

THRIVING

A JOURNAL OF WELL-BEING from
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Live Long and Prosper...with Friends

If friends are gifts we give ourselves, it's good to be generous.

There is a growing body of evidence that shows people who have good friendships and strong social circles live longer—as well as happier—lives.

In study after study, researchers have found that those who have friends are less likely to become disabled and, if they do suffer a period of disability, more likely to recover. Further, people with fewer friendships are more likely to have a heart attack and to die as a result, while people with more social contacts are less likely to suffer cognitive decline.

Health-wise, friends encourage us to do what's good for us: eat better, drink less, exercise and seek medical care when we need it; friends listen to us when we need to let off steam and cheer us up when we're down. We stress less when we have friends who support us and help us along the way.

Frequently, family and friends are lumped together when people talk about support. However, friends don't usually make the same demands that family members sometimes do. The old saying goes, "We choose our friends, but we're stuck with our family." Granted, we may have a supportive family that we're very happy to be "stuck" with, but friendships allow us to experience ourselves in a new way and grow beyond the patterns and expectations of our family.

While friendships can be passing, we generally hang on to the ones that are meaningful. As we grow older, we may have fewer friends, but our pleasure in them grows. The reason? People become more selective and get better at knowing the kind of people they like and don't like, steering

away from those they don't care for.

These days, in our mobile, fast-paced culture, it's more difficult to make and maintain social relationships than when folks stayed in one place and had more leisure time. People move across town or across country and jam-pack their lives with schedules that leave no time for finding and nurturing friendships. Consequently, at the end of a too-full day or when a free weekend finally arrives, we may discover ourselves longing for the kind of easy pleasure friendship offers. Without friends, life can get lonely.

If you've moved to a new location, or your friends have drifted away and you need to restock the reservoir, reach out through joining groups and pursuing hobbies and interests where you're likely to find kindred spirits. Extend a hand and an invitation.

Like any other living thing, friendship requires care and feeding:

- **Give your friendships priority**, not just when you're lonely.
- **Make a weekly date.** This can provide the scaffolding for an enduring emotional relationship.
- **Stay in touch** when you can't be together physically: call, write, and send pictures, too.
- **Celebrate occasions together.** Be there for the big events and the small. Create celebrations of your own.
- **Make time for old friends**, even if it might be an inconvenience.

There is wisdom in the simple lines from the childhood song, *Make new friends and keep the old. One is silver, the other gold.* *

10 Ways to Make It a GREAT Day

Great days—when everything seems to go right and we connect with others (and ourselves) in meaningful ways—seem to come randomly, like they are something we can enjoy when they're here, but not necessarily create.

But we can influence much more than we think. The following 10 tips can transform what might be an ordinary day into something that verges on great.

- 1. Start off with a plan.** Ask yourself what one thing you can do that will build toward creating a great day.
 - 2. Be mindful.** Throughout the day be present in all that you do.
 - 3. Do first things first.** Give priority to the important.
 - 4. Spend time with those you love.** If you can't be together in person, call or write a letter or email. Connect.
 - 5. Lighten up!** Find time to play and enjoy yourself.
 - 6. Give yourself something nice.** Eat something you love for lunch. Gift yourself with a bunch of flowers or a massage. Take a walk in the sun.
 - 7. Learn something new.**
 - 8. Complete one thing.** Do something you've been meaning to do, finish a project or a task.
 - 9. Do something good,** or give something to someone, anonymously.
 - 10. Be, instead of Do.** Allow yourself time without needing to fill it. Be a human Be-ing, rather than a human Do-ing.
- Have a Great Day! ***

A Letter From *Margaret Hood Black*



It's a new year, and with it come the intentions to do better and be better than the year before, also known as "New Year's Resolutions."

This newsletter issue is devoted to three of the most common resolutions of the season.

The first encompasses the desire to engage in more activities, to make new friends or spend more time with old friends. In the page 1 feature article, we explore some reasons this is such an excellent intention. It's not only enjoyable, but turns out we live longer and healthier lives when we spend time with friends.

The page 3 article on exercise offers suggestions on how to get beyond the "I don't have enough time" excuse that kills this #1 resolution.

And if you're intent on getting better control of your finances this year, read the page 4 article on developing a healthier attitude toward money.

The quiz helps you pinpoint and identify ways that a "victim mentality"—feeling like you have no control over events or circumstances—may be sabotaging your efforts to change. And the Top 10 offers suggestions on how you can positively influence how "great" each and every day is.

Happy New Year, and here's to a healthy, happy, prosperous 2016!

Is a "Victim Mentality" Robbing You of Your Personal Power?

Times of stress or a need to respond to fearful situations can stir up the "victim" in all of us. We think, "I had no choice," or, "There was nothing I could do to change XYZ," or "So-and-so made me feel _____."

But we almost always have more say than we might imagine in situations. Here's a quiz to help you see if you've been carrying around a victim mentality that may be robbing you of your sense of personal power. Answer true or false to the following statements.



True False

- My first response to a setback is to blame someone else for what's happened.
- No matter what I do, things are not really going to change for me.
- I often find myself beginning thoughts with phrases like "I can't ...", "I'm no good at ...", "I've never been able to ...".
- When things go wrong, I tend to beat myself up.
- Sometimes I'm lucky, but when bad things happen they are because I mess up.
- When angry, I rarely begin sentences with "I."
- Conversations with friends are often about how hard my life is.
- When friends offer advice, I usually counter it with a "Yes, but..." since they can't know how difficult my situation really is.
- I spend a fair amount of my time thinking about past failures and mistakes.
- Other people usually cause me to feel the way I do. I'd be more centered if it weren't for them.
- I'm always so busy with work and the things I need to do to survive that I just don't have time to do things I want to do for myself.
- I'd like to exercise more and eat in a healthier way, but I just can't right now.
- If I weren't tied down to all these obligations, I could really do some of the things I always think about doing.
- Someday I'll find a new partner who will really change my life. In the meantime, all I can do is hope.
- I must have done something really horrible in a past life because nothing I do ever works out.
- If only I had had more support, I could have ... (fill in the blank).

"Victimhood" is usually a way of staying stuck in old patterns and can be an externalizing way of dealing with unacknowledged anger or fear of change. If you've answered true to more than a handful of these questions, chances are you'd benefit from a closer look at what's happening in your life right now. Feel free to call. *

If Exercise Is So Good for Us, Why Don't We Do It?

What's on the list of top 10 ways to reduce stress?
Exercise.

One of the top 10 ways of relieving anxiety?

Exercise.

Maintain good health? *Exercise.*

Relieve depression? Build self-esteem? Improve self-image and confidence? Reduce tension? Improve mental sharpness and alertness? Increase immunity to certain diseases and health risks? Lose weight? Improve the quality of sleep?

Exercise. Exercise. Exercise.

With a list like this, one might ask if there is any aspect of human life that isn't helped by regular exercise. Not according to physical and mental health experts. Anyone and everyone who is concerned with health and well-being agrees: Physical activity is a vital component for optimum physical and emotional health. Regular exercise is the key to increasing the quality of life. Being active improves body, mind, and spirit.



But what's ALSO at the top of nearly everyone's lapsed New Year's Resolutions?

Yes, *exercise.*

"No time" is the reason most people offer when asked why they don't exercise. And it's true; most of our lives are busier than ever before. But the fact is, when something is important, when we are committed, when we really want something, we find the time for it. Look beneath the easy and ready excuse and you may find more complex reasons why people won't start or can't seem to stay with a regular exercise routine.

Impatience: People want to get in great shape Right Now! Never mind that it took twenty years to get in the shape they're in.

Unrealistic Expectations: Looking for the "perfect body" is a guaranteed set up for failure.

Denial: Many people are in denial that they might have health problems or suffer a debilitating disease.

Intimidation: The idea of failure or looking foolish or being a beginner intimidates many people into never starting an exercise program.

Bad experiences or painful memories: Experiences

such as humiliation or sexual abuse, or old feelings of inadequacy or embarrassment can cause resistance to the idea of exercise.

Physical exercise is essential to good physical and emotional health and a sense of well-being. If any of these reasons lie beneath the surface of your "not enough time" excuse, consider these suggestions:

- Start slowly.
- Get a buddy.
- Find an activity you like.
- Go for progress not perfection.
- Realize that it may hurt before it feels good.
- Remember healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes; your healthy body is the perfect shape for YOU!
 - Don't give up. If you miss a day, begin again the next day. Every day is a new day. Every day counts.
 - Be patient. All good things take time.
 - Congratulate yourself on your hard work and follow-through. Soon enough it will become a habit.
 - Ask for help if you need it.

If time is your tyrant, the good news is that specialists in health and exercise matters are telling us that short bursts of exercise can be effective, too.

"There's a threshold level of activity needed to gain health benefits," says John M. Jakicic, assistant professor of psychiatry and human behavior of the Brown University School of Medicine. "But it's not

necessary to get all this activity at one time."

Regular bouts of 10 to 15 minutes of aerobic "sparks," such as dancing, an early morning walk, or a midday office stair climb, combined with a few strengthening exercises and stretching routines can have measurable



physical and mental impact.

Though you can't expect to lose much weight or compete in 10K races with these minimum activity levels, you can improve your physical health and feel better. Parking your car at the far end of the lot and walking to the mall, taking the stairs instead of the elevator and dancing through your housework can be the start of something good. *

Gain Control of Your Money Instead of It Controlling YOU

Money—the lack of it, the fear of losing it, and the dread of not having enough—tops the list of concerns of the majority of people these days. Everybody, it seems, has money issues.

We live in a culture that encourages debt and denies the lost art of delaying gratification. And, like color that fades on a cheap paint job, the repercussions of this lifestyle are beginning to show.

Studies have shown that high levels of income-eating debt—especially big credit-card bills—may be related to high blood pressure, insomnia and even problems with physical mobility, vision and hearing. Other studies show that the overall, #1 greatest source of stress is personal finances. And, what do couples report that they fight about most often? Money.

While women may experience a debilitating lack of confidence about taking care of themselves, men have more concerns about providing adequately for their families and also

for their retirement.

Meanwhile, we are showered with seductive messages to “Buy now, pay later.”

Which many of us do. Then we have to work harder to keep up with payments, which causes even more stress. For both men and women.

The language of money is complex and subject to misinterpretation.

Often it is the early messages we received about money that influence our current beliefs. So, one of the first steps in dealing with money issues is to check out old ideas that continue to color behavior and attitudes.

Couples, who may have grown up with different values about money, need to talk about their beliefs. Not who is right and who is wrong,

but what the basic beliefs are.

By better understanding your attitudes and values toward money, you may be more able to gain control of money instead of it controlling you.

Many books on how to deal with financial issues are available, and advice from professionals such as banks, consumer financial agencies, financial planners and advisors, and accountants, is always a good idea.

But maybe the best place to start is with a healthy attitude toward

money. Some ideas:

1. Live within your means.
2. Spend only when you have the money. Save for it, if you don't.
3. Develop an attitude of gratitude for what you have.
4. Feel more in control by being willing to plan and save for future desires. *



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