



Health Insights

December 2020



Having a Sense of Purpose May Add Years to Your Life

Feeling that you have a sense of purpose in life may help you live longer no matter what your age is according to research published in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science.

The research has clear implications for promoting positive aging and adult development, says lead researcher Patrick Hill of Carleton University in Canada. "Our findings point to the fact that finding a direction for life, and setting overarching goals for what you want to achieve can help you actually live longer, regardless of when you find your purpose," says Hill. "So the earlier someone comes to a direction for life, the earlier these protective effects may be able to occur."

Hill and colleague Nicholas Turiano of the University of Rochester Medical Center decided to explore this question, taking advantage of the nationally representative data available from the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) study.

The researchers looked at data from over 6000 participants, focusing on their self-reported purpose in life (e.g., "Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them") and other psychosocial variables that gauged their positive relations with others and their experience of positive and negative emotions.

Over the 14-year follow-up period represented in the MIDUS data, 569 of the participants had died (or about 9% of the sample). Those who had died had reported lower purpose in life and fewer positive relations than did survivors.

Greater purpose in life consistently predicted lower mortality risk across the lifespan, showing the same benefit for younger, middle-aged, and older participants across the follow-up period.

This consistency came as a surprise to the researchers. "There are a lot of reasons to believe that being purposeful might help protect older adults more so than younger ones," says Hill. "For instance, adults might need a sense of direction more, after they have left the workplace and lost that source for organizing their daily events. In addition, older adults are more likely to face mortality risks than younger adults."

"To show that purpose predicts longer lives for younger and older adults alike is pretty interesting, and underscores the power of the construct," he explains.

Purpose had similar benefits for adults regardless of retirement status, a known mortality risk factor. And the longevity benefits of purpose in life held even after other indicators of psychological well-being, such as positive relations and positive emotions, were taken into account.

"These findings suggest that there's something unique about finding a purpose that seems to be leading to greater longevity," says Hill.

Association for Psychological Science. "Having a sense of purpose may add years to your life." ScienceDaily. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/05/140512124308.htm (accessed November 6, 2020).



Purpose in Life by Day Linked To Better Sleep at Night

Having a good reason to get out of bed in the morning means you are more likely to sleep better at night with less sleep apnea and restless leg syndrome, reports a new Northwestern Medicine and Rush University Medical Center study based on older adults. This is the first study to show having a purpose in life specifically results in fewer sleep disturbances and improved sleep quality and over a long period of time.

"Helping people cultivate a purpose in life could be an effective drug-free strategy to improve sleep quality, particularly for a population that is facing more insomnia," said senior author Jason Ong, an associate professor of neurology at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. "Purpose in life is something that can be cultivated and enhanced through mindfulness therapies."

The 823 participants – individuals 60 to 100 years old with an average age of 79 – were from two cohorts at Rush University Medical Center. More than half were African American and 77% were female.

People who felt their lives had meaning were 63% less likely to have sleep apnea and 52% less likely to have restless leg syndrome. They also had moderately better sleep quality, a global measure of sleep disturbance.

For the study, participants answered a 10-question survey on purpose in life and a 32-question survey on sleep. For the purpose in life survey, they were asked to rate their response to such statements as, "I feel good when I think of what I've done in the past and what I hope to do in the future."

Northwestern University. "Purpose in life by day linked to better sleep at night: Older adults whose lives have meaning enjoy better sleep quality, less sleep apnea, restless leg syndrome." ScienceDaily. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/07/170710091734.htm (accessed November 6, 2020).

Mental Health Moment

Battling Holiday Depression and Stress

While many look forward to the holidays, others dread the season. If you feel stressed, the obligations at holiday time can take their toll on even the most cheerful of people. Here are some tips to help you minimize holiday stress.

Causes of Stress

Ask yourself what exactly about the season makes you feel stressed. Your feelings may be triggered by the following:

- Unhappy childhood memories
- Difficult familial relationships
- Negative feelings about your life over the past year
- Seasonal monotony: seeing the same faces, eating the same food, and going through the same motions
- Lowered immune defenses because of colder temperatures, high incidence of the flu, eating more, and sleeping less
- Financial stress

Minimize Holiday Stress

Consider the following tips to help reduce stress this holiday season:

- Enjoy the present and try not to worry about what may be lacking.
- Don't feel you must meet all family obligations. Do not simply do something or go somewhere because of tradition, especially if it makes you unhappy.
- Ask others for assistance. For example, ask a relative to host the family get-together or make it a potluck and have everyone contribute to the meal.
- Make a to-do list in chronological order to minimize stress.
- Limit your alcohol intake.
- Stay active and continue to eat a balanced diet.
- Create a new tradition, such as volunteering, especially if you feel lonely.
- Make time for yourself and your needs, even when hosting guests in your house.
- Keep tabs on your holiday spending. Make a budget and stick to it, no exceptions.



Winter Salad

Ingredients:

- 2 C raw walnuts
- 1/3 C pure maple syrup
- 1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 pinch crushed red pepper
- Flaked sea salt
- 6 C mixed greens, (i.e., baby kale and spinach)
- 2 C arugula
- 2 C POM POMS Fresh Pomegranate Arils
- 1 blood or cara cara orange, sliced (optional)
- 1/2 C dried cranberries
- 1/2 C crumbled goat cheese

Balsamic Fig Dressing

- 1/3 C extra virgin olive oil
- 1/4 C balsamic vinegar
- 1 Tbsp fig preserves
- Kosher salt and black pepper

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Toss the walnuts with the maple syrup, cinnamon, crushed red pepper, and salt. Bake for 15-20 minutes, stirring twice throughout cooking, until the walnuts are toasted. Remove from the oven and spread the walnuts in one layer. Sprinkle with flaked salt.

Add the greens to a large salad bowl. Add the POM POMS, oranges (if using), cranberries, goat cheese, and walnuts. Gently toss the salad.

To make the dressing: Combine all ingredients in a glass jar and shake to combine. Just before serving, drizzle the dressing over the salad and gently toss. Enjoy!

Prep Time: 15 minutes, Cook Time: 20 minutes, Total Time: 35 minutes, Servings: 6, Calories: 193kcal.

Gerard, T. (2019, December 19). Winter Salad with Maple Candied Walnuts. Retrieved November 06, 2020, from: <https://www.halfbakedharvest.com/winter-salad-maple-candied-walnuts-balsamic-fig-dressing-big-giveaway/>



Finding Purpose - Quiz

Having a Sense of Purpose May Add Years to Your Life

1. Greater purpose in life consistently predicted lower mortality risk in which age group?
 - a. Adolescents
 - b. Middle Adulthood
 - c. Late Adulthood
 - d. Across the lifespan
2. Purpose had similar benefits for adults regardless of:
 - a. Retirement status
 - b. Socioeconomic class
 - c. Religious beliefs
 - d. Relationship status

Purpose in Life by Day Linked To Better Sleep at Night

3. What is an effective drug-free strategy to improve sleep quality? _____
4. Individuals who felt their lives had meaning were _____% less likely to have sleep apnea.

Mental Health Moment

5. Which of the following is *not* one of the tips to minimize Holiday stress
 - e. Stay active and continue to eat a balanced diet
 - f. Enjoy the present
 - g. Meet family obligations and uphold traditions
 - h. Make a budget and stick to it

See page 5 for quiz answers

Healthy Habits Calendar

December 2020 - Finding Purpose

Studies show that cultivating purpose in life helps individuals live longer and happier. Try these suggestions to intentionally cultivate more purpose in your life this month!

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 Happy December! Get started today on the Disconnect Challenge.	2 Workout Wednesday	3 Thursday Thoughts: What does it mean to you to live with purpose? Write it down.	4	5 Saturday Service Find a way to serve your neighbor.
6 Stay Connected Sunday Call someone you love.	7 Motivation Monday Take time to read.	8	9 Workout Wednesday	10 Check-in: Are you up-to-date on your Disconnect Challenge tracker?	11	12
13 Self-Care Sunday Take a break from technology.	14	15 Spend time doing something you love.	16 Workout Wednesday	17 Thursday Thoughts What is your purpose? Write it down.	18	19 Saturday Service Serve in the community and involve your family or friends.
20 Stay Connected Sunday Call someone you haven't talked to in a while.	21 Motivation Monday Listen to a podcast or Ted Talk on a topic that inspires you.	22	23 Workout Wednesday	24	25 Merry Christmas!	26 Take a Walk Invite members of your household to join.
27 Self-Care Sunday Take time for yourself	28	29 Try something new Tuesday	30 Workout Wednesday	31 Thursday Thoughts What did you learn this year? Share with someone.	1 Happy New Year!	



Challenge: Disconnect

30 Day Challenge:

Social media and news outlets are a constant presence and can lead to a lot of stressful feelings. Sometimes, the best thing we can do for our mental wellbeing is to put our phones down and disconnect for a while. During this challenge, your goal is to disconnect from your technology for at least one hour three times a week.

Week 1

Weekday	How long did you disconnect?
Sunday	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	

Week 2

Weekday	How long did you disconnect?
Sunday	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	

Week 3

Weekday	How long did you disconnect?
Sunday	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	

Week 4

Weekday	How long did you disconnect?
Sunday	
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	
Saturday	