

November/December 2020

The art of growing young[®]

Gut Health and
Immunity

Nutrition



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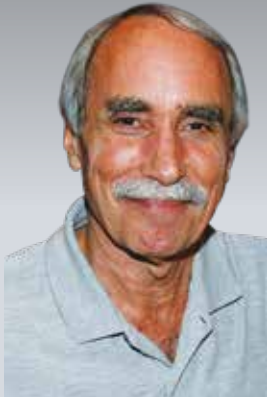
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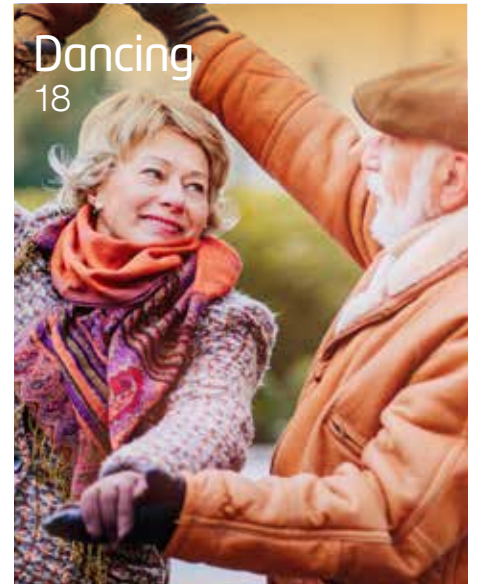
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Don't Hibernate This Winter

There's something undeniably cozy about curling up on the couch with a blanket and a good book or movie during these colder, darker months. Every night, I'm tempted to stay in and do just that, but I don't, because I recognize that hibernating all winter long isn't good for my health. And it's not good for yours either.

Even though it may be easier to be physically active during warmer, brighter months, it's just as important during winter. It may even be more important to stay active during winter because physical activity has been shown repeatedly to help boost mood and impart positive feelings. If you're one of the many people who are affected by SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder), the simple act of going for a midday walk may greatly enhance your mood.

In a normal year, a lot of people head inside to the gym in order to stay active. However, you may not be comfortable doing that during a pandemic. If that's the case, and you just can't stand the thought of being out in the cold, I have a few ideas that might help you.

Yoga is great exercise that doesn't take much room, and there is no limit to the number of free classes you can find online these days.

Pilates is a more intense activity that can still be done in your living room. Much as with yoga, there are plenty of free resources online to keep you going.

Calisthenics can be done anywhere. These include squats, lunges, push-ups, sit-ups and more.

For families with young children, I recommend 10-minute **dance parties**. Let everyone choose an upbeat song and dance together.

Regardless of age or geographic location this winter, it's important to get up and get out. Whether that means bundling up and getting outside or doing yoga in the living room, we all benefit when we keep our bodies moving. So I urge us all to stop hibernating and start getting active.



Dwight L. McKee
Scientific Director



Nutritional News



Diet and Exercise Boost the Brain

The Australian National University recently found diet and exercise can help reduce the risk of developing Alzheimer's, even if a person is already in early cognitive decline. In the study, participants exercised just two or three times a week, did brain training activities, and ate healthier. Not only did participants lose unwanted weight, but they also gave their brains a major health and function boost.¹

New Benefits to the Mediterranean Diet

Many studies have also shown a variety of health benefits from eating a diet rich in olive oil, cereals, fruits and vegetables, and fish (the Mediterranean diet). However, the latest research shows one more remarkable benefit: safeguarding against rheumatoid arthritis. The effects may be even greater for individuals who smoke or used to smoke.⁵



Feeling Sad? Get Moving

A study out of Cambridge recently showed adults with major depression could improve symptoms by up to 55% by engaging in moderate aerobic activity for just two months. Less activity still helped people improve their mood, but the effects were not as large.² Combining regular physical activity with intentional thinking can have a profound impact on mood.

Gut Health Linked to Obesity in Children

Consuming a diet rich in foods that provide probiotics may help youth struggling with weight gain. A new study found that when obese children on a calorie-restricted diet consume probiotics, they lose more weight.³ This is not surprising, as a healthy digestive system plays an important role in weight management, and modern diets filled with junk foods provide little to no probiotic support.

Fish-Rich Diet Protects the Heart

A recent meta-analysis looking at EPA and DHA omega-3 intake revealed supplementing with these important fatty acids is associated with a significantly reduced risk of several types of coronary heart disease. What's more, the health-protecting benefits of omega-3s appear to increase with the amount taken.⁴ Omega-3 fatty acids are found in abundance in fresh, cold-water fish, and also in marine algae that the fish eat. These algae can be commercially grown, and the EPA and DHA can be extracted from them to provide a plant-based source of these crucial omega-3 fatty acids.



¹ McMaster, Mitchell, et al. "Body, Brain, Life for Cognitive Decline (BBL-CD): Protocol for a Multidomain Dementia Risk Reduction Randomized Controlled Trial for Subjective Cognitive Decline and Mild Cognitive Impairment." *Clinical Interventions in Aging*, Dove Medical Press, 21 Nov. 2018, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/30538436.

² Brush, C. J., et al. "A Randomized Trial of Aerobic Exercise for Major Depression: Examining Neural Indicators of Reward and Cognitive Control as Predictors and Treatment

Targets." *Psychological Medicine*, 2020, 1-11. doi:10.1017/s0033291720002573.

³ Solito, Arianna, et al. "Supplementation with Bifidobacterium Breve BR03 and Bifidobacterium Breve B632 Favoured Weight Loss and Improved Insulin Metabolism in Children and Adolescents with Obesity in the BIFI-OBESE Cross-over, Randomized Placebo-Controlled Trial." *Endocrine Abstracts*, 2020, doi:10.1530/endoabs.70.oc3.5.

⁴ Hoang, Tung, and Jeongseon Kim. "Comparative Effect of

Statins and Omega-3 Supplementation on Cardiovascular Events: Meta-Analysis and Network Meta-Analysis of 63 Randomized Controlled Trials Including 264,516 Participants." *Nutrients*, vol. 12, no. 8, 2020, 2218. doi:10.3390/nu12082218.

⁵ Kjeldsen-Kragh, J. "Mediterranean Diet Intervention in Rheumatoid Arthritis." *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases*, vol. 62, no. 3, 2003, 193-95. doi:10.1136/ard.62.3.193.

Movement to Conquer Seasonal Affective Disorder

Late autumn and early winter are times for slowing down to embrace coziness and togetherness. Candles and fireplace settings, holiday parties and family, warm wool blankets and hot cups of tea all make for a cozy setting. However, the reality of it is that the colder months with dreary, cloudy skies and bone-chilling temperatures make many of us experience seasonal affective disorder, or SAD.

SAD is especially prevalent in people who live where there is little sun during certain parts of the year. But even places where it is sunny can experience decreased sunlight because of shorter days and the sun being lower in the sky. People can also experience symptoms of SAD when it is still sunny, but the cold may prevent people from going outside.

Common symptoms of SAD are similar to those of depression. The difference is that these symptoms generally resolve or significantly improve during warmer and sunnier times of the year. Typically, sufferers of SAD feel less motivated; need to sleep more and have decreased energy; become self-isolating; become more reclusive, irritable and easily frustrated; have poorer memory; and have an increased appetite or bouts of emotional eating (which often leads to weight gain).

Among general, healthy lifestyle behaviors used to treat SAD—such as eating well, drinking less alcohol, being fit, using a light box lamp (also called a SAD lamp, which simulates more sun exposure) and scheduling time for socialization—regular exercise was among the most imperative for addressing symptoms.¹



Regularly practiced, moderate-to-intense exercise is essential for anyone suffering from depression.

The endorphins, or special hormones, and endocannabinoids released during exercise are a significant contributing factor of why people feel good when they exercise.

Exercise boosts metabolism and energy. A major factor of the debilitating effects of SAD is low energy levels, and fitness fights that. In fact, at Harvard University in the United States, a large-scale study of 8,000 depressed adults and their activity levels demonstrated that increased sedentary behaviors and decreased physical activity were significant factors in their depression (and it also contributed to other health issues, such as cardiovascular disease).²



Sufferers of SAD often experience excessive sleepiness and fatigue. Many go into a hibernative state during the colder months. While anyone can stick to a circadian rhythm year-round that would lead to more sleep in the winter, SAD sufferers also feel a general sense of tiredness. Exercise actually promotes healthier and more constructive sleep patterns.³ Physical exercise fatigues our muscles and our bodies, but with the benefit of better-quality sleep.

¹ Choi KW, Zheutlin AB, Karlson RA, et al. "Physical activity offsets genetic risk for incident depression assessed via electronic health records in a biobank cohort study." *Depression and Anxiety*. 2020;37(2):106-114. doi:10.1002/da.22967

² Schuch F, Vancampfort D, Firth J, et al. "Physical activity and sedentary behavior in people with major depressive disorder: A systematic review and meta-analysis" [published correction appears in *J Affect Disord*. 2018; Jan 1;225:79]. *J Affect Disord*. 2017;210:139-150. doi:10.1016/j.jad.2016.10.050

³ Alley JR, Mazzochi JW, Smith CJ, Morris DM, Collier SR. "Effects of resistance exercise timing on sleep architecture and nocturnal blood pressure." *J Strength Cond Res*. 2015;29(5):1378-1385. doi:10.1519/JSC.0000000000000750



What exercise should you do and how much should you be doing? When someone is depressed, the answer is truly an individual one, and really, any exercise may help. The same Harvard study mentioned previously suggested that at least four hours a week were pivotal for improved depressive symptoms. While moderate-intensity exercise (think swimming, jogging or dancing at a Zumba class) is preferred, it is no secret that motivation is a hard thing to muster when you're feeling depressed. Setting your goals or expectations too high and then not achieving them can contribute to lack of motivation—creating a vicious cycle.

Instead, start off with achievable plans—walking around your neighborhood for 20 to 30 minutes a day or working your way through various exercises (try squats, lunges, crunches or planks) in your living room when you first wake up in the morning.

Make it social and accountable by enlisting a friend you really enjoy spending time with. Go on weekly walks or hikes in nature together. Maybe check out a swimming session at your local park natatorium or gym, where you can be around other people, but not necessarily with the requirement to socialize (an additional benefit is that water therapy can help soothe the spirit). Or sign up for a weekly fitness dance or biking class to get you moving your body to music (music is also good for mood improvement).

Reflect, Recharge, Refocus: End the Year on a High

The new year is approaching, and after this incredibly tumultuous year, for many of us it is a very welcome time to focus on betterment and progress. The world over, this year has been historic in terms of difficulties, tragedies and struggles, but it also has been a year of resilience. Not resilience in the sense that we are truly out of the woods and past all of the difficulties that 2020 has put upon us, but resilience in terms of how we are actively progressing forward in life—physically, personally, professionally, emotionally and socially.

Maybe you lost your job or saw a significant decrease in income. Perhaps someone you care about immensely suffered from COVID-19. Most likely you know someone who indirectly was affected by the so-called pandemic. Maybe you didn't experience anything firsthand, but the onslaught of bad news worldwide from the media—wildfires, hurricanes and flooding, daily incivility, violence and uprisings—day after day took a considerable toll on your mental health.

Reflect

Recognize all of this and reflect. It indeed has been heavy. Don't focus on it, but do your best to remember to only observe these kinds of things. Pay attention to how they make you feel, and don't let that feeling become a part of you. If you felt it more deeply than you have in other years, you are not alone.

The end of the year is a time to reflect on the previous year. It's a time to take an inventory of your personal response to life, what life presented to you and how you reacted to it—the continual cycle. If you journal, this time of reflection may be easy. If not, you could try looking through photos and reviewing memories. In any case, spend an hour or two by yourself with a pen and paper to write down your reflections on the year.

Ask yourself some important questions. What were the harder experiences this year for you? What were healthy ways in which you responded to those difficulties? Were there responses that were not as helpful or healthy? This helps you honor the hard times and notice the ways in which you rose to the occasion and were resilient.

This process, if we just remember to do it, also can create space for noticing actions and responses that either didn't serve you in coping or in progressing in life.

If you have more than one or two harder experiences you are reflecting on, notice the patterns of your responses. In other words, be the watcher, but even more so, "watch the watcher."

What are things that you accomplished this year? This is not a specific question about productivity or accomplishments in a material or professional sense (though it may be for you). This can include accomplishments such as finding time to meditate in the morning and making it an ongoing practice. Perhaps you worked on building a relationship with someone new in your life. It even could be something like planning and tending to a backyard garden, cooking more healthfully on a regular basis, or learning a new skill or knowledge set like phone photography or reading more about a given topic.

Maybe you did get recognized at work for a job well done or even got a promotion or a raise. Or maybe you set out to build a backyard deck or refinish some furniture. Perhaps you reached a health goal like losing weight or decreasing your blood pressure. These all are wonderful accomplishments. List them during your time of reflection.



Take it a step further and challenge yourself to go deeper in that reflection. Notice what were the feelings, actions and thoughts involved in those accomplishments. Reflect on how it was actually also hard! You didn't just build a backyard deck or cultivate a garden—you probably also had some lows during the process. Maybe you got frustrated as you learned the different settings for taking a well-lit photograph on your phone. Perhaps you felt a lot of agony managing your weight and not losing any in some weeks or months. It's probable that your daily meditation habit was very challenging at first—waking up earlier, feeling bored and getting antsy during your time sitting in quietude.

The point is that reflecting on accomplishments isn't simply about finding the glee in the happy ending. It also should provoke thoughts of difficulty, strife, perseverance and resilience. Honor and celebrate all of those steps in success.

Another step in reflection is looking at how you changed over the past year and what you learned about yourself.



Perhaps the pandemic forced you into more solitude, and from that you learned you need more alone time. Alternatively, maybe you deeply missed friends and family you were not able to visit. What did this time teach you about who you are?

Recharge

Now look at the present day—the time of transition from this year to the next. It is time to recharge. Recharging is ultimately recognizing your needs and responding to them. It is the essence of self-care. What do you need to continue to propel you forward? Do not yet focus on what's ahead, but instead think of what your body and soul need to feel energized and whole in the present (of course, in addition to moving forward).

Recharging doesn't simply mean massages and spa days. It sometimes actually takes work—doing things we may not even want to do. Attend to your medical and health needs with your health care providers. Declutter your home, review and organize (and throw away) paperwork, get caught up on small domestic duties such as reorganizing your kitchen or cleaning out your garage.

Clear out your email inbox. Minimize your frivolous or unnecessary needs and wants so you can focus on what is more essential and life-giving.

After the tasks involved in recharging—decluttering, catching up on bills and paperwork, cleaning and paring down—now do the more enjoyable self-care activities. Schedule a day to go to bed early and sleep in late. Go ahead and get that massage or do a spa day at home. Spend a week when every night you tune out screens and make the evening hours slow and calm. Take an aromatherapy-infused bath. Exfoliate your skin with a do-it-yourself sugar scrub and olive oil. Alternatively, spend a week binge-watching a show you've been wanting to watch.

Refocus

Now it's time to refocus. Refocusing becomes a clearer path after deep reflection and necessary and enjoyable self-care (recharging). Refocusing means prioritizing that which you absolutely must do and carefully selecting what you want to do in the remaining time. Is there something from last year (or previous years) that you wanted to accomplish, try or explore that you weren't able to get to? Is that still something you want to do?

Focus on what brings you joy and energy, and figure out ways to incorporate that in your life more. If you want more free time, start taking an inventory of what drains you that is not pertinent to your financial or personal wellbeing. Perhaps you want a greater sense of peace and harmony—refocus your free time on activities that bring you that, such as weekly nature walks, daily yoga, time with a special friend every month or even simple quiet time in your backyard by yourself.

Reflect, recharge and refocus this new year so that you can be best equipped to resiliently respond to whatever 2021 brings.

Now is the time

All of this sounds great, but we all realize good ideas are not always easy to implement in our lives. We should do our best to stay focused on the good things around us, including the millions of wonderful people in our societies. Things are always cyclical, and we are entering a new time, a new dispensation. Some wise people call it the Age of Aquarius. We are here to enjoy life, so let's do it!

Beating the Winter Blues

Think of a few times when you felt full of joy and peace. Some memories may involve time spent with close friends and family.

Other thoughts perhaps are times when you were on a vacation exploring new things, relaxing and leaving your responsibilities behind. Many of those memories probably took place in a warm and sunny location and time.

Focusing on the darker, colder days we're in right now in the Northern Hemisphere is only going to attract darker, colder emotions, people and experiences into your life.

To beat the winter blues, you must align your thoughts and emotions with the positive aspects of your life—friendships, family, experiences and circumstances.

A good place to start is to write down helpful affirmations that you can recite to yourself that encourage and enlighten you. Put this list someplace prominent in your house, such as on your refrigerator, so you see it regularly until reciting it becomes second nature.

Think of people in your life who bring you joy, energy and peace, and make sure you are regularly spending time with them. Spending time with like-minded people creates a dynamic of "like makes like," meaning that it is a positive feedback loop.

Notice when you are complaining, and stop yourself and shift your thoughts and actions to the positive side while considering what you might do to remedy whatever it was you were complaining about—which may or may not be possible, but at least considering it allows new possibilities to arise.

Talk therapy with a counselor may also be helpful, particularly if you wish to learn cognitive behavioral strategies for coping and become more accountable for your actions.

One other way to help boost your mood and beat the winter blues is to make sure you have enough exposure to natural sunlight, particularly in the early morning hours. For those who live in climates where sunlight is rare during the winter months, light therapy can be used during normal daylight hours to mimic a normal circadian rhythm.

Exercise is also essential—and outdoor exercise may address two issues at once. Taking daily walks outside, even when the sun is not out, can help regulate serotonin and melatonin. It also exposes us to nature, vitamin D (if the sun is out) and perhaps other people.



Getting outside into nature is one of the best ways to improve mood. Aim for at least 20 minutes daily of outdoor time.

And while exercise outside is a great option, your time outside can include other activities like meditating, eating breakfast, gardening or even just sitting in a rocking chair. Nature doesn't have to be a place you take great efforts to travel to, like a national park or a forest preserve.



Instead, embrace your yard, patio or local park as a place where you can enjoy fresh air and trees. You could even include on your written list of mantras reminders of nature, fresh air and soothing natural surroundings.

Vitamin D during the winter months is not always easy to get from the sun. Shorter days mean there is a smaller window of opportunity to get outside during daylight hours, and the winter sun gives off considerably fewer short-wave ultraviolet rays, which are the part of the solar spectrum that stimulates vitamin D production.

In these cases, taking a daily vitamin D supplement may be necessary. Aim for at least 800 international units (IU) daily, and consider up to 4,000 IU if you have very little sun exposure or if you are pregnant or breastfeeding (or if you know your blood level of 25-hydroxy vitamin D is less than 40 ng/ml).

Consider increasing your intake of omega-3 fatty acids through fatty fish and/or high-quality supplements. Also be sure to add citrus, berries and nuts (walnuts or almonds are good options).

It's natural to feel a little down during the winter. However, if you make an effort to align your thoughts and emotions with positive energies and make sure you are taking care of your body's nutritional and physical needs, you can be happy and healthy year-round.

Gut Health and Immunity

Have you ever had a “gut feeling” about someone or a situation? Or what about when you’re nervous and get “butterflies” in your stomach? How about that dreadful feeling of your gut dropping when you hear horrible news? It turns out that those feelings aren’t just happenstance; the relationship between our intestinal tract and our brain is intricate and still being heavily researched. The communication axis between our intestine and our brain is one that is essential for physical and psychological health. But our intestinal health is particularly important for our immune system’s functions.

The bacteria in the body are more numerous than actual human cells and account for nearly as much weight as the brain.¹ Increased research in the past decade has demonstrated all the intricate ways that our intestinal microbiome communicates with and affects the other organs in our body. In fact, some researchers suggest that the body’s microbiome should be considered an additional body system or even an organ!

A healthy intestine protects against invasive bacteria because it strengthens the gastrointestinal cells to better protect against bad bacteria.² So, the next time you are going abroad to an exotic locale, consider adding a probiotic supplement to your travel bags!

A large study of children in a day care setting—a metaphorical but practically literal petri dish of infection potential—showed that children who consumed probiotics had fewer respiratory infections and milder symptoms when they did get sick.

Women who experience frequent urinary tract infections (UTI) may get an immune boost from a healthier intestinal microbiome. Probiotics have been demonstrated to be a potential tool to address reoccurrences of UTIs.³ If a course of antibiotics is necessary to treat a UTI or for any other purpose, having varied and robust gut flora will help prevent side effects such as diarrhea.

If you have to take antibiotics for any reason, couple them with foods rich in prebiotics and probiotics, and consider taking a high-quality probiotic supplement, consumed as long after the antibiotic as possible.

People who suffer from autoimmune disorders or allergies also benefit from the immunity-boosting effects of a healthy intestine with normal intestinal permeability—which lets through essential nutrients after digestion of food but keeps out large molecules and prevents bacteria from the intestinal microbiome from crossing the intestinal barrier and entering the bloodstream or lymphatic system, where they have to be eliminated by an inflammatory response of the immune system. Excessive permeability of the intestinal barrier is often referred to as “leaky gut.” A healthy gut flora with healthy permeability may be essential for prevention and treatment of several autoimmune disorders, such as multiple sclerosis.⁴ Intestinal health and feeding the microbiome help the immune system combat symptoms of allergy sufferers.⁵ In one study, allergy sufferers who were not taking any allergy medications or steroids demonstrated a decrease of rhinoconjunctivitis symptoms when given a probiotic supplement.

⁴ Mangalam A, Shahi SK, Luckey D, Karau M, Marietta E, Luo N, Choung RS, Ju J, Sompallae R, Gibson-Corley K, Patel R, Rodriguez M, David C, Taneja V, Murray J. “Human Gut-Derived Commensal Bacteria Suppress CNS Inflammatory and Demyelinating Disease.” *Cell Rep.* 2017 Aug 8;20(6):1269-1277. doi: 10.1016/j.celrep.2017.07.031. PMID: 28793252; PMCID: PMC5763484.

⁵ Dennis-Wall, Jennifer C et al. “Probiotics (*Lactobacillus gasseri* KS-13, *Bifidobacterium bifidum* G9-1, and *Bifidobacterium longum* MM-2) improve rhinoconjunctivitis-specific quality of life in individuals with seasonal allergies: a double-blind, placebo-controlled, randomized trial.” *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Volume 105, Issue 3, March 2017: 758–767. doi. org/10.3945/ajcn.116.140012



What we eat is essential for health and not just from the perspective of obtaining nutrients. We also need to feed our intestinal microbiome. This involves eating both prebiotics and probiotics, but it also means taking other nutritional habits into account. Another word for prebiotics is “fiber.” These are large carbohydrate molecules that are not digestible by the upper intestinal digestive enzymes but are digestible by the microbiome in the large intestine. Such substances as psyllium seed and husk, guar gum, flax seed, and maltodextrin soluble fiber all are excellent prebiotics, as are single-cell algae such as spirulina and chlorella as well as the fiber from fruits and vegetables. All such dietary fiber sources feed the intestinal microbiome, which use these indigestible carbohydrate molecules for energy and produce short-chain fatty acids (propionic and butyric acid, which are three- and four-carbon fatty acids), which are the primary fuel for the cells that line the large intestine (colonocytes). A diet high in prebiotics also supports the growth of probiotics, which can lead to a more diverse, robust and resilient intestinal microbiome and supports healthy function of the brain, immune system and other organs of the body.

¹ Sender, Ron et al. “Revised Estimates for the Number of Human and Bacteria Cells in the Body.” *PLoS biology*. Vol. 14,8 e1002533. 19 Aug. 2016. doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.1002533

² Resta-Lenert S, Barrett KE. “Live probiotics protect intestinal epithelial cells from the effects of infection with enteroinvasive *Escherichia coli* (EIEC).” *Gut.* 2003 Jul;52(7):988-97. doi: 10.1136/gut.52.7.988. PMID: 12801956; PMCID: PMC1773702.

³ Gupta V, Nag D, Garg P. “Recurrent urinary tract infections in women: How promising is the use of probiotics?” *Indian J Med Microbiol.* 2017 Jul-Sep;35(3):347-354. doi: 10.4103/ijmm. IJMM_16_292. PMID: 29063878.



When new or increased amounts of prebiotics are added to the diet, an initial increase in intestinal gas production as the microbiome adjusts to these new food sources is not uncommon.

An overgrowth of yeast such as *Candida* can cause a long-term increase in intestinal gas—special low-carbohydrate diets, sometimes along with the use of anti-fungal agents and increased intake of probiotic bacteria, may be needed to reestablish balance within the intestinal microbiome and reduce the production of intestinal gas by prebiotic foods.

Keep your diet varied. Food diversity keeps life interesting, but it also keeps the body working better. This is because you are more likely to consume a full range of nutrients when you eat a full range of food. The gut also benefits from the variety. Because the microbiome should contain a multitude of various bacteria, those bacteria have different dietary needs. So, when you eat a varied diet, it promotes a more diverse microbiome.⁶

While high-quality probiotic supplements may be beneficial, as always it is helpful to meet your basic nutritional needs through what you eat. Fermented foods such as kimchi, yogurt, kefir, miso, beet kvass and sauerkraut are excellent choices. But unless you are eating a variety of food daily, supplements may be a good thing to consider. The reason is that supplements are more likely to contain diverse probiotics.

Other things you can do to boost your gut health and therefore your immune system include some of the following. Eliminate artificial sweeteners, as some forms can actually encourage the growth of unhealthy bacteria in the gut microbiome.⁷

Avoid unnecessary antibiotic use. While antibiotics have been a lifesaving medical tool since their development, they are often overprescribed (such as for viral illnesses, on which they have no effect, and long-term use of antibiotics for acne, a condition that can be effectively managed with diet and supplements). The overall impact of excessive medical antibiotic use and the massive use of antibiotics in “factory farms” lead to antibiotics being transferred into our bodies from meat produced in this way, and the impact that such antibiotics have had on the collective human intestinal microbiome has become a global health problem.

Encourage exclusive breastfeeding, as infants who are exclusively given breast milk (as opposed to formula or mixed breast milk and formula) for at least the first six weeks of life have healthier gut microbiomes.⁸

⁶ Heiman ML, Greenway FL. “A healthy gastrointestinal microbiome is dependent on dietary diversity.” *Mol Metab.* 2016 Mar 5;5(5):317-320. doi: 10.1016/j.molmet.2016.02.005. PMID: 27110483; PMCID: PMC4837298.

⁷ Palmnäs MS, Cowan TE, Bomhof MR, Su J, Reimer RA, Vogel HJ, Hittel DS, Shearer J. “Low-dose aspartame consumption differentially affects gut microbiota-host metabolic interactions in the diet-induced obese rat.” *PLoS One.* 2014 Oct 14;9(10):e109841. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0109841. PMID: 25313461; PMCID: PMC4197030.

⁸ Madan JC et al. “Association of Cesarean Delivery and Formula Supplementation With the Intestinal Microbiome of 6-Week-Old Infants.” *JAMA Pediatr.* 2016 Mar;170(3):212-9. doi: 10.1001/jamapediatrics.2015.3732. PMID: 26752321; PMCID: PMC4783194.

The Benefits of Gratitude

The focus of gratitude in the world of mindfulness and wellbeing is nothing new. “Keep a gratitude journal,” people say. “Focus on the positive,” they insist. But why is gratitude so important? And how do you practice it even during difficult times in life and society?

Positive people have better cardiac health

People who focus on positivity and gratitude lead more heart-healthy lives.¹ They tend to eat diets that are more plentiful in vegetables and fruits compared to their more negative-focusing counterparts.² And they also tend to participate in more exercise and physical activity, which are beneficial to cardiac health.³

Gratitude and sleep

Most people are naturally more irritable, less resilient and even more negative-thinking when they are sleep-deprived. On the other hand, negative thoughts are more likely to keep us up at night as we mull over details and ruminate on feelings. It’s not surprising, then, that people who practice gratitude, optimism and positive thinking also benefit from better sleep.⁴ A good night’s sleep is essential for basic and advanced metabolic and endocrinological functions in the body.

Gratefulness and immunity

When you lean into gratitude, you naturally become more positive, and that helps your immune system! One study looked at 300 adults and their susceptibility to the common cold. The group that participated in more positive actions—and gratitude is essential for positivity—were more resistant to the virus!⁵ The science behind this connection has to do with hormones and their role in building robust immunological responses.⁶

¹ Sin NL, Moskowitz JT, Whooley MA. “Positive Affect and Health Behaviors Across 5 Years in Patients With Coronary Heart Disease: The Heart and Soul Study.” *Psychosom Med.* 2015 Nov-Dec;77(9):1058-66. doi: 10.1097/PSY.0000000000000238. PMID: 26428445; PMCID: PMC4643380.

² Sapranaviciute-Zabazlajeva, L et al. “Link between healthy lifestyle and psychological well-being in Lithuanian adults aged 45-72: a cross-sectional study.” *BMJ Open*, Vol. 7,4 e014240. 3 Apr. 2017. doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2016-014240

³ Dubois CM, Beach SR, Kashdan TB, Nyer MB, Park ER, Celano CM, Huffman JC. “Positive psychological attributes and cardiac outcomes: associations, mechanisms, and interventions.” *Psychosomatics*. 2012 Jul-Aug;53(4):303-18. doi: 10.1016/j.psych.2012.04.004. PMID: 22748749.

⁴ Steptoe A, O’Donnell K, Marmot M, Wardle J. “Positive affect, psychological well-being, and good sleep.” *J Psychosom Res.*

Recognize and grieve the bad stuff

Practicing gratitude does not mean minimizing or neglecting your sadness, disappointments and losses. Name your frustration, and linger in the longing for better things. But don’t linger too long. Focus and feel your negative thoughts, recognize them, and honor them. But then look at them with more complex vision. Find ways to see life lessons (including that some things are randomly unfair!). Look for the helpers and kind people involved in undoing the bad things. Plan ways out of the sadness and steps to take to move into positivity.

Take a gratitude walk to process unhappy experiences. Put a timer on your watch or phone for half the walk to think and feel sadness and anger about the negativity. Then spend the other half of the time on the walk intentionally only naming the things you are grateful for.

Get out of yourself and focus on others.

When you are focused on your own losses and your own grief, specifically shift your attention to sending well wishes and blessings to others; doing it in just your mind is fine! There is always someone up the river and down the river. It doesn’t mean that your pain is inconsequential or insignificant. This isn’t an exercise in shaming yourself into happiness.

The onion activity

If you think of the world as the outer layers of the onion and your internal spirit as the inside, start naming things you are grateful for on a worldwide level and keep “coming closer.” Start at the world level, then move to the continent you live on, then your country, your city, your neighborhood, your yard, your house, the room you’re in, your outer body, your inner body and your spirit.

2008 Apr;64(4):409-15. doi: 10.1016/j.jpsychores.2007.11.008. PMID: 18374740.

⁵ Cohen S, Doyle WJ, Turner RB, Alper CM, Skoner DP.

“Emotional style and susceptibility to the common cold.” *Psychosom Med.* 2003 Jul-Aug;65(4):652-7. doi: 10.1097/01.



Then move from your inside out, listing different things along the way. This is an engaging way to think personally and then globally about gratitude.

Basking in abundance

When we dwell in the abundance of our lives, we intentionally choose to see what we have and not what we do not have. It is a mental shift that helps us see that we indeed have the basics—and more than that! We must intentionally and continually change the internal narrative from “I need” or “I want” to “I have” or “I’m grateful for.”

One of the reasons so many people are trending toward minimalism is that the focus is on abundance and joyfully living with less. It lightens the mental load.

psy.0000077508.57784.da. PMID: 12883117.

⁶ Silverman, Marni N et al. “Immune modulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis during viral infection.” *Viral immunology*, Vol. 18,1 (2005): 41-78. doi:10.1089/vim.2005.18.41



When we choose to see what we have as more than enough, we can use our energy for activities, people and things that bring us joy.

Reframing

Realistic reframing to see a more positive side of things takes practice. The more you do it, the more you can make it a habit. Here's a story that highlights this.

Once there were two children who had very different perspectives on life. One was a relentless optimist, and the other lacked resilience and gratitude. Their parents fretted that the optimistic child wasn't realistic and worried that the world would get the better of her someday. They loved her optimism and idealism but thought that all of it would lead to disappointment. On the other hand, the parents saw their other child and worried his constant complaining would hinder him from actually leading a contented life.

One day, their parents decided to put this to the test. They filled two rooms with entirely different things. One room was filled with toys and playthings of every kind—any child's dream come true! The other room was piled high with manure. That's right—poop! The parents intended to teach their optimistic daughter that life can be tough and disappointing by having her deal with the manure room. And they wanted to show their pessimistic son that there is so much joy and appreciation to be experienced.

The children were ushered into the respective rooms. The child who was usually focused on the negative went into the room full of toys and skeptically looked around. He poked around a bit, played with a few things and then started to say how he was really hoping there would be this kind of toy, but he didn't see it.

Or that the toys were too messy or hard or there were too many toys he didn't prefer and only a few that he liked. After hours of playing (and whining) in the toy room, he complained when it was time to clean up and stop playing!

Meanwhile, in the room full of manure, the parents were certain that their daughter would be disgusted. The smell, the amount of manure—how awful! They meandered over to the room and couldn't see their daughter yet saw manure flying from one area into a pile on the side. Worried, they called for her, wondering where she was. She popped up to see them, smiling widely, with a shovel in hand. "Mommy and Daddy, do you see this? With all of this manure everywhere, there has got to be a pony in here!"

Which child and which spirit do you want to emulate?



Coenzyme Q10

Coenzyme Q10, also known as CoQ10 or ubiquinone, is an antioxidant that your body naturally produces. It is an important chemical that fights off free radical attacks within your body. Whereas many antioxidants are obtained only from food or supplements, CoQ10 is one that your body makes on its own.

Unlike with vitamin D, magnesium, zinc, selenium or probiotics, it is rare to have a CoQ10 deficiency. However, people with certain conditions can benefit from additional supplementation or from making sure they are eating foods rich in CoQ10. Additionally, as one ages, the body may decrease its production of CoQ10, and additional supplementation may be appropriate.

CoQ10 is an integral part of metabolism and energy production in the body. It helps turn consumed food into energy, not just in the sense of burning calories, but by actually breaking down and properly utilizing all the healthy and nutritious food we consume. CoQ10 transports the energy-carrying electrons that help enzymes in our body work properly.

A lot of that has to do with our mitochondria, which are essentially the power plants of our cells and where CoQ10 is stored in the body.¹ CoQ10 is found in every cell of the body, but it exists in larger amounts in organs that are the powerhouses of the body's vital functions, such as the kidneys, lungs and heart.²

Beyond basic metabolic work, CoQ10 has important roles in cardiac conditions, the immune system, brain health, migraine prevention and cognition. It isn't known whether these conditions and diseases are caused by low levels of CoQ10 or themselves cause the low CoQ10 levels.



CoQ10 has promising potential for helping those with heart disease live longer.

Heart failure patients participating in two independent studies who took supplements of CoQ10 had fewer complications of heart failure and fewer hospitalizations.^{3,4} While still inconclusive, some research has suggested that high blood pressure can be lowered by increasing CoQ10 (other research has not shown any benefits).^{5,6} If you have heart disease, it may be worth talking to your health care provider about whether CoQ10 supplementation is something you should explore.

That said, if part of your cardiac issue is hyperlipidemia, commonly known as high cholesterol, and you are taking medication for it, there is a chance that your medication is lowering your levels of CoQ10.

If you are experiencing side effects of statin medications such as pain or weakness, supplementing with CoQ10 may help mitigate some of those side effects. As always, especially when taking prescribed medication for a serious condition, talk to your health care provider first.

Brain health and cognitive function can also benefit from CoQ10. The brain is particularly susceptible to oxidative damage due to its fatty nature and due to the aging process. CoQ10 serves as an important antioxidant in combating the oxidative stress that free radical activity can have. While more research on human subjects is necessary, the progression of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases may be slowed down with supplementation of CoQ10.^{7,8} CoQ10 deficiencies have been noted in migraine sufferers, and some research has shown positive effects for prevention or treatment of migraines.⁹

Certain foods are particularly high in CoQ10, and many of them are the standard ones you should reach for when eating for optimal health. Fatty fishes such as trout, salmon, tuna, sardines and mackerel once again pack a punch when it comes to nutrition. Spinach and broccoli are also high in antioxidants. Legumes, especially the humble lentil, are decent options for vegetarians or those who dislike or are allergic to fish. Seeds and nuts such as sesame seeds, pistachios and peanuts are other good non-meat options for CoQ10.

¹ Garrido-Maraver J, Cordero MD, Oropesa-Ávila M, Fernández Vega A, de la Mata M, Delgado Pavón A, de Miguel M, Pérez Calero C, Villanueva Paz M, Cotán D, Sánchez-Alcázar JA. Coenzyme q10 therapy. *Mol Syndromol*. 2014 Jul;5(3-4):187-97. doi: 10.1159/000360101. PMID: 25126052; PMCID: PMC4112525.

² Saini R. Coenzyme Q10: The essential nutrient. *J Pharm Bioallied Sci*. 2011 Jul;3(3):466-7. doi: 10.4103/0975-7406.84471. PMID: 21966175; PMCID: PMC3178961.

³ Mortensen SA, Rosenfeldt F, Kumar A, Dolliner P, Filipiak KJ, Pella D, Alehagen U, Steurer G, Littarru GP; Q-SYMBIO Study Investigators. The effect of coenzyme Q10 on morbidity and mortality in chronic heart failure: results from Q-SYMBIO: a randomized double-blind trial. *JACC Heart Fail*. 2014 Dec;2(6):641-9. doi: 10.1016/j.jchf.2014.06.008. Epub 2014

Oct 1. PMID: 25282031.

⁴ Morisco C, Trimarco B, Condorelli M. Effect of coenzyme Q10 therapy in patients with congestive heart failure: a long-term multicenter randomized study. *Clin Invest*. 1993;71(8 Suppl):S134-6. doi: 10.1007/BF00226854. PMID: 8241697.

⁵ "Complementary and Alternative Medicine – Penn State Hershey Medical Center – Penn State Hershey Medical Center." Coenzyme Q10, Penn State Hershey Health Information Library, pennstatehershey.adam.com/content.aspx?productid=107.

⁶ Ho MJ et al. Blood pressure lowering efficacy of coenzyme Q10 for primary hypertension. *The Cochrane database of systematic reviews* vol. 3,3 CD007435. 3 Mar. 2016, doi:10.1002/14651858.CD007435.pub3.

⁷ Wadsworth TL, Bishop JA, Pappu AS, Woltjer RL, Quinn JF. Evaluation of coenzyme Q as an antioxidant strategy for

Alzheimer's disease. *J Alzheimers Dis*. 2008 Jun;14(2):225-34. doi: 10.3233/jad-2008-14210. PMID: 18560133; PMCID: PMC2931577.

⁸ Shults CW, Oakes D, Kiebertz K, Beal MF, Haas R, Plumb S, Juncos JL, Nutt J, Shoulson I, Carter J, Kompolti K, Perlmutter JS, Reich S, Stern M, Watts RL, Kurlan R, Molho E, Harrison M, Lew M; Parkinson Study Group. Effects of coenzyme Q10 in early Parkinson disease: evidence of slowing of the functional decline. *Arch Neurol*. 2002 Oct;59(10):1541-50. doi: 10.1001/archneur.59.10.1541. PMID: 12374491.

⁹ Hershey AD, Powers SW, Vockell AL, Lecates SL, Ellinor PL, Segers A, Burdine D, Manning P, Kabbouche MA. Coenzyme Q10 deficiency and response to supplementation in pediatric and adolescent migraine. *Headache*. 2007 Jan;47(1):73-80. doi: 10.1111/j.1526-4610.2007.00652.x. PMID: 17355497.

Teaching Children Kindness

When we think about what we want for our children, many people will cite that they want their kids to be healthy or happy. Some will report that success is something they hope their children experience. Others will say they hope their children always feel loved. How many of us are making kindness a priority value for our children? One of the most important things we do as parents (or grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, or caregivers of children) is teach our children the importance of kindness.

Although it may not always feel like it when you are dealing with a toddler, children are actually innately empathetic and socially wise. However, this develops with time. Initially, young children do good acts because it gets them what they want—a reward for helping clean up, for example. This will develop into being kind and sociable in order to garner praise. Eventually, as they socially and emotionally mature, they begin to recognize people's needs—"That other child on the playground is crying because she is sad to have to go home," or "My sister is angry because her toy broke." This then develops into a deeper sense of wanting to help because it intrinsically feels good to them. Just as they take pride in learning new things, like how to dress themselves or put on their own shoes, they start to feel that emotion we all feel inside when we know we've done the right thing for another person.

As with so many things we want our children to learn—eating healthfully, moving our bodies daily, learning with interest and engagement—being a kind person is best taught by example.

This takes a lot of introspection and perhaps some difficult self-analysis. Instead of hearing the imperative of "Be nice, and don't yell at your friend" or the admonishment of "Don't take that toy away from him," the first step to teaching children kindness is looking at how you treat others. Are you friendly, courteous and grateful toward the grocery clerk during checkout? Do you huff impatiently when someone is moving more slowly in line? Are you friendly and engaging with your neighbors? Do you speak kindly or critically of other people? This last one is particularly important because children are listening all the time (even when they ignore our requests to clean up their toys!). If you criticize other people's appearance or gossip about people you find annoying, your children are watching and learning.

Notice kind actions of others, and talk about them. "Grandma told me she is volunteering to read books to children at her neighborhood school." Engage your children with what their grandmother is doing, why she is doing it and how that is helpful to others. If you can, enlist other people in your children's lives to talk about the importance of kindness. Ask Grandma to talk with your children and share what she is doing and why. This will create a sense of kindness being normal and expected.



Be careful not to note the kind actions of others in a comparative way—"Your sister is being so much nicer than you."

This creates shame and feelings of resistance and inadequacy. Instead, speak of the kindness you see with appreciation and inspiration. "I just got off the phone with a customer service agent who was so helpful and proactive. I really appreciate how kind the person was to me in resolving the issue I had."



Here are some ways to create a culture of kindness in your home. Talk about your feelings, particularly your vulnerability. This shows children that vulnerability and processing feelings are normal, but it also gives opportunities for them to respond and troubleshoot helping others. Keep in mind that each child is unique, and help each discover his or her own “style” of kindness.

Demonstrate how you share and act with abundance. If you grow a lot of chard (or tomatoes, flowers, etc.) in your garden, talk about how much you have, and have your children walk with you as you drop extras off at neighbors’ homes.



Start chores early (as young as 18 months or 2 years old), but instead of simply assigning chores, talk about this as part of their responsibility for helping the family.

When you are cooking dinner or vacuuming, talk about how you are helping the family. And pitch in occasionally to help them out, just as you would want them to help you.

Talk to them daily about their peer interactions. Be mindful of bullying or incivility in their social groups. Go beyond teaching them that in your family your values are to be kind—encourage them also to scrutinize any mean behavior or actions of their peers, and talk to them about possibly sticking up for those who are being gossiped about or taunted.

Recognize that your children are part of your contribution to society. Yes, you want them to be content, healthy and successful, but none of those matter unless they are also good to others and to the Earth.

Dancing

What uplifts your spirits, keeps you social, makes you feel younger, is great for your cardiac health, boosts your metabolism, and is something you can stick with as you age? Dancing!

Dancing can be a full-body workout. When you go on a bike ride or walk, you are primarily utilizing your legs. While these are fantastic exercises, full-body fitness helps keep us balanced in strength, prevents one or two groups of muscles from getting overly fatigued, and makes things more interesting.

Balance and coordination are certainly necessary for dancing, but if yours aren't as up to scratch as they once were, dancing may be a good option for improving them.

Movement that we do on a daily basis—such as walking or stair-climbing—keeps us in the same longitudinal plane (the midline plane that splits vertically down the body). When we are dancing, our body is moving in an entirely unique way and through all different planes—lateral, frontal, rotational, etc. We are twisting, bending, arching back and moving our arms independently from the movement of our legs.

When you are dancing, you can actually forget you are exercising. Have you ever been on a bike ride or a jog and kept looking at your watch to see how much time had passed and how much time you had left? When you are dancing, it is easy to lose track of time because dancing is such a social, dynamic and fun activity. The music and movement of our bodies bring us joy, so dancing doesn't feel like a physical chore.

¹ Edwards, Scott. Dancing and the Brain, Harvard Mahoney Neuroscience Institute, neuro.hms.harvard.edu/harvard-mahoney-neuroscience-institute/brain-newsletter/and-brain-dancing-and-brain.

Dancing is a full-body exercise that is actually gentle on your body. Unlike running, which can cause knee, ankle or hip injuries for some people, dancing is only as strenuous as you make it. Of course, professional dancers push their bodies to extreme limits. But social dancing is easier on the body. If you wonder about the strenuousness of a dance class, talk to the instructor beforehand, or find out if you can observe a class to see if it's right for you.

Some exercises, like swimming, jogging and rowing, are great for getting into that trance of repetitive movement. Dancing is more dynamic since the dance moves change with the music and with your dance partner (if you are partner dancing). Therefore, it keeps your mind active as well.¹

Dancing is a bit like chess—it activates the areas of the brain that involve memory, planning, organizing and skill building.²

You have to think about your next move, respond to a partner and their moves, listen for musical rhythms and clues, and keep track of space and your body within it. There is a lot going on, and it causes your brain to think and respond in various ways.

² Teixeira-Machado L, Arida RM, de Jesus Mari J. Dance for neuroplasticity: A descriptive systematic review. *Neurosci Biobehav Rev.* 2019 Jan;96:232-240. doi: 10.1016/j.neubiorev.2018.12.010. Epub 2018 Dec 10. PMID: 30543905.

Socially speaking, dancing is pretty varied. You can wake up in the morning, turn on some music and just dance in the privacy of your own home.

This requires little skill or need to learn any new moves. Dancing alone also allows you some personal freedom to dance any way you like without feeling insecure or self-conscious. Solo dancing allows you to choose the music you want and the amount of time you wish to dance. You can also access plenty of dance classes online with instruction or even just motivational instructors or leaders for the class.

Of course, a dance class or a dance group is also an option. You can choose a dance class in which you'll need a partner (like salsa dancing) or one in which there is a group and you just follow the instructor (like Zumba). The nice thing about a class is there is a bit more external accountability to show up. Beyond that, it is a way to meet other people or spend time with people you enjoy while doing an activity together. Since dancing is intergenerational, it can also help you stay connected with younger adults or even kids—so go ahead and invite your grandkids to the dance class!



Social Benefits of Golf

Imagine being outside on a sunny day with verdant nature as far as the eye can see, feeling a soft breeze blowing, walking leisurely and getting a gentle, full-body workout, all while spending time with people you enjoy. This describes a typical day of golf.

In the fitness world, golf can be dismissed as a sport that is too easy on the body or doesn't get one into any strenuous heart rate zone. But don't discount golf as just an activity of golf carts and golfers wearing polo shirts and white visors. Golf is a sport that can help people who are not able to participate in strenuous exercise get outside and move their bodies.

In fact, a large-scale, long-term study of nearly 6,000 participants showed that those who golfed regularly—defined as at least once a month—had notable important health outcomes.¹

Data from a large group over the course of 10 years shows regular golfers actually saw a significant difference in their death rates compared with nongolfers. The mortality rate of golfers over the 10 years was only 15.1%, whereas that for their non-golf-playing counterparts was 24.6%.

Of note, the study did not indicate whether the golfers walked or drove golf carts when golfing. So the outcomes of improved vitality cannot be fully attributed to the physical activity of walking between holes. Instead, scientists who analyzed this data believe that golf may be beneficial because of the social aspects, including the excitement of the competition.

¹ "Golfing Regularly Could Be a Hole-in-One for Older Adults' Health." American Heart Association, 12 Feb. 2020, newsroom.heart.org/news/golfing-regularly-could-be-a-hole-in-one-for-older-adults-health.

² Rose, Amanda J, et al. "How girls and boys expect disclosure about problems will make them feel: implications for friendships." *Child development* vol. 83,3 (2012): 844-63.

One of the physicians who presented this information also credited the positive health effects of fresh air, sun exposure and nature.

For instance, loneliness in men is a concerning social issue, particularly as they grow older. From an early age, boys report sharing their feelings as a strange experience that wasn't worth their time.² When presented with sad situations, boys are less likely than girls to process those experiences with a peer. The sad thing is that this viewpoint and behavior are modeled for them by their adult male role models (men tend to have fewer friends than women) and persist into their own adult years.

Interestingly, men tend to focus more of their social interactions on their marriage and careers. While dedication to one's job, spouse and family is a wonderful trait, it often places the onus of social needs on the spouse and can create blurred lines of personal and professional life. Some research has suggested that while familial support is good, men who also had close friendships with people outside their households had better health outcomes and even lived longer.³

But there is hope! Generationally, millennials are more likely to value friendship and depend on their nonfamilial social network not only for social entertainment but for emotional support as well.

doi:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01734.x.

³ Chopik, William J. "Family/Friend Influences on Health across the Lifespan." *OSF*, 4 Apr. 2017. Retrieved from osf.io/9jpux.

⁴ Landrum, Sarah. "Millennials And The Resurgence Of Emotional Intelligence." *Forbes*, *Forbes Magazine*, 21 Apr. 2017, www.forbes.com/sites/sarahlandrum/2017/04/21/millennials-and-the-resurgence-of-emotional-intelligence/.

A high percentage of millennials also report emotional intelligence as something they strongly value and something they desire to personally develop in themselves.⁴





Bringing it back to golf, how do you make your social life a priority? The primary answer to that is you show up, get involved and let your guard down.

Vulnerability—and along with that, some awkwardness, perhaps—is key to developing deeper relationships.

You must be committed to making friendships a life priority. When participating in social activities such as golf (or a running group, a parents' network, a gaming club, etc.), you are doing some good for your health while also nurturing relationships.



New Mom Isolation

New mom isolation is a common theme in modern society. Just a few generations ago, families lived in housing that was multigenerational with plenty of other parents to learn from. These days, so many first-time mothers experience isolation as they step into a completely novel and life-changing role. There are obvious reasons for this isolation, and there are specific ideas you can use to combat some of this loneliness.

The nuclear family really has existed only for the past 100 years. It isn't something that historically occurred very often. During times of mass intranational migration from countryside to urban areas, such as during the Industrial Revolution, or international immigration from one country to another, for example during the large immigration trends in the late 1800s or post-World War periods from Europe to the Americas, often entire extended families moved together.

Now, singles, couples and nuclear families live alone, sometimes hundreds of miles from their extended relatives. And this makes it more complicated for a new mother to adjust to her role and responsibilities.

Breastfeeding is one of the most non-instinctual yet natural human acts! For a new mother learning to breastfeed (and for a new baby, who has never had to eat before!), it can take two or three months, with several visits with a lactation consultant, to get it right. And even if you feel comfortable and supported with public breastfeeding, a lot of times you are breastfeeding your baby while it is sleeping or to help the baby go to sleep—therefore, you are by yourself in quietude. This alone can be quite isolating. Recognize this feeling and see if you can change your mental map to embrace the time to slow (way, way) down and bond with your baby.

Depending on where a woman lives in the world, finding a support system may be entirely up to her during the postpartum period. Whereas some countries, like Denmark and Sweden, have new mothers' groups set up by their local government through the health care and education systems, in most countries, mothers are on their own to find such support. This is further complicated when groups are pay-to-participate or hard to find.

Find resources on the internet, but go to in-person groups. While the internet holds a wealth of information, parenting forums can be Pandora's boxes of unnecessary or uninformed advice (at best) or harsh criticism (at worst). Search for new mom groups in your area (even prior to giving birth) or ask your midwife or obstetrician if they know of any groups. If you are breastfeeding, there is usually a breastfeeding support group through La Leche League or the local hospital.

Going to something in person can be complicated when you are unimaginably tired with newborn care or even during the social-distancing period of this pandemic.

It really depends on what your comfort level is for in-person groups. Ask the group leader what precautions they are taking to make sure health and safety are being observed (such as mandating the proper use of masks—covering the entire mouth and nose).



Another alternative is to attend online (Skype, Zoom, Google Chat) groups that meet live with consistent group members. Again, this is preferable to just a typed-out forum or Facebook group. Seeing people's faces, hearing their voices, and being able to smile and interact immediately are all essential for the human connection a woman needs postpartum.

If you are still pregnant—particularly if you are in the early weeks—consider joining a prenatal group. Some midwives or nurses at obstetrician clinics participate in a concept called “centering pregnancy” in which many prenatal appointments are done as a group with other women whose due dates are close to yours. This provides a built-in support group with a health care focus.



These groups often meet postnatally as well. The midwife or nurse will often teach mothers what to expect during pregnancy, labor and birth, and they also help teach them newborn care.

During your pregnancy, check your local yoga studio to see whether there is a prenatal class you can join and whether they have postnatal yoga programs as well. Postpartum yoga focuses on healing your abdomen and pelvic floor, particularly if you have the very common condition of diastasis recti (abdominal muscle separation). If you're not into yoga, see if there are any new mom stroller-walking groups.

Find a mother mentor, perhaps a woman who had a baby a few months or a year sooner than you. Ask her if you can reach out with questions, concerns and feelings.

More than likely, she will be ecstatic to share her newfound knowledge.

If you think that your feelings of isolation are leaning toward postpartum depression, seek professional help immediately! Your hormones are out of balance and your sleep is often skewed, so recognize that those two facts alone put you in a vulnerable place.

Remember that this is a significant period of adjustment. Be good to yourself and others.

Ask the Expert

How important is it to have friends?

In a word: extremely! Friends (and family) create a social safety net to help take care of us when we are in trouble and a network of joyful reinforcement when we have good news to share. There is ample scientific evidence that shows humans are inherently social creatures and spending time with others is good for the mind and body. In terms of happiness alone, social connection was recently shown to be the strongest protective factor against depression.¹

When a person cultivates close friendships with people who share a desire to focus their thoughts and energies on positive experiences, people and circumstances, everyone in the group benefits.

As the group members grow closer, they are able to hold each other accountable in healthy and positive ways that can keep



everyone involved healthier and happier. And the downside to having good friends? None! While people differ in how many close friends they need in their life, one thing will always remain true: spending time with like-minded friends and family is an important aspect of the art of growing young.

What's the difference between prebiotics and probiotics?

Probiotics are tiny, nonpathogenic (meaning they do not make us sick) bacteria living in our digestive system. There are trillions of tiny organisms living inside us doing all kinds of great things for our bodies, including taking foods that our bodies cannot digest easily and converting them into nutrients that can be absorbed by our digestive tracts. Probiotics also help keep us healthy by competing for resources with unhealthy bacteria, which if left unchecked can cause illness and discomfort. Prebiotics are quite simply food for probiotics. Like any other living creature on earth, probiotics must eat to survive. Fortunately, probiotics thrive on foods such as fiber from vegetables and fruits. Because of this, diets that are low in fiber and high in saturated fats do not allow probiotics (and hence our intestinal microbiome) to thrive. On the other hand, diets rich in fresh fruits, vegetables, unprocessed whole grains, nuts and seeds do. If we take care of our probiotics by feeding them healthy prebiotics, they will in turn take good care of us.

What is the healthiest diet?

Because no two human beings are identical, the answer is different for different people. Your body has unique needs that are slightly different from those of even your closest family members. Therefore, there is no one diet that can be said to be the healthiest. However, there are broad guidelines every person should follow, such as eating a wide variety of foods to ensure all nutritional needs are met. Or drinking fresh, clean water. And all people should avoid eating prepackaged junk foods. If you follow these simple rules and consume fats, carbohydrates, and proteins in good proportion and in quantities appropriate for your physical activity level, you will be eating a healthy diet that meets your unique needs. Let common sense, variety and your intuition regarding your own body be your guide.



¹ Choi, Karmel W., et al. "An Exposure-Wide and Mendelian Randomization Approach to Identifying Modifiable Factors for

the Prevention of Depression." *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 2020, doi:10.1176/appi.ajp.2020.19111158.