helps create some distance from work and keep your home life private.



International Women's Day

International Women's Day is celebrated every year across the globe on March 8. It is a day to commemorate the hard work women and their allies have done. This year the theme is #EachforEqual.¹ When every one of us—women, girls, men, boys—stand for everyone's rights, we can create an even more just and equal world.

This year is particularly important as people the world over will honor everyone's effort to create a gender-equal world. Topics such as education for girls, ending all forms of sexual violence, and women's health are commonly heralded.

We must all be accountable for our own feelings, views, judgments, and actions. It's important to see how stereotypes break down the connection between human beings. It is essential that we expand our perspectives on the roles of women and men.

We must work to improve situations in our personal lives and in the public realm to make sure women and everyone else are treated with respect and fairness.

The history of International Women's Day is over one hundred years old. The initial purpose was to honor garment and textile workers. It became more mainstream in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Today, some countries mark International Women's Day as a public holiday. That said, for other countries it is less politically focused and more about appreciation for the women in one's life.



Others consider it a day to honor women in the same way Mother's Day does.

In some places public gatherings are more celebratory and take on a more festive feel. Other mobilizations serve more as organized protests to advocate for better treatment of women or support a specific goal.

There is a belief that if one person rises up in terms of self-actualization then we all rise up. When you are able to live up to your higher self and achieve great things, then others also will be more able to do so.



The idea is that if we elevate the status and quality of life for women, this will create a chain reaction and ripple through all of society. Those women are our daughters, mothers, sisters, neighbors, and coworkers. An equal world is an empowered world, one that is not just benefiting women but all of us.

Everyone brings their unique outlook to situations. When more women are empowered and equal to everyone else, there is more chance for true progress.

¹ "Theme for International Women's Day 2020 Is #EachforEqual." International Women's Day, 2 Sept. 2019. <https://www.internationalwomensday.com/2020Theme>. Retrieved December 15, 2019.



Countries with greater gender equality tend to have higher levels of economic prosperity. Additionally, countries with less gender equality tend to have less governmental stability and societal security (greater rates of crime). When we equalize the role of women, men benefit in terms of peace, safety, and income.

How we treat girls as young as newborns can affect their potential in life. And this in turn can harm not only women but also men. When mothers, daughters, and sisters are disempowered, men also may not completely live to their full potential.



There is a belief that asserts that a society is only as strong as its weakest and most vulnerable members.

Women have accomplished great things, not just for themselves but for the whole of society. By appreciating the perspectives and needs of all the world's female population, we are improving today's world for the greater good for all. Thank you, women, for all that you do and all that you stand for, especially equality for all.

Ask the Expert

How much salt is too much?

Much like fat, salt has an undeserved bad reputation. Both nutrients are vital for a healthy body. There is plenty of evidence that shows salt may not have as much of an impact on heart disease and high blood pressure as once believed. For example, one study showed that a low-salt diet increased blood cholesterol by only 2.5 percent and blood triglycerides by only 7 percent.¹ Another study revealed participants who consumed a low-salt diet may experience resistance to insulin, the hormone responsible for transporting sugar from the blood to cells.²

Sodium is involved in muscle contractions, nerve function, blood pressure, and blood volume.

Humans simply cannot live without salt. How much is too much depends on many factors that are highly specific to each person's unique body, lifestyle, and health history. Those people with high blood pressure (hypertension) who experience lower blood



pressure when following a sodium-restricted diet are considered salt-sensitive and may need to monitor their sodium intake under their physician's care, unlike most people with hypertension who are not salt sensitive. For most of the population, salt is not something to be avoided at all costs. It can be a healthy and delicious part of the diet.

What are probiotics, and why are they important?

There is an entire ecosystem living in your digestive tract collectively referred to as gut flora, also known as the human gut microbiome (each compartment of the body has its own microbiome, but the gut microbiome is by far the largest and most diverse). In a healthy body, most of these microscopic organisms are healthy and beneficial. In fact, without them your digestive tract would not be able to function properly and your immune system could not function either. Competing with these beneficial organisms are bad ones that can cause disease and infection and impede the body's ability to fully absorb nutrients from food. Consuming probiotics, whether from supplements or fermented foods such as yogurt, kefir, sour cream, sauerkraut, kimchi, and other fermented vegetables adds more of the good bacteria to your body. Because all these bacteria are competing with one another for resources, by supplying probiotics that allow the good bacteria to thrive, you are also naturally controlling the bad bacteria.

Does my mood really affect my health?

Yes! Mood and the feelings we choose to focus on can have a huge impact on mental and physical health. A massive study of over 225,000 participants recently concluded that optimism and pessimism may be associated with cardiovascular risk and all-cause mortality. Researchers found that people with optimistic mindsets experience a lower risk of cardiovascular events and mortality.³ In other words, when we choose to focus on the positive aspect of our lives—the things, people, experiences, and thoughts that bring joy into our lives—we also protect our physical health. There is a very real and very strong connection between mind and body. Choosing to align our thoughts with an optimistic mindset is an extremely powerful tool in the “art of growing young.”



¹ Graudal, Niels Albert, Thorbjorn Hubeck-Graudal, and Gesche Jurgens. "Effects of Low Sodium Diet versus High Sodium Diet on Blood Pressure, Renin, Aldosterone, Catecholamines, Cholesterol, and Triglyceride." *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, September 2011. <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.cd004022.pub3>.

² Feldman, R. "Moderate Dietary Salt Restriction Increases Vascular and Systemic Insulin Resistance." *American Journal of Hypertension* 12, no. 6 (1999): 643–47. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0895-7061\(99\)00116-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0895-7061(99)00116-3).

³ Rozanski, Alan, Chirag Bavishi, Laura D. Kubzansky, and Randy Cohen. "Association of Optimism With Cardiovascular Events and All-Cause Mortality." *JAMA Network Open* 2, no. 9 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.12200>.