



Wellbeing Insights

Living a Better, More Vibrant Life



Cultivating Empathy

Empathy is a powerful mental muscle we can use to gain better insight into and understanding of the situations, feelings and motives of others. It is particularly useful in times of acute or chronic stress or crisis. The more that you practice empathy, the easier it will become to leverage its power to lift up others and yourself in times of distress.

To utilize empathy as a skill we must first understand what it is. Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes. It is a cognitive and/or emotional understanding of what another person is experiencing from their frame of reference. In other words, it is the ability to feel with someone, sensing their pain, joy, exhaustion or other emotions and, to varying degrees, sharing those emotions.

This is not the same as sympathy, which is largely used to convey that you feel for

someone, as in "feel bad for" or "feel pity for" another. When expressing sympathy, a person might say "I'm sorry you're in pain" whereas, expressing empathy might sound more like "I feel your pain." There is evidence that people with a highly developed sense of empathy can actually feel the distress, anxiety, aching or physical symptoms of others without ever having been in their same situation. But, generally, a healthy dose of empathy can help us be better colleagues, friends, parents and citizens.

The reason empathy is so critical to human connection is that it has the power to move a person to act on behalf of another even if they don't share the same circumstances or perspective. A person who turns their empathy into action takes steps to relieve another person's suffering. In order to be an effective and enduring advocate for

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others, [here are some ways to get your empathy in shape:](#)

Build emotional self-awareness. As you become more aware of your own emotions, you can better recognize them in other people and build the emotional vocabulary to communicate with understanding. Try pausing in emotionally intense situations, develop a mindfulness practice or start a journaling routine.

Heal emotional wounds and identify triggers. When you arrive with less baggage than your travel companion, you can shoulder a bag of theirs. In a similar way, the less emotional baggage that you come to a conversation with, the more capable you are of being present to actively listen for emotions and observe the body language of the other person. Use a coach or therapist to facilitate your personal journey.

Examine preconceptions that may block you from being open to others. At the same time, nurture your sense of curiosity by exploring places, attending events and interacting with others that are outside of your normal routines and groups. This will help you challenge your [implicit biases](#).

Read about other cultures, faiths, communities and lifestyles directly from sources that support and advocate for them. Limiting your education or social media feed to the voices of like-minded people only serves to validate your existing experiences or perspectives, which could be narrow in scope or inaccurate representations. Empathy does not always lead to agreement, but it should result in greater openness to witnessing and embracing the emotions of others without judgment.

Nurture common ground. Participate in activities that entail sharing in the responsibility of taking care of things, such as a buddy system to clean out the office fridge, taking a turn tending to a community garden or signing up for a shift to pick up litter in your neighborhood. In these tasks, everyone holds the same title, and we learn to talk with each other on a human level without formalities.

Exchange stories of hardship and joy. While we each have vastly different life experiences, sharing these stories can be powerful. When someone shares with you, quiet the urge to stay distanced from their experience as something you “can’t imagine.” Instead, ask yourself how you can relate to an emotion they may have been experiencing in that moment.

Recognize when you can move beyond empathy to lessen someone’s suffering. The beauty of empathy is that you are taking on the feelings of another person but not living with the situation that gave rise to those feelings. Even small gestures like offering to check back in, writing a reference letter on behalf of the person or their plight, or joining them in activities that show your solidarity can go a long way. Let people know they matter and show your gratitude for sharing their struggle with you.

It’s also good for your own wellbeing to find productive ways to release negative emotions that you’ve shared in with others. If you lose sleep over someone else’s struggle, such as the victim of a natural disaster or occurrence of violence, you’re closer to being in their shoes, and it’s important to channel that into compassionate acts that serve to prevent others from similar harm.

“ When you show **deep empathy toward others**, their defensive energy goes down, and **positive energy replaces it**. That’s when you can get more creative in solving problems. ”

– Stephen Covey



July Is BIPOC Mental Health Month

BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, People of Color. This health observance was created by Bebe Moore Campbell, an author, teacher and mental health advocate, to bring awareness to the unique struggles that underrepresented groups face regarding mental illness in the U.S. Visit the [Mental Health America](#) website to learn more and join in the conversation.

On the Menu

Nutritional Yeast

Nutritional yeast, also known as *saccharomyces cerevisiae*, is a food additive that is often used to enhance a food's flavor and provide a nutritional boost. Although it is used very differently, nutritional yeast is made from the same species of yeast that is used to bake bread and brew beer.

There are two types of nutritional yeast – unfortified and fortified. During the manufacturing process, fortified yeast has vitamins added to boost nutrient content. These vitamins are included on the ingredient list and may include thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, folic acid, and vitamins B6 and B12. Nutritional yeast is typically found in the spice section in the form of flakes, granules or powder. Due to its unique, cheesy, nutty and savory flavor, nutritional yeast is often used as a substitute for cheese products in soups and sauces, as well as a topping for pizza, popcorn and pasta.

Nutritional yeast, also called nooch, is a kitchen staple in many vegan kitchens because it is not derived from any animal products and provides a host of nutritional benefits, including protein, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

Benefits of nutritional yeast include:

- **Antioxidants** – Glutathione and selenomethionine are present in nutritional yeast. These antioxidants protect your cells from damage caused by free radicals and heavy metals. They also help your body eliminate environmental toxins.
- **Quality Protein Source** – Nutritional yeast is a complete protein source with nine essential amino acids, the building blocks of strong muscles.
- **Fatigue Reduction** – Nooch contains vitamin B12, which is touted for boosting energy and reducing fatigue and weakness. B12 is especially important for vegetarians and vegans as it's mostly found in animal products.
- **Healthy Pregnancy Support** – Folic acid may help prevent neural tube irregularities and reduce the risks of preterm birth, heart irregularities and cleft palate, among other problems. Folic acid found in nutritional yeast is also highly bioavailable, meaning it's easily absorbed by the body.

Keep It Fresh!

Nutritional yeast keeps best when stored in a cool, dark place, which helps preserve its nutritional value. It should also be kept in a tightly sealed container to keep moisture out. When properly stored, it can keep for up to two years.

Vegan Mac & Cheese

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. pasta (use lentil, chickpea or quinoa pasta for an extra nutritional bump)
- 1½ cups raw cashews
- 1 cup unsweetened almond milk
- ¼ cup nutritional yeast
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp paprika
- ½ tsp onion powder
- Freshly ground black pepper

Directions:

To make the cashew cheese sauce, soak the cashews in 4 cups of water for 2 hours. Once the cashews have finished soaking, add drained cashews, garlic, nutritional yeast, almond milk, paprika, onion powder, Dijon mustard, salt and black pepper to a high-powered blender. Blend until a thick sauce forms. Cook the noodles according to the directions on the package. Drain noodles, then add back to the pot and stir in your cashew cheese sauce. Serve immediately.

Adapted from AmbitiousKitchen.com

Nutrition Info

Per serving (recipe makes 6)

Calories	237
Total Fat	15.8g
Carbohydrates	66.3g
Fiber	5.7g
Sugar	3.5g
Protein	16.7g



Summertime Exercise Safety Tips

Use these precautions to prevent heat-related illnesses while enjoying the summer weather:

Drink up. Ensure you're replacing all of the fluids you sweat out. It is recommended that you consume 16 to 24 ounces of water an hour before exercising in hot temperatures. Continue the momentum by drinking another 6 to 8 ounces of fluids every 15 to 20 minutes of exercise. For intense workouts, you may want to consider sports drinks that can replenish carbohydrates and electrolytes, but beware of too much added sugar.

Be smart about timing. Humidity is a huge factor to take into account. The primary way the body cools itself during exercise is by sweating. Sweat on the skin's surface evaporates to cool the body, but in a humid environment sweat evaporation is limited due to high levels of moisture in the air. Consider moving activities indoors on days that are extremely hot and humid or planning workouts early morning or evening when temperatures tend to be cooler.

Dress smart. Wear loose, light-colored clothing. The lighter color will help reflect heat, and cotton will help the evaporation of sweat. You may also want to try specially designed technical fabric workout clothes; they're designed to keep you cool. If you can, choose shaded pathways that keep you out of the sun.

Most importantly, listen to your body. Stop immediately if you are feeling dizzy, faint or nauseous.



After a full night's sleep without water, the best thing you can do is rehydrate with a glass of water. Lukewarm water is the absolute best as your body can absorb it most efficiently at this temperature. There has been substantial recent research on the benefits of adding lemon to your morning glass of water, and the findings are impressive! Starting your morning with a large glass of warm lemon water can:

- Revitalize your digestion by supporting stomach acid in breaking down food more quickly
- Flush out toxins by stimulating liver function
- Support immune function with a healthy dose of vitamin C
- Boost energy and metabolism

Give it a try!

Start your day with at least 24 ounces of lukewarm water. Add ½ of a lemon (preferably organic) to the water and enjoy. Be careful; the acid may be good for your gut but not for your teeth. Be sure you follow it up with a few gulps of plain water.



DIY: Jump-Start Your Day with Lemon Water

Keeping an Energy-Effective Home in the Heat

Summer has arrived, bringing with it hefty electric bills. Homeowners spend \$11 billion each year to power their air conditioners! With a little planning you can shave dollars off your electricity bill with some simple changes around the house without sacrificing comfort.

- Install and set a programmable thermostat. It could save you up to 10% on heating and cooling costs each year.
- Ceiling fans allow you to raise the thermostat setting about four degrees with no reduction in comfort. Don't forget to turn them off when you leave the room as fans do not cool rooms but rather people by creating a wind-chill effect.
- Insulate your attic and walls, and seal cracks and openings to prevent warm air from leaking into your home.
- Insulate and seal all ducts. Air loss through ducts accounts for about 30% of a cooling system's energy consumption.
- Don't heat your home with appliances and lighting. Avoid using the oven, purchase efficient lightbulbs (e.g., compact fluorescents), avoid leaving on hot appliances and consider air drying clothes and dishes.
- Install window coverings to prevent heat gain through the windows.
- Avoid placing lamps or TVs near the thermostat. It senses the heat they give off and causes your AC to run more than necessary.
- Vacuum your air registers regularly and ensure they're not obstructed by furniture for the most efficient cooling.
- Clean your AC filter monthly.
- Unplug electronics when they're not in use or invest in a smart strip to cut power costs.

Adapted from energy.gov.

Mindful Minute

Compassion, kindness and caring are some of the “heart qualities” of mindfulness. They allow us to connect to other people and truly shape our quality of life. However, practicing empathy, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and exploring challenging emotions makes emotional awareness and regulation all the more important. As we learn to honor and nurture our emotional experiences, we can increase our capacity to be caring and accepting of ourselves and others.

The HeartMath Institute researches heart-brain communication and has developed an emotional regulation tool called positive emotion refocusing to help people shift attention to a higher perspective, improve outlook and broaden thinking when experiencing stress.

Most stress has an emotional underpinning, yet many stress-reduction techniques do not focus directly on shifting the emotion (e.g., going for a walk or taking a hot bath). While these techniques can be effective, think of **positive emotion refocusing** as a shortcut, going straight to the source of the stress – the emotion – and shifting it. Here's how it works.

The moment you experience stress, follow these three 3 steps:

- 1. Focus attention on the heart.** Notice the sensation of the heart, bring your full awareness into this area and hold your attention there.
- 2. Breathe through the heart.** Imagine your breath coming and going from your heart. Continue to remain focused on the heart as the breath comes and goes.

- 3. Feel through the heart.** Generate a sincere positive emotion, such as appreciation or caring for someone or something in your life. Continue your heart breathing while you focus on this sense of appreciation or caring in your heart.

Practicing this “heart shift” when experiencing stress will help you learn how to pivot away from stress and more easily adapt to difficult emotions. As with anything, the more frequently you practice, the easier the shift will become.

Do I Have a Drinking Problem?

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken nearly every aspect of life, adjusting to new ways of working, communicating and coping. As people sort through their fear and frustration, wrestle with the unknown and try to decipher mixed media messages, those with Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) face a unique set of challenges. While some outlets have made light of soaring alcohol sales, many people are grappling with their relationship with alcohol as old habits surface or new ones form and they attempt to cope with anxiety, loneliness and other triggers.

This can be particularly challenging as individuals wonder if they're an alcoholic – a term that is often misused as an all-or-nothing diagnosis. However, The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5 (DSM-5) defines AUD on a spectrum of mild, moderate or severe based on answers to the following questions.

In the past year have you:

- Had times when you ended up drinking more or longer than you intended?
- More than once wanted to cut down or stop drinking, or tried to, but couldn't?
- Spent a lot of time drinking? Or being sick or getting over other aftereffects?
- Wanted a drink so badly you couldn't think of anything else?
- Found that drinking or being sick from drinking often interfered with taking care of your home or family? Or caused job troubles? Or school problems?
- Continued to drink even though it was causing trouble with your family or friends?

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- Given up or cut back on activities that are important or pleasurable to you in order to drink?
- More than once gotten into situations while or after drinking that increased your chances of getting hurt, such as driving, swimming, using machinery, walking in a dangerous area or having unsafe sex?
- Continued to drink even though it was making you depressed or anxious or adding to another health problem? Or after having a memory blackout?
- Had to drink much more than you once did to get the effect you want? Or found that your usual number of drinks had much less effect than before?
- Found that when the effects of alcohol were wearing off, you had withdrawal symptoms, such as trouble sleeping, shakiness, restlessness, nausea, sweating, a racing heart or a seizure?

Mild AUD: Presence of 2 - 3 symptoms

Moderate AUD: Presence of 4 - 5 symptoms

Severe AUD: Presence of 6 or more symptoms

An estimated 15 million people in the U.S. have AUD, but less than 10% seek help for the condition. If you or someone you know is struggling with their relationship with alcohol, support and treatment can help. You might start with the [NIAA Alcohol Treatment Navigator](#), your employer's EAP, the [ASAM listing of online support groups](#), or by calling the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) hotline at 1-800-662-HELP.

Source: <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohol-health/overview-alcohol-consumption/alcohol-use-disorders>