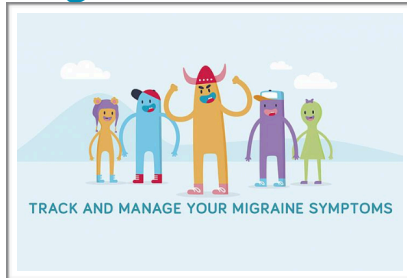


# F O C U S

VISTA PSYCHOLOGICAL & COUNSELING CENTRE. LLC

SPRING 2020

## Migraine Trainer



Have you ever had a migraine? A migraine is a headache that causes a throbbing pain on one or both sides of your head. Migraines can be very severe and may cause other symptoms like nausea, weakness, and sensitivity to noise and light. Your migraines may seem random, but there are many factors that might cause them, including stress, certain foods, and too much or too little sleep. Take control of your migraines with National Institute of Health's new app called "Migraine Trainer." Designed for teens 13 and older, the app can help you find out what causes your migraines. This can help you and your health care provider come up with a personalized plan for managing them. You can take note of when your migraines happen, how long they last, and where the pain is. You can also mark down how much sleep, exercise, and water you had before the migraine started. Tracking your habits can help you discover what leads to your migraines and what's helped get you through them. "Migraine Trainer" also offers tips for dealing with the pain of migraines. Take migraines into your own hands by downloading the app for free.

<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/>

## Probiotics May Help Boost Mood and Cognitive Function

Research shows that the gut and brain are connected, a partnership called the gut-brain axis. The two are linked through biochemical signaling between the nervous system in the digestive tract, called the enteric nervous system, and the central nervous system, which includes the brain. The primary information connection between the brain and gut is the vagus nerve, the longest nerve in the body. The gut has been called a "second brain" because it produces many of the same neurotransmitters as the brain does, like serotonin dopamine, and gamma-aminobutyric acid all of which play a key role in regulating mood. In fact, it is estimated that 90% of serotonin is made in the digestive tract. What affects the gut often affects the brain and vice versa. When your brain senses trouble—the fight-or-flight response—it sends warning signals the gut, which is why stressful events can cause digestive problems like a nervous or upset stomach. On the flip side, flares of gastrointestinal issues like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), Crohn's disease, or chronic constipation may trigger anxiety or depression. The brain-gut axis works in others ways, too. For example, your gut helps regulate appetite by telling the brain when it's time to stop eating. About 20 minutes after you eat, gut microbes produce proteins that can suppress appetite which coincides with the time it often takes people to begin feeling full. How might probiotics fit into the gut-brain axis? Some research has found that probiotics may help boost mood and cognitive function and lower stress and anxiety. For example, a study published online November 10, 2016, by *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience*, found the Alzheimer's patients who took milk made with four probiotic bacteria species for 12 weeks scored better on a test to measure cognitive impairment compared with those who drank regular milk. A small 2013 study reported in the journal *Gastroenterology* found that women who ate yogurt with a mix of probiotics, twice a day for four weeks, were calmer when exposed to images of angry or frightened faces compared with a control group. MRIs also found that the yogurt group had lower activity in the insular, the brain area that processes internal body sensations like those emanating from the gut. It's too early to determine the exact role probiotics play in the gut-brain axis since this research is still ongoing. Probiotics may not only support a healthier gut, but a healthier brain, too. **Source: Harvard Medical School, HEALTHbeat, [www.health.harvard.edu](http://www.health.harvard.edu)**

## How to Bring More Meaning to Dying

Most of us don't lie to talk about our own death. And when we refer to other people's deaths, we often say things like "Her health is failing" or "He failed treatment." These common sentiments make it sound like death is an option or that we can prevent it somehow—if only we ate more kale or walked 10,000 steps a day. But guess what? Death isn't optional. Death is as much apart of our life as birth. And, just like a birth, it goes better when we are prepared for it. Not that we can control all outcomes or make it pain-free—but there is a lot we can do to help make it easier and more meaningful. In their new book, *A Beginner's Guide to the End*, palliative care specialists BJ Miller and Shoshana Berger, talk about all of the ways people can prepare themselves and their family members for the inevitable. Some of their book focuses on basic practicalities—like how to talk to doctors if you have a chronic illness, how to make treatment decisions, what documents to have in place for your end-of-life care, and how to create wills and trusts. They try to provide a comprehensive list of resources and detailed advice about how to manage that part of dying. But, while many people think to prepare for the practical aspects of dying, too often they give short shrift to the emotional side of dying—meaning, what to do so that your death has more meaning and is less emotionally trying for yourself and those left behind. There are many ways that you can improve the experience of dying if you plan for it and communicate your wishes to your loved ones. Here are some of the ideas they recommend in their book. **Don't leave a mess.** Many people don't realize that the stuff they've been saving may not be of much value to those they leave behind. Therefore, it's important to take time while you are still alive to clean out those closets and attics. Doing a big purge serves a dual purpose: it will make you feel lighter and also lighten the load on loved ones when you're not around to help sort through your belongings. It's important to ask yourself why you're keeping so much stuff. Is it because you still use it and it brings you pleasure? Or does keeping it push away thoughts of dying? Or are you overwhelmed by the task of going through it all. It can be cathartic to set aside time to go through your possessions, reflecting on what they mean to you, then letting them go. In some

cases you may want to save family heirlooms that have special value and make a plan to talk to your heirs about keeping them after you die. But it will have more meaning for them if you explain why you'd like them to have them and what it means to you. **Clean out your emotional attic.** Cleaning out your emotional attic is important, too. This may include sharing old secrets that you have kept from loved ones that are likely to be discovered after your death. Especially in this age of popular DNA testing, it's important not to leave important things unsaid, though it requires sensitivity in the delivery. If your secrets are just too damaging to reveal, consider enlisting someone to "scrub down" your life after you die. This can be a close friend who goes through your medicine cabinet, electronic files, and nightstand to rid them of old medications, personal diaries, sex toys, and other unmentionables. If you are happier knowing that these parts of your personal life won't be exposed after you're gone, we are not here to shame you! Just take care to make it a choice. **Mend important relationships.** When people die, they do't regret not having worked harder; they regret not having worked on their relationships. It's important to mend old wounds before it's too late. Even if you meet resistance from loved ones, keep pushing for more conversations making sure you say what you want to say to them now. In Ira Byock's book, *The Four Things That Matter Most*, the pioneering palliative care physician talks about what most people long to hear that can help mend even long-fractured relationships: Please forgive me. I forgive you. Thank you. I love you. Why these four phrases? True apologies and forgiveness while helpful to consider at any stage of life, can go a long way toward making someone's death more peaceful. Gratitude and love are what most people tend to need at the end of life. Closure is a human construct, rather than an act of nature, and a very useful one at that. This framework offers a recipe. When asked if he would add anything to the list 14 years after publishing that book, Dr. Byock said, "It's useful for a parent to say to their child "I'm so proud to be your mother, I'm proud to be your father." He's met many men in their 60s who still yearn to hear that from a father who's long gone. **Leave a mark.** Legacy can be a loaded word. But most dying people

(continued from page 2) want to know they mattered in some way and they want to leave a mark. While for some this will mean using assets to fund a scholarship or a trust for their kids, others will have fewer material—but no less valuable—things to leave behind. In a survey of baby boomers, only 10 percent thought it “very important” to inherit financial assets from parents, while 77 percent said that receiving and providing “values and life lessons” is very important. This means that money is not the only thing of value you can leave behind, and you may want to start thinking about what you want to pass down. Here are some ideas that have been found helpful to those who wonder what to leave. **1. Leave your story.**

Telling the story of your life and leaving a record of experiences, people, and ideas that mattered to you give those who love you a feeling of continuity from one generation to the next. While you may assume that no one will care, imagine this: What would it be like to have the story of your great-great-grandmother in your hands? Wouldn't that be amazing? If you are still daunted by this idea, you may want to enlist the services of StoryCorps or StoryWorth—two organizations committed to helping people get their stories down. Or you could create a family tree, perhaps using [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) or the National Archives. Fun for you, important for those you leave behind, and research suggests doing so may help improve your and your caregiver's well-being at the end of life.

**2. Leave a letter.** Writing a letter can be a good way to put into words things that may be difficult to say in person. You might want to express how much you love someone, how proud you are of them, what they mean to you, your hopes for their future. If you need help, you can look to services like Last(ing) Letters.

**3. Leave an ethical will.** An ethical will is a way of transferring immaterial things to your loved ones: your life lessons and values. It's not a replacement for a regular will, but a compliment to it, and research suggest it reduces your suffering by taking care of “unfinished business” and bringing a deeper sense of purpose to the life you still have. An ethical will can explain why you made certain choices in your legal will—e.g., why you left your car to your youngest daughter instead of all of your children. Barry Baines, a hospice medical director who wrote a book called *Ethical Wills*, found that 77 percent of his patients felt their emotional well-being improve and 85 percent felt their physical well-being improved after completing an ethical will. Of course, there are many other ways people can make the experience of saying goodbye less fraught. Few folks will get to

every last detail before the end comes; as ever, do the best with what you have, while you can and forgive yourself and others the rest. By taking care of emotional needs and focusing on what you hope to leave behind you can bring more meaning to the experience and ease the burden on loved ones in the process. In other words, bring the same dignity and care to death that you bring to life.

**Source: *A Beginner's Guide to the End: Practical Advice for Living Life and Facing Death* (Simon & Schuster, 2019, 544 pages)**

## A Parent's Guide to Screen Use

With screens virtually everywhere, controlling a child's screen time can be challenging. To complicate matters, some screen time can be educational for children as well as support their social development. So how do you manage your child's screen time? Set reasonable limits for your child's screen time, especially if your child's use of screens is hindering involvement in other activities.

### Consider these tips:

- **Prioritize unplugged, unstructured playtime.**
- **Create tech-free zones or times, such as during mealtime or one night a week.**
- **Discourage use of media entertainment during homework.**
- **Set and enforce daily or weekly screen time limits and curfews, such as no exposure to devices or screens one hour before bedtime.**
- **Consider using apps that control the length of time a child can use a device.**
- **Require your children to charge their devices outside their bedrooms at night.**
- **Keep screens out of your child's bedroom.**
- **Limit your own screen time.**
- **Eliminate background TV.**

- The Mayo Clinic

## Cannabis Medicines May Be the Future of PTSD Treatment

PTSD is a serious condition and cannabis is part of the answer. "PTSD is a disease that is mostly centered in the inability to forget," explains Dr. Michele Ross, Ph.D.. After a traumatic event or series of experiences, some individuals are left to relive the reality through their dreams, in their memories, and in their unconscious responses to seemingly harmless everyday encounters. "You have this trauma and you can't let it go, you have nightmares and it causes agitation and irritability and it causes all of these issues," Ross says. Ross, a neuroscientist and author believes that one vital tool for managing PTSD that is appallingly overlooked and underrated: medical cannabis. Medical cannabis has been a topic of contention among the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. In 2016, a study conducted by the department found that 14.6% of veterans with PTSD sampled in their research had used cannabis within the past six months. The study included data from 719 men. Yet, the VA wasn't hopeful about the therapeutic potential of the herb, writing: "The present findings show that cannabis use is quite prevalent among veterans seeking PTSD specialty treatment and is associated with poorer mental health and use of other substances." Dr. Ross, however, presents a different and compelling argument. In an interview for Green Flower Beginner Series, Ross makes a serious case for the oft-dismissed plant. With cannabis, she explains, "You're alleviating symptoms of anxiety and depression; you're improving family dynamics because now there's less drug use or because there's less anger less depression; there are less issues at work; they're not getting fired from their jobs because now they're able to have normal interpersonal relationships. No matter how patients are using cannabis, even if perhaps they aren't using the right strains or not the right products they could be dead without cannabis," she says. Dr. Ross's assumptions about the benefit of cannabis for PTSD are more than speculation. While the study conducted by the Dept. of Veteran's Affairs failed to find a significant positive impact of cannabis amongst their sample population, a new era of experimental cannabis research is emerging. It's fairly common knowledge that cannabis can make you feel a little forgetful. However, research over the past decade has finally uncovered why this is true. As it turns out, the active compounds in cannabis tap into a large network in the central nervous system that helps you forget. That system is called the endocannabinoid system (ECS), and it responds to chemicals like those found in the cannabis plant. In healthy individuals, the human body naturally produces cannabis-like compounds called endocannabinoids. However early evidence suggests that this system has gone awry in those with PTSD. Specifically, it is thought that those with PTSD have some type of deficiency of

endocannabinoids, which may prevent them from extinguishing fearful memories. In fact, one 2013 study published in the journal *Depression and Anxiety* indicates that exploration in the endocannabinoid system may pave the way for PTSD treatment that is based on real evidence about how the pathology works. In the status quo, PTSD treatment is focused on managing symptoms of depression, anxiety, mood instability and insomnia. Cannabis medicines, however, are expected to do something different. Rather than simply managing symptoms of depression and anxiety, cannabinoid medicines may target the trauma-based memories themselves. Authors of a 2016 review published in *Pharmacological Research* write, "Much attention has been lately directed to cannabinoid drugs because of this dual ability to modulate memory processes for emotional experience on one hand and to reduce anxiety of the other." In her research, Dr. Ross has come to similar conclusions. "When you have an endocannabinoid deficiency or dysfunction, you're no longer able to forget," she articulates. "So, that's why cannabis helps. It activates those cannabinoid receptors and helps you let go of those horrible memories that are keeping you up at night and are causing you to not be able to function." PTSD can affect people from all walks of life. It is a complex and often life-threatening condition that deserves serious attention. While the early science and anecdotal support suggests that cannabis may have a transformative impact on those suffocated by the burden of traumatic memories, there's still a lot to learn about the herb. Thus far, no large-scale research has been conducted on treatments for PTSD that integrate cannabis into a larger recovery plan. For this reason, it is always vital to work with a trusted medical professional in managing PTSD. None the less, some progressive medical cannabis carriers and providers have already begun integrating the herb into patient care. A great place to begin is with CBD. Cannabidiol (CBD) is a natural anti-anxiolytic, analgesic, and anti-inflammatory, and it can help temper the effects of THC. Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) is the primary intoxicant in the cannabis plant. However, while CBD may be a good place to start, there may also be benefits to THC. It is a natural stress reducer. When faced with depression, lack of motivation, and difficulty finding joy in everyday life, the euphoria and blissful side effects of psychoactive cannabis can inspire profound changes on how you're viewing your present reality. Medical cannabis is an individualized medicine. Therefore, symptom relief is achieved when the various components of cannabis are used in combination.

**Source: Ana Wilcox, Green Flower Beginner Series, [www.Green-Flower.com](http://www.Green-Flower.com) June 20, 2018.**

