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Melatonin Supplement Use Rising Among Adults

Sleep is important for your mental and physical health. But nearly a third of U.S. adults don't get enough. Some people turn to sleep aids for help. A new study found that the number of adults taking melatonin supplements to help them sleep has risen sharply. Melatonin is produced by the brain in response to darkness. It helps cue the body that it's time to sleep. But studies have not consistently shown that melatonin supplements can help promote sleep. Researchers looked at melatonin use in 55,000 adults who took part in a national survey. The survey ran from 1999 to 2018. Melatonin use increased from 0.4% of survey participants to 2.1% over the nearly two decades. The use of high doses—over 5 milligrams per day—rose from 2005 on. Overall, high-dose melatonin use remained low. But these findings raise safety concerns. Dietary supplements are not regulated. Companies do not have to prove their products work. And sometimes, the amount of melatonin in a pill can be as much as five times higher than what the label says. Melatonin supplements appear to be safe for most people when taken for a short period. But information on the safety of long-term use and of taking high doses is lacking. “Our findings highlight the need for clinical studies to look at the long-term safety of melatonin use. We also want to understand whether it can effectively help people with sleep problems,” says Dr. Naima Covassin at the Mayo Clinic, who led the study.

Source: NIH News in Health, April 2022.

A Little Nostalgia Could Make Your Relationship More Loving

Recent research suggests that engaging in nostalgia about their romantic relationship helps partners feel more connected and passionate.



My husband and I just celebrated a milestone wedding anniversary. Recounting the fun we had on our wedding day—as well as some of the funny mishaps—felt like a great way to connect and amp up the romance of the evening. Still, I can imagine friends rolling their eyes at that idea. Engaging in nostalgia may seem overly “cutesy” to some, while others might worry about it backfiring. After all, when you look back on the early days of your romance, you might feel bittersweet realizing how much has changed since those early, heady days. But recent research suggests that feeling nostalgic about significant, past events from your relationship can actually benefit it—whether you reminisce alone or with your partner. In one study, some participants in a romantic relationship were prompted to write about a nostalgic experience they'd had with their partner or to listen to a song that made them feel nostalgic about their relationship, while others wrote about an ordinary experience they'd had or a song they liked (as a basis of comparison). After comparing the groups, the researchers found that those primed to experience nostalgia felt closer, more committed, and more loving toward their partner, and were more satisfied with their overall relationship. This was true even when accounting for other emotions, like happiness, that might affect our views of others. “Our conclusion is that experiencing nostalgia temporarily

(Nostalgia continued) enhances perceptions of relationship quality,” says lead researcher Nicholas Evans of the University of Manitoba in Canada. “People report more closeness, commitment, and relationship satisfaction after listening to a nostalgic song or writing about nostalgia.” To look at how this might work in everyday life, Evans and his team asked another group of participants to fill out diaries for a couple of weeks, noting every evening how much time they’d spent with their partner and whether or not they’d experienced any romantic nostalgia during the day. They also reported on how connected they felt, how optimistic they were about their relationship, and if they’d had any thoughts of leaving their partner that day. Again, those who experienced nostalgia in everyday life felt better about their relationship, regardless of how much time they’d spent with their partner that day. “In our daily lives, when we experience romantic nostalgia, we can experience positive perceptions of our relationship that go above and beyond just spending time with someone,” says Evans. While past studies have found that feeling nostalgic brings meaning to one’s life and helps people feel more socially connected, the use of nostalgia in romantic relationships, specifically, had not been tested before. Evans believes this is an untapped resource for couples. “Nostalgia definitely could be one of many tools to help enhance relationships,” he says. I certainly agree with that finding myself. But does it matter that I’m the kind of person who already tends toward nostalgia? Evans doesn’t know for sure. Past research suggests that a person’s age, gender, and “attachment style” (whether someone feels secure or insecure in a relationship or tends to avoid intimacy) may affect how much they reminisce and how beneficial it is. For example, one study found that avoidant people are less likely to benefit from reminiscing, while another found that women tend to recall past relationship events better than men (though, when recalled, those memories benefit both genders). The content of nostalgic memories could also be important, though it wasn’t explored in Evan’s study. However, he points to prior research showing that nostalgia for the past can have benefits for psychological health, even if you feel wistful or sad. As long as a relationship memory carries a redemptive narrative, showing how it led to further growth, it will probably be helpful, he says. “Nostalgia helps us to see where our relationship has been and where it’s going,” he says. “What drives its effects is that it helps us make meaning in our relationships.” Although Evan’s study looked at individual nostalgia (and focused mostly on young adults), others have considered how reminiscing together about relationship-defining events affects partners’ relationship quality. For example, a recent meta-analysis (where findings from several studies were pooled together) found that married couples who reminisced tended to be more satisfied with their

relationship and feel warmer and closer to their partner than those who didn’t. It’s hard to say whether nostalgia leads to better relationship quality or vice versa. It’s possible that people with happy relationships are more apt to spontaneously engage in nostalgic reminiscing, and people in troubled relationships aren’t as likely to do so. Still, at least some studies included in the above meta-analysis were experimental, supporting a cause-and-effect relationship between nostalgia and marital satisfaction. For those of us who are fairly happy with our partners, tapping into nostalgic feelings could lead us to feeling closer, warmer, and more satisfied with our relationship partner. That’s why I like to reminisce about the past often—whether for a special anniversary or not. I feel it helps my relationship—and the research seems to bear this out. “Nostalgia is one of many ways to enhance our relationships—on top of engaging in gratitude, being more empathic, and taking the perspective of the other in your relationship,” says Evans. “It’s another tool to help relationships thrive.”

Source: Jill Suttie, Psy.D., is *Greater Good’s* former book review editor and now serves as a staff writer and contributing editor for the magazine. She received her doctorate of psychology from the University of San Francisco in 1998 and was a psychologist in private practice before coming to *Greater Good*. The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley.

This Is the Top Cause of Accelerated Aging and - How to Beat It

What is the top cause of accelerated aging? Bad habits such as smoking and excessive drinking are often the first thing that comes to mind. However, perhaps surprisingly, scientists have recently found that the leading culprit behind aging is a poor psychological state. A joint experiment conducted by American and Hong Kong researchers has examined the effects of various factors on people’s biological age with data from 11,914 adults in the China Health and Retirement Longitudinal Study (CHARLS) database. The data include participants’ blood tests, living conditions, psychological status, disease history, and more. Researchers found that the mean effect of stroke, liver disease, and lung disease on biological aging doesn’t exceed 1.5 years. They also tested healthy people and found that for people without any diseases, the primary cause of aging is the state of their mind. Having a poor psychological state adds up to 1.65 years to a person’s biological age. The second factor is smoking, a bad habit that affects life expectancy, accelerating aging by 1.25 years. Other factors that contribute to accelerated aging include being male, living in rural areas,

(Aging continued) being single, among others. Suffering from depression or anxiety may also increase a person's biological age and accelerate aging. Of all the negative psychological states, feeling unhappy increases aging by 0.35 years, while restless sleep increases aging by 0.44 years. "Mental and psychosocial states are some of the most robust predictors of health outcomes—and quality of life—yet they have largely been omitted from modern health care," said co-author Manuel Faria of Stanford University. There is a difference between a person's biological age and chronological age. In a 2022 study, the researchers developed a statistical model to calculate biological age and gave it a figurative name: the aging clock. A person's biological age can be obtained with the aging clock by an input of the person's blood biochemical indicators, blood pressure, heart rate, marital status, living area, lifestyle, etc. If a person's biological age is lower than their chronological age, they would be aging slowly. On the other hand, if his biological age is higher than the chronological age, he is aging fast. Increased biological age is also associated with higher all-cause mortality and infection rates, as well as some diseases. In addition to psychological factors such as stress, loneliness, mental health, and negative perceptions of aging, there are several psychosocial factors that accelerate aging, including negative fateful life events and modern lifestyle. There are some causes behind negative psychological states that accelerate the aging process.

Why can negative psychological states affect a person's biological age so prominently? When assorted negative feelings accumulate, the human body will undergo a series of subtle reactions, and many physiological indicators will also change accordingly. The body secretes stress hormones and other chemicals, and oxidative damage increases. Aging-related genes are therefore stimulated, creating instability in the body's life rhythm.

Under stress, the body produces large amounts of glucocorticoids, which impair almost all body tissues and accelerate the aging process. Glucocorticoids are associated with memory and cognition, causing epigenetic changes in DNA and affecting DNA methylation associated with aging, which can contribute to arteriosclerosis and other health problems. Animal studies have shown that competition-induced social stress can cause accelerated aging. Some researchers have calculated that accumulated stress across the course of life leads to an increase in biological age by 3.6 years. Moreover, stress may exacerbate oxidative damage and shorten DNA telomeres in

the human body. Both of which contribute to aging and increase biological age by 10 years. Studies of childhood trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder also suggest that this stress-induced accelerated aging may persist for years.

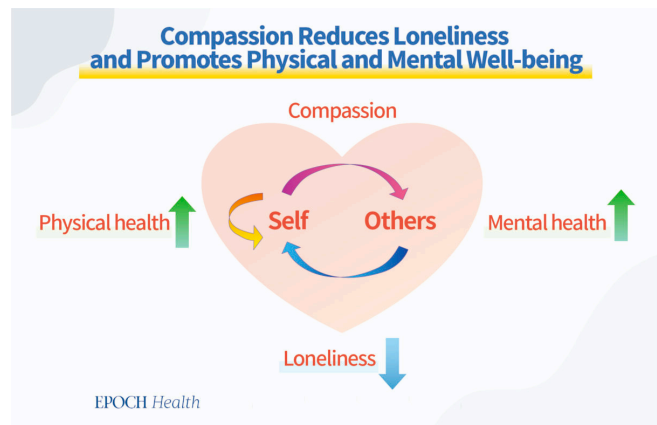
There are also studies showing that cumulative stress results in insulin resistance in the human body. Insulin resistance will lead to chronic inflammation and oxidative stress, which are key mechanisms of biological aging. Leukocyte telomere length (LTL) is inversely associated with insulin resistance. As insulin resistance increases, LTL decreases and cellular senescence increases. Among the blood biomarkers inputted into the aging clock, the increase of a crucial marker—cystatin C—indicates the decline of renal function. Decreased renal function is a major risk factor for increased all-cause mortality in the general population. Furthermore, abnormal cystatin C levels may be associated with new-onset depressive symptoms. The sad thing is that on a whole, our psychological state is increasingly worse: We feel unhappier and lonelier.

According to Gallup, the unhappiness of the global population has been rising over the past 15 years and is now at a record high. People feel more anger, sadness, pain, worry, and stress than ever before. If the negative experience index ranges from 0 to 100, people's unhappiness has risen from 24 in 2006 to 33 in 2021. In over 5 million interviews on happiness conducted by Gallup, statistically representative of 98 percent of the world's population, interviewees were asked to describe their lives on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 represents the worst possible life and 10 represents the best possible life.

When the survey began in 2006, 3.4 percent of respondents said their lives were a 10, and only 1.6 percent said their lives were a 0. In 2021, after 15 years of tracking, those numbers of people on either end escalated significantly. Among them, those who rated their lives the best accounted for 7.4 percent, an increase of 1.1 times, while those who rated their lives the worst reached 7.6 percent, an increase of 3.75 times. Loneliness has increased substantially since the outbreak of COVID-19. An online survey of 950 Americans conducted by Harvard University in October 2020 showed that 36 percent of all Americans—including 61 percent of young adults aged 18 to 25 and 51 percent of mothers with young children—feel serious loneliness. The report also revealed the dire costs of loneliness, including premature mortality and a wide array of severe physical and emotional problems, such as depression, anxiety, heart disease, substance abuse, and domestic abuse. How can we change our mental state and

reduce unhappiness? Numerous studies have found that apart from improving diet, being close to nature, and exercising regularly, maintaining compassion for oneself and others can also lead to a positive psychological state and delay aging. Compassion is defined by scholars as the sensitivity to suffering in others with a commitment to help alleviate it. In contrast to empathy, compassion is not simply the ability to recognize and experience the psychological states of others, it also requires motivation followed by action. Not only that, it encompasses being self-compassionate. Compassion improves mental and physical well-being in various aspects, which can be manifested in reduced loneliness, enhanced happiness, decreased cardiovascular risk and inflammation, and improved diabetes. A study published in *Transitional Psychiatry* conducted a 10-year follow up of 1,090 American adults. Researchers examined the physical and mental effects of compassion toward self (CTS) and compassion toward others (CTO) by making phone calls and filling out forms. The results showed that an individual who consistently had higher levels of CTS and CTO was less lonely years after. If an individual starts out with low levels of CTS and CTO but changes afterward, his mental well-being will also improve accordingly. The positive effects of compassion on health are greater than the adverse effects of smoking and drinking. This echoes the finding at the outset of the article that poor mental states accelerate aging more than smoking. This is because compassion and good deeds can enhance the connection with others without making them feel threatened. People are likely to reciprocate with more responses and warm returns. Moreover, CTS and CTO are reflective of empathic abilities—understanding the emotions and perspectives of others—which reinforces more valuable social relationships. In the post-pandemic era, people experienced increased depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as a decreased sense of social security.

A study involving adults from 21 countries and regions in the context of COVID-19 pandemic also demonstrates the general protective effect of compassion on people. The compassion refers to CTS, CTO, and compassion from others, that is—three directional flows of compassion. The results show that, with more compassion to self and others, an individual has less psychological distress and a higher sense of social security. An individual can be less depressed if he is being compassionate to others. Reduced depression, anxiety, and stress come along if an individual is self-compassionate. Compassion from others may alleviate the fear of looming health risks such as that of the pandemic onset, and increase the sense of social security. However, *actions* that express compassion and kindness are more beneficial than merely holding thoughts of compassion or empathy. Also, studies have shown that individuals who meditate with love and compassion for others have longer DNA telomeres and are less likely to age.



Source: Flora Zhao is a health reporter for The Epoch Times, Health 1+ 1, October 26, 2022. flora.zhao@epochtimes.nyc

“WHAT YOU CHOOSE TO FOCUS YOUR MIND ON IS CRITICAL BECAUSE YOU WILL BECOME WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT MOST THE OF THE TIME.” Noel Peebles

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