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Health and Fitness Guide

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TIPS for

EATING MORE PLANTS

By Anna Leigh Bagiackas, Courtesy of StripesEurope.com

It's hard to ignore that plant-based eating has become more of the mainstream, rather than on the fringes. That doesn't mean that people are committing to vegetarian or vegan diets; instead, there's an increase of people incorporating meals without meat into their regular routine. The increased interest comes from a number of reasons, including health, environmental impacts and cost.

If more plant-based eating is a big change to your regular eating and cooking routine, my biggest advice is to start small and be open. Here are a few tips to get more plants into your diet.

Set the right tone. Rather than replacing meat with something else, start with a mindset of trying a new ingredient or food. For example, maybe you want to make cauliflower tacos. Don't preface the meal with explaining that you're never going to make pork carnitas or your kids' favorite beef "Taco Tuesday" meal. Rather than creating a mood of something being taken away, add a positive and fun spin to it.

Take any opportunity to add some fruits or vegetables. When we took a trip to Slovenia we noticed how vegetables were a main addition to their breakfasts. They would roast peppers, onions, eggplant etc. and serve it with eggs, just like your favorite hash browns or breakfast potatoes. It inspired me to think, why not vegetables at breakfast? So, I try to sneak in some wherever I can, whether it's a breakfast sandwich with arugula or spinach or even adding a small breakfast salad to a plate of eggs and bacon.

Commit to one plant-based meal a week. Rather than completely reworking all your routines, favorite recipes and patterns, start with just one meal a week, such as the #MeatlessMonday movement.

Get creative with what's in your pantry. In my efforts to reduce my trips to the grocery store, I've noticed how easy it is to have a plant-based meal when I just get creative with pantry staples. Beans, vegetables, pasta and grains make great soups or bowls. While it might not be the most mind-blowingly delicious meal, it could save you a trip to the store and use up what is in the pantry.

Take a risk with a new item. Maybe the idea of cooking tofu, tempeh or even Beyond Meat is intimidating. I totally get that, but what's the harm in giving it a try?

Smoothies are an easy way to get more plants in your diet. I always have a bag of fresh spinach or kale in my fridge for smoothies. Yes, green smoothies are maybe a little bit of a fad, but it's the easiest and fastest way for me to get greens in for the day. I also love my breakfast routine and the idea of drinking my breakfast really ruins my mood, so I opt for a smoothie bowl, spooning a couple tablespoons of homemade granola on top.

Keep protein in mind. One complaint of a meal without meat is that you're not fully satisfied. While this might take some getting used to (consider what it means to feel satisfied), I always try to keep protein in mind and where we are getting it if we aren't having meat. This is where beans, grains, nuts etc. become important.

I know it can be hard to believe, but small changes really can add up to big impact. Maybe making a huge change to your diet works for you, but maybe it doesn't. Just remember that every little thing you do towards giving yourself and your family more fresh fruits, vegetables and other plant-based ingredients does make a difference—to you, your health, your wallet and the planet.

SLEEP, HEALTHY DIET, AND GOOD EXERCISE

Your invisible body armor against infection

By Samir Deshpande,
Courtesy of Walter Reed Army Institute of Research

Soldiers, according to Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville, are the Army's "most important weapons system." Like with any other weapons system, preventive maintenance is necessary to ensure continuous readiness and maximum performance.

The Army's Performance Triad is a public health campaign aiming to implement this upkeep through proper sleep, activity, and nutrition. The campaign plays a critical role in developing high-quality, physically fit, mentally tough Soldiers that are able to succeed during Multi-Domain Operations.

The current COVID-19 pandemic adds another layer of difficulty to continuously remaining fit and effective. Yet, researchers from the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine (USARIEM) and Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, both subordinate commands of the U.S. Army Medical Research and Development Command, are finding that these same building blocks of Soldier performance may also prove to be techniques for fighting off the disease.

"As we've shifted our resources to help address this pandemic, we're building from the understanding that the same strategies that help us optimize human performance in training and operational settings—eating well, exercising right and getting a good night's sleep—also protect us from infection," said Col. Sean O'Neil, USARIEM's Commander.

Here is what these leaders of the Army's efforts to improve military nutrition, human performance, sleep, resilience and defense against infectious disease, have learned and what they advise:

Nutrition: The Building Blocks of Immunity

A balanced diet that meets energy demands and provides essential nutrients not only increases energy and endurance, it also directly impacts the immune system.

The absence of key nutrients can directly limit your body's ability to protect from invaders. For example, a lack of vitamin D can limit the production of antimicrobials and compromise your skin, the primary barrier against infectious disease. Poor nutrition can even increase harm from infectious disease—one study found that low levels of the nutrient selenium caused viral mutations resulting in an even more damaging infection. Obesity, or excess energy intake, can also stress the immune system.

"These findings highlight the critical role of diet and nutrition in Warfighter health and performance—including immune function and infectious disease. Optimal nutrition is a critical first step to immunity," said James McClung, chief of the Military Nutrition Division at USARIEM.

Sleep—Your Internal Body Armor

Given its well-known impact on vigilance, learning, reaction time and mental acuity, sleep loss has long been a topic of concern for military leaders and a focus of research by military scientists. Less widely known, however, is the recent evidence showing that sleep is also critical for maintaining a healthy and effective immune system.

It is now understood that sleep duration is a powerful predictor of infection. In one study, volunteers were exposed to the virus that causes the common cold. It was found that those who averaged less than seven hours of sleep per night had a three-fold greater risk of infection than those who averaged eight hours or more; for those who habitually obtained less than five hours of sleep, the risk was four times greater.

Physical Activity: Boost Your Immune System

Physical activity and fitness are critical aspects of military service as well as overall health—they also can boost your immune system.

Even a single session of physical activity can improve your immune system, resulting in the redistribution of immune cells to your body's "front lines"—places like your lungs or gut—to enhance surveillance of potential pathogens.

Regular physical training also improves one's immune response to infection challenges. On the contrary, excessive physical training without adequate time to recover has been linked to a suppressed immune system.

"Physical activity and fitness are key to optimal and enhanced health and performance of our Soldiers. Special care to practice smart physical training practices will help promote stronger immune system responses," said Susan Proctor, chief of the Military Performance Division at USARIEM, who is responsible for targeted musculoskeletal health and military performance research.

Don't Let This Information Stress You Out

In addition to emotional health, well-being, and job performance, stress may impact our immune system as well.

One study found that self-reported stress predicted more symptoms in volunteers exposed to influenza virus.

Another study found that individuals who reported high levels of stress over a period of at least one month were two to three times more likely to develop colds than those reporting less stress when challenged with a cold virus. A range of evidence also suggests that in addition to increasing the risk of infection, stress also worsens outcomes.

"Stress has significant direct and indirect impacts to both risk and severity of infection. Alongside getting enough sleep and regular exercise, stress mitigation strategies like mindfulness can go a long way to improving overall wellness and staying healthy," said Amy Adler, acting director of WRAIR's Research Transition Office, which bridges the gulf between laboratory and field to get research advances into Army training.

The Performance Triad, Infection and COVID-19

Perhaps most significant is that deficits in each factor are separately linked to decreased vaccine efficacy. For example, being physically active heightens vaccine effectiveness compared to being sedentary.

Furthermore, nutrition, sleep, exercise, and stress are all intrinsically linked—high levels of stress may result in difficulty falling asleep, poor diet or lack of motivation to exercise; overexertion is often linked with compromised nutrition and sleep disturbances—suggesting that addressing one factor can positively influence others.

"Sleep, activity and nutrition are all critical aspects of ready, resilient and healthy Soldiers and family members—it is important that individuals and their families consider every one of them. Setting realistic, attainable, but ambitious goals can help you focus on your health during this pandemic while building your invisible body armor against infection," said Col. Deydre Teyhen, WRAIR's Commander.

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The Easiest, Healthiest Apple-Pear Crisp You'll Ever Love

By Karen Bradbury, Courtesy of StripesEurope.com

Just a short bike ride away from my house, there's a sweet little public garden where children can learn all about herbs and growing things. There's also an old orchard, and all of the fruit that grows there is free for the taking.

Upon return home from a recent forage with three juicy apples and two rather bland and hard pears in hand, I began my internet search for a healthy, sugar-free dessert. All the pear and apple crisp recipes I found called for what I would consider exotic ingredients. I have no almond flour in my pantry, and I can't recall having ever even seen spelt flour sold in any of our local supermarkets. So I pared down a mash-up of the recipes I found online to a bare minimum of ingredients that I happened to have at home, and to my surprise, the results were delicious. If fast, inexpensive and easy—and pretty healthy too—describes the way you like to bake, you should appreciate this one. The following recipe results in a dessert that makes generous servings for two, but could also feed three at a stretch.

APPLE-PEAR CRISP

Start to finish:
45 minutes (10 minutes active)

Servings: 2-3

Three medium-sized apples

Two medium-sized pears

2 teaspoons cinnamon

teaspoon salt

1 cup oats

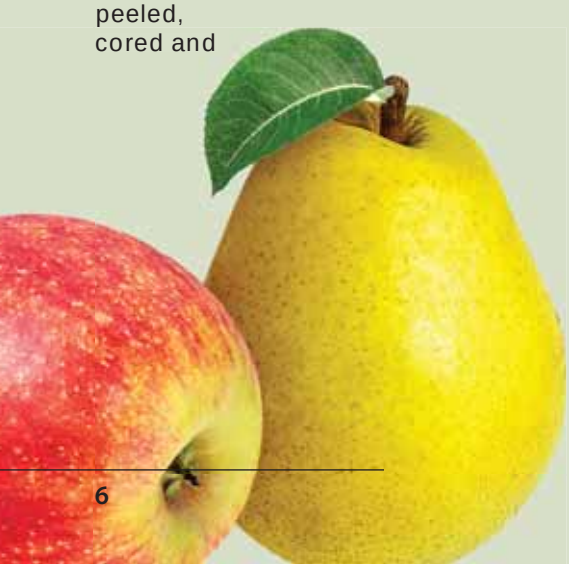
cup applesauce, preferably sugar-free. I used a type that contained pureed mango as well.

cup coconut oil

1 tablespoon of honey

Preheat oven to 180°degrees Celsius /350° Fahrenheit.

Into a slightly greased baking dish or pie plate, place fruit that you have peeled, cored and sliced. I used an oval baking dish that was roughly 6 inches by 9 inches. If you have all apples or all pears on hand, that's fine as well. Other fruits could work in this recipe as well.



Mix fruit slices with half of the salt and half of the cinnamon.

In a bowl, mix together the oats, applesauce, and coconut oil. Add the remaining salt and cinnamon. Once mixed thoroughly, spread the mixture evenly atop the fruit.

Bake for 20 minutes, checking every five minutes or so thereafter to ensure the topping doesn't get overdone.

Once the top is nicely brown, remove from oven and sample the fruit to see if your crumble requires any additional sweetness. If so, melt the honey in the microwave. Move the topping aside as best you can, pour over the fruits, and patch the topping back over the top. I found my apple-pear mix crisp required that extra bit of sweetness provided by the honey, whereas my apples-only crisp was perfect without it.

Return to oven to finish baking, approximately 10 – 15 additional minutes depending on the hardness of your fruit and your oven. Check frequently, poking fruit slices with a fork to check for softness and making sure the top doesn't burn.

I've never seen a recipe that called for this, but before I finish baking my crisps, I like to take them out of the oven, stir the fruits and topping together, and then bake them a little longer. I like the mixture of oats and fruit within and the texture of the fruit that has been exposed. But this is simply a matter of preference.

Fruit crisp desserts taste great with add-ins such as walnuts, raisins or dried cranberries, so if you have those on hand, you can mix them in as well. To make a bigger or smaller batch, adjust accordingly while adhering to the 4 parts oatmeal, 2 parts applesauce and 1 part coconut oil ratio.

Enjoy while still warm from the oven, perhaps with a cup of milky Chai tea, or if you're entertaining, a glass of chilled Chardonnay alongside it is sure to impress.

Find your new favorite fitness program this year

By Stacy Roman, Courtesy of StripesEurope.com

We may have started the year with the best intentions, such as eating healthier and working out more; however, the reality of multiple lockdowns and shuttered fitness centers quickly put the kibosh on those goals. The only marathon I trained for was the entire series of "The Office," and some days the only steps I squeezed in were from the couch to the kitchen cabinet for the hidden Oreos. Some gyms may still be closed, but we can still get our workout on! These nine programs guarantee not only a great sweat session, but they can also be done without a gym and they're a blast to try.

Peloton – Currently one of the hottest fitness trends, Peloton has stores and studios in Germany and the U.K. The bicycles are expensive, but you don't have to shell out dough for the bike to get your sweat on — you can still utilize the app. Offering live and on-demand classes, choose between cycling, HIIT cardio, yoga, strength and more. The digital membership (sans cycle) is $12.99 per month.

Zumba – Zumba is a high energy, hip-shaking program with awesome music and movies. It's often offered at fitness centers on military installations and no special equipment is needed. During the pandemic, instructors upped their game to offer livestreamed classes. You can pay-per-class or purchase a class package for multiple classes. Price varies per class.

Beach Body – Fitness legends Tony Horton, Shaun T. and Chalene Johnson added their popular workout regimens to an on-demand platform. More than 1,500 classes from programs such as P90X, Insanity, 21-Day Fix, PiYo and 80-Day Obsession are available to try. A three-month membership is $38.87, six months for $59 or $99 for one year.

Jazzercise – Synonymous with spandex leotards in the 80s, today's Jazzercise classes have incorporated kickboxing, new dance moves and music, strength training and an array of classes to choose from. New classes are added to the on-demand platform every Tuesday. Price is $19.99 per month, with legwarmers and headbands optional.

Just Dance – Fun for the whole family, Just Dance is a video game available on Nintendo, Xbox and Playstation consoles. The basic game includes 40 songs to move to, or you can upgrade to Just Dance Unlimited for more than 550 songs. The most current version of the game retails for $49.99. The unlimited subscription is $2.99 per day, $3.99 for one month, $9.99 for three months or $24.99 for one year.

CrossFit – Focusing on different muscle groups, varied movements and repetitions, CrossFit creates a challenging and intense workout. Some boxes (gyms) offer classes via Zoom, so you may want to check your local box. For experienced CrossFitters, many workouts of the day (WODs) are available online for those who have access to equipment.

Pure Barre – Based on poised ballet movements, Pure Barre incorporates low-impact and high-intensity movements to promote strength, flexibility and agility. The company recently launched Pure Barre GO, their on-demand platform. You can choose from a variety of classes ranging from five minutes to an hour. Membership is $29.99 per month.

Kait Hurley: Move + Meditate – Combining serious cardio with calming meditative moves, Kait Hurley has developed a fantastic combination to stay active and refocus your mind, working on wellness as a whole. With a variety of classes at different intensity levels offered, plans begin at $9.99 a month.

Couch to 5K – If you've ever wanted to become a runner or need to get back into it, this program is a great way to begin (or start over). Starting with walking and gradually building up running endurance, the program works at your own pace. It's not about how fast you go, only that you start. There are plenty of free apps you can download to help track your progress.

Grab your water, dust off your workout gear and give one (or more) of these fun fitness programs a try. The only thing you've got to lose is the calories from the extra bag of Cheetos.

5 simple tips for staying healthy at work

You walk into work, sit down at your desk and get started on your long list of tasks you need to complete by the end of the day. You glance over at your clock to notice the day is already halfway over. You decide to eat at your desk or skip lunch completely to save time. You haven't gotten up in hours because you're so focused on your to-do list. Next thing you know it's time to leave for the day. You don't realize how hungry, tired, thirsty and stiff you feel until you're driving home. Does this sound familiar? If so, you need to kick this routine to the curb. Follow these simple tips to take better care of yourself while still being productive at work.

By Elizabeth Jones, Courtesy of StripesEurope.com

1 FUEL YOURSELF FOR THE DAY

Whatever you do, eat a nutritious, filling breakfast and take a proper lunch break! If you skip out on breakfast you will deplete the energy you need to get through the day. Try your best to take an actual lunch break by getting away from the desk. Meal prep a lunch you will look forward to eating instead of having a boring salad. Keep delicious and healthy snacks on hand such as nuts and fruits. Snacks are the perfect mid-morning and afternoon pick-me-up.

2 STAY HYDRATED

Invest in a 24-ounce water bottle and drink from it every hour. You can set reminders on your computer or mark your water bottle with times to help ease into this habit. Drinking water is vital to keep you feeling full and staying hydrated.

3 GET UP AND MOVE

Sitting for more than six hours a day can make you 18% more likely to die from heart disease or diabetes. Set a reminder on your computer or phone to stretch and walk for at least a few minutes every hour. Most fitness watches have an hourly reminder feature to keep you moving. Make it simple by going down to the break room for a glass of water or taking a quick walk outside.

4 LET LOOSE

To relieve neck pain, position your computer screen to match your natural gaze. For your back, ensuring your posture is in check is the best way to prevent tension. You can also try to keep your lower back muscles engaged by leaning slightly in front of your hips. If your elbows and wrists are bothering you try having your desk placed where they can comfortably hover.

Give your trouble spots mini massages throughout the day to loosen up. Taking the time to work these areas out will have you leaving work less tense than ever before.

5 CALMLY COLLECT YOURSELF

Even if you absolutely love your job, there will be times you feel overwhelmed. Instead of letting it get the best of you, take some time to yourself. Take a coffee break, go outside and give a loved one a quick call, or sit in your car and listen to your favorite song. Do whatever you need to do to not let the stress get to you.

You don't want to burn yourself out as time goes on. Once you start feeling exhausted from your job it will start to trickle into your personal life. Start taking better care of yourself while you're at work. Your body and mind will thank you!

STAYING HEALTHY: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF RUNNING

By Jennifer Brown, Courtesy of Stripes Guam

Exercise has many health benefits. In particular, running for me has been a great stress relief and a way to cope with life's challenges. When I go for a run, I take my mind off of my problems and focus on the road in front of me. When I was training for my first marathon, I sometimes had to go on runs when I did not feel like it. However, my perspective is that you always feel better having gone on run than if you had not gone on one. Running has also been beneficial to my well-being and mental health.

Though not every run is done in a group format, I have found that joining a running group helps promote feelings of togetherness and connectedness. One of my favorite stories about running is when I joined a running group on a whim. Though the group was already established, they let me join last minute and run a race with them across a portion of Okinawa's main island. Despite being unsure about my own running ability, joining the group on this endeavor was a once in a lifetime opportunity for me. The last time I had been running in a group was back in high school cross country, so running in a group across an island in Japan was a major accomplishment.

Whether you decide to run in a race or just go on a solo run for some fresh air exercise, there is no correct way to try this physical activity. Running is all about your pace and your miles, not about doing it perfectly. Joining the race felt uncomfortable at first, but eventually led to making great memories. What I enjoyed most about running in a team was that everyone was there with you in your struggle and were there to back you up.

Running is also a great way to get out of your dorm or barracks and off your electronic devices. This activity helped create a sense of self and community for me and it was also a good way to take a break from the computer and watching movies. On Okinawa, running allowed me to explore my surroundings and took me to so many places including nearby castles and areas around them.

Besides gaining some new running buddies and exploring new places I might not have if I'd only stuck to driving or staying indoors, this activity also had an effect on my general wellbeing. For instance, I developed a greater sense of self-worth and confidence as I became a seasoned runner. This was especially true when I was training for my first marathon. I did not believe I could ever run a half marathon, needless to say a full one, but once I gradually increased my mileage, I found that I was breaking down walls that I used to have in front of me.

Running is beneficial whether you are just starting or have many years of running under your belt. It is an inexpensive hobby that will get you out of your house and your heart rate pumping while also allowing you to push your physical and mental boundaries. It's a great hobby that has helped me on so many levels. Give it a try!

Jennifer Brown is a hospital corpsman at U.S. Naval Hospital Okinawa. Originally from Florida, she joined the Navy in 2018 and has been on island for over a year. During her free time, Brown enjoys spending time with animals, running, rock climbing, and hiking. She is a graduate of the University of Central Florida and holds a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. Her professional interests include social work, animal welfare, and children.

FUN EXERCISES TO DO WITH YOUR BABY

Active parents are an inspiration to their children. Your patient little baby or toddler is always watching whether you realize it or not. It is a bittersweet moment when your child tries to join you or asks how to do a pushup. But when that determined, active parent is vigorously pushing to complete their last set of 20 squats and that adorable fussy baby isn't having it, it can be quite frustrating. What's a mommy or daddy to do? Pick up that cute ball of fuss and use them to your advantage – add extra weight and balance to your lunges? Sure, why not? A little more burn and challenge will maximize results, and most babies find it exciting to go up and down or side to side because they are being held, and spending more one-on-one time with their parents.

Here are 10 great exercises you can safely and efficiently do with your happy baby. If baby just won't get in the mood, that's ok. Take a deep breath and try again later. A few things to keep in mind before beginning:

Make sure baby can at least hold their head up (3-4 months old), and is secure and safe — either in your arms or in a carrier — while you perform these exercises. Keep your core engaged with each exercise, belly button pulled in, shoulders back. Engaging your core helps strengthen your abs while protecting your lower back. It also gives you better control and stability while holding your baby.

By Amanda Hayward,
Courtesy of StripesEurope.com

Squat and hold – Firmly holding your baby out in front of you, lower back into a deep squat and back up.

Make it easier: Simply hold your baby in toward your chest, elbows back and lower into a squat.

Shoulder raises – Smile at your baby and raise them up in the air, bring your baby toward your chest and back up in the air, arms extended up overhead.

Make it easier: Sit in a chair as you raise baby up and back toward your chest.

Lunge and twist – Begin in standing position, holding baby directly in front of you with your elbows slightly bent. Slowly step your right leg in front, lowering into a lunge. As you lower, slowly twist your torso (and baby) to the right. Twist back to center and return to starting position. Repeat on other side to complete one rep.

Make it easier: Hold baby closer to you as you step out into a lunge.

Baby chest press – Lying on your back, knees bent and holding baby on your chest (baby is lying on his belly), slowly raise baby directly above your chest, bring baby down and back up, mimicking a chest press.

Make it easier: Put your knees down so you are lying flat as you perform a baby chest press.

Leg lifts – Lying flat on your back with extended legs, hold baby firmly with both hands so he is sitting on your belly. Engage abs and slowly lift legs up to the ceiling for three counts. Lower center for three counts then alternate left and right completing one rep. Be sure to inhale as you lower, exhale as you pull up, and smile at your baby.

Make it easier: Keep knees bent at a 90 degree angle parallel to the ceiling. Slowly lower legs to "tap" the ground, and slowly bring back to starting position.

Traditional baby crunch – Lay on your back, knees bent and feet off the ground. Gently hold baby in a sitting position on your belly. Contracting abs and smiling at your baby, crunch up for three counts and back down for three counts, never letting go of that contraction.

Make it easier: Keep knees bent with feet flat on the floor as you perform a crunch.

Sumo baby curl and press – Stand in plié position with your feet more than hip width apart, toes pointed out. Holding baby at waist height, slowly squat down while lowering baby just below the hips. As you return to starting position, bring baby up toward chest, (mimicking a bicep curl) and immediately lift baby overhead to perform an overhead press. This completes one rep.

Make it easier: Perform each body exercise separately. For example, perform the plié squats for as many reps as you can handle. Next, in standing position feet hip width apart, slowly "curl" baby up to your chest and up overhead to complete one rep.

Baby dance-off – If all else fails, dance! Hold your baby securely or place baby in a carrier (Tula, wrap, etc.), turn on some good tunes and dance around! This is a great cardio workout and a stress reliever as well. Babies are usually entertained by this and can spend some quality time with mommy or daddy.

Stroller warrior walk – Go for a stroll or fast-paced walk. It's good for baby to get some fresh air, and good for mommy and daddy too. Whether you go for a power walk first thing in the morning, before baby's nap, or after dinner, walking is refreshing and healthy for everyone.

Baby and me stretch – Don't forget to stretch out those hard-worked muscles. Sitting up with legs spread apart in a straddle position, place baby in the center of your legs sitting up, lying on belly or on back (depending on what stage your baby is in). Slowly reach center toward your baby, belly button in, back flat and exhale. Hold for 15 to 20 seconds. Return to starting position. Turn your torso to the right side and slowly reach toward your ankle until you feel a good, comfortable stretch (interact with your baby as you like) while keeping your back flat. Repeat on other side.

STRUGGLING WITH MEDITATION?

TRY MINDFULNESS THROUGH ACTIVITY

By Amanda Palumbo, Courtesy of StripesEurope.com

I am terrible at meditation. I am quite skilled in the art of anxiety and overthinking.

Over the years many blogs, books and doctors have encouraged us to sit on a floor, close our eyes and "clear our minds." That is an amazing tactic, especially in times of high-stress, but not everyone can truly achieve this, at least not easily.

In fact, attempting to do the "traditional meditation" seems to cause more anxiety because you're trying very hard to clear your mind but realize you're thinking too hard to clear your mind and therefore your mind isn't clear and why am I so bad at this and... Well, you know where the rest of that thought process goes.

Meditation takes focus and how you focus is entirely up to you. Here are a few techniques to practice mindfulness, ease stress and even "meditate" for the over-thinker.

COLORING ▲

Chances are you've either seen an "adult coloring book" or there's a good chance you own one. Allowing your mind and hands to work in tandem, selecting colors and staying between the lines (or outside the lines if that's your style) gives you focus while cathartically watching something colorful come to life.

You can find adult coloring books on Amazon or in your nearest bookstore like Thalia. If you want to test drive coloring or if you're looking to save money, Justcolor.net has hundreds of printable coloring sheets ranging from swear words to unicorns. If you're a parent, this is a great opportunity to have everyone sit down and color a page for just a few golden minutes of silence.

CROCHET/KNITTING/ SEWING ▲

Whether you're using one needle or two, activities like crocheting and knitting have a similar result as coloring: having your brain and fingers work together allowing you to focus and create. If you haven't ever picked up a needle and yarn, don't be intimidated. There are so many tutorials on YouTube and free patterns online to teach yourself. My mother showed me the basics of crochet but I have learned many intricate stitches thanks to crafty YouTubers.

YOGA ▲

Yes, we all know yoga is a great outlet for stress. However, what you may not realize is what stress does to your body. Prolonged periods of stress can damage cortisol production, which

can lead to inflammation. Restorative yoga can help with flexibility, tight muscles and increase circulation. The poses are designed to be gentle and loosen up the joints and muscles. You can turn to YouTube or other streaming services but make sure you search "restorative yoga." Dr. Melissa West has a whole restorative yoga session online and it's a good start for beginners.

JOURNALING ▲

I don't know many times it's been suggested I journal but when I sit down and stare at the paper, I have no idea what to write. And this is coming from someone who writes for a living.

If you're in that same boat, don't despair. There are journaling templates to get you going. A good place to start is "gratitude journaling," which can help positively reframe your thinking. Positive Psychology has some options and ideas to start you off.

Even if you don't try any of these techniques, the one thing everyone needs to do is give yourself some grace. This is a really weird time, where life has been turned upside down and there is no normal. What is normal is to feel anxious, angry and sad. Not to mention the oddly intense pressure to accomplish something great during this time.

If binge-watching all of "Bridgerton" in a single day is what you need to do to get out of your own head, do it. The great thing you're accomplishing is surviving.

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Germany's top five

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

By Mary Del Rosario and Stacy Roman, Courtesy of StripesEurope.com

Between hiking through mountains and kayaking on pristine lakes, Germany has no shortage of outdoor activities. Its beautiful nature is the reason the term "great outdoors" was invented. When you have this beauty as your backyard, venture out, and take advantage of these five activities for an unforgettable adventure.

Kayak

A sport that combines being one with nature and moving those arms, kayaking is a perfect activity for everyone. Germany's lakes and rivers to include the Danube, Altmühl, Gutach, Weser, and Werra, are ideal for this sport. While northern Germany provides calm, flowing waters, the south has different types of rivers — ranging in landscapes, yet still offering gorgeous river valleys. Though spring is in the air, the best time to take the kayak out on the Danube River, the second biggest river in Europe, is in the fall when you have the vibrant fall foliage as a natural backdrop.

Volksmarch

A great way to get those steps in is by lacing up your sneakers and exploring the world around you by going on a Volksmarch, or non-competitive walking. Translated to the "people's march," this activity was formed in the mid-late 1960s as a way to get the whole community involved. Now, there are many clubs in which you can take part — just ask your local community. Whether it be with your pets, family, friends, or people you've just met, volksmarching is a perfect way to get a healthy dose of exercise.

Zipline

Want to explore the Black Forest from a different vantage point? Get your harnesses on and head to Hirschgründ for an awesome ziplining experience! From easy-going lines to the Gründle — a 570-meter-long rush of pure adrenaline — there is something for every level. Seven lines loop their way through the forested canopy, where you'll climb over steep ledges and zip through scenic valleys and over babbling creeks. Don't worry if you've never done it, the experts on the ground will give you an introductory and safety course before they let you get hooked up on the lines.

Culinary Hike

Food, wine, beer and exercise? If you think one of these things is not like the other, you've been misinformed! In Germany, culinary hikes are sprouting everywhere this time of year and are the best way of combining food and the great outdoors. Foodies and wine aficionados alike have the chance to get their hands on German cuisine — both traditional and innovative while being able to explore nature. For those who enjoy wine, the Ahr Valley in the Rhineland Palatinate region boasts a phenomenal Red Wine Trail that provides views of lush green vineyards and the River Ahr.

Surf

When you mention surfing, odds are Germany doesn't spring to mind as a wave-catching hotspot. However, the beaches along the Baltic Sea, Pelzerharken and Hohwachter Bucht, offer good options for beginners. For the more experienced wave riders, check out the beaches along the more exposed North Sea — Sylt offers larger waves and beaches that are less crowded.

Can't quite make it to the northernmost reaches of the country? Head to downtown Munich instead. Believe it or not, one of Germany's most famous surf spots is right in the middle of the city. Due to a mistake in engineering, city officials inadvertently created a standing or perpetual wave in the Eisbach.

Tip: Just remember, your skin probably hasn't seen the sun in a while, so be sure to slather on the sunscreen before you embark on your great outdoor adventures.

Enjoy these 5 must-do activities at
LAKE CONSTANCE

By Mary Del Rosario, Courtesy of StripesEurope.com

Imagine a crystal clear, green lake encompassing you. The wind gently blowing on your hair, your skin being slightly kissed by the sun, and the beautiful boats all around you waiting to set sail. Sounds like the perfect place doesn't it? Spend a couple of days at Lake Constance and be ready to see a side of Germany you haven't seen before.

Lake Constance, or the Bodensee, is Central Europe's third-largest lake that straddles three countries: Germany, Austria and Switzerland. In this convenient strategical location, you can see the clearest lake with trees and boats everywhere, as well as the Alps in the distance. Just under four hours from Kaiserslautern, you can revel in all of Lake Constance's glory.

Don't know what to do there other than enjoy a sunny day? Check out these 5 must do's before heading down to one of the most beautiful places in Germany.

Mainau

This "Blumeninsel" (Flower Island) is heaven on Earth that lies just off the shores of Lake Constance.

Only a short ferry or bus ride away, this breathtaking island calls you to relax as you visit an arboretum over 150 years old with giant sequoias adorning the walkways. The millions of tulips, rhododendrons, scented roses, perennials and colorful dahlias will have you feeling mesmerized as if you're in the Garden of Eden.

During the summer months, you will truly feel like you're in the Mediterranean from the palms and citrus plants that await you. Walking amongst giant flower bushes as tall as the eye can see, you will be amazed at how such an island can exist. The rich and vibrant colors of the copious amounts of flowers will make your photos very Instagram worthy.

If you feel like you've had your fill of flowers (impossible, right?), you can relish in the architectural highlights from the Baroque era, such as The Teutonic Castle and St. Marien Church. You can also visit the butterfly house and admire these colorful creatures as they freely flutter their wings in their natural habitat.

To say that Mainau is just a flower island would be an understatement. It is an island adorned and covered with the most exotic and beautiful flowers that you won't find in just any garden. The view of Lake Constance with the Alps in the background will make you forget you're in Germany and instead feel like you're in paradise.

Pfahlbauten Museum

Imagine a tropical island with huts on the water, but during the Bronze and Stone Ages. That is the best way to describe the Pfahlbauten. This museum shows how the lake dwellers lived in 4,000 to 850 BC. The museum was done so well, it truly made me feel like as though I were one of the settlers living in this lake dweller settlement.

Zeppelin Museum

Blimps, or zeppelins, are an interesting form of air transportation. They are so big you can see them from miles away. Aren't they fascinating? Many people who visit the Zeppelin Museum in Friedrichshafen think so, too! In this museum, you can see the fascinating history of air travel come alive. This museum bears a replica of the LZ 129 Hindenburg, a large German commercial passenger-carrying rigid airship, and you can even see inside.

If you're up for spending extra money, you can also book a scenic zeppelin flight that will take you to many locations.

Affenberg Salem

If you have children who love monkeying around, take them to Salem's Affenberg where the kids can do all the monkey business they want! This monkey mountain is a great treat for children as they can feed 200 Barbary macaques (monkeys that are native to Morocco and Algeria) unsweetened popcorn. Tell your children you have popcorn waiting in the car because this popcorn is designed to be eaten by the monkeys only. **Check the website beforehand as restrictions may apply.**

Affenberg serves not only as a tourist attraction, but it is also a reserve as these monkeys are currently under threat of extinction. Not only will you and your family enjoy these silly primates climbing trees and eating popcorn out of your hands, but you will also be supporting conservation efforts.

Water activities

Some of the most obvious pastimes to do in Lake Constance are the various amounts of water sports and activities that can be enjoyed. This clean and inviting natural pool calls all water lovers to swim, sail, enjoy SUP (stand up paddling), wind sail, canoe, or even go on a cruise. Lake Constance satisfies every taste for all those who love water.

This lake provides sailors the best conditions and even goes easy for those beginners who want to learn to set sail. Bask in the beautiful scenery of the mountains and others' sailboats as you crisscross one another at sea. Many sailing schools offer sailing courses, motorboat courses, rental boats for an excursion, and even surfing courses.

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HIKERS FIND BEAUTY ALONG THE RHEINGAU MONASTERY ROUTE

By Karen Bradbury,
Courtesy of StripesEurope.com

If you live near Wiesbaden, Germany, there's no doubt you've heard of the Rheingau, but what does the word refer to, exactly? The Rheingau is a cultural and historical region bordered by the Rhine River to its south and west and framed by the Taunus mountain range to its north. Its rugged and handsome landscape includes steep ravines, wooded hills, castles, churches and rolling vineyards yielding world-famous wines. The western part of the Rheingau lies within the Upper Middle Rhine Valley, a UNESCO World Heritage site. The best-known towns of the Rheingau include elegant Eltville, quaint Rüdesheim am Rhein and Assmannshausen, famous for its red wines, making it an outlier in an area overwhelmingly dedicated to the cultivation of whites, first and foremost rieslings.

The Rheingau's rich history and prosperity has much to do with its strategic location alongside one of Europe's most important waterways. It was also heavily influenced by its proximity to the Archdiocese of Mainz, long one of the most important seats of church power north of the Alps.

While cycling and day trips by car are fine ways to get to know this unique area, there's something about a journey undertaken by foot that helps an explorer connect with the landscape in a much more intimate way. The Rheingauer Klostersteig, or Rheingau Monastery Route, is a long-distance hiking trail conceived for those with an eye for beauty and a head for history. Along its 20-mile route, hikers can explore the traces left behind by the many religious orders once based there.

Considered a pilgrim's way, the route passes by six churches and monasteries, tranquil beauty spots and testaments to a past peopled by monks, nuns and visionaries. Those interested in completing the hike for spiritual purposes can collect stamps in a special brochure available for free in the churches along its route.

Although ambitious walkers could conquer the route in a single spring or summer day, taking on the trail in the colder months when darkness sets in early, is a different story and tackling it over the course of two days might prove the better strategy. A less-rushed itinerary allows modern-day pilgrims the chance to linger over sweeping landscapes and sites of historical interest and enjoy stops for picnics and warm beverages. You may find that this overview of the highlights along its route leaves you thirsting to complete a spiritual journey of your own.

Day One

Although it's not the official starting point of the walk, the picturesque town of Kiedrich makes a good place to begin. To reach it by public transportation, take the train to Eltville am Rhein and from there hop on bus number 172. Doing so ensures you can use public transportation for your home journey without having to double back to pick up your vehicle. From Kiedrich, just follow the signage marking this stage of the Rheinsteig long-distance hiking route until you reach your first landmark, the Kloster Eberbach, or Eberbach Monastery.

Eberbach Monastery: In 1136, Bernhard von Clairvaux, along with Abbot Ruthart and twelve monks, founded a Cistercian abbey in this idyllic wooded nook. It functioned until 1803, when it was secularized and much of its property was put up for sale. An elegant arcaded cloister forms the monastery's central complex, and the large Romanesque church impresses with its simplicity. In 1985-86, the Eberbach Monastery served as the set for the film "The Name of the Rose," in which Sean Connery plays a Franciscan friar tasked with trying to solve the murder

of a young monk. Visitors on guided tours can see how the monks once lived by visiting their dormitory and dining quarters and exploring vast wine cellars lined with wooden casks. Be sure to visit the shop selling locally produced wines, as modern-day pilgrims need fortification too! Vow to return post-pandemic, when wine tastings will be offered once again.

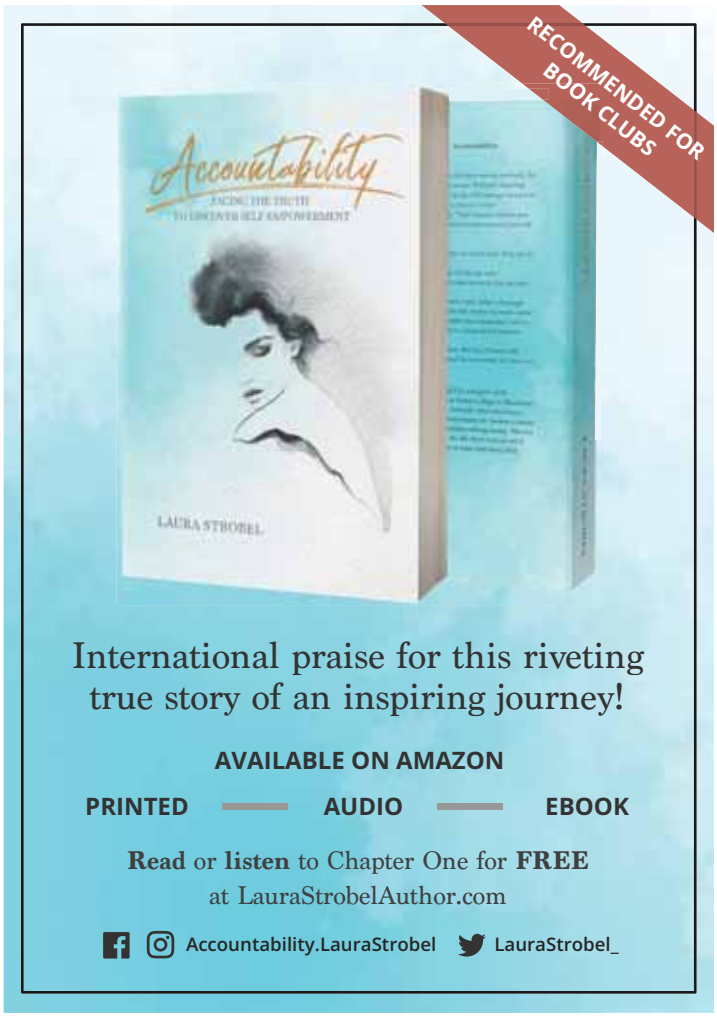
Schloss Johannisberg: Nine miles of walking, at times through steep terrain, leads walkers to an impressive stone basilica named in honor of St. John the Baptist. The site of a Benedictine monastery founded in 1100, the surrounding vineyards date back even earlier, to the year 817. Newer but no less impressive is the circa-1716 Johannisberg Palace, recognized as the world's first wine estate completely dedicated to the production of rieslings. Before visiting the wine shop, check out the statue of a rider on horseback. The event to which it refers took place in 1775, when the start of a grape harvest could only begin with a nod from the prince-bishop in distant Fulda. Legend holds that the courier bearing permission to let the harvest commence was delayed for reasons lost to the mists of time. The late harvest of the shriveled and rotting grapes didn't diminish their quality in the least; in fact, it heralded the start of the production of Spätlese.

Basilika Schloss Johannisberg | Photo by Karen Bradbury

From Schloss Johannisberg, a two-mile downhill walk will bring you back to the train station in either Geisenheim or Oestrich-Winkel. Take your pick—they are roughly equidistant.

Day Two

Marienthal Monastery: From either train station, vigorous uphill walking leads back past Schloss Johannisberg and to the day's first highlight, the Marienthal Monastery and pilgrimage church founded in 1330. Miraculous appearances of the Virgin Mary are tied to numerous events said to



have occurred here. The site once occupied by Jesuits is now in the hands of Franciscans. Inside the church, note the exquisitely carved statue of the Virgin Mary and Jesus and the many tablets on the walls thanking the Virgin Mary for her intercession. Leave time to explore its peaceful leafy grounds traversed by a trickling brook. There you'll find the Stations of the Cross and a small enclosure of St. Francis surrounded by animal statuary.

Nothgottes Monastery: The Nothgottes Monastery also dates back to the 14th century and is founded on the spot where a farmer is said to have uncovered a blood-sweating figure of Jesus Christ while ploughing his field. Between 1620 and 1622, a Capuchin monastery was built on this site and existed until secularization in 1813. Inside the pilgrimage church, take a look at the copy of the original carved figure and note its elongated pleading hands.

St. Hildegard Monastery: The imposing St. Hildegard Monastery rising high above the vineyards and the town of Rüdesheim is hard to miss. Also known as Eibingen Monastery, the 20th-century structure is much younger than it might first appear, but its roots stretch back to 1165, when a community of sisters led by the visionary Hildegard of Bingen was founded here. Today, it is a functioning Benedictine community of some 48 nuns. The interior of the striking abbey church with its mighty twin towers is decorated in a style known as Beuronic, characterized by murals in muted colors and pleasing geometric proportions. The abbey shop sells wine and spirits, herbal teas, spelt breads and noodles, condiments, soaps and other natural products.

Marienhausen Monastery: The hike concludes at the Marienhausen Monastery, which was once subordinate to the Eberbach Monastery, the starting point of your pilgrimage. The old monastery church was thoroughly renovated in 2010, its simplistic yet highly symbolic artistic design conceived and executed by people with disabilities.

To download a copy of the brochure about the Rheingau Klostersteig or a pilgrim's passport in which to collect your stamps, see the Rheingau Tourism website. You can also request hard copies to be sent to your home address free of charge.

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Seeking help from friends and family can be vital for mental health

Courtesy of Military Health System Communications Office

Reaching out for help with your mental health is not a sign of weakness, according to Tim Hoyt.

Hoyt, the chief of Psychological Health Promotion and supervisor of the Combat and Operational Stress Control mission at the Psychological Health Center of Excellence, recently discussed the negative outlook some servicemembers and veterans have toward seeking that help during a Facebook Live event. Also participating were Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America CEO Jeremy Butler and Executive Vice President Hannah Sinoway.

They discussed mental health issues including post-traumatic stress disorder, suicide prevention and coping with stress surrounding the holidays.

Hoyt, a former Army psychologist, said there is often a stigma associated with seeking help, especially among veterans and service members, who often feel like they have been trained to be self-sufficient.

"That translates into a variety of things, whether that's leaving benefits on the table that you are eligible for or not reaching out when it is time," Hoyt said. "Those are all of those critical times when we can't let ourselves get in the way of addressing those problems, whether that is struggling with PTSD or struggling with thoughts of suicide."

Given what we're taught in the military, noted Hoyt, the opposite should be the case.

"Those are the times when we have to say…'Every single day in the military, I was relying on battle buddies, I was part of a squad, I was part of a platoon, I was part of a group that was cohesive, that was working together, and we all had our own sectors of fire,'" Hoyt said.

Support and prevention efforts, he explained, are just as important after getting out of the military or experiencing a traumatic event as they are in the field.

Hoyt stated that many of the problems that military members or veterans may have been facing before, have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Things like depression and anxiety are higher than normal this year.

"As much as we can, we have to continue to say, 'It is OK to ask for help right now.' That is the main message," Hoyt said.

Another issue the group discussed was isolation during the holidays, whether it be by choice or by precautions related to the pandemic. Hoyt suggested that holidays are a great time to reach out to old friends and re-establish connections that may have been lost or forgotten to deal with the physical separation. Reaching out, he said, should be viewed as a sign of strength.

The most important thing that friends and supporters can do is to listen and be a "trusted partner" in the process of dealing with various types and levels of stress, Hoyt said.

Army Lt. Col. Peter Armanas, Ft. Belvoir installation director of psychological health, agreed that seeking help should never be viewed as a sign of weakness.

"Mental and behavioral health is not a luxury. It affects your quality of life and your ability to accomplish the mission at hand." Armanas said. "You have to treat your mental health the same as you would treat your physical health. There's no dishonor in asking for help to be mission ready."

Armanas added that there are a lot of resources available that don't require seeing a military behavioral or health care provider, including chaplains, the Military and Veterans Crisis Lines, Military OneSource and installation military and family life counselors, which can be more confidential than MTFs.

Armanas agreed with Hoyt that the most important part of having a plan in place to deal with adverse situations is social connectedness especially when you're prone to psychological issues such as depression.

"Under stress, the best thing that people can do to decrease the risk of being overwhelmed or overtaxed by that stress is to reach out to someone else," Armanas said. "Also, don't hesitate to seek medical care. Behavioral crises are just as dangerous as medical crises."

He encouraged those in need to use the communication resources they have at their disposal, including social media, to reach out.

"One of the best things that people can do is take the challenge of physical separation and turn it into a benefit or an opportunity to reconnect with people they may have lost touch with," Armanas said.

Dr. Tim Hoyt, chief of Psychological Health Promotion and supervisor of the Combat and Operational Stress Control mission at the Psychological Health Center of Excellence, discusses mental health issues facing service members and veterans during a Facebook Live event with IAVA's CEO, Jeremey Butler and Executive Vice President, Hannah Sinoway. (Screenshot from IAVA Facebook Live event.)

Mental Health:

What to expect at a

THERAPY APPOINTMENT

Courtesy of the Uniformed Services University Human Resource Performance Center

Fever, sore throat, and chills: Typically, these are signs that it's time to visit your doctor, and you usually know what to expect. The nurse might weigh you, check your blood pressure, and take your temperature. The doc will arrive, ask what's bothering you, take a look, maybe prescribe some medicine, and send you on your way.

However, when it comes to your mental health, it can be hard to decide when it's time to make an appointment and even harder to know what to expect when you get there. That fear of the unfamiliar and unknown can give you pause in going to see a therapist, but the good news is a little knowledge can feel like a lot of power.

You don't have to wait until you're in crisis to see a mental health professional. Therapists are ready and trained to assist with issues such as grief over a loss, strain in your relationships, depression, anxiety, insomnia, and other issues. Or you might even need help with improving health behaviors such as quitting smoking or losing weight.

Similar to your physical health, it's also important to catch and address psychological struggles early before things get worse or your symptoms start to impact your day-to-day functioning. And just like your annual physical, you might want to schedule regular checkups with your care provider to make sure you're engaged in preventive maintenance—even if things seem just fine.

So, what can you expect at a therapy appointment?

For starters, there likely will be some paperwork and questionnaires about how you've been feeling lately and any symptoms or problems you're experiencing. During the first meeting, she or he will ask a lot of questions and get to know you. You also can ask questions to learn more about his or her approach and decide if it's a good fit.

The first meeting usually takes about 60–90 minutes and, despite common misconceptions, rarely involves lying on a couch or talking about your childhood. Your therapist will ask questions that focus more on your specific problem to help understand what's contributing to it and what your goals are for improvement.

It can be hard to open up to a stranger at first. Still, being open and honest, will help you get the most out of your visit. Your therapist is on your side and serious about maintaining your privacy as well. Mental health professionals are held to strict confidentiality guidelines, and it's extremely rare that speaking with one will impact your security clearance.

Once there is a shared understanding of what your goals are and what you want to achieve, you also might discuss what stood between you and those goals in the past. Finally, you and your therapist will talk through your treatment plan. You'll work together to build up your tool box, so you have the skills you need to excel when you reach your destination. Keep in mind many of the gains you make while working with a mental health professional happen outside of the therapy room, so you must be willing to put in the hard work. It's also common for your therapist to assign "homework," so it's essential to practice what you're learning between sessions.

Your therapist's goal is to ensure you're safe and help you reach your goals, improve your functioning and performance, and build resilience and strength to manage your current problem and any others you might face in the future. With this in mind, therapy isn't intended to last forever. Once you're equipped with the essential skills you need to thrive, sessions might become less frequent, and treatment will end while you still continue the work on your own.

Common barriers can make it hard to take action toward addressing your mental health. Working with a psychologist or other behavioral health provider can help you master the skills you need to manage many types of life challenges in a safe, confidential setting.

How your family can adopt

HEALTHIER DIGITAL HABITS IN 2021

Courtesy of StatePoint Media

Here are some great ideas for helping your family build healthier relationships with their digital devices:

- Get healthy: Not all screen time is wasted time. You can use your device in positive, productive ways that help your family work toward improved physical health. For example, a steps counter might encourage your family to move more or even take up running, while a yoga app can help guide your family through quick routines you can practice from the comfort of home.
- Get smart: Likewise, the members of your family can use their devices to exercise their minds. Encourage everyone to let their smartphones and tablets double function as e-readers, and to download apps that teach new skills and build knowledge. You can even try setting a goal as a family, such as learning a new language using the same app.
- Schedule digital downtime: Too much screen time is associated with poor quality sleep, increased anxiety and a range of other physical and mental health concerns, so be sure each day includes digital downtime. This is especially important if your family is working and learning from home right now. Make the most of these screen-free blocks by engaging in active play, moving, getting fresh air or spending quality time together.
- Get assistance: Making sure every member of the family is using their device only in safe and healthy ways is easier said than done, however, a parental guidance app can help. Using OurPact for example, the most comprehensive parental control app, you can remotely establish automated schedules for when internet, apps and the device itself are unavailable. Features include URL whitelisting and blacklisting, daily screen time allowances and iMessage/SMS blocking, helping ensure device usage passes your approval. Available at the iOS App Store and Google Play Store, parents can also sign up for an account at www.ourpact.com.

For better overall health and wellness, make 2021 the year your family adopts great digital habits.

Laughter really is among the best medicines, says Air Force nurse

Most people have heard the phrase "laughter is the best medicine," but Air Force Col. Jacqueline Killian has the scientific proof to back it up.

By Jacob Moore, Courtesy of MHS Communications

Killian, a senior nurse scientist for the 711th Human Performance Wing at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, focused her 2015 Ph.D. research at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USU) on using laughter yoga as an intervention to mitigate the effects of stress on students at USU.

Laughter yoga, she said, is not what people may think of when they think of traditional yoga. Laughter yoga, popularized by Dr. Madan Kataria in the 1990s and early 2000s, is a combination of laughter exercises interspersed with pranayama, which is the practice of breath control in yoga.

"The yogic aspect doesn't have to do with yoga poses, it has to do with yogic breathing," Killian said.

Killian monitored the students and all military officers from programs throughout USU, before, during, and after the introduction of laughter yoga, and the results spoke, or perhaps laughed, for themselves.

"I asked participants before, at the two-week mark, and one month out about their perceived stress levels and

> ***Some of them reported that they were sleeping better, that they were drinking less alcohol or caffeine, or that they were exercising more.***

resilience," said Killian. "I also used the Positive and Negative Affect scale and monitored for depression and anxiety."

The Positive and Negative Affect Schedule is one of the most widely used scales to measure mood or emotion. The scale is comprised of 20 items, with 10 items measuring positive affect (e.g., excited, inspired) and 10 items measuring negative affect (e.g., upset, afraid). Each item is rated on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 (very slightly or not at all) to 5 (extremely), to measure the extent to which the affect has been experienced over a specific time.

She also asked the participants open-ended questions to find out what they thought may be changing because of the laughter yoga. That was the most surprising part for her.

"Some of them reported that they were sleeping better, that they were drinking less alcohol or caffeine, or that they were exercising more," Killian said. "Some reported that family members or colleagues even commented about how much better their attitude was or how much happier they seemed. It was almost like participating in the laughter yoga gave them permission to take care of themselves better."

Among the other results participants reported were decreased stress levels and increased resilience.

"Over time, once we analyzed the data, we found that just participating in laughter yoga four times, twice a week for two weeks, actually did decrease their perceived stress levels and negative affect, and it improved their resilience scores and their positive affect, said Killian.

Killian explained that laughter has the dual benefit of being free and easy. It also isn't time consuming.

"Laughter is a super easy thing to do. We can all laugh, but I think we get stuck focusing on lists of things we have to do, bills we have to pay, tasks that are required at work. We have this constant list of things in our minds that don't allow our minds to rest," she said. "If we just took a minute to try to laugh, even if you're fake laughing, it engages the diaphragm, which is where our vagus nerve sits."

This, she said, is where the science of laughing and its health benefits come into play.

"The vagus nerve activates your parasympathetic nervous system–the 'rest and digest' part of your nervous system–which is the opposite of the 'fight or flight' part of your nervous system. So, essentially, you're telling your body to relax when you laugh," said Killian. "If you do that once or twice a day–share a laugh with a friend or a coworker–you immediately feel a sensation of relaxation in your body, whether you're conscious of it or not. It counteracts the chronic stress response."

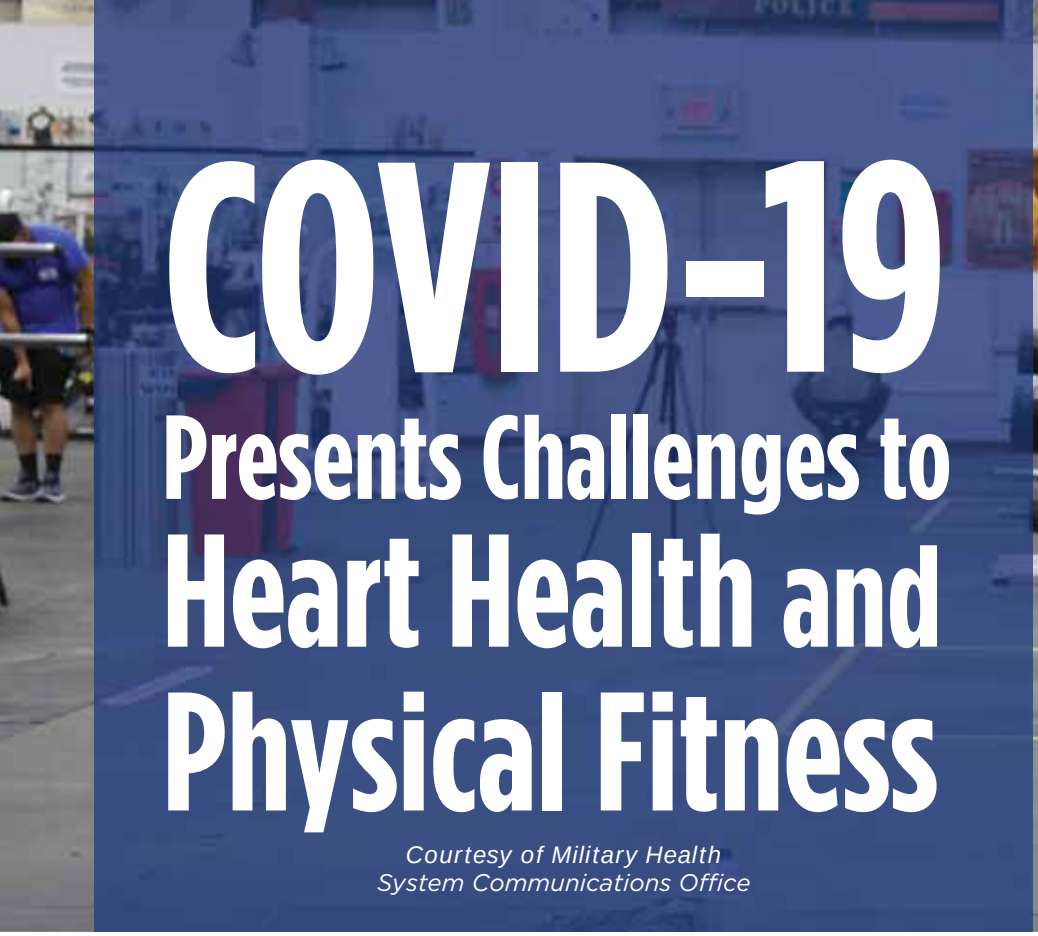
That means there's a physiological reason that you feel better when you laugh.

"It's good for your respiratory system, your autonomic nervous system and your mind," Killian said.

Not only is laughter free and easy, Killian said, but it also gets easier with time.

"The great thing about laughing is the more we do it, the easier it is to do."

COVID-19 Presents Challenges to Heart Health and Physical Fitness



Courtesy of Military Health System Communications Office

A healthy heart is a prerequisite for a fully-trained combatant or a fit beneficiary. Without a healthy heart, a soldier cannot expect to complete tasks such as loading 155 mm rounds onto a bustle rack, or a beneficiary may huff and puff going up stairs.

"A heart at rest stays at rest, while a heart in motion stays in motion, to paraphrase the old axiom," said Navy Lt. Cmdr. (Dr.) Olamide Oladipo, chief of cardiology at the Navy Medical Center-San Diego (NMC-SD).

Due to on-again, off-again shutdowns resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the overall health of both military personnel and beneficiaries has taken a hit over the last year, he noted. A more sedentary lifestyle increases the risk of cardiovascular disease and, therefore, death.

One way the military is addressing this issue is through the Aging Warrior study, which intends to look at cardiovascular risks in men 40 and older and women 52–55 with one risk factor for cardiac disease, such as hypertension, Oladipo explained. Following a CT scan, study participants will receive preventative medication or other interventions if they show early signs of cardiac atherosclerosis (a narrowing or blockage of the heart vessels).

As for fitness, NMC-SD has adopted more of a holistic approach among active-duty personnel and beneficiaries.

"We treat the whole person", said Melissa Palacios, a nurse and head of the Health and Wellness Department at NMC-

SD's Naval Medical Readiness Training Command. "We're looking at concomitant diagnoses that affect a person's heart health." This includes diabetes, sleep apnea, obesity, stress, and PTSD.

"We do this though more virtual classes, group-based exercise programming, fitness trackers, and apps that help with heart rate monitoring, food intake, medication, and sleep hygiene," Palacios said. She noted COVID-19 has had a negative impact on the base's effectiveness in physical training and meeting beneficiaries' fitness needs.

"Getting moving can have a profound impact on lowering blood pressure, strengthening muscles, controlling weight, lowering stress, and reducing inflammation, therefore decreasing risk for heart disease," Palacios said. "We encourage our active-duty members and beneficiaries to not only participate in aerobic activities, but [to identify] opportunities in their everyday lives to intentionally become more physically active, such as taking the stairs."

The ideas behind fitness training also have changed in the Army. At Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri, unit physical training "used to be very focused on the Army Physical Fitness Test events (pushups, sit-ups, and running)," said Army Maj. Brett Dougherty, director, Physical Performance Service Line, General Leonard Wood Army Community Hospital. "However, over the last few years, that focus has slowly changed to incorporate more resistance training, specifically functional lifting, and that change [was amplified] with the introduction of the Army Combat Fitness Test that looks at the body more functionally."

The Army follows the October 2020 FM 7-22 guidance on fitness and physical performance, which includes five domains of combat physical fitness: muscular strength, muscular endurance, aerobic endurance, explosive power, and anaerobic endurance. The guidance lays out exercises, stretches, progressions, and sample schedules of how to train for Army fitness tests and overall fitness.

FM 7-22 also gives guidance on nutrition, sleep hygiene, mental wellness, and the overall well-being of soldiers.

Therefore, physical fitness is much more than laps ran, push-ups done, or crunches crunched. It's a holistic framework of both physical and mental fitness that means being able to exercise while avoiding injury and enjoying a longer life span. And, when it comes to physical fitness, a healthy heart is paramount.

Do sports/energy drinks enhance individual performance?

By Army 1st Tanner James, Courtesy of the Military Health System

Sports drinks claim to "increase performance," "rehydrate," and "refuel." What does this mean and should you include them as part of your work out?

What do sports drinks have in them?

Sports drinks contain electrolytes and carbohydrates. Carbohydrates replace the energy used to fuel your workout. Dextrose and high-fructose corn syrup are two commonly used energy sources.

Are all sports drinks the same?

Many energy sports drinks are available, however the energy source used for sports drinks varies. For example, some contain dextrose, a rapid source of fuel, while others use high-fructose corn syrup, which fuels muscles more slowly than dextrose. The cost of sports drinks can also vary with some being more expensive than others based on the cost of ingredients (high-fructose corn syrup is cheaper to produce than dextrose). Absorption rates of sports drinks are also different. For example, dextrose has two glucose molecules, while high fructose corn syrup consists of glucose and fructose. Muscles absorb glucose quicker than fructose. So, if you are looking to fuel more quickly you will want to choose a beverage that is made primarily of dextrose.

Can sports drinks increase your performance?

When it comes to "increased performance," there is no agreement on the definition. However, the use of sports drinks as fuel during exercise has been associated with performing an activity for a longer period of time.

When to include sports drinks:

Sports drinks aim to fuel the exercising muscle. However, not all exercise calls for drinking an energy-containing sports drink. You should critically analyze your exercise to ensure it meets the recommendations for adding energy containing sports drinks. Different types of exercise require different amounts of energy replenishment. For example, intense exercise (an exercise level that makes it hard to carry on a conversation) lasting longer than one hour calls for ingesting, eating, or drinking 30-60 grams of carbohydrates per hour.

Additionally, endurance exercise (an exercise level of breathing hard but still being able to have a conversation) lasting greater than one hour also increases your need for energy replenishment. Exercise lasting less than one hour does not typically indicate a need for an energy-containing sports drink. Keep in mind that excess sports drink consumption can lead to weight gain.

Here are recommendations for sports drink consumption:

Exercise Time	Amount of Carbohydrate
Less than 1 hour	0 grams
Intense Exercise: 1 hour or longer	30 to 60 grams per hour
Endurance Exercise: 1-2 hours	30 grams per hour
Endurance Exercise: 2-3 hours	60 grams per hour

Sports drinks can aid in recovery after both intense and endurance exercise when used correctly. The next time you reach for a sports drink, make sure that drink is going to help you meet your performance goals; understand the amount and intensity of your exercise; read the sports drink label; identify the source of energy (dextrose versus corn syrup); and identify how much energy (carbohydrates) it contains.

Making a smart choice will ensure you get the energy you need to enhance your performance.

For more information about diet and exercise, call your local military medical treatment facility's Nutrition Services Department.

MEDICATION DISPOSAL TIPS FOR YOUR OLD OR UNUSED MEDICINE

Courtesy of Military OneSource

Getting rid of old or unused medicine is a tricky issue. Throwing it in the trash might pose a risk to a child or pet that finds it and flushing it might hurt the environment. Keeping it "just in case" or for another time isn't safe either, as expired meds don't work as well and can even be harmful. Keep your family and community safe by cleaning out your medicine cabinet periodically. Take the following steps.

- **Read the medication's label** or the patient information that comes with it to see if there are disposal instructions. Don't stray from those instructions; follow them strictly.
- **Take the medicines to a local drug collection or take-back program** if your unused medications have no disposal instructions. Contact local law enforcement for an authorized site near you. A locator tool can be found at www.safe.pharmacy/drug-disposal/
- **Follow the FDA's simple steps** for throwing most medications away in household trash if there is no authorized take-back site in your area. Don't throw the medicine away as is. Instead, mix the medicine with coffee grounds before tossing it out.
- **Check the FDA's authorized list of medications** that can be flushed down the sink or toilet. Don't flush any medicine not on the approved list.
- **Remember, these disposal methods can apply to over-the-counter drugs, too.** Don't think of over-the-counter medications as less important than prescription drugs. Treat them all the same when it comes to safe disposal.

Visit the Drug Enforcement Administration to learn more about drug disposal, national take-back events and locations of authorized collectors in your area, or contact Military OneSource if you'd like additional information on safe storage and disposal of prescription medications.

Spokane Community College has several resources in place to support student veterans and family members.

The Veterans One-Stop, located in the Lair Student Center, offers military veterans and their families support services and space to achieve academic success. Supports include guidance in understanding educational benefits, a study area and computer lab in the veterans lounge and access to Common Access Card (CAC) readers.

We're proud of our ***Americorps/Vet Corps*** students and our designation as a ***Military Friendly school***. Learn more here:

scc.spokane.edu/For-Our-Students/Student-Resources/Veterans-One-Stop

Community Colleges of Spokane
Spokane Community College

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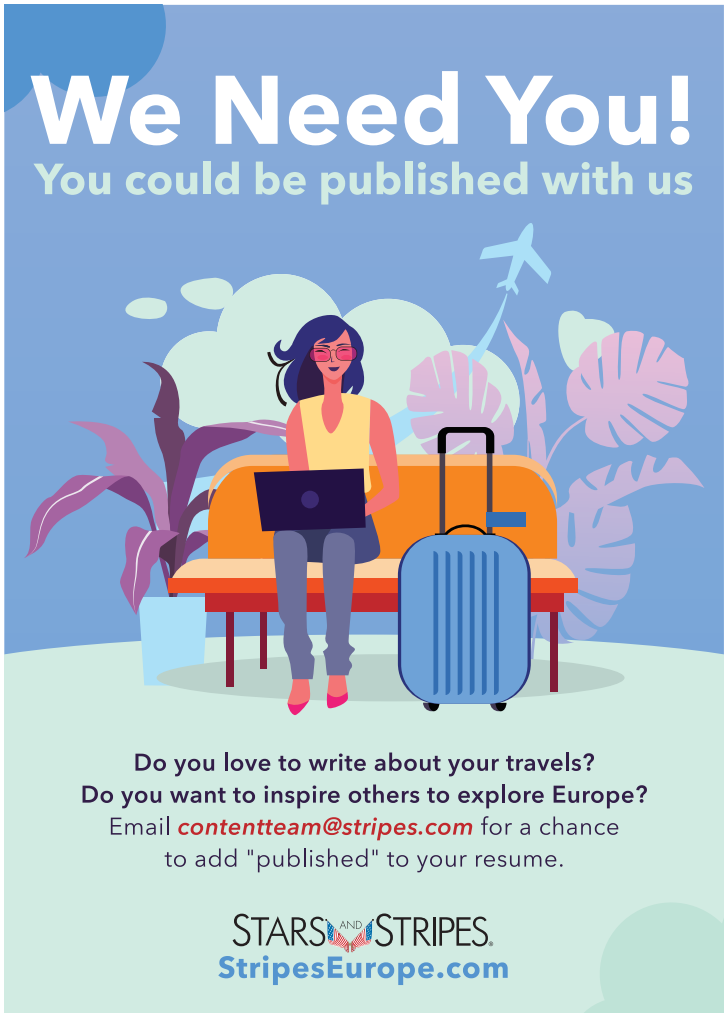

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