

HEALTH | WELLNESS | PERSONAL GROWTH | RELATIONSHIPS

IndigoBLUE

HOW I IMPROVED MY SELF-CONFIDENCE AND MY MENTAL HEALTH

By Stan Popovich



JULY 2023

In This Issue:



1

How I Improved My Self-Confidence and My Mental Health



5

Book Review of *I Want to Die but I Want to Eat Tteokbokki* (spicy rice cakes) by Baek Se-hee



9

My Journey with Morning Pages: A Personal Narrative



13

In Pursuit of a Simpler Life



17

Healthy Avoidance



21

The Health Benefits of Exercise 'Microbursts'

EDITOR'S NOTE—JULY 2023 ISSUE

It's the small changes that can really add up and make a difference; or just the simple act of being kinder to ourselves. While we are pulled in many different directions, our authors offer ways to incorporate exercise, mindfulness, and self-care into our busy lives. In our last issue, we hope we have been able to help our readers achieve their goals, maintain their health and wellness, and establish lasting, healthy relationships.

Laura Boyle

CONTRIBUTORS:

Publisher / Editor-in-Chief
Laura Boyle, MPH, MIPP

Writers
Dr. Colleen Arnold
Kritika Narula
Kate Orson
Laura Parr
Stan Popovich
Dhanista Shah

Production and Design
Jennifer Strass

Photography
various photographers from Canva
Cover Photo: rdonar

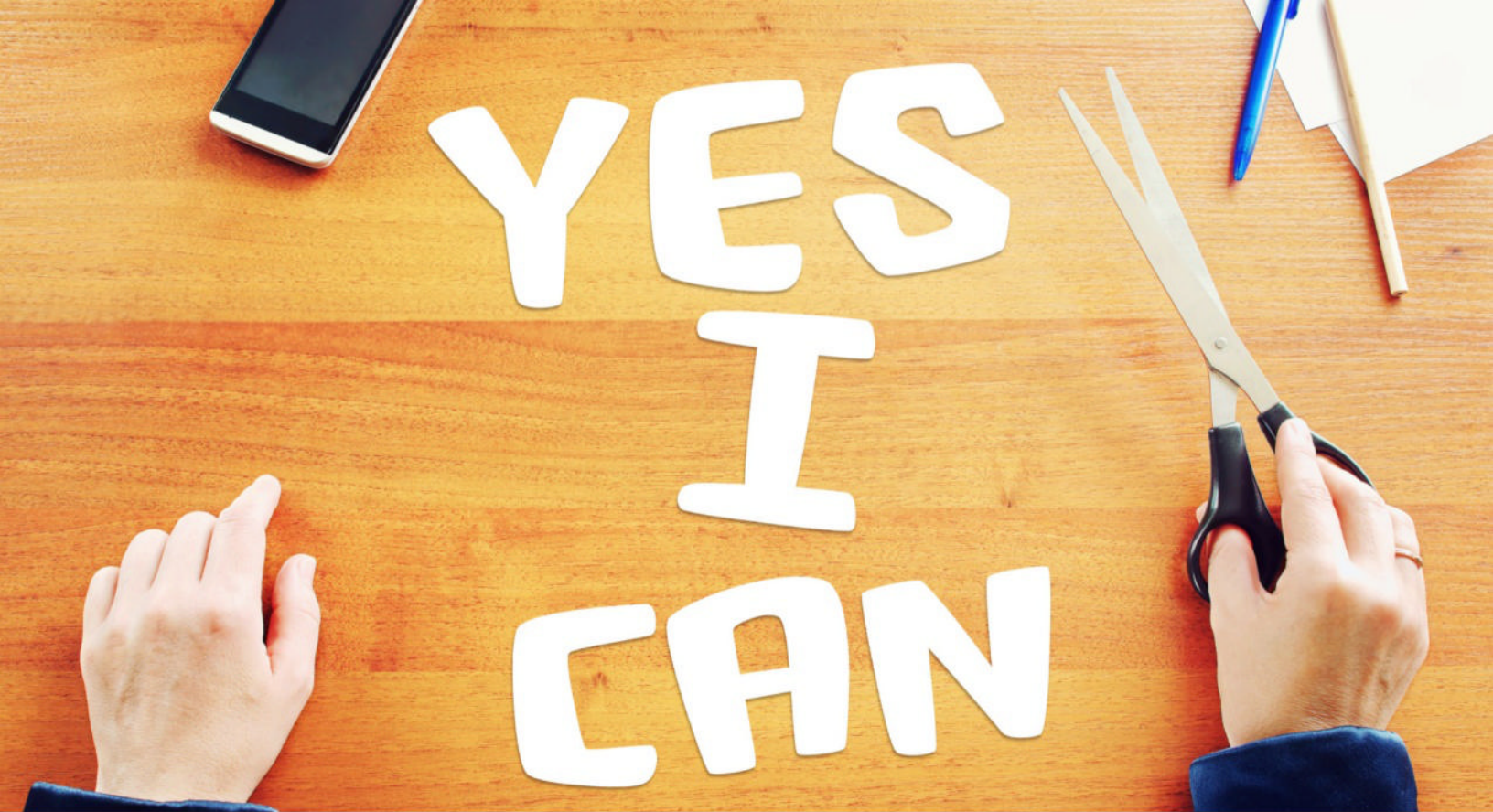


Photo: a-poselenov

How I Improved My Self-Confidence and My Mental Health

By Stan Popovich

Many people who struggle with their mental health can have difficulty maintaining their self-confidence. Dealing with fear, anxiety and even depression can wear you down to the point that you start to doubt yourself in terms of getting through each day.



Photo: The Carlose Gutierrez collection

In terms of my mental health struggles, I found it challenging to be confident and remain optimistic about the future.

As a result, here are eight things that I did to increase my self-esteem and live a productive life.

1. Know your weaknesses and strengths: I find that the first step in improving your self-confidence is to know what helpful skills you have in your life. Taking a skills assessment test is a great way to determine your strengths and weaknesses. Another way to determine some of your skill sets and to look at your past experiences is to think about those times that you were really successful and happy

with yourself. Figure out what you were doing and try to see if you can follow the same route in your current situation.

2. Accept who you are as person: I made it a habit to not to compare myself to my successful friends. There were times that the people I knew were doing good while I was struggling with my mental health and other things in my life. I reminded myself that everyone has problems and that I just needed to be patient with myself in overcoming my challenges. I also realized that I am unique in this world and that I can do anything I want to do if I put my mind into it. Everyone person has the ability to improve and all it takes is some patience and a little bit of work.



Photo: marekulasz

Remember to make sure that the goals you make in your life are attainable and always monitor your progress. Don't get upset if you don't accomplish all of your goals. You can always change your goals so that you can be more successful. In addition, always try to learn from your mistakes. If you make a mistake, do not get angry with yourself. The key is to learn from your

experiences and continue to move forward in achieving what you want out of life.

3. Do not downplay your achievements: Some people downplay their successes and focus on those things they struggle with. Always remind yourself of your past accomplishments no matter how small they may be. Stop focusing on the negative parts of your life and remember the times that you were successful. Whenever I would get depressed with my mental struggles, I would look at my past experiences where I was able to manage my stresses and anxieties. This gave me the confidence to move forward in my life.

4. Create goals in your life: I found it very helpful to set some achievable goals in my life and then take small steps to accomplish them. This gave me something to look forward to and gave me the motivation to move forward rather than being stuck in my current situation. There were times that I did not have the energy to move forward so I made it a habit to do at least one small thing a day to accomplish my goals.

5. Talk to others: It is important that you talk to other people in order to get a better perspective of your life. Listening to other people's challenges and accomplishments can go a long way in feeling better about yourself. I would talk to my friends, and I realized that they had similar problems just like me. It can be very easy to just focus on your problems rather than realizing that there are other people who are in a similar situation. I also found that by trying to help others, I felt better about myself.

There are many people who struggle with their mental and physical health and are able to maintain a positive attitude. All it takes is some work on your part.

6. Do not try to please everyone: Do not let your friends and relatives pressure you into doing things that may make you feel anxious or uncomfortable. For example, your friends want you to join them at a local gathering, but you are tired and

stressed out and just need to take a rest. Decide what you want to do and then tell your friends what you plan on doing.

I learned from experiences that trying to please other people usually makes me anxious and stressed out. It was difficult for me to tell my friends “No” but in the end I usually felt better about myself and over time, I became more confident in myself.

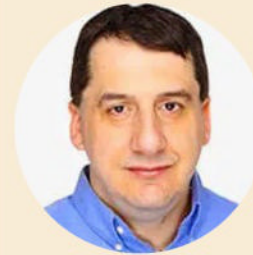
7. Think about your future: Take time to think about what you really want out of life. Do not live your life for others. Once you determine what you want to accomplish, the next step is to develop a strategy that will help you to move forward. Many people try to live their life for other people rather than for themselves. I realized that there were times I tried to live up to other people’s expectations and I always felt discouraged. Eventually I decided that I needed to be myself and do those things that made me happy. Once you feel better about yourself, you will be much happier and more successful in managing your mental health.

8. Get some help for your mental health: Finally, I knew that I would not be happy unless I got my mental health under control. Therefore, I made the effort to talk to a mental health counselor, and I would always take notes on what I learned from each session I went to. In addition, I read many books and I learned what worked, what didn’t work, and what I needed to do to improve my situation. I realized that the more I learned the easier things got for me. Eventually I became more confident

in myself because I was successful in managing my stresses and anxieties.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Stan Popovich



Stan Popovich is the author of the popular managing fear book, *A Layman’s Guide to Managing*

Fear. For more

information about Stan’s book and to get some more free mental health advice, please visit Stan’s website at

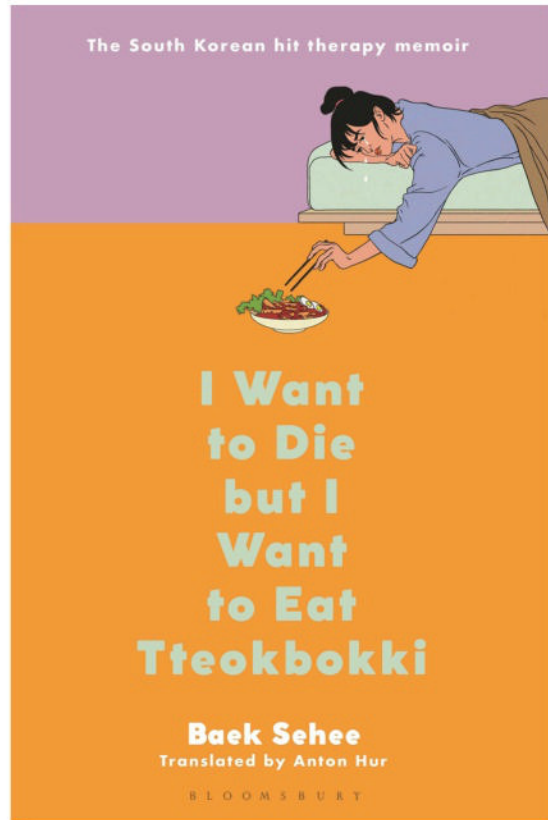
<http://www.managingfear.com>



Book Review of *I Want to Die but I Want to Eat Tteokbokki* (spicy rice cakes) by Baek Se-hee

By Kritika Narula

In her therapy memoir, author Baek Se-hee makes no pretense or exaggeration. She hopes to share her conversations with her therapist in a vulnerable account of what it means to know yourself better. Kritika Narula reviews the book that overcame her skepticism of therapy memoirs.



“What’s it like being in therapy?” More often than not, when people ask this question, they are looking for a story in the answer. They are looking for a narrative. Something that makes for a good story, with a breakthrough moment that takes the limelight. In reality, however, therapeutic settings are hardly dramatic.

I have been in and out of psychotherapy for over 5 years now. And my only point of reference for what therapy was supposed to be like was a few pop culture depictions here and there. Grey’s Anatomy brought in a psychologist when the characters lived through a deadly mass shooting. There was the highly problematic Dr. Reisman in *Big Little Lies*. Realistic portrayals of therapy were hard to come by in mainstream pop culture until a few years ago.

So, when a therapy memoir went viral, I felt just slightly uncomfortable. Often, therapy can seem like a nebulous concept to explain. For people who have been in therapy for a while, it is hard to imagine the blank canvas they started with, now that they have verbalized so many of their previously unacknowledged emotions. For those just starting out, the blank canvas means they don’t really know what to expect from the process.

And how your healing process unfolds can look different for each person, but it is rarely a big climax or dramatic moment of change. You may have an ‘aha’ moment, but that’s just the beginning of a healing journey where you have more information about yourself. The realizations, the changes, and the epiphanies grow slowly in the space you and your therapist create. You use the therapy space as a microcosm for the world, where you practice embracing all your emotions. So, I didn’t want to read another account of the therapy experience that favored the dramatics.

The title of [Baek Se-hee’s book](#) particularly intrigued me, though. The tteokbokki reference reminded me of all the times I have wanted to give up on a goal, but still had an external point of reference that I wanted to stay for. In an email to *The Sunday Times*, Baek [shares](#), “I was thinking of planning my own death, but I got hungry and ate tteokbokki. I felt guilty thinking that I could still eat tteokbokki when I wanted to die, yet it felt like such a natural thing to do.”



Photo: Polina Zimmerman

And this is a good glimpse into the rest of the book. To my delight, it didn't dramatize or exaggerate. Just like the tteokbokki reference, it made me chortle at times. As someone who finds her sorrow definition-defying, it also made me feel seen and heard.

We all have emotions

Baek opens the story of her therapy experience with an earnest question, "Why are we so bad at being honest about our feelings? Is it because we're so exhausted from living that we don't have time to share them?" As anyone stepping into a therapist's office will tell you, the first realization in therapy, for many people, is about the validity of our emotions.

We stop thinking of our emotions as a natural response only when they are either dismissed, invalidated, or belittled at some point in our lives. And the initial sessions often force us to unlearn this tendency. Just like Baek, we learn that all emotions carry information about us. They are opportunities to learn more about

ourselves. Later in the book, Baek focuses on her self-esteem, diving deeper into what makes or breaks it. It is one of the gifts of therapy — it gives you the permission to explore what makes you who you are.

Lingering sadness

If I had to point out one reason this book merits a place in your reading list, it is because of the context. What made Baek seek therapy wasn't a life-altering event or a sudden loss, but rather a mundane genre of sadness, something she defines as a "rotting on the inside, where the rot is this vague state of being not fine and not devastated at the same time."

We all go in and out of funk in tandem with life's ups and downs. But some people embrace the lows a little too closely. Her experience of lingering sadness resonates with me. She describes how she accepted that she was a little sadder than everyone else from a young age. She also shared the tense, restrictive circumstances at her home and in her family.

She remarks, “I let my world grow darker and darker,” and the honesty in this conversation shines through. Therapy spaces let you share your feelings and thoughts without sugarcoating anything. It doesn’t have to sound appetizing. It is not supposed to be edited. Once again, your sessions help you practice being authentic in the real world.

It takes a lot of courage to admit something like this: “To me, sadness is the path of least resistance, the most familiar and close-at-hand emotion I have. A habit that has encrusted itself into me everyday.” It takes far more courage to be curious about this complicated feeling.

An honest glimpse into the healing process

Baek’s account is a reminder of how imperfect the healing process can be. Previously, therapists have talked about the imperfection of the process in [*Maybe You Should Talk to Someone*](#) (by Lori Gottlieb) and in [*Why Has Nobody Told Me This Before*](#) (by Dr Julie Smith). But to hear the client’s perspective was refreshing. What people don’t often tell you about therapy is how much of the healing work takes place in the outside world. Therapy equips us with the tools needed to live authentically, and we then step out into the world with those tools to build that authentic life. Therapy is also an extremely exhausting process. As Baek shares candidly, therapy reflections bring our contrariness to the surface, “That human beings are three-dimensional is perhaps my favourite thing to say. But it is also likely the last thing I will remember in a bad moment.”

The author writes prefacing the novel, “I doubt I could ever again be as candid in a book as I was in this one.” And when you sit through this simple but meticulous account of her conversations with her therapist, you understand why.

[SAMHSA’s National Helpline](#) is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service (in English and [Spanish](#)) for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders. Call 1-800-662-HELP (4357).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Kritika Narula



Kritika Narula is a writer, journalist, and communications consultant based in Delhi, India. She

loves consuming stories in all forms – books, movies, TV shows – and places these stories under a fierce assessment to see if they are feminist, empathetic or entertaining enough. All of Kritika’s work is guided by her mental health activism, including her latest project called the Mental Health Mirror.

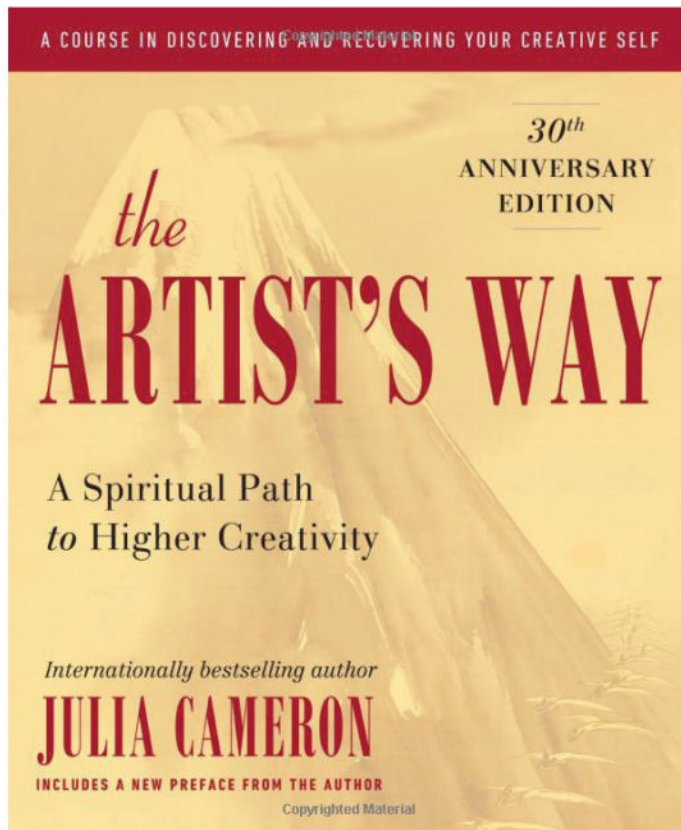


Photo: lil artsy from Pexels

My Journey with Morning Pages: A Personal Narrative

By Dhanista Shah

I first encountered the concept of [the Morning Pages](#) in [The Artist's Way](#) by Julia Cameron. The practice seems very simple—it is a form of daily journaling, writing three pages of stream-of-consciousness thoughts every morning. This means that you don't judge or think or formulate anything, but just let it flow. These pages act as a sort of daily brain dump.



The morning pages help you explore and release mental clutter, doubts, and fears that may otherwise hinder your creative expression and productivity during the day. The technique has been used by individuals across all professions and not just by artists.

Cameron insists this practice is not just effective but is the cornerstone of a creative and fulfilled life. It has been five years since I started writing them, and I believe that the morning pages have helped me open up and live my life in a flow.

My morning pages

I used to have a romanticized image of diary writing, where the writer ‘pours out’ emotions, thoughts, or feelings onto pages

in a dramatic fashion. The model proposed by Cameron looks quite different. It means writing each and every day with discipline and purpose. I moved beyond the conception that journaling involves just outpouring of emotions.

After five years, the Morning Pages have enriched my life, helping me overcome creative blocks, rekindle my imagination, and access inspiration, personal growth, and self-discovery. I also experience stress reduction, clarity of thought, and emotional healing.

Enhanced creative expression: The morning pages is stream-of-consciousness writing. This means that you write freely and don’t really bother about grammar or coherence. This can be really freeing, and I found that freedom unshackled my mind and allowed me to express myself more.

Encouraging mindfulness: These days, there is a lot of talk about mindfulness and being rooted in the present moment. The Morning Pages are the epitome of mindfulness. After you write, you are totally focused on the here and now and what occurs to you in that moment.

Provide a safe space: Morning pages are intended for personal use only and should not be shared or judged by others. They create a safe space for expressing thoughts and feelings without fear of criticism. Hence, the fear of judgement does not exist. This is empowering in itself. I felt that it took the pressure of sticking to a cohesive narrative off my head and this is what helped me actually write.



Photo: Rawpixel Ltd

Catharsis and processing: Initially I felt that it provided a cathartic effect. This is true because any kind of journaling is known to help process pent up emotions and enable a safe release. But, slowly, in addition to catharsis I also experienced a transformative power. I felt that I developed ideas, wishes, and plans that I would not have really thought of otherwise. I also felt that I could identify insights about other people around me, that I would have been blind to before.

Structures my routine: As the name suggests, the pages are to be written in the morning. I find that this sets a tone to structure my day and is a great activity to include in my morning routine. The consistency really helped me and over time I experienced its anchoring effects.

Pattern identification: When I re-read my morning pages, I identify several patterns, including recurring anxieties, triggers, thoughts, and opinions. We think we know ourselves well. But when I read the morning pages in retrospect, I found a lot that I didn't know about myself! It helped me uncover hidden fears and desires, leading to greater self-reflection and personal growth.

Some tips

- Have an appealing journal that you love. Nice stationary supplies go a long way. Don't underestimate the power of a beautiful journal and a pen that flows smoothly.
- Create a little ritual around it. I write my morning pages as I sip my morning tea



Photo: DAPA Images

and that really works for me.

- Don't skip the practice! Even if your morning is rushed, write something.
- Some people type it out and claim it works, but I really believe that nothing can replace the magic of writing with your hand.

Read the morning pages after a sufficient time gap and experience the magic of introspection. However, if you'd rather protect your privacy, you could destroy them as well, especially ones which may have particularly sensitive content. For me, preserving them is crucial.

For another perspective from a user of morning pages, watch [this video](#).

Little detours

Over the years, some things have changed in my morning pages practice. I find myself not sticking to three pages. I also notice that what I write has become more reflective, even as it is stream-of-consciousness writing. For me, it has become an introspective practice that is the best possible way to kick start my day.

If you're already writing morning pages each morning, I encourage you to own this practice and truly follow it up. If you intend to start, I trust you will find in time that this is perhaps a great gift you give yourself at the beginning of each day.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dhanishta Shah



Dhanishta Shah is a writer based out of India. She believes that reading and writing gives

sense to experience, and is constantly on the quest to explore new and exciting territories and formats for writing. She is the founder of literary portal www.bookedforlife.in, and is especially interested in the connection of books and literature to our lifestyles.



Photo: FangXiaNuo

In Pursuit of a Simpler Life

By Laura Parr

Modern life seems to be getting harder. In 2020 [burnout was at an all-time high](#), and in a questionnaire, [43% of respondents](#) from more than 100 countries reported feeling stress for much of the day before—38% higher than in the previous year. In 2022, [57% of workers](#) felt their employers expected 24/7 access to them.



Photo: KeithBinns

Fed up with such intrusion, many are looking for a simpler way of life. Off-grid living, back to the land mentalities, and attempts at self-sufficiency are on the rise, as people make the effort to be more sustainable, both environmentally and emotionally.

Such thoughts were certainly on my mind when, in 2013, my husband and I traded in our life in the UK's city of Brighton for one in rural Portugal. While we don't live entirely off-grid and we still have a long way to go towards sustainability, our life is much simpler than it was in our home country. We grow vegetables, harvest olives for their oil, and live more in keeping with the seasons. Our chickens provide us with all the eggs we ever need and, perhaps most importantly, we are part of a growing and inspiring community.

Thriving community

One of my neighbors is fellow immigrant and massage therapist, [Michelle Towler](#). She left the UK four years ago to live in a caravan on the edge of a river, and she gives the most intuitive massages ever from the comfort of her heated polytunnel. "Being a holistic therapist, it feels normal for me to be surrounded by nature," she says. "I open my curtains and see green. I can hear the birds and the river, and the air is clean."

But you don't have to move to a foreign land to live a more peaceful existence. Jessica Ammes' life changed when she wrote her debut novel, [Celestia](#). Billed as an action-packed, sci-fi novel, *Celestia* was really a vision of a better world in which people lived in harmony with one another and the earth. Ammes and her husband



Photo: Luis Coutinho

had long considered moving abroad to make that world a reality, but when the first lockdown happened in 2020, they were still in their hometown of Suffolk in the UK. “I realized we weren’t going anywhere and so we had better create that world here,” she tells me.

She created [Joinavision](#), a non-political community group that acknowledges the fact that much of our society needs to change. It was originally meant to be a small group, local to the county of Suffolk, but people started joining from other counties, and eventually membership increased globally, showing people’s desire for change.

At the same time, Ammes moved into a five-bedroom house with an acre of land,

a bore hole, and a large track. She shares this house with her husband, four children, two other investors and a volunteer who works in the vegetable garden. The idea is to work as part of a community, working together to come up with creative solutions to everyday problems.

Simple = easier, right?

Actually, *a simpler life* doesn’t necessarily equate to *a less complicated life*. “Working and living with people can be challenging,” says Ammes. “Every time someone new comes there’s a shift. You can try to avoid confrontation, but some people thrive on it, so you have to work out how to deal with it without letting it get you down.”

And it’s not always communal living that

causes problems. Towler says: “Living in a more natural way can be hard work, and as you get older, it gets harder. But you find ways of coping. You’re less likely to waste food when you know what work goes into growing it, and so you need to come up with creative ways of dealing with it.”

Towler knew she wanted to grow food from the outset, but for Ammes, the idea came after her sister-in-law died from cancer. “I started wondering how this could have happened,” she says. “I thought my sister-in-law had a healthy diet, but when I started looking into it, I realized she ate a lot of plastic-wrapped food. Everything she ate had been sprayed with chemicals, and when I started researching those chemicals, I knew that the only way to be sure that my family was getting the best food was to grow it ourselves.

“Once you start gardening you discover that getting your hands in the soil and growing your own food is incredibly healing,” she says. “But we don’t just want to grow vegetables. We want to inspire other people to do similar things.”

The snowball effect

In my experience, that’s how it works. We inspire one another with our actions, and when we see others achieving the things we want to do, we start to believe it really could be possible. These days, I simply don’t know anyone who believes their boss should be able to contact them night or day.

Of course, moving to a more rural location isn’t possible for everyone, but you don’t have to take such a drastic step to benefit

from nature’s healing effects. When I lived in the city, I cultivated connection by learning the wild plants that grew in messy corners of my local parks and on sidewalks. My husband and I would go for moonlit walks, catching sight of foxes on the street and hedgehogs scurrying in parks.

It sounds simple, but these moments of peace benefitted us in many ways—and probably led us right to where we are now. We didn’t completely know it at the time, but those snatched fragments of time were anchoring us into the natural world. Henry David Thoreau said: “You must live in the present, launch yourself on every wave, find your eternity in each moment.” I think this is what he meant.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Laura Parr



Laura is a yoga teacher and therapist with a background in nursing and public

health. She thinks that health needn’t be complicated and is passionate about helping people find simple ways to achieve wellness in their lives. Laura founded [Slow Yoga Portugal](#), and when not on her mat or at her desk, she can be found running with her dog or growing vegetables.



Photo: BGStock72

Healthy Avoidance

By Kate Orson

Keeping busy. Helping out a friend to avoid your own emotional issues. Distraction with social media or TV. Avoiding emotions and practical life issues is usually considered unhealthy, but could there be times when it is actually a beneficial coping mechanism?



Photo: LL28

If you are feeling like an issue is just too big to tackle and you just want to run away, call a friend, go out for a run, or go shopping, you might be beating yourself up about not facing up to things, or not doing enough ‘self-care’ to shift your mood. However, maybe it’s time to reframe distraction as a natural inclination that can help you through tough times.

[Elizabeth Sumpf](#) is a therapist based in Portland Oregon. She explains the psychology of why avoiding emotions can be beneficial. “There are times when avoidance can be a helpful tool in managing stress and healing from trauma, if someone is being flooded by

feelings, then it’s not the time to feel all the feelings.”

Perhaps one analogy could be a powerful tap. You wouldn’t want to turn it on too high as it would flood your bathroom, but if it’s a slow trickle then the overflow can catch the water. If the pressure is so strong that undoing the tap is going to result in an instant flood, then maybe it’s time to turn it off for a while and do something else entirely.

Avoidance may be an especially helpful tactic if you are going through a big change or trauma. Maybe it’s the loss of a loved one, or a divorce, or recovery after an



Photo: Jelena Danilovic

accident. Some things are just so painful, that getting through the day should be classed as an achievement. Putting the pressure on to do the right kind of 'healing,' or 'self-care' can add even greater stress.

Finding ways to connect with others can help to cope, whether it's phoning a friend, hugging your dog, or just going to a local shop to see some friendly faces. Physical actions can help to get connected to your own body, like going for a walk or swim. Cleaning the house or cooking can be simple and immediate ways to get out of your head.

If the situation is ongoing, scheduling time for regular 'avoidance strategies' can take the pressure off emotional overwhelm. It could be going for a run with a friend,

or ensuring your weekend is packed with distraction. If you have the capacity, volunteering or doing something in your community can be a helpful strategy to redirect attention away from personal struggles by helping others. This can also happen spontaneously just by being in conversation with a friend. As they talk about their own problems and issues, you might find your own receding into the background, even if just slightly.

Maybe one of the reasons avoidance gets a bad rap is when we use unhealthy avoidance strategies such as excessive drinking, or overuse of social media. Being aware of this tendency can help to develop healthy ways to avoid and cope.

Another thing to watch out for when avoidance becomes a long-term habit.

While it's an excellent short-term strategy, overuse can lead to a lack of self-awareness as emotions stack up. Sumpf says that consciousness of what we are doing is key. "It's normal to need to avoid at times, and it is a coping skill that one can choose to do as needed. The consciousness around it helps to shift it from denial because there's awareness that it needs to be returned to at some point."

When it feels like time to address emotions, it's okay to take baby steps. Sumpf suggests making what she calls a 'containment jar' to tackle an issue in bite-size pieces. She says, "choose a jar or box with a lid, and if you'd like to decorate it, and then put in that container anything that you need help holding. Write down thoughts, feelings, sensations, or memories that feel too much in the moment on a piece of paper and put it in the container. You can always draw, scribble, or express in any way you like. You can revisit when with a therapist or when in a more regulated state."

Elizabeth's Sumpf's tips for healthy avoidance strategies

Resourcing: Internal and External

Develop a list of resources that might be helpful when feelings become overwhelming.

Internal: Anything internal that provides comfort, calm, sense of security, such as deep breathing, grounding yourself, invoking positive memories, looking at positive images (think of a time that was special, fun, brought comfort), or connecting to personal strengths (i.e., humour, creativity, or problem-solving).

External: Anything external that provides comfort, calm, sense of security, such as getting out into nature, being around people, going to special places, spending time with pets/animals, or using things you consider special like crystals, candles etc.

Coping skills:

Create a list of coping skills when you are not overwhelmed so that you can have it available in times of difficulty. Examples can include the following:

- Grounding
- Knitting
- Coloring
- Watching a favorite show or film that brings comfort
- Dancing
- Calling a friend or hotline for support

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Kate Orson



Kate is a freelance writer and author of *Tears Heal: How to Listen to Our Children*.

She writes about wellness, parenting, and

sex, and is currently crowdfunding to publish a memoir, *A Cut in the Brain*. Originally from the UK, she now lives in Italy with her husband, author Toni Davidson, and their 8-year-old daughter.



Photo: mihailomilovanovic

The Health Benefits of Exercise ‘Microbursts’

By Dr. Colleen Arnold

As a family physician, I regularly encourage my patients to find ways to exercise. It’s one of the cheapest, easiest, and most consistent ways to improve overall health. Unfortunately, the standard recommendation for 150 minutes of exercise per week is too hard for many people. And many follow the ‘all-or-nothing’ philosophy and just do nothing. Eighty [percent](#) of U.S. adults are considered sedentary. Wow. And despite my prompting, all too often, I hear, “I want to exercise, Dr. Arnold; I just don’t have the time.”



Photo: Zen Chung

Maybe we do have the time.

Recent research suggests that we all do have the time, after all. A fascinating study published in [Nature Journal](#) suggests that 1-2 minute bursts of high-intensity physical activity 4 times throughout the day can decrease mortality risk from heart attack, stroke, and cancer by as much as 40% in previously inactive adults.

What are exercise microbursts?

With the advent of wearable fitness trackers like Fitbit and Apple Watch, researchers can use data from everyday life instead of just stats from labs and gyms. The *Nature Journal* study looked at vigorous bursts of physical activity done as part of daily life.

We're not talking about go-to-the-gym type exercise like cycling or walking the treadmill, but rather simply increasing the intensity of everyday activities. This is known as *vigorous intermittent lifestyle physical activity* (VILPA). It requires a significantly lower time commitment – only 8 minutes and no specific equipment or training. Granted, you won't get ripped muscles or lose weight (most likely), but you will get healthier. For parents who are buried under laundry piles and school forms, or folks who work long hours, this is exciting news.

What qualifies as vigorous, and how can I tell if I'm at that level?

“Vigorous” depends on your starting



point – what’s moderate for me might be vigorous for you. And the less fit you are, the more likely it is that any activity will be vigorous. You can tell you’re at the right level of intensity in three ways – heart rate, talk test, and perceived exertion.

Your heart rate will increase to 70-85% of your maximum when you are exercising vigorously. To estimate your maximum, subtract your age from 220 and then calculate about 75%. At 63, my maximum heart rate is 157, and 75 % of that is 118.

In the talk test, you try to carry on a conversation. If you can only speak a few words at a time without having to catch your breath, you are likely in the vigorous range.

Lastly, on the “rate of perceived exertion” scale, zero is no exertion, and 10 is extremely difficult. Consider how fast and hard you’re breathing and whether you’re sweating and sore to estimate your exertion. Vigorous is considered seven and above.

How to add VILPA microbursts to your day:

Once you get a sense of what vigorous exercise feels like for you, you can start to incorporate a few VILPA activities into your routine. Remember, these are things that you already do as part of daily life.

For example, you’ve heard the recommendation to take the stairs instead of the elevator. To change it into a VILPA activity, set a timer on your cell phone for 1-2 minutes and run up and down as fast



Photo: Prostock-Studio

as you can until the alarm goes off. Hold the railing to keep your balance. If you are a sedentary person, you won't have to go very fast to reach an age-related heart rate that's 85% of your maximum. And you definitely won't be able to sing or carry on a conversation. As with all exercise, it will get easier the more you do it.

You've also heard the suggestion to park at the far edge of the parking lot at work or the grocery store. This, too, can be easily converted to a VILPA activity.

Instead of strolling into the building, powerwalk around the lot as fast as you can for 1-2 minutes. Pay attention to your surroundings and stick to the periphery of the parking lot to keep things safe.

Playing outside with your kids? Try chasing them around the playground instead of sitting on the bench. Walking the dog? Sprint for a minute and let her try to catch you. Vacuuming or sweeping? Pick up the pace and go as quickly as you can. Any normal daily activity can be changed into a



Photo: rattanakun

VILPA by doing it as fast or as hard as you can for 1-2 minutes.

If you love the gym or your daily walk, keep at it! But if you're a sedentary person or someone who is too busy to do the standard 150 minutes a week, microbursts are a great way to get healthier and lower your risk of heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers. And who knows, you might enjoy yourself so much — and feel so much better — that you make even more time for exercise.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Dr. Colleen Arnold



Dr. Arnold is a physician and freelance writer in Lexington, Virginia. She has written for *Insider*,

Wall Street Journal, *Saint Anthony Messenger*, *Spirituality and Health*, and *Chicken Soup for the Soul*, among others. She is a mom to three adult daughters and grandmother to a precious two-year-old. When she's not with patients or family, she's probably hiking with her dog, doing yoga, or camping in her minivan. You can find her on [Facebook](#) and on her [Website](#).



About *IndigoBlue Magazine*

Editor-in-Chief: Laura Boyle

IndigoBlue Magazine is a product of Imagine Communications, a consulting firm that develops print and online products and material that support the health and well-being of clients, organizations, and individuals. The magazine provides online content on health, wellness, and personal growth & development from authors sharing their personal perspectives and expertise. Since so many of us are feeling disconnected, the magazine offers an opportunity to feel more connected and see our experience through the experience of others. If you are interested in submitting an article, access the [Editorial Guidelines](#) or reach out to indigobluemagazine@gmail.com.