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***“Life is about the Journey,
not the Destination.”***

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energy. Feel
the power that
comes from
focusing on what
excites you.”**

– Oprah Winfrey

VALUES – BASED QUALITY OF LIFE™ *Newsletter*

Because Making Smart Choices About Your Money Impacts The Quality of Your Life

Over the years, we have found that there are elements of your life that are more important than money. These elements - Physical Health, Relationship Health, Inner Health and Career Health - cannot be delegated. We hope that you find these articles to be of value in improving the quality of your life.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

For Your Brain's Sake, Keep Moving

By Gretchen Reynolds

Because we can never have enough reasons to keep exercising, a new study with mice finds that physical activity not only increases the number of new neurons in the brain, it also subtly changes the shape and workings of these cells in ways that might have implications for memory and even delaying the onset of dementia.

As most of us have heard, our brains are not composed of static, unchanging tissue. Instead, in most animals, including people, the brain is a dynamic, active organ in which new neurons and neural connections are created throughout life, especially in areas of the brain related to memory and thinking.

This process of creating new neurons, called neurogenesis, can be altered by lifestyle, including physical activity. Many past studies have shown that in laboratory rodents, exercise doubles or even triples the number of new cells produced in adult animals' brains compared to the brains of animals that are sedentary.

But it has not been clear whether the new brain cells in active animals are somehow different from comparable new neurons in inactive animals or if they are just more numerous.

That question has long interested scientists at the Laboratory of Neurosciences at the National Institute on Aging, who have been examining how running alters the brains and behavior of lab animals.

Last year, in an important study published in *NeuroImage*, the researchers found for the first time that young brain cells in adult mice that spent a month with running wheels in their cages did seem to be different from those in animals that did not run. For the experiment, the scientists injected a modified rabies vaccine into the animals, where

it entered the nervous system and brain. They then tracked and labeled connections between brain cells and learned that compared to the sedentary animals' brain cells, the runners' newborn neurons had more and longer dendrites, the snaky tendrils that help to connect the cells into the neural communications network. They also found that more of these connections led to portions of the brain that are important for spatial memory, which is our internal map of where we have been and how we got there.

This type of memory is often diminished in the early stages of dementia.

But these findings, while intriguing, involved animals that had been running for a month, which is the equivalent of years of physical activity by people. The researchers wondered whether such changes in neurons and connections might actually begin earlier and maybe almost immediately after the animals began to exercise.

So for the new study, which was published last month in *Scientific Reports*, most of the same researchers gathered a group of adult, male mice. (Males were used to avoid accounting for the effects of the female reproductive cycle.) The animals were injected with a substance that marks newborn neurons. Half were then allowed to run for a week on wheels in their cages, while the others remained inactive. Afterward, some were also injected with the modified rabies vaccine to track new synapses and connections between the neurons.

When the scientists then microscopically examined brain tissue, they found that the runners' brains, as expected, teemed with far more new neurons than did the brains of the sedentary animals, even though the runners had been exercising for only a week.

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RELATIONSHIP HEALTH

Why Courage Is Essential if You Want a Truly Happy Relationship

By Deborah Fox, M.S.W.

We all want to thrive in our relationships. In order to keep your relationship strong, you'll need courage. Yes, you're likely to think, we'll need courage to face adversity together. True. But you'll also need courage to stay in love with your spouse.

When most people imagine the future of their romance, what comes to mind is loyalty, fidelity, facing difficulties together, having fun together, enjoying sex, and feeling the contentment and safety of each other's company.

What doesn't usually come to mind is what will be required of you to actually fulfill your hopes and dreams. And that's courage.

Every couple experiences resentment and dissatisfaction at times. Frustrations in relationships often center around seemingly incompatible differences—feeling judged, lonely, suffocated, criticized, sexually frustrated. All too often, partners just give up.

You might resign yourself to those feelings never changing. But the solutions you sometimes agree to (“I’ll try to not get so angry” or “I’ll just accept things the way they are”) can go by the wayside in a flash.

In an instant, your resolve evaporates. You might react in what you later realize is an irrational way, even over seemingly little issues.

These intense reactions are often not the result of some deliberative process—you're not pausing to think, “Hmm, does that comment make me mad?”

You're just reacting. Reaction leads to reaction, and the escalation takes on a life of its own.

During courtship, we don't get triggered so quickly and intensely. The stakes just aren't high enough yet. When your commitment grows, your partner becomes so much more important to you.

Once you're in a committed relationship, your partner has the capacity to make you feel threatened, simply because they're now “under your skin.” They now have the power to make you feel small, suffocated, or abandoned and alone. This inherent capacity to threaten and feel threatened underlies the tension which creeps up over time, and it takes a lot of bravery to knock it down.

Historical demons play a huge role in relationship behavior, and identifying them isn't an easy task.

Reacting intensely is your signal to look deeper into the sources of the conflict with your partner. These sources may not be immediately apparent to you because this is all occurring in your “lizard” brain. This primitive part of your brain is the home of your survival instincts that trigger “fight or flight” responses.

That flash that erupts when you react negatively to something has an emotional thread, and with lightening speed, dips into a pool of hurt you experienced earlier in life. This adds massive fuel to the current fire.

Cue courage, because along with those demons of the past come the discomfort and anxiety you have to work through for a solid relationship.

“The secret to happiness is freedom... And the secret to freedom is courage.”

– Thucydides

If, for example, you felt criticized frequently by your mom or dad, you likely have a well of painful feelings stored away, often including shame or self-doubt. If your partner criticizes you, even in a small way, you might react defensively in a split second as a way of protecting yourself from a surge of painful feelings stored away from long ago.

Your reaction is a little bit about the present and a lot more about the past. And it creates disconnection and distance in your romantic relationship.

The challenge then becomes disentangling the present from the past. This requires you to revisit your past feelings of shame, hurt, worthlessness, and self-doubt. The threatening surge of old feelings is accompanied by anxiety because you don't want to re-experience that pain.

Anxiety is really uncomfortable. I often say, “We’ll sell our souls to avoid feeling anxious.” Yet you need to build a tolerance for feeling anxiety in order to discover the roots of your troubles. Then, you can make the shifts in yourself to lead the life you want and fully connect in the relationship.

How do you build a tolerance to anxiety? There are moments (milliseconds, really) you can make the most of before they slip away.

Anxiety is there when you're having intense feelings. Frequently, you're feeling angry or defensive, which can cause you to shut down and withdraw.

In these moments, ask yourself, “What else am I feeling?”

This question will allow you, over time, to pinpoint which feelings are hiding just below the surface.

You know you're angry or agitated or anxious, but you might identify feeling humiliated or unimportant underneath. If you follow that emotional thread back, you'll land in an earlier time when you felt hurt, humiliated, unsure, frightened, or alone.

You will feel very uncomfortable and vulnerable. Take a deep breath, and just stay there in that feeling. Sitting with the inevitable feeling of anxiety allows you to access emotions that you can't feel when you're shut down or just reacting.

This courage, although it doesn't always feel good, allows you to know yourself at a deeper level.

You now have the option and ability to express yourself in a way that another person can hear you.

Your partner's ears will likely perk up when they hear you speak from that place of vulnerability.

Both of you can come to understand how your histories are influencing the present. You may be able to do or say something that hadn't occurred to you.

You and your partner can now work together to solve whatever is troubling you. You're on the road to building a more satisfying and constructive present.

If you're really going to thrive in your relationship, you'll need the courage to struggle with inevitable discomfort. The cutting edge of change is always anxiety—a journey well worth the vulnerability you will encounter along the way.

Be curious about what your emotions mean and brave about what you find out. Staying in love requires it. The courage to grapple with those demons is what allows you to build an even better relationship.

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INNER HEALTH

The Science Behind Making New Year's Resolutions That You'll Keep

By Jeena Cho

Do you make New Year's resolutions each year—promise to get more exercise, lose weight, become more productive—only to feel discouraged and break your resolution just a few weeks into the new year?

What are the conditions that make it more likely that you'll stick to your New Year's resolution? How do you create lasting changes and actually make it a regular habit?

To answer some of these questions, I asked Professor Clayton R. Cook, Ph.D. He's in the Department of Educational Psychology and College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota.

What is a habit?

According to Professor Cook, "within the field of psychology, habits refer to behaviors that are provoked somewhat automatically in response to cues embedded in the environment." Some examples of such habits are washing hands (behavior) after using the toilet (environmental cue), or putting on exercise clothes (behavior) quickly after turning off your alarm clock and getting out of bed (environmental cue).

"Habit formation is a behavior change process—replacing certain behaviors with new ones," says Cook. Creating behavior change has been a topic of social scientific inquiry for a long long time, and now there is a robust knowledge base regarding the factors that impact successful behavior change.

How do you create new, desired behaviors?

We need cues in the environment to trigger the new desired behavior. Many people have all kinds of competing cues for unhealthy habits. The key to change is to "embed cues that signal or prompt a person to exhibit the new desired behavior," says Cook.

Behavior-environmental cue relationships are critical to habit formation. Cook uses breaking the habit of nail biting to illustrate how to create a new behavior.

If you want to give up biting your nails, first you need to become aware of when you're prone to biting your nails.

Embed cues during those time when you're likely to bite your nails.

Set up cues that signal or trigger an alternative competing behavior—that is, the new habit you're trying to form.

For example, if you're prone to biting your nails while driving, tape a question near the steering wheel that says "Do you know what's under your fingernails?" This is your cue to, for example, begin chewing gum (alternative competing behavior).

Why is it so difficult to maintain a new, healthier behavior?

Habits form out of repetition. Most people initially engage in a behavior to form a healthy habit (for example, going to bed earlier to get more sleep) but don't repeat it enough to form

"Whoever is careless with the truth in small matters cannot be trusted with important matters."

- Albert Einstein

the habit. Repetition is fundamentally a part of the habit formation process.

Tips for creating automaticity

With repetition comes the development of automaticity. "Automaticity makes things feel more effortless and easy. It also requires less cognitive load," says Cook.

This raises yet another question: How does one stick with the behavior to repeat it enough to make it a habit?

Have an accountability partner

"Creating situations that involve positive peer pressure from trusted, respected and valued others is a good way to create accountability to stick with a new behavior," says Cook.

To think pragmatically about this one, finding a peer accountability partner or embedding oneself within a group of respected and valued

others helps create positive peer pressure to engage in the behavior.

Remember: Relapse is part of the habit-forming process

It's important to remember that "relapse or going back to the old habit is a normal part of the behavior change process," says Cook.

Sticking with the behavior despite a setback is important. Slipping back to the old habit isn't an opportunity to beat oneself up, but rather a normal part of the habit formation process.

Pair goal setting with identifying the barriers

According to Cook, "research has shown that more conventional forms of goal setting in which one creates a goal and visualizes how cool it will be when one achieves the goal has been shown to produce paradoxical effects. In many cases setting a goal and thinking positively by visualizing success leads to worse outcomes—not better."

In order to combat this effect, Cook suggests pairing goal-setting with identifying addressable barriers that are likely to emerge while trying to reach a goal. Next, if-then or when-then plans are developed to overcome the barriers when they arise to stay on track to meet the goal, which is to exhibit the desired new behavior with sufficient repetition so it becomes a habit.

Use WOOP

This form of goal setting combined with problem-solving is titled WOOP (Wish-Outcomes-Obstacles-Plan) and was developed by Gabriele Oettingen. Her research has shown that WOOP helps people develop healthy habits across a range of different domains of life. For details on WOOP, read this article on increasing motivation.

Whatever goals or resolutions you're setting for yourself for [the new year], remember to take a gentle stance towards yourself. Motivate yourself by using the same tools you might with your child or someone you love dearly rather than self-criticism or judgement.

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CAREER HEALTH

4 Ways To Kick Off Your Weekend Mindfully

By Amy Hillock

Life can be hectic, but a few simple healthy habits can help keep you centered. Here, are some tips for transitioning from work to weekend vibes.

Life would just be too easy if Friday at 6 (or 5, or 4) P.M. meant that all of your work for the week was done and you could set off to enjoy the weekend or days off without thinking about anything except happy hour spots and brunch plans.

Those involuntary reminders of tasks to be done pop up in our head long after we leave the office, and we feel compelled to do something about them. It's called responsibility. It's not an easy practice to avoid work distractions during our time off, but it is an important one.

Disconnecting from the hustle and bustle, and even taking breaks from technology, do a lot to both physically and mentally reset us. Staying tied to our devices, especially when they're work-related, can lead to sleep problems, stress management issues, increased anxiety, even depression and more severe disorders. Plus, when we arrive back to the daily grind without a proper break, the quality of our work may suffer.

It is as important for our mental health as it is for our relationships and jobs to master the art of truly stepping out of office. Try some of the following tips to help smooth the transition from work to weekend much more mindfully.

1. Leave your workspace organized.

Alongside the excitement of the end of the day and start to the weekend is the looming deadline to wrap up the week's work. Realistically, there is rarely a clean break at the end of any given Friday, where all projects and tasks have been completed and a clean slate can be left for the coming week. But that's not to say we can't have a little closure when leaving the office.

As the end of the day is approaching, start to prioritize the leftover tasks. Physically organize the workspace so it is extremely clear and straightforward what needs to be completed on

Monday morning. Leaving a clean and efficiently arranged workspace will offer the right amount of closure for the days off where any uncompleted tasks and to-do list items are acknowledged and left waiting in a neat line, so you can feel confident that they won't be forgotten.

2. Practice post-work meditation.

It is always a calming practice to sit silently, close your eyes and take in a few breaths. This can be done almost anywhere: at your desk before you leave work; in the elevator; on the commute home; or outside of your door before entering your home. Even 30 seconds will be enough to provide a little refresh and mark the end of one part of the day and beginning of another.

Related: 5 Classes Every Beginner Should Try at Least Once

3. Don't bring work home—literally.

Having tasks in mind is one thing, but keeping a tangible pile of work in your living space is going too far. The likelihood of completing said work is already minimal when faced with much more exciting plans or personal errands. Plus, it robs you of a much-needed break from the work mindset. It also helps if you set time boundaries for responding to work emails or even texts from co-workers relating to work. Being too available for work when you're off of work means you're less available to actually enjoy it.

Related: How to Have Tough Conversations Without Losing Your Cool

4. Set aside time for happiness.

After a long day of working hard, it's important to take time to do something that brings you joy and sends your body the signal that you are officially off-duty. This could mean heading straight to the gym or a class to sweat for an hour, playing with a pet, cooking an amazing dinner, or listening to great music loudly while getting ready to go out. Whatever it is, it's important and you deserve it!

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For Your Brain's Sake, Keep Moving

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Interestingly, these neurons also looked unique. They were larger and, as in the study of mice that ran for a month, displayed more and longer dendrites than similar neurons in the other animals. In effect, the young neurons in the runners' brains appeared to be more mature after only a week of exercise than brain cells from inactive animals.

These young cells were better integrated into the overall brain circuitry, too, with more connections into portions of the brain involved in spatial and other types of memory. Most surprising to the scientists, these cells also proved to be less easily activated by neurochemical messages to fire rapidly, which is usually a hallmark of more mature neurons. They remained calmer and less prone to excitability than new neurons in the inactive animals' brains.

What these differences in cell structure and connection mean for brain function remains uncertain, though, says Henriette van Praag, a principal investigator at the National Institutes of Health and senior author of this and the earlier study. Neither study was designed to look into whether the running mice thought and remembered differently than mice that were sedentary for most of the day.

But the current study "provides more pieces of evidence that brain cells produced under running conditions are not just quantitatively but qualitatively different" than other neurons, she says, "and these differences are evident very soon" after exercise begins.

Perhaps most important, the new brain cells in the runners tended to integrate into and bulk up portions of the brain that, if damaged by disease, are associated with early memory loss and dementia, she adds.

Of course, this experiment used mice, which are not people. While some past neurological studies with people have hinted that exercise might alter our brain structure in similar ways, she says, that possibility is still theoretical.

Still, she says, "I think it is a very good idea for the sake of the brain to be moving and active."

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