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Letter From The Editor

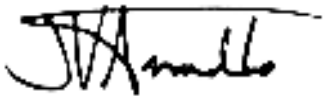
The answer to many of our wellness woes could be growing in our backyards. *From Backyard To Breakthrough,* by Noel F. de Jesus, highlights that the Philippines is a biodiversity hotspot and home to thousands of plant species, many of which have been used medicinally for centuries. It's an interesting feature that makes us look closer at nature.

If you suffer from sleep apnea, as many unfortunately do, then you have to read this month's special feature, *The Silent Thief In The Night,* by Shiela Jimenez. Understanding sleep apnea is one of the most important things any adult can do for their long-term health. The consequences of leaving it untreated reach far beyond the bedroom.

"Scientists rank El Niño as the number one force disturbing climate patterns," says Evangeline Capuno in her feature, *El Niño: The Heat Monster Is Coming.* El Niño is unpredictable. In addition, it is mind-boggling. This weather disturbance is considered an enemy that could cause damage to our environment, agriculture and marine life.

We hope you have been following our social media pages and taking part in our monthly giveaway activities. If you'd like the chance to win a free PhP1,000 gift certificate each month, check us out on Facebook and Instagram. And don't forget to register on the website for our *Mercury & Me* online newsletter - it's free.

As always,



JV Arnaldo

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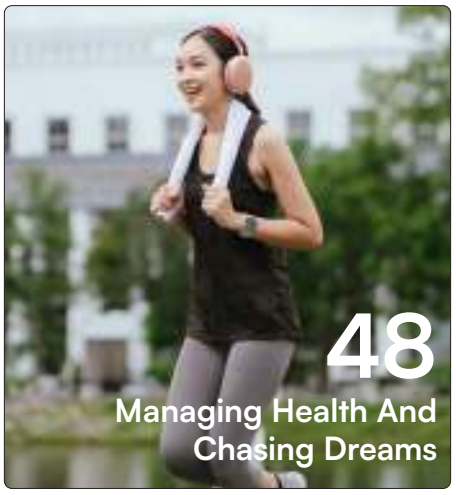
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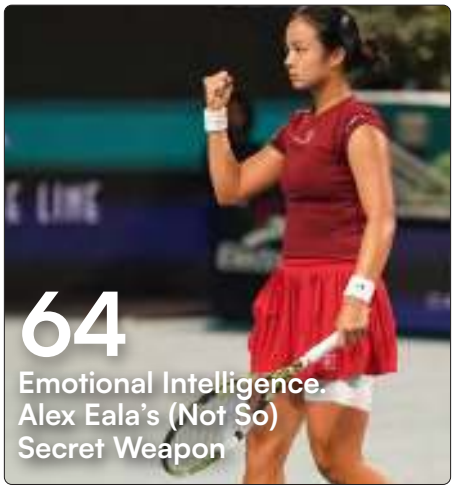


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Superfood Spotlight

BRAZIL NUTS



By Jane Saya

We know that nuts are an important source of nutrients and healthy fats. A mixed bag of nuts will usually contain peanuts, almonds, cashews, walnuts, and a few others. However, one that we might not always see is Brazil nuts. They are not commonly seen in shops or on supermarket shelves here, but are readily available to purchase online. Here's a quick deep dive into what you need to know about Brazil nuts and why we should probably eat a few every now and then.

The Brazil nut comes from very large trees that reach well over a hundred feet in height in the Amazon rainforest. The trees can be found by the banks of rivers and can live for hundreds of years. Although they are called Brazil nuts, they can also be found in other countries such as Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia, Bolivia, and Peru. Even though other countries grow and produce these nuts, Brazil still remains at the top when it comes to production, while Bolivia leads when it comes to exports.

Brazil nuts may be hard to find and may cost quite a bit compared to other nuts due to the production and economic viability. Every year, usually during the months of January to March, gatherers known as *castañeros* harvest the nuts. Since the trees grow so high, you have to wait for the coconut-like shells to fall to the ground. This usually occurs during the rainy season, and it is dangerous since they have very hard shells, and falling from such a height has the ability to cause serious injury. The castañeros build camps near the harvesting areas, and they roam the forest collecting the coconut-like shells and using a machete to open them up. The seeds are taken and sent to a processing plant where they are inspected, peeled, and cleaned.

If you're wondering how these trees continue to naturally propagate, it is due to a couple of special pollinators and planters. There are specific kinds of bees that are capable of pollinating the flowers that are produced by the trees. Along with this, large rodents called agouti are the only animals that are capable of opening the shells when they fall to the ground. When they open them up, what doesn't get eaten eventually gets planted and can start to germinate. This leads to new saplings and trees that will continue to grow for a very long time. The natural cycle of Brazil nuts is one of the most interesting aspects of it. Even without human intervention, nature really does take its course!

What makes Brazil nuts a superfood is that they are high in selenium. Selenium is a mineral that many don't know about. It is an antioxidant and can greatly help our immune system. In our body, selenium is normally found in the liver, spleen, and lymph nodes. It is also important for our brain health since when we are depleted of this mineral, our neurotransmitters can be altered. In extreme cases, it can contribute to seizures in children and cognitive decline in the elderly.

On the other hand, consuming too much selenium is toxic to our bodies. It can cause hair loss, brittle nails, nausea, stomach problems, difficulty in breathing, fatigue, nerve damage, kidney failure, and other uncomfortable outcomes. The recommended amount to be consumed daily is one to three nuts only.

There are other foods that also contain selenium, such as seafood, namely tuna, sardines, and shrimp, and organ meats such as beef liver and lamb tongue. It can also be found in dairy, like cottage cheese and yogurt, as well as grains like brown rice and oats. However, Brazil nuts remain the highest source when it comes to the amount of selenium per ounce. When it comes to plants, fruits, and vegetables that contain selenium, the amount that can be traced will depend on the kind of soil the fruits and vegetables were grown in. If you are looking for a quick and highly effective food source of selenium, then your best bet is the mighty Brazil nut.

You might be wondering how you can eat or add Brazil nuts to your diet. The easiest answer is that you can eat one to three nuts in the same way you eat other types of nuts. Just raw or roasted will do if you are looking to supplement your selenium levels. If you don't want to eat them like a snack, you can take one to three nuts, chop them up finely, and add them to your oatmeal in the morning, or use them as a salad topper for your lunches or dinners to add texture as well as nutrition. When on the go, you can quickly add them to your smoothie, which is a convenient way to consume them since it requires minimal effort and can be done quickly. Lastly, you can add them to baked goods such as cookies and brownies, just always be mindful of the amount you are using and consuming. ●

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FACT #01



The Roswell Incident. A mysterious object crashed near Roswell, New Mexico, in July 1947, sparking decades of UFO theories that continue to this day.

By Noman Karl O. Banayat, M.D.

MEDICINE IN THE WORKPLACE

Building A Life-Saving Workplace

The Importance Of CPR Training



People don't usually expect to see someone having a medical emergency in their daily life. But sudden cardiac arrest can occur to anyone, anytime, anywhere. It happens without warning, and when it does, how the patient comes out in the end depends on how fast people nearby are able to respond.

In the Philippines, cardiovascular disease continues to be a major public health concern. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), in 2023, the leading cause of death in the country was heart disease, with between almost 118,000 to 127,000 cases,, around 19 percent of the total deaths in the country. A reality that has the potential to be greatly reduced had immediate cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) been performed by bystanders, which has been seen to increase survival rates in these cases.

These numbers point to a gap that workplaces are in a strong position to address.

Understanding Workplace Risk

While cardiac arrest can affect anyone, there are also certain work conditions that increase the chances of having an emergency at work. High stress, long hours, physically demanding work, and exposure to high heat all place added stress on the body. Any pre-existing conditions of the employee can also increase this risk.

"Offices don't always have an ambulance readily accessible, and given the state of traffic in the country, the response time of emergency medical services can be greatly affected. In many cases, the people already on-site become the real first responders. Something that isn't too much of a challenge when employees are trained and confident, then they can act immediately instead of waiting"

FACT #02



The inaugural Tour de France began on July 1, 1903, making it one of the world's oldest and most celebrated sporting events.



This is why prevention and screening have an important role in these areas. Encouraging regular health checks, promoting balanced nutrition, supporting physical activity, especially for those who have a sedentary workplace, and managing workload can all help reduce the chances of a cardiac event.

Having a workplace that is able to support the overall health of its employees is better positioned to prevent emergencies from happening.

Immediate Action Matters

Cardiac arrest occurs when the heart suddenly stops pumping blood. Oxygen supply to the brain is cut off almost instantly. Within minutes, the risk of permanent damage or death increases rapidly.

CPR is a lifesaving procedure that helps keep blood circulating until professional medical help arrives. If done correctly and promptly, it can increase an individual's chances of survival by two to three times. With CPR, blood flow is maintained even when the heart has stopped beating, and it can even restart the heart.

Offices don't always have an ambulance readily accessible, and given the state of traffic in the country, the response time of emergency medical services can be greatly affected. In a lot of cases, the people who are already on-site become the real first responders. Something that isn't too much of a challenge when employees are trained and confident, then they can act immediately instead of waiting.

This is why I believe that CPR readiness should be treated as a standard safety measure and not an optional activity. Occupational health and safety programs in companies are expected to have clear plans for health emergencies, and cardiac arrest response should be included in that system. At the moment, knowledge and skills to address such an emergency are limited to the health team. Increasing the number of people who know how to do CPR would not only help decrease the burden on the health team during emergencies but also give them the opportunity to delegate tasks properly and coordinate efficiently.

Organizations can integrate this into their structure by assigning trained responders across all teams and then making sure that they are able to share their knowledge with their peers. Even if there are only a few members of the team who are highly skilled, they would be able to do wonders during emergencies, as they would be able to guide their peers.

A Responsibility That Saves Lives

Readiness is not just about training or equipment. It depends on how people think and respond in critical moments.

Employees need to feel confident stepping in during emergencies. That confidence comes from practice, clear guidance, and visible support from leadership. When management actively promotes safety programs and recognizes participation, it sets the tone for the entire organization.

A great initiative that we can look at is by ARISE Philippines, who has partnered with the Department of Health's Health Emergency Management Bureau in trying to train anyone on hands-only CPR in an effort to increase the survival rates in cardiac arrest cases, particularly those that happen outside of the hospital.

A culture of preparedness ensures that action is immediate, not delayed by fear or uncertainty. ●

FACT #03



The world's population officially reached 5 billion on July 11, 1987, a milestone marked by the United Nations.

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Diabetes Corner





TOMATO, CELERY & APPLE DIABETIC-FRIENDLY SMOOTHIE

This tasty smoothie is good for people with diabetes because it's low in sugar and high in fiber, which helps keep blood glucose levels steady.

What You'll Need

1 medium ripe tomato
1 stalk celery
½ small green apple
1 tablespoon chia seeds
½ cup unsweetened almond milk (or water)
½ inch piece of ginger
Juice of ½ lemon

Procedure

Chop the tomato, celery, ginger and apple. Add everything into a blender. Blend until smooth and drink fresh. You can pour over a few ice cubes if you prefer it chilled. ●

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FACT #04



Fought from July 1 to 3, 1863, the Battle of Gettysburg is widely regarded as a major turning point of the American Civil War.



CHICKEN WITH GREEN MANGO AND GINGER

This diabetes-friendly "Adobo Twist" chicken with green mango dish is safe and suitable because it combines lean protein, low-sugar fruit, and a vinegar-based seasoning without added sugar, helping to support more stable blood sugar levels.

What You'll Need

2 skinless chicken breasts or thighs (cut into pieces)
½ cup green mango, sliced thin
3 cloves garlic (minced)
1 thumb-size ginger (sliced)
2 tablespoons soy sauce (low sodium if possible)
2 tablespoons vinegar (cane or coconut vinegar)
1 tablespoon olive oil or coconut oil
½ cup water or low-sodium broth
Black pepper to taste
Optional: chili for heat

Procedure

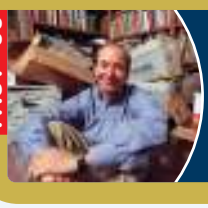
Heat oil in a pan, sauté garlic and ginger until fragrant. Add chicken and cook until lightly browned. Pour in soy sauce, vinegar and water/broth.

Let it simmer for 10 to 15 minutes until the chicken is cooked through. Add the green mango slices in the last two to three minutes (so they stay slightly crisp).

Season with pepper (and chili if you like). ●

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FACT #05



Amazon online bookstore was launched by Jeff Bezos in July 1995.

Just Be



By Mae Anacay-Banayat

KNOW YOUR WORTH

I want you to be very honest with yourself right now. What do you think makes you worthy? Is it because you have a good job, you put food on the table, and you provide stability for your family? Is it because you have a degree, you're affiliated with a big company, or you have a lot of savings in the bank? Is it because you have accomplished a lot of things in your life, you are married to the love of your life, you have perfect little children, and your life is good? Are you worthy because of your contributions to society… or are you worthy because you are you?

The last statement is most likely not something that you expected, but I've recently learned that people use external factors to measure their self-worth. This is something that happened firsthand: I thought I was a valuable member of my team, as my line manager keeps thanking me every day for all the things I'm doing for the team. I keep getting praises from my colleagues and the leadership team, and I keep getting commendations for my high performance. But when it came to me asking for a raise, all of these praises suddenly turned quiet. The feedback then became: you can leave, as long as you render your notice period.

It was like a bucket of cold water was poured on me. Instantly, my sense of self was shattered. I thought I was irreplaceable. I thought they depended on me to keep things business as usual, so why is it that they're willing to lose me? Why is it suddenly such an easy task to lose your star performer over something as minuscule as a raise? If budget was an issue, why didn't they even offer a plan where the promotion or increase could be in increments rather than a big chunk? I had so many questions, but at the end of the day, it became obvious that how I see myself as a strong contributor to this team is not how they see me. And that shattered me.

It made me realize that I was measuring my self-worth based on external scales. This is a common narrative, according to Rebeca, the therapist behind Serenity Sessions Online Counseling and Therapy. She writes, "When we measure our worth using external scales, we're constantly at the mercy of things we can't control. People's opinions change. Trends fade. Success is fickle. And no matter how hard you try, you can't please everyone." And she should know, as Rebeca has over 20 years of counseling and therapy experience, holds a Master's in Health Psychology, a Level 4 Diploma in Therapeutic Counseling, and a Bachelor's in Psychology. You can take her word for it.

While it's human to measure your self-worth by external scales, it also comes with the pitfalls of misplaced self-worth. Once the outside world's perception of you changes, you would feel confused, experience self-doubt, and emotional instability. I know I did, and I had spent so many emotions and sleepless nights trying to reconcile who I know myself to be, and who I thought I was to other people. It took this nugget of wisdom from my therapist to break through the noise: "Their perception of you is not who you are. It is their perception only, but it doesn't represent who you are as a person. Your worth is not measured by your efforts. Your worth is measured by who you are."

Knowing Your Worth With The Right Scales

Psychology Today says, "When you know who you are, and you're pleased with the person you've become, you'll experience a sense of peace through life's inevitable ups and downs. You'll believe in yourself regardless of whether you've been fired,



FACT #06

Louise Brown, the world's first successful test-tube baby, was born on July 25, 1978, at Oldham General Hospital in England.



Disclaimer: This article is based on the author's personal experiences and should not be taken as medical advice. Should you need guidance, please consult a professional.

gone through a divorce, or failed to get a promotion."

You see, you have to know your inherent value based on who you are, and not on how other people see you. You don't need *external* validation; you need *your* validation. You don't need to measure yourself against a yardstick that you cannot control; you must measure your worth against a yardstick that matters to you.

I like to think of it this way: who do you want to be? This best version of yourself. What are your values, your morals, what do you believe in? Are you loving, kind and honest? Do you always act with integrity? Where do you stack now against that version of yourself in your head? What do you need to adjust and address so that you can be the best version of yourself? Remember, this is not about external factors; this is about who you are at your core. This is knowing what you stand for and understanding your true value.

Living Your Best Life With The Best Version Of Yourself

Once you see how your daily actions reflect your values, you will be able to adjust your actions and thought processes accordingly to remind yourself that you are worthy. You have to practice compassion and forgive yourself; know that you are human and fallible, but you are still worthy.

Instead of focusing on things that you cannot control, such as your job, your net worth, or your relationships, focus on things that you can control. Celebrate your uniqueness. Recognize that you do make an impact on the lives of other people. Accept that you have flaws, but despite all of them, you are still worthy.

It takes time, but eventually you will get there. By constantly adjusting your thought processes, assessing where you stand with your "map" of who you should be, acting within your moral guardrails, upholding your values, and simply being yourself, you can raise your self-worth.

I'd like to end this with a line from Eleanor Roosevelt, made popular by *Princess Diaries:* "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." Change the narrative, and see yourself in a new light. Know that you are worthy at all times; no ifs and buts. Believe in *you*, and you will see that you will blossom into the best version of yourself. ●

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Home Safety First

By Mona Sabalones Gonzalez



YOUR MICROWAVE CAN HELP YOU, OR HURT YOU



Microwaves are useful and convenient, whether you live in a studio apartment or a mansion. You can cook food in it like an oven, or heat refrigerated food just before meals. You can also defrost frozen food. I like using it to heat water in my mug for my coffee. Note: Don't heat your coffee in a mug inside the microwave. It alters the taste. Instead, heat only the water in your mug, then add the coffee afterward.

Microwaves are generally safe, but they can be dangerous, too, especially if you don't use them knowledgeably. You might have a microwave fire or damage your cooking equipment. So here are some tips for home safety when using your microwave.

Preparation

First, when you buy your microwave, read the manual. This is what I didn't do with my first microwave. As a result, I put a pan with a metal handle in it, causing sparks and ruining my first microwave. On the upside, I turned it off immediately after, so the sparks didn't turn into a fire.

So, when you buy your microwave, read the manual. Maybe you should do that even with your second, third, and fourth microwaves, and so on down the line, because many microwaves have slight differences. Even if you're accustomed to a microwave, you want to know its intricacies





> **"IT'S HARD TO TELL WHETHER YOU'VE HEATED WATER BEYOND ITS BOILING POINT IN A MICROWAVE BECAUSE WATER THAT IS BOILED IN A TEAPOT NATURALLY FORMS BUBBLES, AND THE TEAPOT WHISTLES. BUT IN A MICROWAVE, THAT DOESN'T HAPPEN. THERE ARE NO BUBBLES, SO IT MAY END UP SUPERHEATING INSTEAD"**

and nuances. That way, you can use it safely and properly, according to Whirlpool Appliances. You will also be able to avoid damage, injury, and other mistakes. So, start smart.

Also, be sure to use microwave-safe containers. Plastics are usually okay and microwave-safe. But some plastics melt inside a microwave, releasing harmful chemicals into your food. Another material to watch out for is metal, as mentioned above, which can cause sparks. Avoid wood, too, as it can cause fires.

Also, not all dinnerware is microwave-safe. Are your plates antiques from your great, great-grandmother? They may be fine and beautiful, but they are not microwave-safe, especially if they were made before microwaves were invented. Also, read the labels of ceramic or glass to ensure that they're microwave-safe.

To get the most from your microwave, always choose the right setting. There are different settings for defrosting, reheating, or cooking, among others, Whirlpool says, and if you have the wrong setting, you may end up superheating, something you want to avoid.

It's hard to tell whether you've heated water beyond its boiling point in a microwave because water that is boiled in a teapot naturally forms bubbles, and the teapot whistles. But in a microwave, that doesn't happen. There are no bubbles, so it may end up superheating instead. This may cause a delayed explosion of boiling water and steam on you, resulting in severe first or second-degree burns to the face, hands, and body.



Finally, while a microwave is handy, don't use it for everything. It's only ideal for reheating and simple cooking, not for browning meat.

Radiation

Usually, people are wary of microwave radiation. True, microwaves absorb energy, but they use non-ionizing radiation to move molecular atoms. They don't remove electrons. As a result, microwave radiation won't change your food's chemical makeup. There's no danger of radiation getting into your food, WebMD says.

Also, don't worry about microwave radiation, because the amount of radiation emitted can't alter the atomic structure of food or cause cancer. As long as you use your microwave as the booklet advises, you should be fine, according to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

You also don't need to worry about getting cancer from microwave radiation. What you must worry about is getting burned. Because if that happens, your body tissue will "cook" like a piece of meat. Microwave burns are painful but occur only with exposure to high levels of microwave radiation.

Always keep the microwave door clean and sealed to keep radiation safely inside. Make sure that it's always closed properly.

Also, regularly clean the edges of your microwave door, and make sure it closes tightly so radiation won't escape. Take time to inspect your microwave for cracks or damage, too.

Cooking

When cooking in the microwave, always put food or liquid inside before you start it. Otherwise, there is the risk of damage or fire. Also, remember that microwaves heat water in uncooked foods, raising the temperature to a point where the water can vibrate. Because of this, foods with more water, such as vegetables, will cook more quickly than those with less water. For example, meats have a lower water content, so they'll cook more slowly than vegetables.

When you reheat food in your microwave, make sure it heats evenly; otherwise, it could create cold spots that are prone to bacterial growth. Also, beware of hot spots, as they can burn.

When cooking, wait until you're halfway done, then stir the food. Also, when removing containers, use mitts, and inspect the food to make sure it's heated thoroughly.

Don't heat nonfood items in the microwave. Don't leave sponges in the microwave to "sanitize" them. Wet sponges quickly dry and can catch fire. Also, clothing such as shoes, gloves, or socks shouldn't be put in the microwave. You can't dry them in the microwave; you may get scorch marks, or synthetic materials may melt.

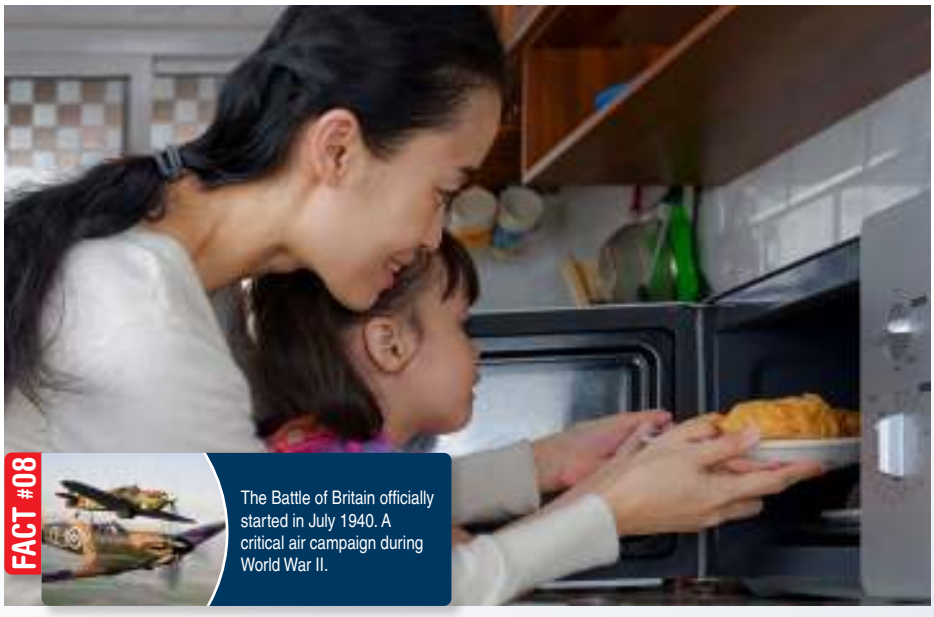
Don't run your microwave if there's nothing inside it. This will cause electromagnetic energy to bounce back, damaging your microwave and potentially causing a fire.

Safety

Watch your children when they're around the microwave. It may be easy to use, but that doesn't mean children can use it unsupervised. Also, teach your children basic microwave safety information, such as which containers are safe to use, how to avoid burns, and when to ask for help. Teaching your children will protect them from harm. But even if you teach them, they should still be supervised when they use it.

Regularly check and maintain your microwave. Be mindful of strange noises, a broken door or seal, and burning smells. If your microwave seems off, call a repairman.

Microwaves simplify our lives, but only when we use and maintain them correctly. By being mindful of how you use your microwave, you can maintain microwave and kitchen safety. Microwaves are convenient, but use them wisely. ●



FACT #08

The Battle of Britain officially started in July 1940. A critical air campaign during World War II.

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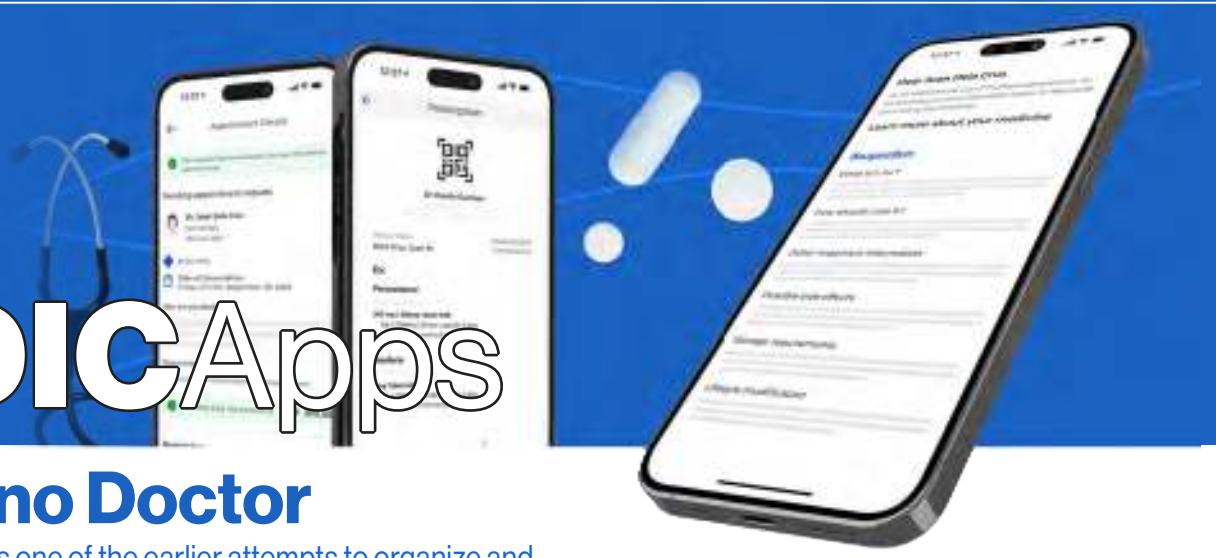


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By Mikee Gan

MEDICApps

The Filipino Doctor

The Filipino Doctor app is one of the earlier attempts to organize and digitize healthcare access in the Philippines, and its story is closely tied to the country's steady shift toward telemedicine and digital health services.

It was developed by Medicomm Pacific, Inc., a Philippine company founded in 1992 whose roots lie in healthcare publishing rather than technology. The idea behind the platform came from a very practical problem in local healthcare: patients often struggled to find the right specialist, schedules were inconsistent or not publicly accessible, and most consultations and prescriptions still depended heavily on phone calls, walk-ins, or paper records. For doctors, managing appointments and patient communication outside the clinic was also fragmented and time-consuming.

The Filipino Doctor app was created as a response to this gap. Formerly known as PPD Patient, a name that reflects its origins within Medicomm Pacific's pharmaceutical directory ecosystem, it gradually evolved into a more complete telehealth platform. At its core, it allows patients to search for licensed Filipino physicians across different specialties, view their clinic schedules, and book appointments either for in-person visits or online consultations. Over time, it expanded to include direct communication features such as built-in chat and video consultations, which became especially relevant during and after the COVID-19 pandemic when remote healthcare access became more important.



A key part of the app's development was its shift from simple listings to actual clinical interaction tools. Doctors using the platform can issue electronic prescriptions, medical certificates, and requests for diagnostic and laboratory tests after consultations. Patients, in turn, can store these records digitally within the app, reducing reliance on physical paperwork and making follow-ups easier. In some cases, depending on location and clinic participation, prescriptions can also be linked to pharmacy fulfillment or delivery services, although this option is currently limited to Metro Manila through the TFD Health Store — a far narrower reach than the fully integrated health systems found in other countries.

The app also serves as a bridge between patients and the broader Philippine medical community. It includes a searchable database of registered physicians drawn from practicing doctor profiles across the country, helping users identify and connect with legitimate healthcare providers. This is particularly important in a healthcare environment where access and trust are major concerns. For many users, especially in urban areas like Metro Manila, the app became a practical tool for accessing private healthcare more quickly without going through traditional appointment bottlenecks.

Despite its usefulness, The Filipino Doctor is not a centralized national healthcare system. Its adoption varies depending on the doctor, clinic, and region. Some physicians actively use it as part of their daily practice, especially in private clinics and telemedicine-focused setups, while others rely on more traditional workflows. In the broader context, the app represents an early step in the Philippines' digital health transformation. While countries with more centralized healthcare systems have more integrated platforms, The Filipino Doctor reflects a more decentralized reality where private companies, clinics, and independent practitioners adopt digital tools at different rates. Its significance lies less in being a dominant system and more in being part of the foundation that introduced structured telemedicine and digital doctor-patient connectivity to the Philippine setting.

Overall, The Filipino Doctor app can be seen as the digital evolution of a healthcare publishing company's long-standing mission to make medical information more accessible. It now sits in the middle of traditional and digital healthcare in the Philippines, bridging the gap, but not yet replacing the older systems it was designed to improve. ●

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BY LUKE JOHNSTON

SPORTING ICONS



JUDD TRUMP

Sport: Snooker
Born: 20 August 1989
Birthplace: Bristol, United Kingdom

It was clear from a very young age that snooker would play a defining role in Trump's life. He picked up the sport early and quickly stood out as a rare talent, combining natural cue power with an instinctive attacking style that set him apart from other young players. By his early teens, he was already competing at a level far beyond his age group. His reputation as a prodigy grew when he became one of the youngest players to compile a maximum break in practice conditions. That early promise soon turned into a professional career when he joined the main snooker tour in 2005 at just 16 years old.

In the early years of his professional journey, Trump showed flashes of brilliance but also faced the usual challenges of adapting to the elite level. His breakthrough came as he began to develop consistency alongside his natural flair. In 2011, he reached the final of the World Snooker Championship, announcing himself on the biggest stage even though he lost to John Higgins. That same year proved to be a turning point, as he captured his first ranking title at the China Open and followed it up with a stunning victory at the UK Championship, one of snooker's most prestigious events. These achievements marked him as one of the sport's brightest rising stars and suggested that major success was only a matter of time.

As his career progressed, Trump's game matured while still retaining its aggressive identity. He became known for taking on ambitious pots, building heavy scoring breaks, and playing at a pace that often overwhelmed opponents. His hard work and natural ability eventually came together in 2019, a defining year in his career. That season, he won the Masters and then reached the peak of the sport by claiming his first World Snooker Championship title at the Crucible Theatre, beating John Higgins 18–9. The victories confirmed his place among snooker's elite and completed the Triple Crown (UK Championship, Masters, and World Championship).

Following his world title, Trump reached world number one and established a period of sustained dominance. He continued to collect ranking titles, reaching 31 by early 2026, and became one of the most prolific break-builders in the history of the sport.



FACT #10

The Trinity nuclear test took place on July 16, 1945. It was the first detonation of a nuclear weapon.

His scoring power reached historic levels: he holds the record for the most century breaks in a single season (107 in 2024–25) and has compiled more than 1,148 career centuries. This consistency, combined with his natural flair, has kept him at the top of the game for years.

In more recent seasons, Trump has continued to add to his legacy, including a second UK Championship title in 2024, a second Masters title in 2023, and further ranking victories such as the 2026 German Masters. Even as new generations of players have emerged, he has remained one of the most dangerous, entertaining, and consistent competitors on the tour, currently holding the world number one ranking.

Today, Judd Trump is widely regarded as one of the greatest snooker players of his era. His career has been defined by a rapid rise, fearless attacking play, major championship victories, and record-setting scoring ability. From a talented boy in Bristol to a world champion, multiple Triple Crown winner, and all-time great, his journey reflects both natural genius and sustained excellence at the very highest level of the sport. ●

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FAMOUS FILIPINOS

By Vincent Tajanlangit



▶ Nick Joaquin

Nick Joaquin's story begins in the old districts of Manila, where he was born on May 4, 1917, into a Philippines still under American rule yet steeped in the lingering echoes of Spanish colonial culture. Churches, traditions, and everyday life carried the layered marks of history, influences that would later form the very heart of his writing.

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Joaquin did not follow a conventional academic path. Largely self-educated, he read voraciously, observed the world around him with keen insight, and gradually forged a distinctive literary voice, one that allowed him to understand his nation more deeply than most.

He chose to write primarily in English, mastering the language with a richness and elegance that set his work apart. For his journalistic pieces, he adopted the pen name Quijano de Manila. His stories were never mere tales; they were profound reflections on identity, memory, and the weight of history. In landmark works such as *The Woman Who Had Two Navels* and *A Portrait of the Artist as Filipino*, Joaquin explored the tension between tradition and modernity, portraying characters caught between the pull of the past and the demands of change. Blending realism with myth, folklore, religion, and cultural ritual, his narratives felt both timeless and unmistakably Filipino.

Joaquin lived through some of the most turbulent chapters in Philippine history, including the Japanese occupation during World War II. These experiences sharpened his understanding of the Filipino condition. Rather than simply chronicling events, he probed how history continually shapes a people's identity. For him, the past was never truly past; it lived on within the present, a conviction that infused both his fiction and nonfiction.

Beyond literature, Joaquin distinguished himself as a journalist and historian. In books like *Manila, My Manila* and *Culture and History,* he revisited the nation's heritage with a thoughtful, often critical eye. He urged Filipinos to reclaim their past not as a burden, but as a vital source of identity and strength, inviting readers to see history not as dry dates and facts, but as a living narrative that explains who they are.

Joaquin was named National Artist of the Philippines for Literature in 1976, the country's highest honor for artists. He later received the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 1996, affirming his influence across Asia as well as at home.

Nick Joaquin passed away on April 29, 2004, at the age of 86. He left behind a rich body of work that continues to resonate with readers and scholars alike. His true legacy lies not only in his books, but in the way he taught a nation to see and understand itself more clearly.

Through his stories, essays, and historical writings, Joaquin gave a powerful voice to the complex, layered Filipino experience—deeply rooted in history yet always alive in the present. His life and work remain a bridge between past and future, reminding every generation that identity is shaped as much by where we have been as by where we are going. ●

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Source: www.orthopedicshoulder.com

Seven Tips And Benefits For Good Sitting Posture



1. Strengthen your core

The core is the group of trunk and hip muscles that stabilize the spine and facilitate movement. Exercises such as planks, side planks, and bridges can help strengthen your core muscles.

2. Stretch regularly

Regular stretching can help keep your muscles flexible and reduce muscle tension. Include stretches for your chest, shoulders, neck, and hips.

3. Sit correctly

When sitting, keep your feet flat on the ground and your back straight. Make sure that your hips are pushed back against the chair, and use a cushion or a rolled-up towel to support your lower back.

4. Stand tall

When standing, make sure that your shoulders are back and down, your chin is parallel to the floor, and your knees are slightly bent. Keep your weight evenly distributed on both feet.

5. Take frequent breaks

If you sit for long periods, make sure to take regular breaks. Stand up and move around to help reduce the strain on your back and neck muscles.

6. Use ergonomic equipment

Ergonomic chairs, keyboards, and mouse pads will help support your body in the correct posture while working.

7. Get regular exercise

Regular exercise will strengthen your muscles, improve your flexibility and help improve your posture.

Source: www.doctorondemand.com

Here Are Five Tips To Keep Your Digestive System Healthy



1. Eat healthy foods

Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables and both insoluble and soluble fiber. Soluble fiber found in foods like oat bran, barley, nuts, seeds, and beans helps your digestive system absorb water. Insoluble fiber found in foods like wheat bran, vegetables, and whole grains keeps everything moving through your digestive tract.

2. Stay hydrated

Drinking plenty of water helps your digestive system function smoothly. Typically, it's recommended that women drink 2.7 liters of water per day, and that men drink 3.7 liters per day.

3. Take probiotics

Probiotics are the good bacteria in your stomach. They can be added to your diet by eating yogurt or other fermented foods; they can also be taken as daily supplements.

4. Get moving

Exercise increases blood flow and metabolism for smoother digestion.

5. See a doctor

If you experience digestive problems regularly, it's important to see a doctor who can help track your digestive health and manage your symptoms. ●

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TRIVIA

Source: www.nih.gov.com

Laughter can actually decrease pain and release happy hormones.

When you laugh, your body releases endorphins, which help you feel happier. These happy hormones boost your mental health. This can also lead to less pain.

Source: www.evidation.com

Drinking a cup of coffee can reduce feelings of depression.

One study found that a cup of coffee can boost your mood and lower your risk of depression. But don't go for the decaf. You need caffeine for this effect.

Source: www.heart.org

Owning a dog may reduce the risk of heart disease.

The American Heart Association says owning pets improves mental health and may lower blood pressure and cholesterol levels, lowering your risk for heart disease.

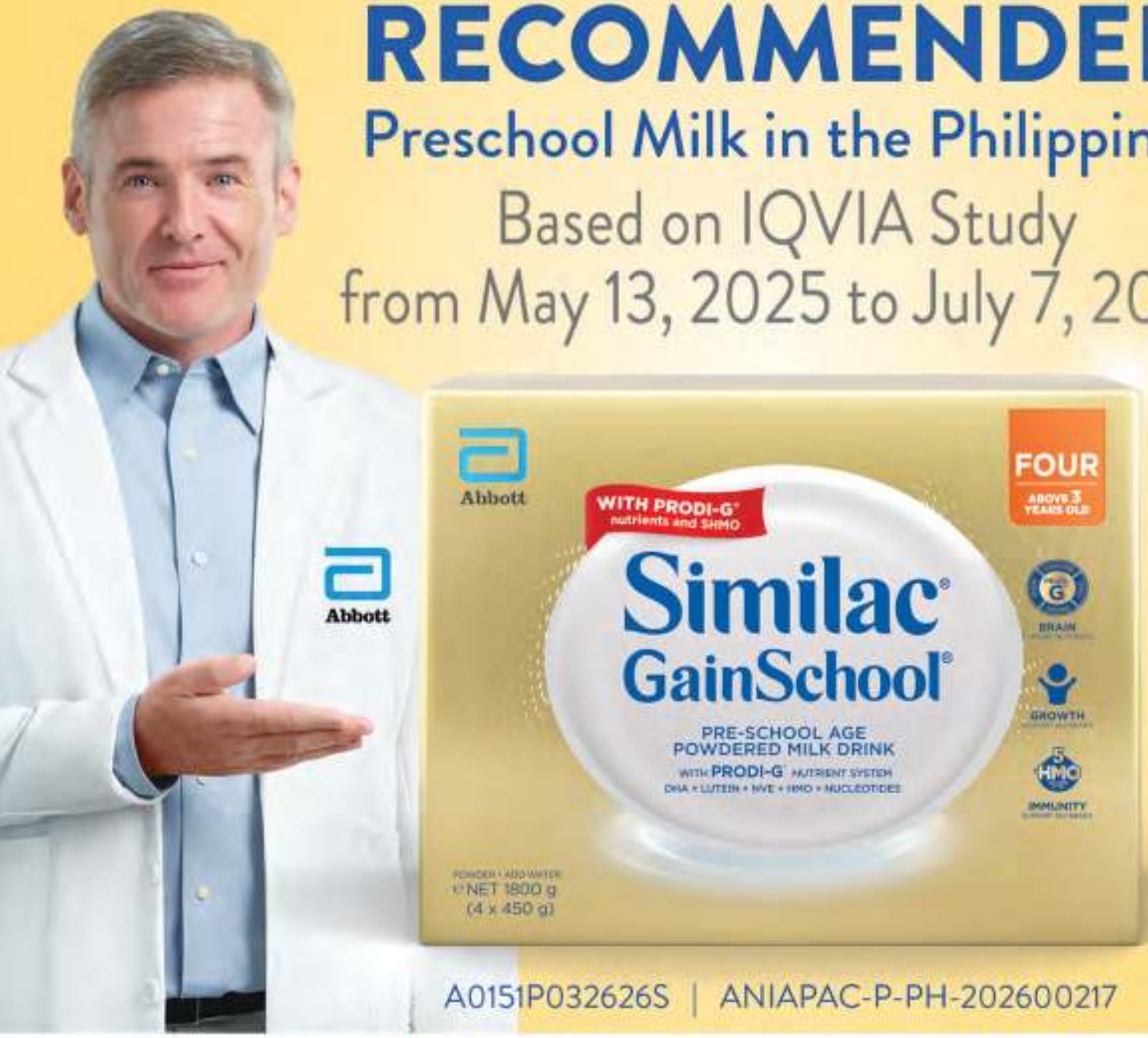
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THE SILENT THIEF IN THE NIGHT

By Shiela Jimenez

Imagine drifting off each night believing you are getting a full seven or eight hours of rest, only to wake exhausted, irritable, and foggy every single morning. I often experience things like this myself. It's not pleasant. For the estimated one billion people worldwide living with obstructive sleep apnea, and the many millions more who remain undiagnosed, this is not a metaphor. It is daily life. Sleep apnea is a chronic condition in which breathing repeatedly stops and starts throughout the night, fragmenting sleep so severely that our body and mind never fully recover. Yet because its most dramatic episodes happen while we are unconscious, it often goes unnoticed for years, quietly doing damage that extends well beyond tiredness.

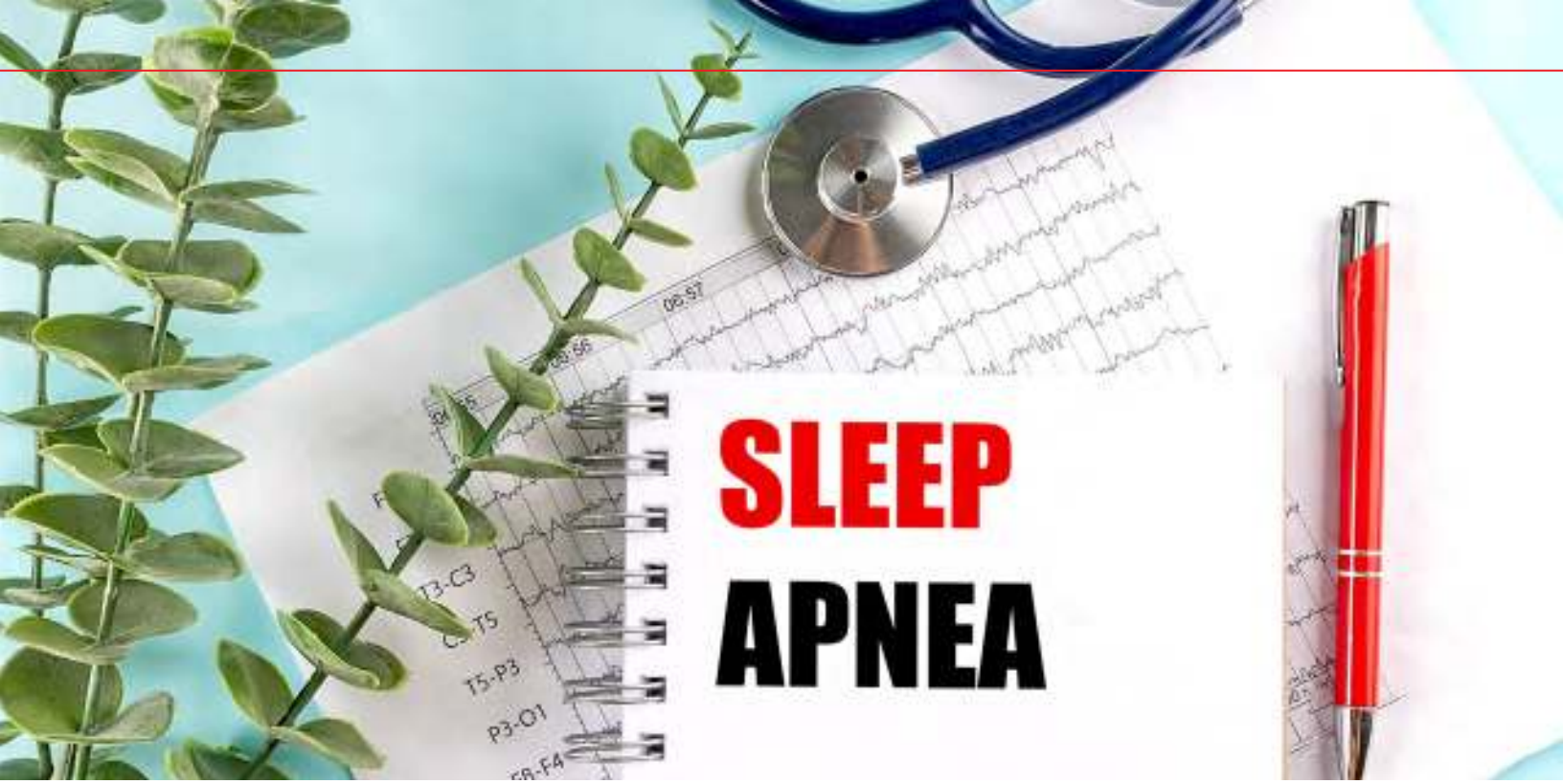
Understanding sleep apnea, what it is, what drives it, and what modern medicine can do about it, is one of the most important things any adult can do for their long-term health. The consequences of leaving it untreated reach far beyond the bedroom.

What Is Sleep Apnea?

Sleep apnea belongs to a family of sleep-disordered breathing conditions. The word "apnea" comes from the Greek for "without breath," and that is precisely what happens: during sleep, breathing pauses for 10 seconds or longer, sometimes hundreds of times a night. These pauses drop oxygen levels in the blood, trigger micro-arousals in the brain, and disrupt the architecture of sleep in ways that a standard alarm clock, or even a sleeping partner, may never detect.

There are three distinct forms. Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is by far the most common, accounting for the vast majority of cases. It occurs when the muscles at the back of the throat relax excessively during sleep, causing the soft tissue to collapse and physically block the airway. Central sleep apnea is less common and neurological in origin: the brain simply fails to send the correct signals to the muscles that control breathing. Complex or mixed sleep apnea combines elements of both.





The hallmark symptom is loud, persistent snoring, often followed by a sudden silence, then a gasp or choking sound as the body forces itself to breathe again. But snoring is not the whole picture. Daytime sleepiness so profound that people fall asleep at desks or behind the wheel, morning headaches, dry mouth, difficulty concentrating, mood swings, and a reduced interest in sex are all common complaints. In children, the signs can be even more subtle: restless sleep, bedwetting, behavioral problems at school, or simply breathing through the mouth.

What Causes It?

Sleep apnea does not have a single cause. It comes from a mix of anatomy, physiology, lifestyle, and genetics, which is part of why it remains so widespread and so underdiagnosed.

The strongest risk factor for sleep apnea is excess weight, particularly when fat deposits accumulate around the neck and upper airway. A neck circumference greater than forty centimeters in women or forty-three centimeters in men is considered a clinical warning sign. A narrow or recessed jaw, a large tongue, or enlarged tonsils and adenoids can all reduce the airway's functional space, especially when muscle tone drops during sleep.

Age is another significant factor. As we get older, the muscles that hold the airway open lose tone and elasticity. Men are roughly twice as likely as women to develop sleep apnea during their working years, though the risk for women rises sharply after menopause, bringing it close to parity. There is also a strong hereditary component: if a parent or sibling has sleep apnea, your own risk is much higher, even when other variables are taken into account.

Lifestyle choices play a clear role as well. Alcohol relaxes the throat muscles further and suppresses the arousal response that would normally wake a sleeping person when oxygen dips. Sleeping on your back allows gravity to pull the tongue and soft palate backward. Smoking inflames the upper airway tissues. Sedatives, including certain prescription sleep aids, deepen sleep in ways that can worsen breathing. And nasal congestion, whether from allergies, a deviated septum, or a persistent cold, forces mouth breathing and increases the work the airway must do.

Why It Matters Beyond Tiredness

The dangers of sleep apnea extend well beyond the fatigue and poor concentration that patients most frequently complain about. Each time breathing pauses, oxygen levels fall, and the body's stress response activates, flooding the bloodstream with adrenaline. Repeated hundreds of times a night, night after night, creates a constant state of physiological strain with many unpleasant consequences.

Cardiovascular disease sits at the top of the list. People with untreated sleep apnea are significantly more likely to develop high blood pressure, often treatment-resistant hypertension that does not respond well to medication, because the underlying trigger is never addressed. The condition is an independent risk factor for heart attack, atrial fibrillation, stroke, and heart failure. Metabolic health suffers too: disrupted sleep impairs insulin sensitivity and glucose regulation, contributing to type 2 diabetes. There is emerging research linking severe untreated OSA to non-alcoholic fatty liver disease, cognitive decline, and even certain cancers.

The mental health toll is equally serious. Chronic sleep deprivation caused by apnea is strongly associated with depression and anxiety. Some studies have found that successfully treating OSA brings big improvements in mood that rival those of antidepressant medication. And the dangers are not confined to the individual: drowsy driving caused by unrecognized sleep apnea is a significant public safety issue, responsible for a disproportionate share of road accidents.

Diagnosis

For all its prevalence, sleep apnea is chronically underdiagnosed. Because we are asleep during episodes, we have no idea anything is wrong until a partner tells us of the snoring and gasping, or a doctor notices

secondary signs such as uncontrolled blood pressure or daytime sleepiness during a routine check-up.

The gold standard for diagnosis is a polysomnography, or overnight sleep study, conducted in a specialist sleep laboratory. Electrodes and sensors monitor brain activity, heart rate, eye movement, breathing effort, oxygen levels, and limb movement throughout the night. The results are used to calculate an Apnoea-Hypopnoea Index (AHI), the number of breathing events per hour of sleep. An AHI of five to 14 indicates mild sleep apnea; 15 to 29 is moderate; 30 or above is severe.

Home sleep apnea tests, compact devices worn overnight, are now widely available and, for patients without complicating conditions such as heart failure or suspected central apnea, they provide a reliable and far more accessible alternative. If you regularly snore, frequently wake unrefreshed, or experience excessive daytime sleepiness despite what seems like adequate sleep, speaking with your doctor is the most important step you can take.

What We Can Do About It

The good news is that sleep apnea responds well to treatment, and the range of options available has expanded considerably in recent years. Treatment choice depends on severity, and our specific anatomy and physiology, and how well we tolerate different approaches.

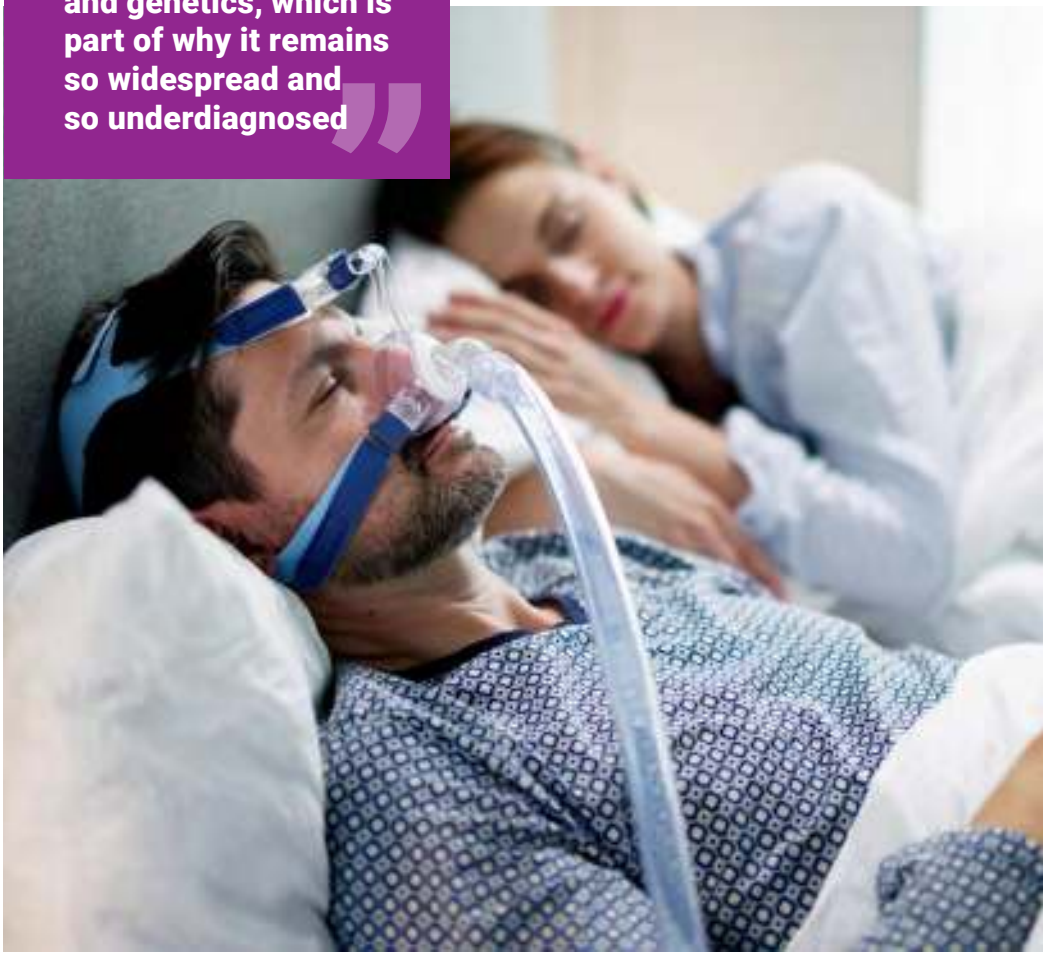
Continuous Positive Airway Pressure therapy, better known as CPAP, remains the most effective treatment for moderate to severe OSA. The patient wears a mask connected to a machine that delivers a steady, gentle stream of pressurized air, physically holding the airway open throughout the night. Modern CPAP machines are quieter, smarter, and more comfortable than earlier generations, with auto-adjusting pressure settings and heated humidifiers to reduce dryness. For patients who find the full-face mask uncomfortable, nasal pillows and other mask styles offer alternatives. Sticking with it is the key challenge: the benefits of CPAP are substantial, but only when it is actually worn.

For mild to moderate OSA, particularly when positional or jaw-related factors are prominent, a mandibular advancement device (MAD), a custom-fitted oral appliance worn like a sports mouthguard, can be highly effective. It works by gently holding the lower jaw forward during sleep, which keeps the tongue and soft tissue from collapsing into the airway.

Lifestyle changes form an essential layer of any treatment plan. Weight loss of even five to 10 percent of body weight can produce dramatic reductions in AHI scores for overweight patients. Sleeping on your side rather than the back, eliminating alcohol in the hours before bed, quitting smoking, and treating nasal congestion aggressively all make a measurable difference. For some patients with mild OSA, these changes alone are sufficient.

When anatomy is the primary issue and other treatments have failed, surgery may be considered. Uvulopalatopharyngoplasty (UPPP) removes or repositions tissue in the throat to widen the airway. Newer procedures, such as hypoglossal nerve stimulation, in which a small implanted device senses breathing patterns and electrically stimulates the tongue muscle to prevent collapse, show strong results for carefully selected patients who cannot tolerate CPAP.

> **"Sleep apnea does not have a single cause. It emerges from a mix of anatomy, physiology, lifestyle, and genetics, which is part of why it remains so widespread and so underdiagnosed"**



A Condition Worth Taking Seriously

Sleep apnea is common, consequential, and, crucially, treatable. Yet it persists as one of medicine's most overlooked conditions, hiding behind the social acceptability of snoring and the normalization of daytime fatigue. If any of the symptoms described here feel familiar, do not wait for exhaustion to become the baseline. A conversation with your doctor and a single night of monitoring could be the beginning of a transformation in your health, your energy, and your quality of life.

The night, it turns out, is not meant to steal anything from you at all. ●

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By Henrylito D. Tacio

HEPATITIS B
It's Deadly But Highly Treatable

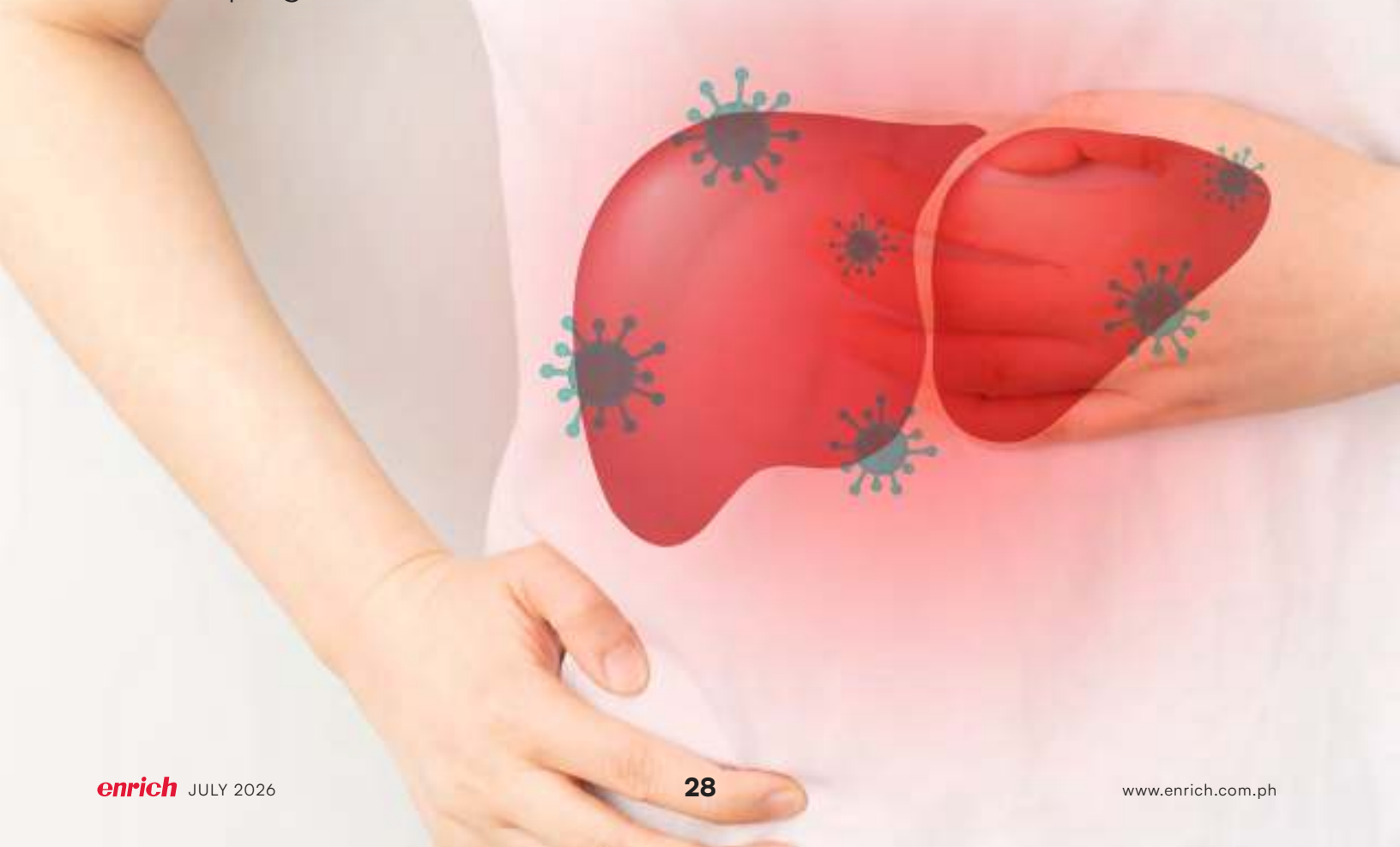
It is just a matter of time. Hepatitis B may soon become a thing of the past, as promising results toward a "functional cure" have emerged for the disease. A functional cure signifies that the chronic hepatitis B virus (HBV) is diminished to undetectable levels in the bloodstream (HBsAg loss with undetectable HBV DNA), enabling some patients to cease treatment while the immune system manages the virus, thereby averting disease progression.

GSK, a worldwide biopharmaceutical company, announced on January 7, 2026, that its candidate drug, bepirovirsen – commonly referred to as bepi – has demonstrated promising results against the disease in its two pivotal Phase 3 trials (B-Well 1 and B-Well 2).

The New England Journal of Medicine reported (from earlier Phase 2b data) that approximately nine to 10 percent of participants who received the drug in conjunction with already-approved treatments exhibited undetectable levels of HBV in their blood for at least 24 weeks following the conclusion of all treatment. Bepi resulted in minimal serious side effects. Phase 3 topline results showed a statistically significant and clinically meaningful functional cure rate (higher than standard care alone); full data are expected later in 2026, with global regulatory filings planned from Q1 2026.

"Bepirovirsen has the potential to transform treatment goals for people living with chronic hepatitis B by achieving significant functional cure rates – a first for the disease," said Dr. Tony Wood, GSK Chief Scientific Officer, in a statement.

This is positive news for Filipinos, as recent modeling estimates place chronic



hepatitis B prevalence at approximately 4.9 percent (2022 data), with higher rates in some adult groups. The significant prevalence of this condition renders hepatitis B a major public health concern within the country, leading to severe health complications.

The HBV is reportedly 50 to 100 times more infectious than the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). A study conducted in 2003 showed the prevalence of hepatitis B was highest among the 20-49 age group, which comprises the country's workforce.

Hepatitis B – a viral infection that can cause both acute and chronic liver disease – accounts for a considerable number of fatalities each year, with global viral hepatitis (mainly B and C) causing around 1.3 million deaths in 2022, or approximately 3,500 deaths per day.

Inflammation Of The Liver

The word "hepatitis" is derived from the Greek term *hepar*, meaning "liver," combined with the Latin suffix -itis, meaning "inflammation." Thus, it literally means "inflammation of the liver." The term was first introduced in the 19th century by the German physician Johann Lukas Schönlein. The earliest recorded use of the term can be traced back to 1699.

There are five primary strains of the hepatitis virus, known as types A, B, C, D, and E. Although all of these strains can lead to liver disease, they vary significantly in several aspects, including transmission methods, severity of the disease, and strategies for prevention.

"Hepatitis is a silent killer," said Dr. Gundo Aurel Weiler, the Director for Data, Strategy, and Innovation at the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific. "Caused by a virus that has no symptoms, it quietly damages the liver for decades before ending in liver cancer and cirrhosis (scarring of the liver that reduces its ability to detoxify blood). Deaths due to hepatitis have increased over the past two decades, with around 1.3 million lives lost in 2022."

Among the five strains, Hepatitis B is regarded as the most severe due to its high level of infectiousness, its asymptomatic characteristics, and the risk of developing chronic infection. The virus can go unnoticed for many years, enabling it to gradually damage the liver over time.

> "Bepirovirsen has the potential to transform treatment goals for people living with chronic hepatitis B by achieving significant functional cure rates – a first for the disease"



Transmission

In areas with a high prevalence of hepatitis B, the virus is primarily transmitted from mother to child during childbirth or through horizontal transmission, particularly from an infected child to an uninfected child within the first five years of life. The occurrence of chronic infection is quite frequent among infants who contract the virus from their mothers or before reaching the age of five.

The HBV can also be transmitted through needlestick injuries, tattooing, body piercing, and contact with infected blood and bodily fluids, including saliva, as well as menstrual, vaginal, and seminal fluids.

"Transmission of the virus may also occur through the sharing or reuse of contaminated needles and syringes or sharp objects either in health care settings, in the community or among persons who inject drugs," the WHO says. "Sexual transmission is more prevalent in unvaccinated persons with multiple sexual partners."

When hepatitis B infection occurs in adulthood, it results in chronic hepatitis in fewer than five percent of instances, while infections contracted during infancy and early childhood result in chronic hepatitis approximately 95 percent of the time. This underscores the importance of enhancing and prioritizing vaccination for infants and young children.

Symptoms

Most people do not experience any symptoms when newly infected. Some people have acute illness with symptoms that last several weeks: yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice), dark urine, feeling very tired, nausea, vomiting, and pain in the abdomen.

Although most people will recover from acute illness, this is not the case for those with chronic hepatitis B. Doctors urged those with chronic hepatitis B not to ignore their situation, as it can result in liver damage, liver failure, liver cancer, or even death. In the Philippines, liver cancer is the fourth most common cancer, with approximately 12,544 new cases in 2022. "Liver cancer carries a poor prognosis,



making it [one of] the leading cause[s] of cancer death locally," says the Hepatology Society of the Philippines (HSP).

Prevention

"Any deaths from preventable diseases are unacceptable, and hepatitis is no exception," says Dr. Weiler. "Nowadays, we can prevent and treat the disease. However, many people with hepatitis do not know they are infected and thus do not seek treatment."

The hepatitis B vaccine, an inactivated viral vaccine given intramuscularly, can prevent the viral disease by offering protection against all HBV subtypes.

The WHO recommends that all infants receive the hepatitis B vaccine promptly after birth, ideally within the first 24 hours. This initial dose is followed by two or three additional doses of the vaccine, spaced at least four weeks apart.

Typically, booster vaccinations are not necessary for individuals who have completed the three-dose vaccination series. The vaccine is effective in providing protection against hepatitis B for a minimum of 20 years, and likely for a lifetime.

The safety of the hepatitis B vaccine has been evaluated by many leading health authorities. "For more than forty years, the hepatitis B vaccine has been thoroughly studied and consistently proven to prevent hepatitis B and liver cancer for infants, children and adults," said the Hepatitis B Foundation. "In the sheer number of lives saved, the vaccine has been one of the greatest public health achievements in the past 100 years."

"To eliminate this deadly disease, the Philippines must invest in hepatitis testing and treatment services," urged Dr. Weiler.

"The Philippines must also continue to strengthen the hepatitis B immunization for infants and adults. Current estimates indicate [around 50 to 57 percent] of newborn infants are administered the hepatitis B birth dose within 24 hours after birth," he added.

Treatment

People living with chronic hepatitis B can be treated with highly effective medicines to stop the disease from progressing and reduce the risk of it developing into liver cancer. Many patients often require lifelong antiviral therapy for viral suppression.

The Mayo Clinic lists the following as treatments for chronic hepatitis B:

Antiviral medications. Numerous antiviral medications can assist in combating the virus and reducing its capacity to harm your liver. These are typically administered orally, often for an extended duration. Physicians may suggest the combination of two such medications. Alternatively, the physician might prescribe one of these medications alongside interferon to enhance the treatment's effectiveness.

Interferon injections. Interferon is a synthetic version of a substance produced by the body to combat infections. One advantage of interferon injections is that they are administered for a significantly shorter duration compared to oral antiviral medications. However, interferon is associated with a high incidence of side effects, including nausea, vomiting, respiratory difficulties, and depression.

Liver transplantation. If your liver has sustained severe damage, a liver transplant may be a viable option. In a liver transplant procedure, the surgeon excises the damaged liver and substitutes it with a healthy one. The majority of transplanted livers are sourced from deceased donors, while a limited number are obtained from living donors who provide a portion of their liver.

Discrimination

In the past, people suffering from tuberculosis were segregated from the broader community. Due to the airborne nature of the bacteria, there was a strong aversion to engaging in conversation or coming close to them.

A similar situation persists today for those diagnosed with hepatitis B. Friends often avoid associating with individuals infected by the virus. Some family members even go so far as to designate separate kitchen utensils for those with hepatitis B, driven by the fear of potential infection.

While this fear is understandable, it is crucial to recognize that individuals with hepatitis B should not face discrimination. Dr. Janus Ong, a transplant hepatologist, observed, "Many people believe hepatitis B can be transmitted to casual contact."

Despite the existence of a vaccine and available treatments for hepatitis B, discrimination against those affected by the virus continues unabated.

"Every week, I see so many new patients with hepatitis B and liver cancer; it's frightening," Dr. Ong lamented. "But there is still so much stigma and discrimination that no one wants to step up as a champion." ●

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Don't Miss Your Child's Growth Window:

Why Vitamin D3 Matters for Your Child's Height and Bone Development

Every mom wants to give her child every possible advantage to grow tall, strong, and healthy. But many parents don't realize that a child's growth doesn't happen forever. There is actually a limited window of time when children experience their most important height and bone development. During these growing years, the body needs the right nutrients to support healthy bone growth. By understanding how growth works, and by providing the right nutritional support early, moms can help their children reach their full height potential.

Dr. Kevin L. Bautista, a pediatrician and professor from UP - Philippine General Hospital, shares expert insights to help parents better understand the important role of growth and nutrition in their child's development. Here, he answers some of the most common questions moms ask about children's growth and how proper nutrition can help support it.



What does "growth" really mean?

Growth refers to the increase in a child's height and bone length. Growth spurts occur most prominently during childhood and early adolescence, when the body undergoes rapid increases in height, weight, and overall physical development. Once growth stops, height can no longer naturally increase. This is why supporting children while they are still growing is so important.

What are growth plates and why do they matter?



Growth plates are soft areas of developing cartilage found at the ends of long bones. They are the areas where new bone forms, allowing bones to lengthen and children to grow taller. Growth plates are widely open at around 6–12 years old, which is the optimal window for growth and when growth spurts commonly happen.

As children grow older, these plates gradually harden and close during late puberty. This typically happens earlier in girls than in boys.

Is there really a "growth deadline"? When exactly do kids stop growing?

The growth deadline refers to the point at which the growth plates close. Prior to this stage, children have the highest growth potential. But once the plates close, missed growth cannot be recovered, which is why early support is important.

What helps support healthy growth?

Healthy growth is supported by several important daily habits:

- Balanced nutrition
- Adequate sleep
- Regular physical activity
- Key vitamins and minerals for bone development, especially Vitamin D3.

Why is Vitamin D3 important for growth?

Vitamin D3 is essential because it helps the body absorb calcium, which is necessary for building strong and long bones. Without enough Vitamin D3, bone growth may not be optimal.

How can parents maximize their child's growth window?

Parents can help maximize this growth window by supporting children early with the right nutrients. Ensuring consistent daily intake of essential vitamins and minerals helps maintain continuous bone growth during this critical stage of development.

Help your child reach their full height potential during the important growth years with proper daily nutrition and essential vitamins. Make sure to give them Vitamin D3 which supports healthy bone development. By nourishing their growing bodies with the right nutrients, you can help build stronger bones, promote healthy development, and help them grow taller and stronger every day.





THINK WHAT YOU'RE DOING

By Butch Sanchez

From the food on your fork to the finger you absently chew, everything that enters your mouth carries consequences: some trivial, some life-altering.

We do it hundreds of times a day without a second thought. A sip of coffee. A handful of crackers. A tablet shaken from an orange bottle. A fingernail gnawed at a desk. Our mouth is one of the most active and indiscriminate portals of the human body; a gateway so routinely used that most of us have stopped thinking of it as such at all. Yet everything that passes through it has the potential to nourish, harm, or quietly reshape the state of our health over time.

The risks are not always dramatic. They rarely arrive with fanfare. More often, the danger is cumulative, being the steady accumulation of habits we tell ourselves are harmless because nothing bad has happened yet. The science of what we put into our mouths spans nutrition, toxicology, microbiology, and behavioral medicine. And the picture it paints is more complex and more urgent than we realize.



Food: The Foundation And The Fault Line

Food is the most obvious and most common of the things we put into our mouths. It is also the category where individual choices change most sharply from public understanding. For decades, public health messaging focused on avoiding fat, then sugar, then processed carbohydrates. The shifting targets have left many people confused, and for good reason. The real picture is not about single villains.

Ultra-processed foods (those engineered with industrial ingredients, flavor enhancers, and preservatives that bear little



resemblance to anything found in nature) are now the subject of mounting concern among researchers. Studies have linked high consumption of these products to increased rates of obesity, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and even cognitive decline. The mechanisms are not fully understood, but disruption of the gut microbiome, which regulates everything from immunity to mood, appears to play a significant role.

Then there is contamination, a threat hidden in food considered safe. Harmful bacteria such as Salmonella, Listeria, and E. coli enter the food supply through improper handling, inadequate cooking, or cross-contamination at any point from farm to plate. Foodborne illness affects millions of people annually worldwide, and vulnerable populations — the elderly, children, pregnant women, and the immunocompromised — face the gravest consequences. The simple habit of washing hands and surfaces before food preparation remains one of the most powerful preventive measures available.

Sweets And Sugar

No substance we consume freely, legally, and with encouragement causes as much damage as added sugar. It is embedded in the obvious places (candies, pastries, soft drinks) and hidden in the unexpected ones: salad dressings, bread, yogurt, pasta sauce. The average person in many developed countries consumes sugar at levels that would have been considered extraordinary by earlier generations, and the metabolic consequences are profound.

Our teeth are the first to bear witness. Dental decay, driven by sugar-metabolizing oral bacteria that produce enamel-eroding acid, remains one of the most widespread preventable diseases on earth. But the damage goes far beyond the mouth. Chronic high sugar consumption promotes insulin resistance, drives chronic inflammation, contributes to fatty liver disease, and accelerates cellular aging. It feeds the conditions that make chronic disease not merely more likely, but more severe.

Alcohol: The Acceptable Poison

Alcohol is the most socially accepted toxin in human consumption; drank at celebrations, offered at business dinners, and associated in the cultural imagination with relaxation and reward. Yet ethanol is, by the clinical definition of the word, a poison. The liver prioritizes processing it, diverting resources from other metabolic tasks. In excess, it destroys liver cells, inflames the pancreas, weakens the heart muscle, damages the lining of the gastrointestinal tract, and disrupts our sleep.

The cancer risk associated with alcohol is less widely known but unambiguous in the scientific literature. Alcohol is classified as a Group 1 carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, linked to cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, liver, colon, and breast. There is no consumption level that has been established as entirely risk-free. While modest drinking does not catastrophically elevate individual risk for most people, the directional relationship between alcohol and cancer is one of dose — more alcohol, more risk.

For those who drink, honest awareness matters more than guilt. Reducing frequency, choosing smaller quantities, and avoiding alcohol on an empty stomach or in combination with certain medications all help the cause.

Healing Powers And Hidden Hazards Of Medicines

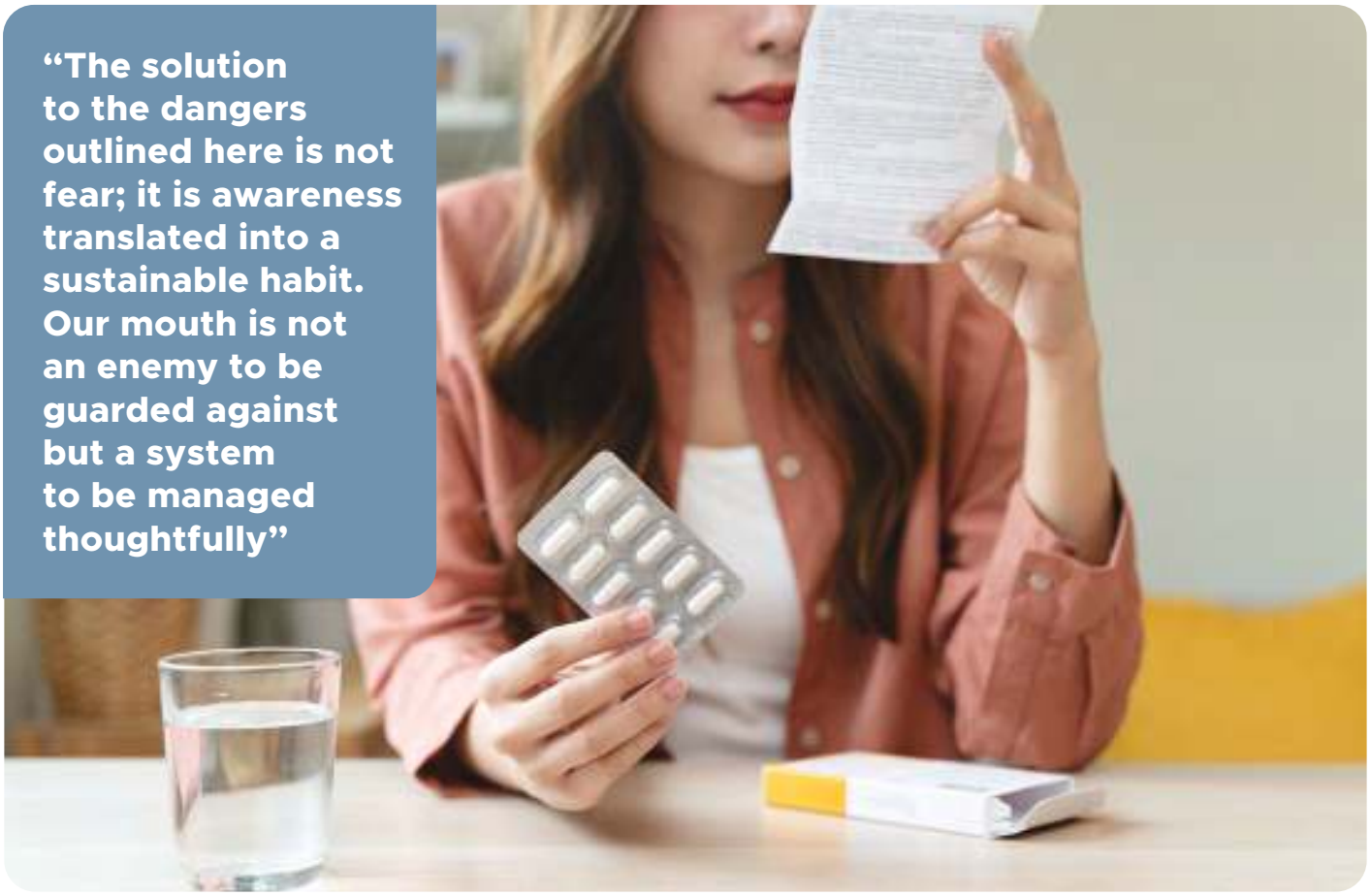
Medications represent one of humanity's greatest achievements and one of its most frequently mismanaged resources. Taken correctly, they restore function, eliminate infection, manage chronic conditions, and save lives. Taken carelessly, they injure and kill. Paracetamol, one of the most commonly used over-the-counter pain relievers on earth, is the leading cause of acute liver failure in many countries when used in excess, often because people take it simultaneously from multiple sources without realizing they are doubling or tripling their dose.

Antibiotic misuse presents a different but equally serious crisis. When antibiotics are taken for viral infections against which they are powerless, or when courses are abandoned prematurely, the result is the selective survival of resistant bacteria. Antimicrobial resistance is now one of the most significant threats to global public health, potentially rendering infections that were once easily treated lethal in the coming decades. The medicine in the cabinet is not harmless because it was prescribed. Respect for dosage, timing, and drug interactions is not optional — it is part of the treatment.

Fingers, Toothpicks, And The Things We Don't Think About

Not everything that enters our mouth is intentionally consumed. Our hands are remarkably effective carriers for microbial transfer. Research on hand contamination consistently finds that the average hand touched to surfaces, money, phones, doorknobs, and a hundred other objects

"The solution to the dangers outlined here is not fear; it is awareness translated into a sustainable habit. Our mouth is not an enemy to be guarded against but a system to be managed thoughtfully"



in the course of a normal day carries a substantial microbial load. When fingers reach our mouth, pathogens, including norovirus, rhinovirus, and intestinal bacteria, complete their intended journey. Nail-biting, in particular, presents many risks: it introduces bacteria both from the environment and from beneath our nail.

Toothpicks and similar oral implements raise a different cause of concern. Used carelessly, they can lacerate the gum tissue, creating entry points for the oral bacteria that contribute to gum disease — a condition increasingly understood to be not merely a dental problem but a systemic one, associated with heightened risk of cardiovascular disease and adverse pregnancy outcomes. Our gum line is a barrier, and breaching it is not trivial.

What We Can Do

The solution to the dangers outlined here is not fear; it is awareness translated into a sustainable habit. Our mouth is not an enemy to be guarded against but a system to be managed thoughtfully. Several principles cut across all the categories above.

Read more carefully. Whether it is a nutrition label on a packaged food, the dosage instructions on a medicine bottle, or a wine list, the information needed to make a safer choice is often already available. Most harm from ingested substances is not from deliberate risk-taking but from inattention.

Honor your gut microbiome. The trillions of microorganisms that inhabit our digestive tract are now understood to be central to immune function, mental health, metabolic regulation, and more. They thrive on dietary diversity, fiber, and fermented foods. They are harmed by ultra-processed ingredients, excess sugar, antibiotics used unnecessarily, and chronic stress.

Wash your hands, and mean it. Washing hands with soap and water for 20 seconds before eating, after handling raw food, and after contact with public surfaces is one of the highest-return health behaviors available. It costs nothing and prevents a great deal.

Take alcohol seriously as a substance, not just a social ritual. This does not require abstinence, but it does require honesty about quantity, frequency, and the contexts in which drinking has become reflexive rather than chosen.

Keep a complete medication list and use it. Drug-drug interactions, duplicate dosing, and contraindications with food or alcohol are common sources of preventable harm. An updated list shared with every prescriber and pharmacist is a simple safeguard with real consequences.

Our mouth is, in many ways, the place where intention meets biology. Every day, dozens of decisions pass through it: decisions about what to accept, what to refuse, and what to notice for the first time. Our body keeps a long and faithful record of those choices. The good news is that it also responds, often with surprising speed, to better ones. Awareness, practiced consistently, is not a burden. It is the beginning of real wellbeing. ●

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You Are What You Eat, More Than Ever

By Pebbles Mendoza



There are those moments that I can recall, a health scare, a quiet conversation with a doctor, a birthday that ends in zero, when I suddenly look at my plate differently. What was once just dinner becomes something more consequential: a daily decision that shapes who I am at the cellular level, and who I will become a decade from now.

Nutrition science has come a long way from the era of simple food pyramids and calorie counting. We now understand that food is not merely fuel. The compounds in a plate of roasted salmon and greens are bioactive signals, molecules that speak directly to our genes, influence the bacteria in our gut, regulate inflammation throughout the body, and either accelerate or slow the biological processes we associate with aging. The question is no longer whether what we eat matters. It is how much it matters, and what we can do about it today.

Why Nutrition Shapes Our Aging

Every cell in the human body replaces itself over time. The raw materials for that renewal, the amino acids, fatty acids, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, come almost entirely from what we eat. When those materials are plentiful and well-balanced, cells replicate cleanly, tissues repair efficiently, and the body's internal systems hum along quietly. When they are lacking or chronically imbalanced, subtle damage accumulates.

Chronic inflammation is at the heart of nearly every major age-related condition, from cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes to Alzheimer's and certain cancers. What researchers have discovered over the past two decades is that diet is one of the most powerful regulators of inflammation that we possess.

Ultra-processed foods, refined sugars, and industrial seed oils tend to push the body toward a pro-inflammatory state. Whole foods: vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, quality proteins, and healthy fats consistently do the opposite, dampening inflammatory signals and supporting cellular repair.

Just as important is the gut microbiome, the vast ecosystem of bacteria, fungi, and other microorganisms that lives in our digestive tract. We now know this ecosystem is not a passive passenger; it actively produces compounds that influence mood, immune function, hormone regulation, and even cognitive clarity. The composition of the microbiome is shaped, more than anything else, by what we eat. A diet rich

in plants feeds a thriving, diverse microbial community. A narrow, processed diet does the opposite.

What The Evidence Actually Says

Decades of population research consistently point in the same direction. People who eat diets rich in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, fish, legumes and olive oil, genarally known as the Mediterranean diet, live longer, suffer fewer chronic diseases, and retain sharper cognitive function into old age. This is not a small effect. Studies have found that closely following this dietary pattern is associated with a real reduction in the risk of cardiovascular events, cognitive decline, and all-cause mortality.

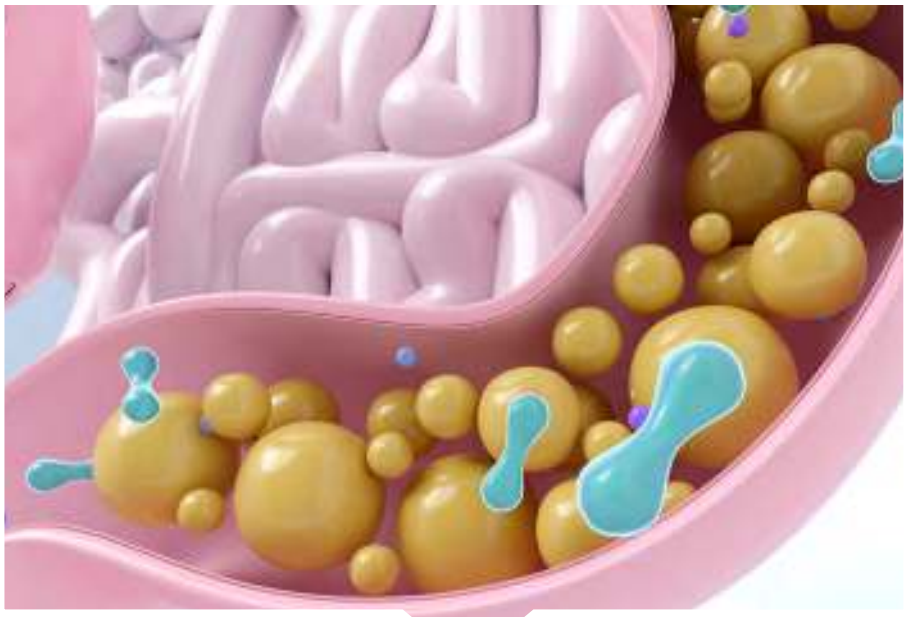
Protein deserves special attention as we age. After roughly the age of 50, the body becomes less efficient at synthesizing muscle from dietary protein, a phenomenon researchers call anabolic resistance. This means that older adults actually need more protein than younger adults, not less, to maintain muscle mass and strength.

Current evidence suggests that spreading protein intake across meals, aiming for 25 to 40 grams per meal rather than loading most of it at dinner, is more effective for muscle protein synthesis. Eggs, fish, legumes, dairy, poultry, and quality plant proteins such as tofu and edamame are all excellent sources.

Omega-3 fatty acids, found in abundance in oily fish such as salmon, mackerel, and sardines, as well as in walnuts, flaxseed, and chia seeds, have a particularly impressive body of evidence behind them. They support cardiovascular health, reduce systemic inflammation, and play an active role in maintaining the structural integrity of brain cell membranes. Adequate omega-3 intake has been associated with slower mental decline and a reduced risk of depression in older adults.

Fiber, found in vegetables, fruits, legumes, and whole grains, is another nutritional hero that tends to be chronically underconsumed. Beyond its well-known role in digestive health, dietary fiber feeds the beneficial bacteria in the gut, helps regulate blood sugar and cholesterol, and appears to reduce the risk of colorectal cancer.

Most adults in Western countries consume roughly half the recommended daily intake. Doubling fiber intake is one of the single most important changes most people can make.





The Nutrients Most Likely To Be Missing

Even people who consider themselves to eat fairly well are often deficient in a handful of key nutrients. Vitamin D, critical for bone health, immune function, and mood regulation, is gained through sun exposure, and in many climates and for many desk-bound adults, levels are persistently low. Magnesium, involved in over 300 enzymatic reactions in the body, is deficient in an estimated 45 percent of the general population; it supports sleep, stress regulation, and cardiovascular function. Vitamin B12 is poorly absorbed in older adults, particularly those taking acid-

suppressing medications, and deficiency can mimic symptoms of dementia.

Zinc, found in meat, shellfish, legumes, and seeds, supports immune function and wound healing but is often lacking, especially in those following plant-forward diets. And potassium, abundant in bananas, sweet potatoes, avocados, and leafy greens, is critically important for blood pressure regulation but consumed at barely half the recommended levels by most adults. These are not exotic deficiencies requiring elaborate supplementation strategies. In most cases, they can be addressed by deliberately incorporating the right whole foods.

Eating Well For The Long Run

Translating nutrition science into daily life does not require a complete change in our diets. Research consistently shows that gradual changes produce better long-term outcomes than dramatic short-term restrictions. Here are the shifts that evidence most strongly supports.

Increase plant diversity. Aim for a wide variety of vegetables, fruits, legumes, herbs, and whole grains across the week, not just salad. Each plant species contributes a distinct set of phytonutrients and fiber types that feed different microbial communities. A practical goal is to aim for 30 or more different plant foods in a week, which research has shown correlates with significantly greater gut microbiome diversity.

Prioritize protein at every meal. Build each meal around a quality protein source and aim to spread it evenly across breakfast, lunch, and dinner. This is especially important for preserving muscle mass and strength in the decades after 50.

Eat oily fish at least twice a week. If this is not feasible due to preference or availability, a high-quality fish oil or algae-based omega-3 supplement is a reasonable alternative. Your brain and cardiovascular system will thank you.

Reduce ultra-processed foods, not all processed foods. There is a big difference between a convenience food made from whole ingredients and a product made in a laboratory from refined starches, industrial fats, and artificial flavorings. The latter consistently causes poor health outcomes; the former need not. Reading ingredient lists is more informative than reading calorie counts.

> "THE COMPOUNDS IN A PLATE OF ROASTED SALMON AND GREENS ARE BIOACTIVE SIGNALS, MOLECULES THAT SPEAK DIRECTLY TO OUR GENES, INFLUENCE THE BACTERIA IN OUR GUT, REGULATE INFLAMMATION THROUGHOUT THE BODY, AND EITHER ACCELERATE OR SLOW THE BIOLOGICAL PROCESSES WE ASSOCIATE WITH AGING"



Stay hydrated, particularly as you age. The sensation of thirst diminishes with age, making older adults more vulnerable to dehydration than they realize. Mild, chronic dehydration, changes mood, and endangers kidney function. Water, herbal teas, and water-rich foods such as cucumber, watermelon, and broth all count toward daily fluid intake.

Limit added sugar rather than fearing all carbohydrates. The evidence against chronic high sugar intake, for metabolic health, dental health, skin aging, and inflammation, is robust and consistent. Natural sugars in whole fruits, however, arrive packaged with fiber and phytonutrients that moderate their impact entirely.

What Happens Next

Nutrition does not exist by itself; how we eat matters too, not just what. Eating slowly, without distraction, in a relaxed social setting, gives better digestion, more attuned hunger cues, and more satisfaction from less food. Meals eaten with others are consistently associated with better dietary quality and greater psychological wellbeing, suggesting that the communal aspect of food is itself a health variable.

It is also worth remembering that nutrition is not about perfection. The body is resilient and forgiving, and the effects of diet operate over time, not over a single meal or even a single week. What matters most is the overall pattern across months and years, not the occasional indulgence or imperfect day.

The evidence is unambiguous: what we eat is one of the most powerful levers we have for how we age, how we feel, and how long we remain vital and independent. The good news is that it is never too late to start changing the pattern. Research shows bigger health improvements in people who improve their dietary quality even in their sixties, seventies, and beyond. The best time to start eating well was years ago. The second-best time is today. ●

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Your Mental Health And Your Work



By Mae Anacay-Banayat

On April 1 this year, the World Health Organization (WHO) posted an image on Facebook that read, "*Decent work and healthy working environments can protect our mental health and wellbeing.*" WHO underscored how our job can affect our mental health and how having a decent, healthy work environment is essential to keeping our mental faculties in top shape.

While talking about mental health is still taboo in some circles, the government has taken steps to ensure that local workplaces are protecting their employees' mental health. Republic Act No.11036, also known as the Mental Health Act, protects the rights of individuals with mental health challenges, integrates care in the community, and calls for a strengthened national mental health awareness. Meanwhile, Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Order No. 208-20 requires all private employers to "create, implement, and monitor a Mental Health Workplace Policy and Program." These programs must educate employees about their mental health and how to take care of it, support employees should they want to seek treatment, provide access to professionals for treatment, and safeguard the confidentiality of these health records. In a nutshell, the framework for taking care of mental health is already laid out; it is up to the employee to take advantage of these services to improve their mental health.

The Reality Inside The Cubicle

But while guardrails are in place to protect an individual's mental health, the reality is that 87 percent of the Filipino workforce have spoken up about work-related mental health issues, particularly driven by heavy workloads and burnout. According to the 2025 AXA Mind Health Study, a high percentage of the Filipino workforce has reported appetite or eating disorders, loss of self-confidence, stress and anxiety, tiredness, loss of interest, trouble sleeping, and other consequences of work-related mental health issues. Even more worrying is that half of the study respondents said they had at least four of these consequences, which are considered significantly higher than the global rates.



According to the study, "The repercussions of poor mental health in the workplace are leading to significant disengagement. 85 percent of Filipino employees are contemplating stepping back from work, with 68 percent considering quitting or changing jobs."

And while Filipinos are likely to speak up and confide in their line managers about their mental health struggles, sometimes it is not enough to bridge the gap to address the triggers. And so the struggle continues.

Your Active Role In Safeguarding Your Mental Health

Employees spend at least eight hours working. Whether you are working in an office with other people or remotely by yourself, you tend to interact with your working environment more than the people in your home. While it may not be obvious, your work has a big impact on your mental health.

According to www.HelpGuide.org, "Work can play a huge role in your overall health and welfare. In addition to the financial benefits, your job can add meaning, structure, and purpose to your life. It can also provide you with a sense of identity, bolster your self-esteem, and offer an important social outlet."

Yet while working has positive effects, it can also take its toll on your mental health. Situations of highly demanding, fast-paced environments with a lack of support are prime conduits for stress. Chronic stress can reduce your efficiency and induce other issues that can impact your physical health.

This isn't hyperbolic; this is the reality. For instance, I went through a very stressful period of uncertainty and redundancies in my workplace recently, and I had difficulty sleeping and experienced alarming chest pains. I was also constantly feeling nauseated, had debilitating headaches, and sometimes felt so ill that I just had to lie down. After a series of cardiac workups, it turns out that I have developed reactive hypertension and required medication for three months until the stressful period has stabilized. Once things in the office had slowed down, the chest pains disappeared along with the anxiety and other symptoms. I was suddenly completely fine.

We've talked about this often, but it still bears repeating: your environment affects your health. Whether it may start as manifestations of stress or something physical, such as a reactive hypertension, only you would have control over the situation. You will have to take charge and safeguard your mental health before the symptoms escape the confines of your control and spill out to your physical health.

How To Improve Your Mental Health At Work

The most important thing for you to do is to identify your triggers. What was happening when your chest hurt, when you couldn't breathe, when you felt like the situation was out of your control? Know what your stressors are, and work on eliminating them from your day.



I understand that you couldn't just walk away from your job, but you could set firm boundaries to limit your exposure to these stressors. You can do the following:

Remove yourself from the situation: When you feel like you need to take a step back, do so. Remove yourself from the situation by walking away from your computer, saying, "Excuse me, I will be right back." If the discussion becomes too heated, say, "Excuse me, I feel like this wouldn't be a conducive time to resolve this issue. Let us pause this discussion and resume in five minutes." Be professional, but be firm. Know that they cannot push your boundaries without you consenting to it.

Prioritize your health: No matter how busy it may be, make sure that you prioritize your health. Drink enough water. Eat nutritious food. Snack mindfully. Take your breaks and leave. Do not feel like you have to live in the office 24/7 to be productive — know that you have a life outside of work, and that is more important than your job.

Communicate: You are your biggest advocate. If you do not let people know your boundaries, they will not know them. Remember, "No." is a complete sentence. You do not have to explain your decisions or justify them. However, you cannot expect people to read your mind, so you would have to verbalize your concerns.

Acknowledge when you need help: Finally, if you feel like you have too much and you cannot cope with it anymore, then speak up and talk to your line manager. Communicate your needs and seek help; remember that you are protected by law to seek treatment. Find a way to make it work, and if it doesn't, then know that you are well within your rights to walk away.

I am encouraging you to take charge of your mental health today. Only you would know your limits, and only you can change the situation. Remember that at the end of the day, you are responsible for yourself. If something should happen to you, your work would continue to function, but you and your loved ones will pay the ultimate price if you fail to take care of yourself. ●

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What nutritionists want every 40- and 50-something to know before the clock runs out on easy wins...

THE DECADE THAT DEFINES THE NEXT THIRTY YEARS



By Phoebe Wong

There is a particular kind of denial that settles in during your forties and fifties, a comfortable, convincing voice that whispers: you feel fine, therefore you are fine. You can still run a 5K, still pull an all-nighter before a deadline, still bounce back from a weekend of indulgence. The body is performing. Why fix what isn't broken?

The answer, as any clinical nutritionist will tell you, is that the biology has already begun to shift, quietly, incrementally, and years before you feel it in any meaningful way. The decisions you make about food, lifestyle, and supplementation between the ages of 40 and 59 are not simply health maintenance decisions. They are investments, or withdrawals, from a biological account that will come due somewhere in your sixties and seventies.

The good news is that the science of healthy aging has never been clearer. We know more than ever about the specific mechanisms through which diet and lifestyle either accelerate or slow the aging process. What follows is a frank, evidence-informed guide to what we, as midlife adults, should be doing right now, not eventually, not after our next birthday, to give ourselves the best possible foundation as we move into our senior years.

Rethink Protein

One of the most clinically significant and least discussed changes that occurs in midlife is the onset of sarcopenia, the age-related loss of skeletal muscle mass and strength. Most people associate muscle loss with extreme old age, but the process begins as early as age 35, accelerates in the forties, and becomes a major functional concern by the sixties unless it is actively countered.

From a nutritional standpoint, the most important intervention is adequate dietary protein, and most midlife adults are not



eating nearly enough of it. While general population guidelines suggest 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight, emerging research in protein metabolism and aging strongly supports higher targets for adults over 40: somewhere between 1.2 and 1.6 grams per kilogram of body weight per day, with some studies recommending even more when combined with resistance training.

Quality matters as much as quantity. Leucine, an essential branched-chain amino acid, acts as a primary trigger for muscle protein synthesis. It is found in highest concentrations in animal proteins, eggs, poultry, fish, lean red meat, and dairy, but can also be obtained through strategic plant-based combinations. If you are following a predominantly plant-based diet, pay particular attention to complete protein sources such as soy, quinoa, and hemp, and consider a leucine-rich protein supplement.

Aim to distribute protein intake evenly across three or four meals rather than concentrating it at dinner. Research suggests that muscle protein synthesis is optimized when each meal delivers 25 to 40 grams of high-quality protein.

Address Inflammation Before It Becomes The Story

If there is one word that has come to define the biology of aging in recent





decades, it is "inflammaging", a term coined by researchers to describe the chronic, low-grade inflammatory state that accumulates with age and underlies virtually every major age-related disease, from cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes to Alzheimer's and certain cancers.

Diet is one of the most powerful modulators of systemic inflammation available to us. The Mediterranean dietary pattern, rich in olive oil, oily fish, legumes, vegetables, fruits, nuts, and whole grains, with limited red meat and ultra-processed foods, has been more extensively studied for its anti-inflammatory properties than any other dietary approach, and the evidence is compelling across multiple health outcomes.

Specific foods with strong anti-inflammatory profiles that every 40-to-50-year-old should be incorporating regularly include:

- Fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, sardines, herring), rich in EPA and DHA omega-3 fatty acids, which directly counter inflammatory eicosanoid production.
- Extra virgin olive oil, high in oleocanthal, a natural compound with COX-inhibiting

(anti-inflammatory) properties comparable to low-dose ibuprofen.

- Berries, particularly blueberries, strawberries, and cherries, are loaded with anthocyanins and polyphenols that suppress inflammatory signaling.
- Turmeric curcumin, its active compound, is a well-studied modulator of NF-κB, a key molecular pathway in chronic inflammation.
- Leafy greens, spinach, kale, and chard deliver folate, vitamins K and C, and carotenoids that collectively support immune regulation.

Equally important is what to remove from our diet. Ultra-processed foods, refined carbohydrates, seed oils high in omega-6 fatty acids, and excess sugar are the primary dietary drivers of systemic inflammation. If your forties and fifties are still marked by heavy reliance on processed convenience foods, this is the era in which the cost of that pattern becomes biologically embedded.

"A landmark 2021 Stanford study published in Cell found that a high-fermented-food diet significantly increased microbiome diversity and decreased inflammatory markers in adults, offering a simple, practical intervention for midlife gut health"

Protect Your Gut

The gut microbiome, the vast ecosystem of bacteria, fungi, and other microorganisms inhabiting your digestive tract, has moved from scientific curiosity to a central pillar of longevity medicine in the last decade. Research now links microbiome diversity and health to immune function, cognitive performance, mood regulation, metabolic efficiency, and inflammation control.

Unfortunately, microbiome diversity tends to decline with age, and the dietary habits common in midlife— high in processed foods, low in fiber, often accompanied by frequent antibiotic use and chronic stress— actively accelerate that decline. The consequences show up not just in digestion but in systemic health: increased intestinal permeability (often called "leaky gut"), elevated inflammatory markers, impaired nutrient absorption, and even changes in mood and cognition.

The single most impactful dietary change most midlife adults can make for gut health is dramatically increasing dietary fiber. Current average fiber intake in developed countries hovers around 15 grams per day, well below the recommended 25 to 38 grams. Fiber feeds the beneficial bacteria in the colon, supports short-chain fatty acid production (which has systemic anti-inflammatory effects), and maintains the integrity of the intestinal lining.

Fermented foods— yogurt with live cultures, kefir, kimchi, sauerkraut, miso, and tempeh— have emerged as particularly potent tools for microbiome support. A landmark 2021 Stanford study published in Cell found that a high-fermented-food diet significantly increased microbiome diversity and decreased inflammatory markers in adults, offering a simple, practical intervention for midlife gut health.

Bone Health Is Not Just A Women's Issue

While osteoporosis tends to be framed as a post-menopausal woman's concern, the reality is that bone density loss affects both sexes and accelerates through midlife for everyone. Peak bone mass is generally







reached in your late twenties to early thirties; from the late thirties onward, bone resorption begins to outpace bone formation. By the time a fracture occurs in later life, decades of preventable bone loss have already occurred.

Calcium and vitamin D remain the foundational nutritional pillars of bone health. Adults between 40 and 70 require 1,000–1,200 mg of calcium daily, best obtained through dietary sources: dairy products, fortified plant milks, canned fish with soft bones, tofu set with calcium sulfate, and dark leafy greens such as kale and bok choy. Calcium supplements, while useful when dietary intake is genuinely insufficient, carry potential cardiovascular risks when used in excess. Food-first is always the preferable approach.

Vitamin D deserves particular attention. Deficiency is endemic in modern populations due to limited sun exposure and poor dietary sources, and its implications go far beyond bone health; it plays a role in immune function, cardiovascular health, mood regulation, and cancer risk reduction. Most adults over 40 benefit from supplementation, typically 1,000–2,000 IU daily, with blood levels ideally kept between 40–60 ng/mL. Vitamin K2 should be taken alongside vitamin D3, as it directs calcium to the bones rather than soft tissues.

Blood Sugar Regulation: The Silent Accelerant Of Aging

If you could choose one metabolic marker to optimize for longevity, blood glucose stability would be a strong contender. Chronically elevated blood sugar, even at levels that don't yet qualify as pre-diabetic, drives a process called glycation, in which sugar molecules bond with proteins and fats throughout the body, degrading tissues, stiffening arteries, damaging neurons, and accelerating the visible and invisible signs of aging.

The dietary levers for blood sugar regulation are well established: reduce refined carbohydrates and added sugars, increase fiber intake, prioritize low-glycemic whole food sources of carbohydrate, eat protein and fat before or alongside carbohydrates to blunt the glycemic response, and avoid large carbohydrate loads in isolation. Time-restricted eating, condensing meals into a 10 to 12-hour

window, has shown promise in improving insulin sensitivity and metabolic flexibility in midlife adults.

A brief walk of 10 to 15 minutes after meals is one of the most effective and underutilized tools for post-meal glucose management. Muscle contraction drives glucose into cells independent of insulin, providing a simple mechanical means of blunting blood sugar spikes without medication.

Don't Wait For Symptoms To Think About Brain Health

Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia do not begin at diagnosis; they begin with decades of molecular and vascular changes that unfold silently through midlife. Amyloid plaques and tau tangles, the hallmarks of Alzheimer's pathology, can be detected in the brains of people in their forties and fifties. This is not cause for despair; it is cause for action.

The MIND diet, a hybrid of the Mediterranean and DASH dietary patterns specifically designed around brain health, has been associated with substantially slower rates of cognitive decline in multiple studies. It emphasizes leafy green vegetables (a minimum of six servings per week), berries (at least two servings per week), nuts, whole grains, fish, poultry, olive oil, and wine in moderation, while limiting red meat, butter, cheese, pastries, and fried food.

Omega-3 fatty acids, particularly DHA, are structural components of brain cell membranes and are consistently associated with better cognitive outcomes. If oily fish consumption is limited, a high-quality fish oil or algae-based DHA supplement (for those avoiding fish) is a worthwhile investment. B vitamins, particularly folate, B6, and B12, are also critical for homocysteine metabolism; elevated homocysteine is an independent risk factor for cognitive decline and dementia.

Hydration, Sleep And Stress. The Nutritional Multipliers

No nutritional protocol functions at its best in the context of chronic dehydration, poor sleep, or sustained psychological stress, yet these are precisely the conditions under which most 40- and 50-somethings operate. The sensation of thirst diminishes with age, meaning older adults are



Hong Kong-based Phoebe Wong is a certified Dietitian Nutritionist. She has over 10 years of clinical and research experience in functional nutrition and healthy aging.

chronically under-hydrated without feeling thirsty. Even mild dehydration impairs cognition, energy metabolism, kidney function, and cardiovascular efficiency.

Sleep is perhaps the most underestimated nutritional variable of all. During deep sleep, the brain's glymphatic system clears metabolic waste products, including amyloid-beta, in a process critical for long-term cognitive health. Chronic sleep restriction (less than seven hours per night) drives cortisol dysregulation, insulin resistance, increased hunger hormones, and accelerated cellular aging. No amount of excellent nutrition fully compensates for poor sleep.

Chronic stress, meanwhile, elevates cortisol, promotes visceral fat accumulation, depletes magnesium and B vitamins, disrupts gut microbiome balance, and accelerates telomere shortening, a key marker of cellular aging. Magnesium glycinate (300–400 mg at night) is a clinically useful supplement for many stressed, sleep-deprived midlife adults, supporting both sleep quality and cortisol regulation.

Your Forties Are Not Too Late. They Are Right on Time

Healthy aging is not a project that begins at 65; it succeeds or fails in the decades before. The biological investments made in your forties and fifties determine, to a remarkable degree, how your body and brain function in your seventies and beyond. The metabolic diseases, cognitive decline, and loss of physical function that many people accept as inevitable features of aging are, in a significant proportion of cases, the consequences of specific, modifiable lifestyle and dietary choices.

You do not need perfection. You need consistency, intention, and a clear understanding of what matters most. More protein. Less ultra-processed food. More fiber, more fermented foods, more fatty fish, more leafy greens. Better sleep. Managed stress. Daily movement. These are not dramatic interventions; they are the compound interest of ordinary daily decisions, accumulating quietly into something extraordinary: a body and mind that still functions beautifully at 75, 80, and beyond.

The decade you are in right now may well be the most important one of your life. Use it. ●

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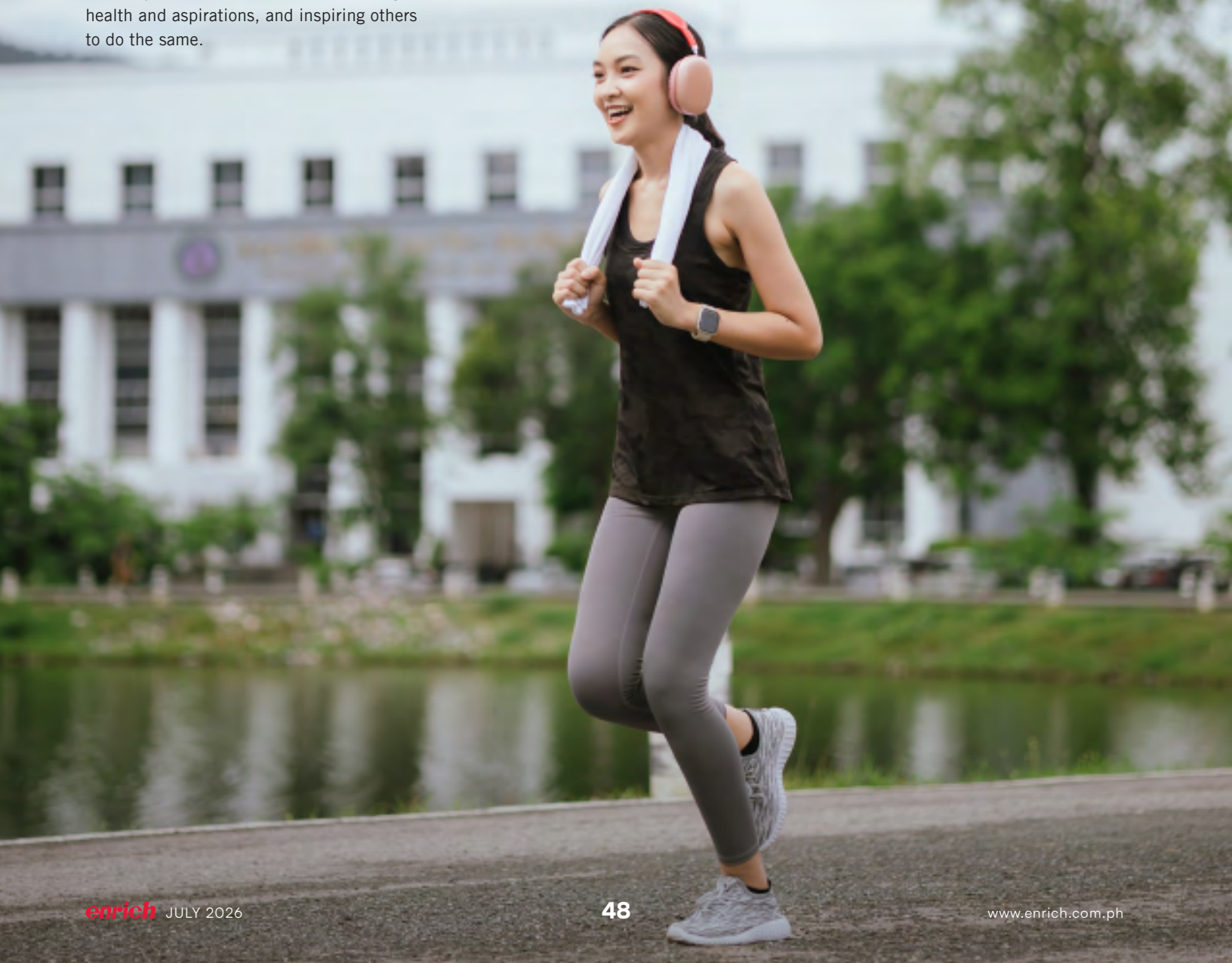
By Erwin Batoon

There was a time when I believed I had to push through everything, stress, responsibilities, and setbacks, without letting my health hold me back. The overwhelming pressure led to stress eating, a sedentary lifestyle, and poor physical health, especially with long hours of daily car rides with my ward as part of his routine. Eventually, I found myself living with chronic illnesses that tested my resilience in ways I never expected. Diagnosed with type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure two years ago, I realized that managing my health is not just about avoiding complications; it's about nurturing my spirit and staying committed to my dreams. Despite these challenges, I discovered that strength comes from within, through self-care, acceptance, and unwavering hope. This is my story of facing each day with a resilient heart, balancing health and aspirations, and inspiring others to do the same.

Here are some of the most important lessons I learned, lessons that helped me manage stress from health conditions, anxiety, and responsibilities without losing sight of my dreams:

Prioritizing My Wellbeing

Before I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes mellitus and elevated blood pressure (as my doctor used to say), I believed that everything I did was okay, though, in my gut, I knew it wasn't. I indulged in late-night snacks, drank more than three cups of the 3-in-1 coffee a day (finding heaven in sipping coffee), and stayed up late for schoolwork, movies, and other reasons.





> MAKING MISTAKES, EXPERIENCING SETBACKS, AND EMBRACING MY ILLNESS ARE NATURAL PARTS OF MY GROWTH AS I NAVIGATE EACH DAY. BEING KIND TO MYSELF AND FORGIVING MY SHORTCOMINGS HELPS EASE MENTAL STRESS AND FOSTERS A COMPASSIONATE MINDSET

However, when I started experiencing thirst, hunger, frequent urination, obesity, tiredness, eye problems, and headaches, I realized something was wrong. I sought medical help, but by then the damage had already been done; early detection and proactive management could have significantly improved outcomes and prevented complications. I had overlooked my body's needs and initially thought these symptoms were normal. My physician informed me that I had already developed two chronic illnesses.

From that day, with treatment and lifestyle changes, I learned that my health, both mental and physical, is my greatest asset. I now prioritize rest on my days off, take breaks during work as a caregiver and student, maintain proper nutrition, and cherish small moments of self-care. When I am healthy, I can give my best in everything I do. Research shows that self-care and health management are crucial for maintaining well-being and effective functioning.

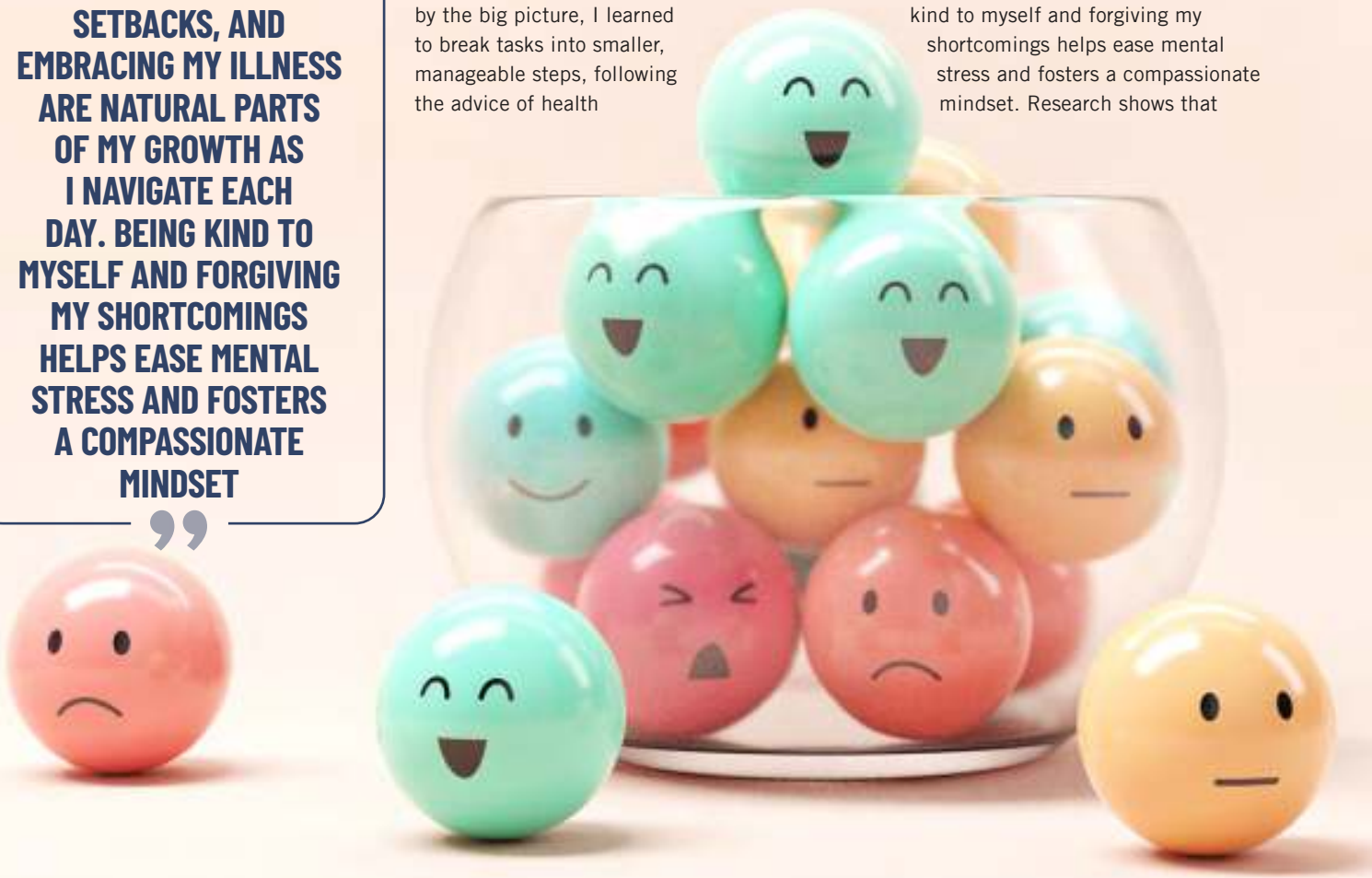
Breaking Down My Goals

Instead of feeling overwhelmed by the big picture, I learned to break tasks into smaller, manageable steps, following the advice of health professionals and what I've learned from reading, both then and now. This approach helped me stay focused and prevent feelings of being overwhelmed. Whether preparing for exams or managing work and family responsibilities, approaching each task calmly and one step at a time helped me reduce burnout and pressure.

Being part of an online course has also been incredibly beneficial, providing the flexibility I need to balance my personal commitments and schedules. The ability to learn and complete assignments asynchronously means I can work at my own pace, fitting my studies into my busy life without feeling rushed or stressed. This flexibility has made a significant difference in my learning experience. I am especially grateful for my professors' understanding and support, which has made this journey more manageable and encouraging.

Accepting That I'm Human

I've come to understand that I don't have to do everything perfectly. Making mistakes, experiencing setbacks, and embracing my illness are natural parts of my growth as I navigate each day. Being kind to myself and forgiving my shortcomings helps ease mental stress and fosters a compassionate mindset. Research shows that



self-compassion enhances emotional resilience, enabling me to bounce back more quickly from challenges. It also helps me celebrate small wins, like enjoying a cup of coffee when my blood sugar is stable, which reminds me of progress, not perfection. My physician emphasized that I don't need to starve myself of foods I enjoy; instead, it's about making mindful choices, practicing self-control, and accepting my humanity. This approach is essential for maintaining both physical health and mental peace, allowing me to live more balanced and fulfilling days.

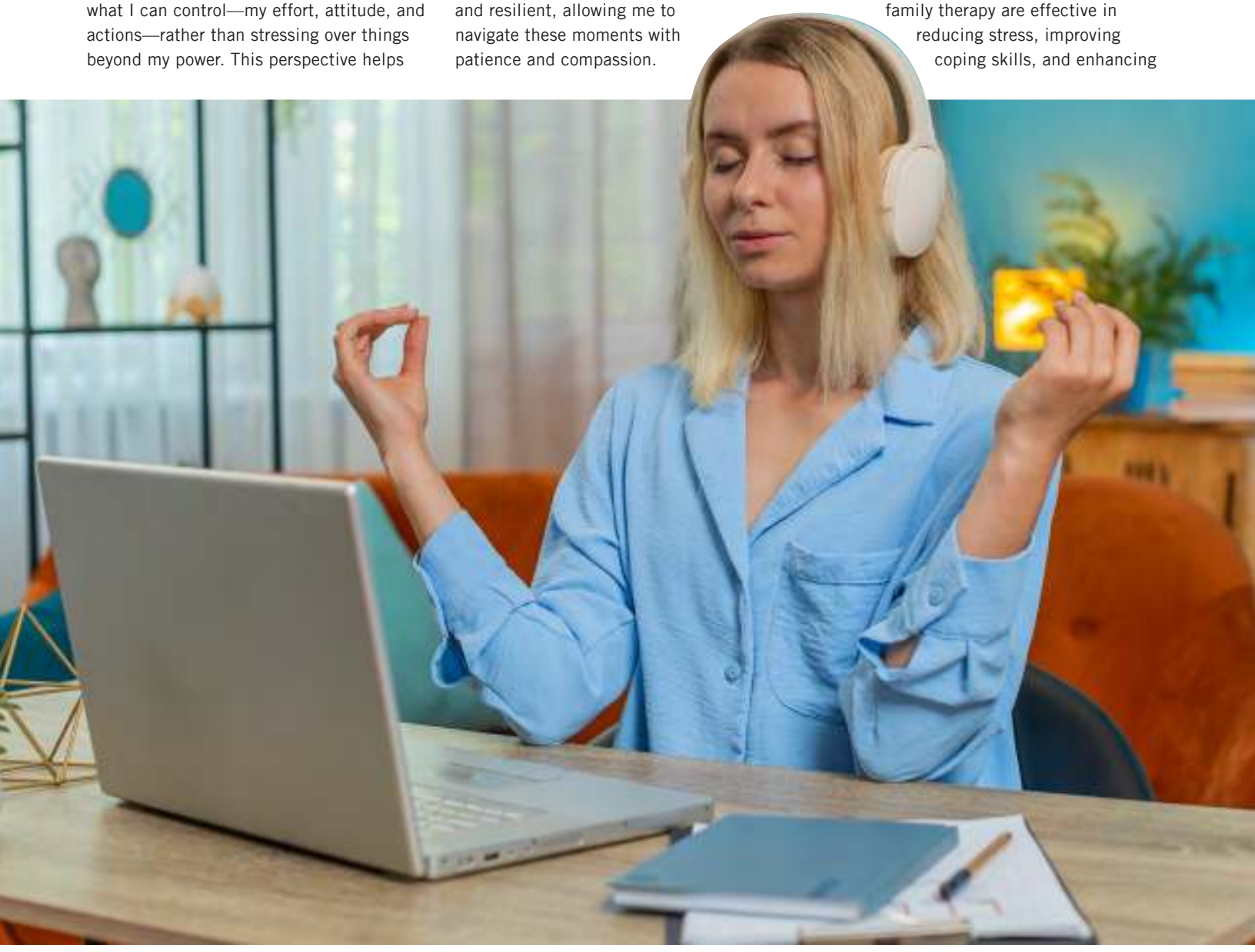
Limiting Worries By Focusing On Control

I remind myself to concentrate only on what I can control—my effort, attitude, and actions—rather than stressing over things beyond my power. This perspective helps manage my emotional wellbeing, especially since studies indicate that individuals with hypertension may experience heightened emotional reactivity, making stress management even more vital. I continue to find joy in simple activities like hiking with a friend, hugging trees when no one is watching, and practicing self-talk during quiet moments alone. I've learned that combining physical activity, proper diet, and stress-relief techniques can significantly improve my overall wellbeing, even amid challenging situations or difficult behaviors from others. Since my ward has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), there are times when his mood is not in my favor, and that can be stressful. However, focusing on what I can control helps me stay grounded and resilient, allowing me to navigate these moments with patience and compassion.

Seeking Support And Sharing My Feelings

Whenever I feel overwhelmed, I make a point to reach out to friends or family or to join my school counseling group. I understand how important it is to share my feelings, as expressing emotions can be a vital step toward healing and self-awareness. Talking about worries and concerns often makes a significant difference; it helps lighten the emotional burden I carry deep down. A graduating psychology student once advised me during a one-on-one talk that opening up and sharing feelings can be a powerful tool for managing stress and fostering resilience.

Research emphasizes that interventions such as counseling, peer support, and family therapy are effective in reducing stress, improving coping skills, and enhancing



quality of life—especially for individuals managing chronic illnesses. These support systems remind me that I don't have to face challenges alone and that sharing my feelings is an essential part of caring for my mental health.

Staying Focused On My Dreams

My aspirations: finishing my degree, building a better future, working overseas, and maintaining my health keep me motivated. I've learned that success requires more than effort; it demands a calm mind, resilience, and a healthy lifestyle. Studies show that good health and mental wellbeing enhance goal achievement and happiness. I stay committed through medication, regular check-ups, a proper diet, and trusting in God's strength. When I let go of worry and anxiety, I think more clearly, make better decisions, and stay motivated, even on tough days.

A Message To Fellow Students And Breadwinners

If you're juggling similar responsibilities, remember: it's okay to feel overwhelmed. It's natural to worry and stress while supporting yourself and chasing your dreams. But don't let these feelings consume you. My journey has taught me that resilience is not about never falling, but about rising every time we do. Take small steps each day to manage stress, nurture your health, and stay connected to your goals. Remember, success isn't just about achievements—it's about being healthy and happy. The road may be tough, but your perseverance will lead you to a brighter, healthier future. Keep moving forward with a calm heart and a hopeful mind. ●

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Busting Autism Myths

By Noel F. De Jesus

During former president Rodrigo Duterte's term, a group of young religious women who supported him presented him an advocacy and hoped he would take their cause. It would not be easy because it was about ASD or autistic spectrum disorder, which even today, remains poorly understood by doctors or if they do, there are different opinions about it.





If understood early, the child could develop exceptional talent, or if not, he or she will be simply shelved aside as a defective child from birth.

The young women decided to make it their advocacy because one of them had an autistic child who grew up to become an outstanding pianist. Here was a child with exceptional talent, but who would not develop because ASD was poorly understood medically. Thus, the young women's advocacy was born. President Duterte understood what it means to be gifted but without the help and support needed by them.

In January 2019, the group chose Ron Michael Aldea as an example of specially gifted children to help develop their genius to flower. He first played beautiful classical concert pieces at a family reunion in Toronto, Canada where they live.

Here was a young Filipino, born and raised in Toronto, Canada, whose hopeless disability became a much-admired ability. He has performed in numerous concerts in Canada to help develop the talented children with ASD.

"SCIENTISTS KNOW THAT AUTISM CAN BE CAUSED BY GENES, BOTH INHERITED AND MUTATED, AS WELL AS OTHER FACTORS, SUCH AS THE ADVANCED AGE OF A PARENT. ONE FRAUDULENT STUDY BLAMED IT ON THE CHILDHOOD VACCINE FOR MEASLES, MUMPS, AND RUBELLA- A PROVOCATIVE CLAIM THAT HAS BEEN DISPROVED"

Tracing The Origin

The brains of infants who develop the disorder grow too fast, researchers say. The discovery could help doctors prevent impairments before they appear.

For parents who learn that their child has autism, the diagnosis comes as a shock. How could their baby have gone from appearing healthy to having an incurable disorder? Since autism was first identified in the 1940s, researchers have struggled to explain it. The cause remains a mystery, but scientists are beginning to learn what happens in the brains of these children.

Studies indicate that it may be possible to detect signs of autism as early as three months of age, long before the disorder manifests itself. Early detection would allow for interventions that might prevent or mitigate the impairments associated with autism.

"What we're learning is that autism is a trait, and whether or not it becomes a disability depends on early experiences," says Ami Klin, a psychologist at Emory University. That raises the possibility, he adds, "that autism as a profound disability, is not inevitable."

Scientists know that autism can be caused by genes, both inherited and mutated, as well as other factors, such as the advanced age of a parent. One fraudulent study blamed it on the childhood vaccine for measles, mumps, and rubella— a provocative claim that has been disproved. Since the late 1990s, the disorder has



become increasingly prevalent. Researchers believe that's partly explained by improvements in diagnosis, but they haven't ruled out the possibility that the incidence is increasing, possibly due to biological and environmental factors.

Joseph Piven, a psychiatrist at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and his colleagues studied 106 infants who had an older sibling with autism, which meant they had a higher chance of developing the disorder. Scanning their brains at six months and again at 12 and 24 months using magnetic resonance imaging, the researchers found striking differences between the infants who later developed autism and those who didn't. The brains of infants who were subsequently diagnosed with the disorder grew faster than the others starting at six months and expanding more in areas until 12 months and then became larger in volume in the second year of life, the team reported in 2017.

The link between brain overgrowth and a subsequent diagnosis of autism was so strong that the researchers could use the brain scans at six and 12 months of age to accurately predict an autism diagnosis for eight out of 10 infants who were found to have the disorder. Scans tracing the irregular brain changes have the potential to allow pediatricians to spot autism well before symptoms appear. The deficits that characterize it – language delays, difficulties with social interaction, and repetitive behaviors – usually don't emerge until about two years after birth, which is when most children are diagnosed. "We're talking about detecting them at a time when they just have some risk markers," Piven says.

Children with autism undergo interventions to help them socialize and communicate, lessening the severity of their impairments. With earlier detection, Piven and his colleagues contend, it eventually might be possible to take preemptive actions, either through behavior modifications or medications, "that would change the trajectory of the brain."







In 2018, a research group led by Charles Nelson, a neuroscientist at Harvard Medical School, published results showing the viability of detecting autism risk in three-month old infants by mapping the electrical activity in their brains using an electroencephalogram, or EEG. The researchers conducted the tests on children between the ages of three months and three years. Nelson and his colleagues found that the activity in the brains of children who were later diagnosed with autism stood out from the rest.

"As early as three months, we see patterns in the EEG that tell us which subset of those children will develop autism," Nelson says.

What these studies reveal about the typical nature of the brain development in the lead-up to autism appears to be consistent with behavioral findings by Klin and his colleagues. Along with Warren Jones, a neuroscientist at Emory, Klin and others tracked the eye movements of babies as they watched videos. In a study with toddlers, they found that those with autism gazed half as often at faces and twice as much at objects.

The results suggest that infants who go on to develop autism see the world in a fundamentally different way. This profoundly alters how they handle social interactions, which in turn has a cascading effect on their brain development, possibly leading to later impairments. "What seems to be happening is that our children with autism are missing thousands and thousands and thousands of experiences of social learning," Klin says.

The findings imply that babies at risk for autism could be nudged onto a remedial track. Researchers have been testing behavioral interventions, such as The Early Start Denver Model, a program that teaches parents and therapists to use specific strategies, including play, to develop social and language skills in children with autism. A recent trial involving 118 children found that the intervention improved language ability, which researchers say is one of the best predictors of long-term gains for individuals with autism.

Geraldine Dawson, a Duke University psychologist, who helped create the model, says, "What we want to do, as early as possible, is to bring the baby back into the social world, so they're paying attention and getting that early enrichment." ●

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From Backyard To BREAKTHROUGH

By Noel F. de Jesus

In the lush, verdant landscapes of the Philippines, nature's pharmacy thrives in abundance. From the misty mountains of Luzon to the sun-kissed shores of Mindanao, a cornucopia of medicinal plants and herbs has been quietly nurturing the health of generations. These botanical treasures, deeply rooted in Filipino culture and traditional medicine, are now gaining recognition on the global stage for their potent healing properties. As we navigate the complexities of modern health challenges, could the answer to many of our wellness woes be growing in our backyards?

Dr. Maria Santos, a prominent ethnobotanist at the University of the Philippines, has spent decades studying the country's indigenous flora. The Philippines is a biodiversity hotspot; she explains, "home to thousands of plant species, many of which have been used medicinally for centuries." Among the most admired is the humble sambong (*Blumea balsamifera*), a shrub whose leaves have been traditionally used to treat kidney stones and urinary tract infections. Recent studies have corroborated its diuretic and anti-inflammatory properties, showcasing how ancient wisdom aligns with modern scientific findings.

Another star in the Philippines herbal pantheon is lagundi (*Vitex negundo*), a shrub whose leaves have been used to alleviate respiratory ailments. "During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw a surge of interest in lagundi," recounts Juan Dele Cruz, a local herbalist from Quezon City. "People were seeking natural ways to boost their lung health." Indeed,



▶ Sambong

▶ Lagundi

▶ Noni fruit



"THE NONI FRUIT (MORINDA CITRIFOLIA), WHILE PRAISED FOR ITS IMMUNE-BOOSTING PROPERTIES, CAN CAUSE LIVER DAMAGE IF CONSUMED IN EXCESS. THIS UNDERSCORES THE NEED FOR INFORMED USE AND GUIDANCE FROM HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS WHEN INCORPORATING MEDICINAL PLANTS INTO WELLNESS ROUTINES"

clinical trials have demonstrated lagundi's efficacy in relieving cough and asthma symptoms and improving mild COVID-19 symptoms, leading to its approval by the Philippine Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as an herbal medicine. This fusion of traditional knowledge and modern research exemplifies the potential of the Philippines medicinal plants to address contemporary health issues.

However, the path from plant to panacea is not without challenges. Dr. Santos cautions, "While these plant herbs can be incredibly beneficial, it's crucial to use them safely and appropriately." She emphasizes the importance of proper identification,



preparation, and dosage. For instance, the noni fruit (*Morinda citrifolia*), while praised for its immune-boosting properties, can cause liver damage if consumed in excess. This underscores the need for informed use and guidance from healthcare professionals when incorporating medicinal plants into wellness routines.

Fortunately, initiatives are underway to bridge the gap between traditional knowledge and modern application. The Department of Science and Technology (DOST) has launched programs to standardize herbal preparations and educate the public on their safe use. Local communities are also playing a vital role in promoting and preserving herbal wisdom. In Batangas, a group of women have started a cooperative that cultivates and processes medicinal plants, providing sustainable livelihoods while ensuring the quality and authenticity of herbal products.

As we look to the future, the potential of the Philippine medicinal plants extends beyond individual health to broader environmental and economic benefits. Sustainable cultivation of these plants can help preserve biodiversity, combat deforestation, and provide economic opportunities for rural communities. Moreover, as the global demand for natural health solutions grows, Philippine herbs could become a significant export, positioning the country as a leader in the burgeoning field of botanical medicine.

In embracing the healing power of Philippine medicinal plants, we're not only improving our personal health but also reconnecting with our cultural heritage and contributing to a more sustainable future. As Dr. Santos poignantly observes, "These plants are not only more than just medicine, but also they're a living link to our ancestors and a gift to future generations. By integrating these natural remedies into our daily wellness routines – with knowledge, respect, and care – we can tap into a centuries-old tradition of holistic health that's as relevant today as it was in the time of our forebears." ●

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By Pebbles Mendoza

STILL MIND, STRONGER LIFE

How the ancient art of meditation is becoming one of the most powerful tools in modern mental health, and why now is the perfect time to start.

Notifications buzz, deadlines loom, and thoughts race ahead to tomorrow before we've even finished today. In this constant hum of urgency, stillness can feel almost unfamiliar, yet it may be exactly what we need most.

Meditation, once associated primarily with spiritual retreats and Eastern traditions, is now stepping confidently into the mainstream as a science-backed practice for mental wellbeing. Championed by neuroscientists, embraced by leading healthcare providers, and adopted by millions worldwide, it is no longer an alternative; it is essential. More than just sitting quietly, meditation offers a way to reconnect with the present moment, creating space to breathe, reflect, and reset.

The Quiet Power Of Awareness

At its core, meditation is the practice of training the mind to focus. Whether through mindful breathing, the gentle repetition of a calming phrase, or simply observing thoughts without judgment, it teaches us something radical in an age of endless distraction: to pause rather than react.

This pause is more powerful than it sounds. As practitioners learn to observe their thoughts rather than be swept away by them, something quietly profound begins to unfold: they are no longer controlled by every worry or distraction that arises. The mental noise doesn't disappear, but it loses its grip.

"Meditation gently restores it. By training the brain to rest its attention on a single point, the rhythm of the breath, and the sensation of stillness"



Less Stress, More Balance

One of meditation's most celebrated benefits is its ability to reduce stress, not as a temporary fix, but as a lasting recalibration of the nervous system. Research consistently demonstrates that regular practice lowers cortisol, the body's primary stress hormone, helping to calm both the mind and the body at a physiological level.

For those trying to get through anxiety, meditation offers something no app notification or weekend getaway can truly replicate: a practical anchor in the present. Instead of spiraling into worst-case scenarios, the mind is gently guided back to the present. Over time, this builds a quiet but unshakeable sense of stability, even when circumstances remain uncertain.

Building Emotional Strength

Life doesn't necessarily get easier, but how we respond to it can change completely. Meditation strengthens emotional resilience by helping us to understand our feelings without being overwhelmed by them. This awareness creates space between stimulus and response, allowing for





thoughtful choices rather than impulsive reactions.

The benefits extend far beyond the cushion. We often find ourselves communicating more clearly, navigating conflict with greater patience, and experiencing a deeper sense of connection, not just with others, but with ourselves. Emotional intelligence, it turns out, is something that can be trained.

Finding Focus In A Distracted World

In an age of chronic multitasking, true presence has become almost a lost art. Meditation gently restores it. By training the brain to rest its attention on a single point, the rhythm of the breath, and the sensation of stillness, the mind gradually becomes less scattered and more capable of sustained, meaningful focus.

The ripple effects of this practice are well-documented: improved concentration, sharper creativity, and a quieter mental landscape that makes space for insight. Many long-term meditators describe the experience simply as finally coming home to the present moment, and finding it surprisingly enough.

Rest That Truly Restores

Stress and overthinking have a habit of following us to bed. For those who lie awake rehearsing the day's events or anticipating tomorrow's demands, meditation offers a gentle but effective circuit-breaker. By calming the nervous system in the hour before sleep, it eases the transition from a busy day into genuinely restorative rest.

Even five minutes of mindful breathing before bed can make a measurable difference—not just in how quickly we fall asleep, but in how refreshed and grounded we feel when waking. Sleep, for the meditator, becomes less about escape and more about renewal.

Perhaps the most transformative aspect of meditation isn't focus or calm, it's kindness. As we turn inward with sustained attention, we begin to develop the same compassion for ourselves that we would readily extend to a close friend.

This shift is quietly revolutionary. Self-criticism softens. The pressure of perfectionism loosens its hold. Over time, meditation gives a more supportive inner voice, one that encourages growth without the fuel of fear. In a culture that constantly measures and compares, this kind of inner peace is nothing short of radical.

Simpler Than You Think

Starting a meditation practice requires no special equipment, no prior experience, and no significant block of free time. It begins with a single intention: to be present for a few minutes each day.

Find a quiet space. Sit comfortably. Close your eyes and notice your breath, nothing more. Thoughts will come; that's perfectly natural. The practice is not about achieving emptiness, but about gently returning attention to the present, again and again. For beginners, even five minutes a day can give noticeable benefits within weeks. Guided meditation apps and short audio programs can also provide structure and encouragement for those just starting out.

A Moment That Changes Everything

Meditation doesn't promise to eliminate life's challenges. What it offers instead is something arguably more valuable: a new way of meeting those challenges, with clarity, calm, and compassion. In a world that relentlessly demands more attention, meditation invites us to reclaim it.

One breath at a time, it reminds us that peace isn't something we have to chase—it's something we can create. And sometimes, the most powerful thing we can do is simply pause… and breathe. ●

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By Evangeline Capuno

EL NIÑO

The Heat Monster Is Coming

Right now, people around the world are discussing El Niño, a climatic event characterized by abnormally warm sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern tropical Pacific that alters global weather patterns.

The current El Niño episode is expected to emerge as early as May–July 2026, with conditions likely persisting through at least to the end of 2026. Climate models indicate the event could reach strong-to-very-strong — or "Super El Niño" — intensity by the fourth quarter of 2026 or early 2027.

So, what is El Niño and how does it affect us?

The name "El Niño" translates to "The Boy" in Spanish, and it was specifically linked to the birth of Jesus Christ because the phenomenon often peaks around Christmas. Thus, the fishermen referred to this warm water event as "*El Niño de Navidad*," highlighting its occurrence during the holiday season.

Today, El Niño is acknowledged as a component of a broader climatic phenomenon often referred to as the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO), which encompasses both El Niño and its counterpart, La Niña (Spanish for "The Girl").

According to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, El Niño occurrences are irregular, taking place every two to seven years, with varying degrees of intensity. Each event usually endures for about a year, although some may be shorter or last slightly longer, influenced by ocean-atmosphere interactions.

"This condition disrupts weather around the world, leading to nasty extremes," says the primer from the Laguna-based Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD), a line agency of the Department of Science and Technology (DOST).

The cycle starts when eastern Pacific winds head westward and push ocean water ahead of them. "When these winds ease, the waves return east," the PCAARRD publication explains. "The warm current mixes with upwelling cold water, warms it slightly, and depresses the thermocline." A thermocline is a layer of cool water that typically separates the warmer ocean surface from the deeper, cooler waters.

"When the sea-surface temperature rises," the PCAARRD primer continues, "the warmer water no longer cools the air above it effectively, producing a cross-ocean temperature differential. Then the winds stop or bring rain and more warm water eastward. The water strikes the coast and splits into two currents that move toward the poles and empty the basin of warm water."

The El Niño cycle may be simple, but the energy reserve it carries is huge, almost beyond what the mind can comprehend. Listen to the explanation of one American meteorologist: "(El Niño) contains more energy than has been procured from all the fossils fuel burned in the United States since the beginning of the century – that's all the gasoline in all the cars, the coal in all the power plants, the natural gas in all the furnaces. It would take more than a million large power plants, at 1,000 megawatts each, running full tilt for a year, to heat the ocean that much."

El Niño is unpredictable. In addition, it is mind-boggling. "This weather disturbance is considered an enemy that could cause damage to the environment, agriculture and marine life. As such, it has destructive consequences to human life," the PCAARRD said.

Scientists rank El Niño as the number one force disturbing climate patterns. For example, in North America, the northern regions of the United States and Canada frequently undergo warmer and drier winters, whereas the southern US encounters wetter and more turbulent weather.

In South America, the coastal areas of Ecuador and Peru might suffer from significant rainfall and flooding, while other parts of the continent deal with drought conditions. In Asia and Australia, the majority of nations face drier climates and a heightened risk of drought and wildfires.

Canadian journalist Stephen Leahy described the forthcoming "super El Niño" as "the colossal-heat-monster Kraken." The Kraken is a prominent literary symbol, embodying the mysteries and fears linked to the expansive ocean. It has been featured in numerous literary works, such as Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*.

Leahy reports: "A super El Niño is likely to start up in June or July, with impacts felt in late summer or early autumn. Most places will be hotter, in what is already likely to be a record or near-record hot year. 2027 is virtually certain to be the new hottest year ever."

There exists a genuine possibility of experiencing the most intense El Niño event in 140 years, according to Paul Roundy, a professor of Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences at the University at Albany, State University of New York.

This phenomenon may even surpass the El Niño intensity record established in November 2015, when sea surface temperatures in the equatorial central Pacific region peaked above 2.5 degrees Celsius above the average.

Whether it will be a super El Niño or not, it can have detrimental effects on the economy in the Philippines. For one, it can



▶ Cracked soils



▶ Watering crops

▶ Water shortage

adversely impact households since over 20 percent of the local workforce depends on agriculture. El Niño results in reduced water availability, leading to dry spells or droughts.

"We drink, in one form or another, perhaps four liters of water per day," said Lester Brown, founder of the Worldwatch Institute (closed 2017) and the Earth Policy Institute (closed 2015), both formerly based in Washington, D.C. "But the food we consume each day requires 2,000 liters of water to produce, or 500 times as much."

Rice, the primary food source for Filipinos, illustrates this problem. Studies have shown that an average farmer needs between 2,500 to 3,500 liters of water to yield just one kilogram of rice. Historical El Niño events have led to a 20 percent decrease in rice production in the country.

Brownouts are expected to become the norm rather than an exception. Under typical circumstances, power outages happen. But during El Niño conditions, these outages will be persistent, and there is no guarantee regarding the restoration of electricity.

The energy crisis will be particularly pronounced in Mindanao. This island, the second largest in the country, derives its electricity from four primary sources: hydropower, coal, geothermal, and oil. Notably, over 50 percent of its power supply is sourced from hydropower through Agus-Pulangi Hydropower Complex.

Fish is the other staple food of Filipinos. Fish production is most likely to be affected as well. After all, they are inhabiting the marine waters, from which the phenomenon actually commences. The ocean is not a uniform and constant environment.

"The high temperature and rapid evaporation of surface water during El Niño create unfavorable conditions for marine fishes," said Dr. Aida Jose, a prominent Filipino climatologist.

"Production losses are caused by drying of fish ponds, shorter production cycles, stunted fish growth, and fish mortalities from stress, poor water quality and disease," Dr. Jose pointed out.

El Niño likewise fosters diseases. Such were the findings of an analysis that was

published in *Scientific Reports*. The study analyzed data from the abnormally strong 2015-2016 El Niño, and scientists found increases in incidences of diseases like chikungunya, hantavirus, cholera, and Zika.

The Department of Health (DOH), on its website, lists disorders associated with high temperatures caused by El Niño. These are: heat cramps, heat exhaustion, exertional heat injury and heat stroke.

Diarrhea and skin diseases are among the health problems related to water scarcity, according to the health department. "Without adequate water, people cannot wash themselves properly," DOH said.

The health department also cited red tide blooms, which can cause paralytic shellfish poisoning. The high temperature of the water is one of the conditions that trigger red tides. People are advised to refrain from eating shellfish.

"Every Filipino is advised to get ready for the impacts of El Niño. Just like past El Niño events, it will come to pass. But when will the El Niño phenomenon end? Scientists claim that when there is no longer enough warm water to sustain the cycle, it dissipates – and then things return to normal once again"



"Humans die when they consume shellfish, particularly mussels, that are contaminated with red tide organisms," Dr. Rafael Guerrero III, an academician with the National Academy of Science and Technology, said. "Being filter-feeders, the mussels take in the red tide organisms from the water, which are accumulated in their internal organs."

Dr. Guerrero said people still get poisoned even if the mussels are cooked because the toxin is not destroyed by heat. The poison in the red tide organisms is known as saxitoxin, a water-soluble salt that affects the nervous system.

Emmanuel Piñol, when he was the agriculture secretary, stated, "There is no way we could prevent the occurrence of El Niño, but we could mitigate its effects by instituting long-term and sustainable programs."

Since water is one of the greatest problems during the El Niño conditions, the health department suggests some measures, such as conserving and using water wisely. It also urges the government to protect water sources from contamination.

Drinking more fluids and wearing light clothing are also highly suggested. People are urged to avoid strenuous physical activity, and if they go out, they must use umbrellas and wear hats.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) offers these timely measures: use a glass of water when brushing teeth; water plants in the morning or in the evening; take a bath in five minutes tops; use a bucket; use washing machines only when it's fully loaded; use water basins when washing dishes by hand; and use a bucket of water and a rag to wash your car or bike.

Since there is less rainfall, PCAARRD advises farmers to plant drought-tolerant crops.

Every Filipino is advised to get ready for the impacts of El Niño. Just like past El Niño events, it will come to pass. But when will the El Niño phenomenon end? Scientists claim that when there is no longer enough warm water to sustain the cycle, it dissipates – and then things return to normal once again. ●

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By Dennis V. Gargantiel

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

ALEX EALA'S (NOT SO) SECRET WEAPON

Filipina tennis sensation Alex Eala faced instant disaster in the very first game of her first round match at the Linz Ladies Open in Austria last April. Her opponent was sitting pretty on two break points, 40 to 15. Even if you don't play tennis, it's easy to imagine how deflating it must have felt to be on the brink of being broken in the opening game of a match. Ordinary humans would have given it up for lost and wallowed in the thought of failing to take advantage of having first serve. But not Alex. She looked disaster in the eye and buckled down to work. After two grueling rallies, she equalized, survived two deuces, and went on to hold serve.



Top-notch mental fortitude, right? Well, if you think that's something, imagine going through the same wringer nine more times and coming out unbroken in all but one. If that's not Olympic-level resilience, we don't know what is! Eala obviously has the mental game down pat. But the thing is, what she brings to bear is not exactly mental; it is emotional strength, or what psychologists call emotional intelligence (or EQ for short). It's not mental in the sense that one can simply will it into existence, but is a product of understanding, self-regulating and putting our emotions to good use.

EQ Decoded

As we now know, there are many kinds of smarts. You can be book-smart, street-smart, a musical genius, a mathlete or maybe even a walking Wikipedia. But there is a kind of intelligence that has been largely underrated and overlooked: being smart with our feelings. This sort of intelligence is evident in how one chooses to be calm and composed in such situations as getting stuck in traffic, having an argument with someone, or, as in Eala's case, facing break point in tennis. But there is much more to EQ than being Zen when needed. Knowing how emotions could influence decisions, behavior, relationships and performance can help us to lead effective, more fulfilling and happier lives. What is great about EQ is that it is not as biologically "fixed" as IQ but can be developed and strengthened over time through simple awareness and practice.

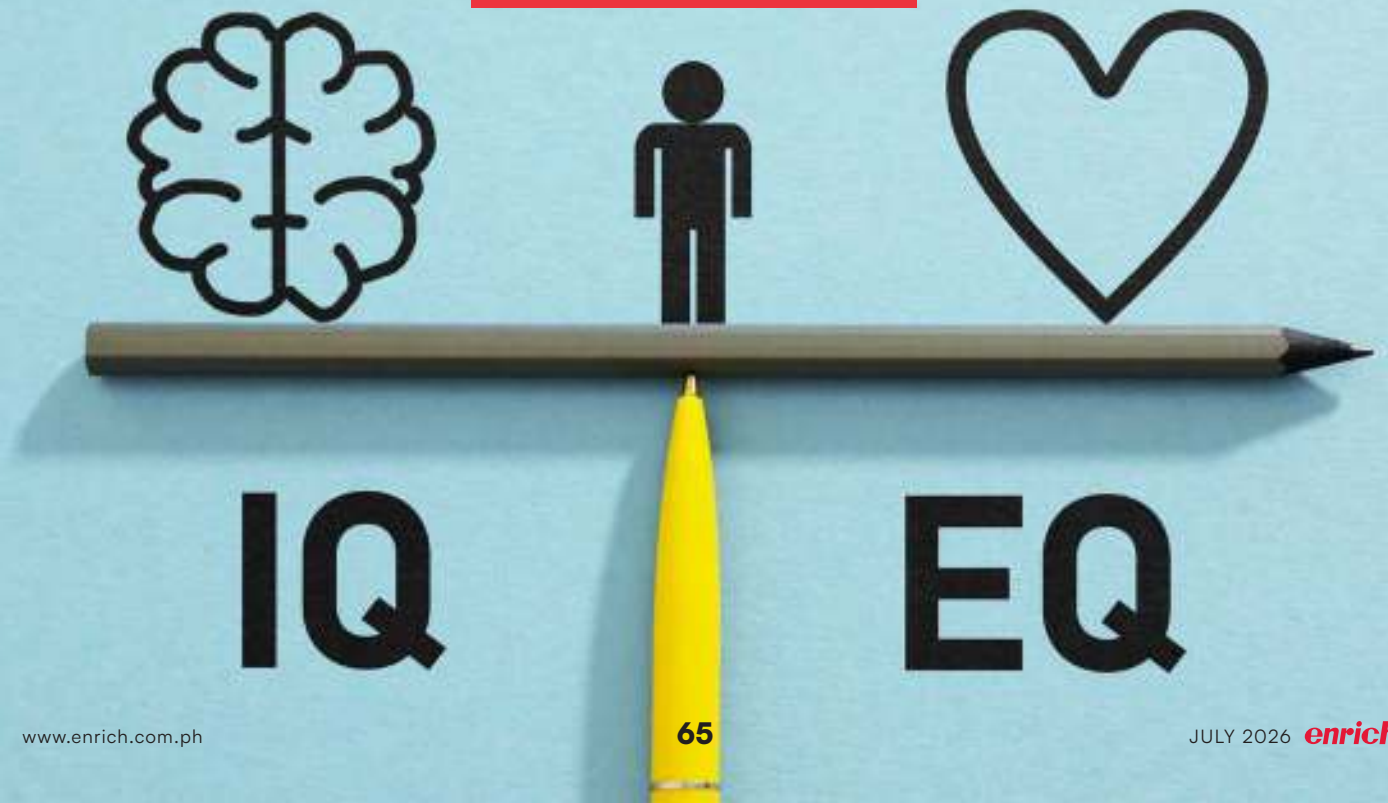
To be clear, emotional intelligence does not mean you have to be calm, happy or super nice 24/7; only fictional characters like SpongeBob and Mr. Spock can do that! What is most important for us to understand is that human existence entails experiencing both good and bad emotions, some of which can make us lose focus on the task at hand or do things we might instantly or later regret. Such understanding helps prevent impulsive decisions and navigate conflicts with clarity and compassion. It can also make us see why boundaries are needed in relationships and why we sometimes have to make tough choices. Don't be surprised, though, if you end up being calm, happy and super nice more of the time, anyway! Studies show that emotionally-intelligent people tend to be more stress-resilient, have stronger relationships, perform better at work or in sports, and experience greater life satisfaction.

Self-Awareness

Emotional intelligence starts from knowing oneself; our strengths, weaknesses and limitations in particular. From what we've seen so far, Eala has mastered this at such a young age. Though she now plays elite-level tennis, she remains grounded in the way she talks about learning the game in a substandard tennis-slash-basketball court, having no high-level local tournaments that could have helped her game to grow, or a local tennis hero to blaze a trail. While recognizing that she is still a work in progress, she certainly knows that she belongs on the WTA tour. She's also aware of her massive popularity and de facto role as a national hero, and yet is remarkably able to keep her feet firmly on the ground. Rather than being overwhelmed, she views the crazy fandom as a strength that few other ladies on the tour possess.

"Studies show that emotionally-intelligent people tend to be more stress-resilient, have stronger relationships, perform better at work or in sports, and experience greater life satisfaction"

But perhaps the most helpful thing to know about oneself, at least in this context, is recognizing one's emotions as they happen in real time, understanding what triggers them, and their impact on our own behavior or on others. Eala herself often points to her ability to control her emotions during intense matches or critical junctures of a match as one of her biggest strengths. "I know how I feel in certain moments, and I know myself," she explained in a recent interview. You don't see her overemotionally argue a call with umpires or smash a racket in anger or frustration. It is awareness that we all can make good use of in our ordinary lives. Knowing what ticks us off or causes



anxiety or displeasure can help us avoid future situations or interactions. Or, failing avoidance, to wisely modify reactions or behavior such that a positive outcome for all involved might be gained.

Self-Regulation

Managing one's emotions starts with earnest resolve to monitor what we are feeling, and for the negative ones that prove problematic, to identify the triggers or patterns of behavior that lead to them. If you notice yourself getting angry or frustrated, tell it to yourself – naming the emotion alone is a big first step towards control as it opens a crack for the rational, thinking part of your brain to realize what is happening under its nose in real time. Stopping to take note of how we feel is easier said than done, of course. But with awareness and practice, this can be mastered even by the overly sensitive or wildly impulsive over time.

As we see in Eala's case, family values and a great upbringing certainly helps. She is living proof that we learn what to do with however we feel from those around us at a very young age. Parents' and siblings' reactions to stress and go-to behaviors when experiencing emotional extremes are templates for kids to emulate. Eala often credits her late grandfather (her coach from age four to thirteen) and parents for instilling her work ethic and commitment to professionalism very early on. The Rafa Nadal Academy may have honed her controlled aggression and grit-and-grace under pressure, but the fundamental values were already there.

Mining Positive Emotions

However, EQ is not just about handling negative emotions; it is also about putting positive ones to good use. We all marvel at how someone as young as Eala can manage the tremendous pressure of representing 120 million Filipinos each time she steps onto tennis's biggest courts and even being likened to boxing hero Manny Pacquiao. She, of course, takes pride in representing a nation, but as Eala herself endearingly explained, the secret is to do it with "a spoonful of gratitude."

Gratitude is a powerful yet largely underutilized positive emotion with clinically-proven benefits to mental and physical wellbeing. Ample research has shown that simply feeling grateful lowers stress hormone levels, mediates optimal autonomic nervous ("rest-and-digest") system functions, and triggers the release of feel-good chemicals in the brain. Being thankful can also overcome the brain's natural tendency for negativity bias and leave little room for unwanted emotional states such as complacency, arrogance or feelings more toxic to creep in.



"Eala herself often points to her ability to control her emotions during intense matches or critical junctures of a match as one of her biggest strengths"

Another positive emotion we've seen Eala display is compassion. That look of genuine concern on her face when an opponent (Gauff, Ostapenko, Baptiste, Boulter) has had to retire due to injury or physical discomfort has endeared her to tennis aficionados. Like gratitude, compassion is known to reduce stress, trigger the release of feel-good brain chemicals, improve cardiovascular health, and boost the immune system. Studies moreover show that experiencing these positive emotions boosts happiness and sense of meaning. Wittingly or not, Eala makes use of these emotions to her advantage. Emotional intelligence, along with the grit-and-grace combo of "no doubt," "never-say-die," and "it's a process" mindsets, makes her a formidable competitor and role model for aspiring youngsters as well.

We all can't be as good as Alex Eala at tennis; she is a generational talent, for sure. But the good news is we all have the capacity to be as emotionally intelligent, and if you are still in doubt as to what it's good for, ample research has shown that the ability to recognize one's feelings and those of others, managing them, and using them for self-motivation, are vital elements for success and interpersonal relations in everyday life. Believe it or not, it has been proven more important than IQ for reaching one's goals. ●

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"BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD"

By Arthur Dominic Villasanta

Old age is defined by relentless loss. And this unending parade of pain—of loss after loss after loss—can be dire for an elderly person's psychological and physical health.

The loss of loved ones, especially the death of a dear spouse; the loss of the ability to care for oneself because of frailty; the loss of one's esteem and self-worth because of loneliness and the loss of cognitive functions with the onset of dementia, are devastating for the elderly if left unchecked. All of these disastrous events create vast and depressing voids of despair that make daily life a living hell for the unfortunate.

More so for "solo agers" who live alone, either by force of circumstance or by choice. "Lonely death" or "solitary death" among the elderly is the tragic and extreme fate awaiting the isolated. Isolation is never good for solo-agers, widows and widowers. Or for any senior, for that matter.

Loss-loss

This torrent of continuous pain has a name. It's called "the loss-loss cycle." On the other hand, gerontological literature refers to it as "grief overload" or "bereavement overload." These phrases are terrible in themselves and highlight the reality that living longer also boosts one's lingering fear of death, and might indeed make one long for it eventually.

Unfortunately, deaths in the loss-loss cycle tend to occur in rapid succession and leave one with scarcely any time to properly heal from the onslaught of grief. Such was the case with me in 2025. In the space of a scant seven months starting January, I lost my beloved sister to cancer; my young daughter-in-law, also to cancer, and two of my dear first cousins who I had grown-up with.

These deaths left me dumbfounded. Too much pain in so short a span of time. The tears still linger. I haven't stopped asking, "Why"?

If anyone asks if I want to live to 100, which seems increasingly possible with



"miracle technologies" such as epigenetic reprogramming and mitochondrial rejuvenation coming online, my answer will always be a loud, "Hell, no"!

And who wants to be the last survivor of the generation into which you were born? Who looks forward to being the only one left to visit the graves of your parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins and dear friends from happier times? The Last Survivor is an unwanted curse.

Surviving the deaths of so many of those near and dear to you will eventually become unbearable. The immortal plaint, "*There, but for the grace of God, go I*," becomes a mournful lament and not a song of thanksgiving. Survivor's guilt is no longer something you conceive as being limited to soldiers who have survived battle.

Recovery?

Resignation or acceptance is a common way the elderly cope with loss. Their long years of life have taught them to accept the inevitability of loss.

They know enough not to rail against outrageous fortune but instead to nurture the mental and emotional toughness to cope with and overcome its tortures. Turning to Jesus Christ and the Blessed Virgin is the medicine many Filipino elderly turn to to assuage their agony. God bless them all.

Acceptance is the final stage in what is today more popularly referred to as "The Five Stages of Grief." The other four stages are Denial, Anger, Bargaining and Depression. In acceptance, one affirms a new reality with the loss of a loved one. It's key to moving forward into a strange, new world and re-entering the world of the living.

On the other hand, medical professionals prescribe a mix of psychological and physical routines to mend a battered psyche, which is the sum total of our minds' conscious and unconscious thoughts, emotions, and memories.

Recovering from the immense stresses of multiple losses means allowing yourself to grieve. Healing means honoring lost loved ones while finding a new purpose in life. Many a time, healing means seeking moral support from people who have undergone the same misfortune. In some cases, coming to terms with loss takes the path of seeking professional psychological assistance.



People in grief often want to be alone. They need the silence and solace that silence brings to process their turbulent emotions of sadness and confusion. They strive to build a safe, private space in their minds — a haven of solitude — where they can reflect deeply on how best to cope.

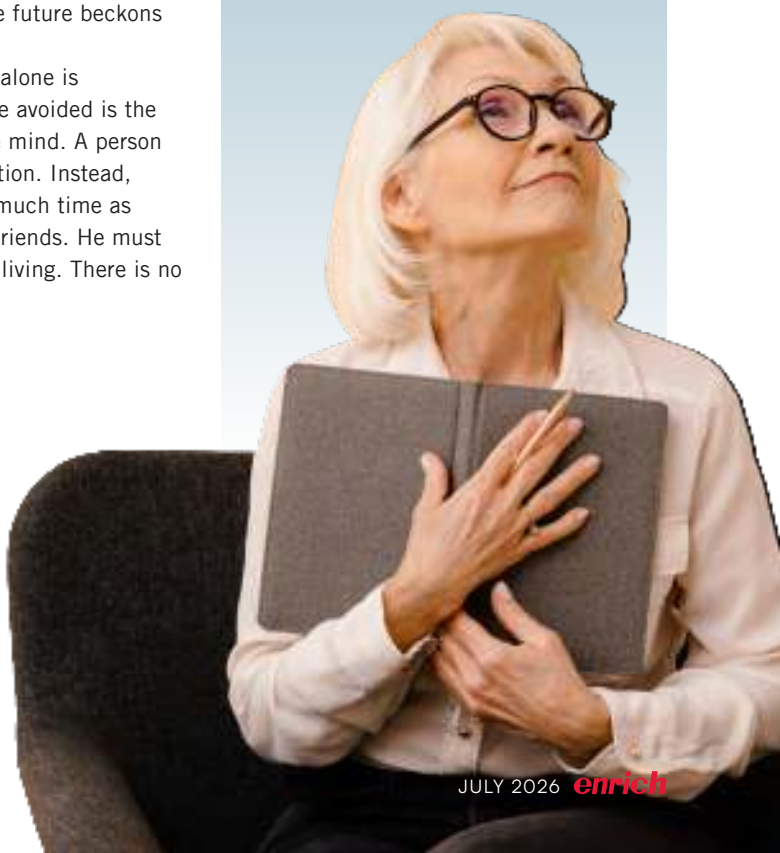
Alone time allows them to come to grips with their overwhelming pain and to regain more control over a shattered life. The aim is to heal at your own pace, which is a normal part of mourning and a key step in emotional recovery. The future beckons despite the pain.

In this context, being alone is therapeutic. What must be avoided is the isolation that destroys the mind. A person in grief must banish isolation. Instead, he or she must spend as much time as possible with family and friends. He must rediscover life to keep on living. There is no other choice.

Do Something

But if self-healing proves fruitless, consult with a doctor or mental health therapist if grief hinders daily activities or leads to severe depression. There is grief so overpowering that faith alone cannot conquer it.

"Resignation or acceptance is a common way the elderly cope with loss. Their long years of life have taught them to accept the inevitability of loss"



Re-engaging with the world outside your pain demands action. It demands that you do something that gives your life renewed meaning. Take up a hobby (playing a musical instrument, reading, photography, gardening or inventing); volunteer for a meaningful cause or engage in religious activities with others that give you joy in action. You need to act—actually do something—to find a new meaning and new purpose to your life. Let the dead past bury its dead.

Me, I took to playing the Melodica once again. I hadn't played this unique and little-known musical instrument for decades. I bought one at a second-hand store I came upon by chance and have since been playing those wonderful love songs from my younger years. I hadn't expected to find a Melodica at this nondescript store. The original Melodicas, like the one I had in grade school, are made by the German firm, Hohner.

Was it kismet? Whatever it was, I'm still happy about this accident. Romantic ballads from the 1970s to the 1980s are still the best to me, and I play them often. Making music is always a delight. I also have an old-fashioned record player and am now hunting the vinyl records from my youth with emphasis on 45s.

Complicated Grief

I'm trying to avoid falling victim to what the learned call "Prolonged Grief Disorder" (PGD) or "complicated grief." This troubling emotion is a protracted and intense reaction to loss that can have unhealthy mental and physical consequences if left unchecked.

It creates an intense yearning, sadness, and numbness to emotions that can persist for months or even years. It leaves a victim unable to engage with the world. Complicated grief can also make it harder for one to resume their own life and impede future plans.

"Complicated grief can also lead to or intensify frailty. A curse of old age, frailty is a medical condition where an elderly body is wracked by reduced strength, energy, and the ability to recover from illness or injury"

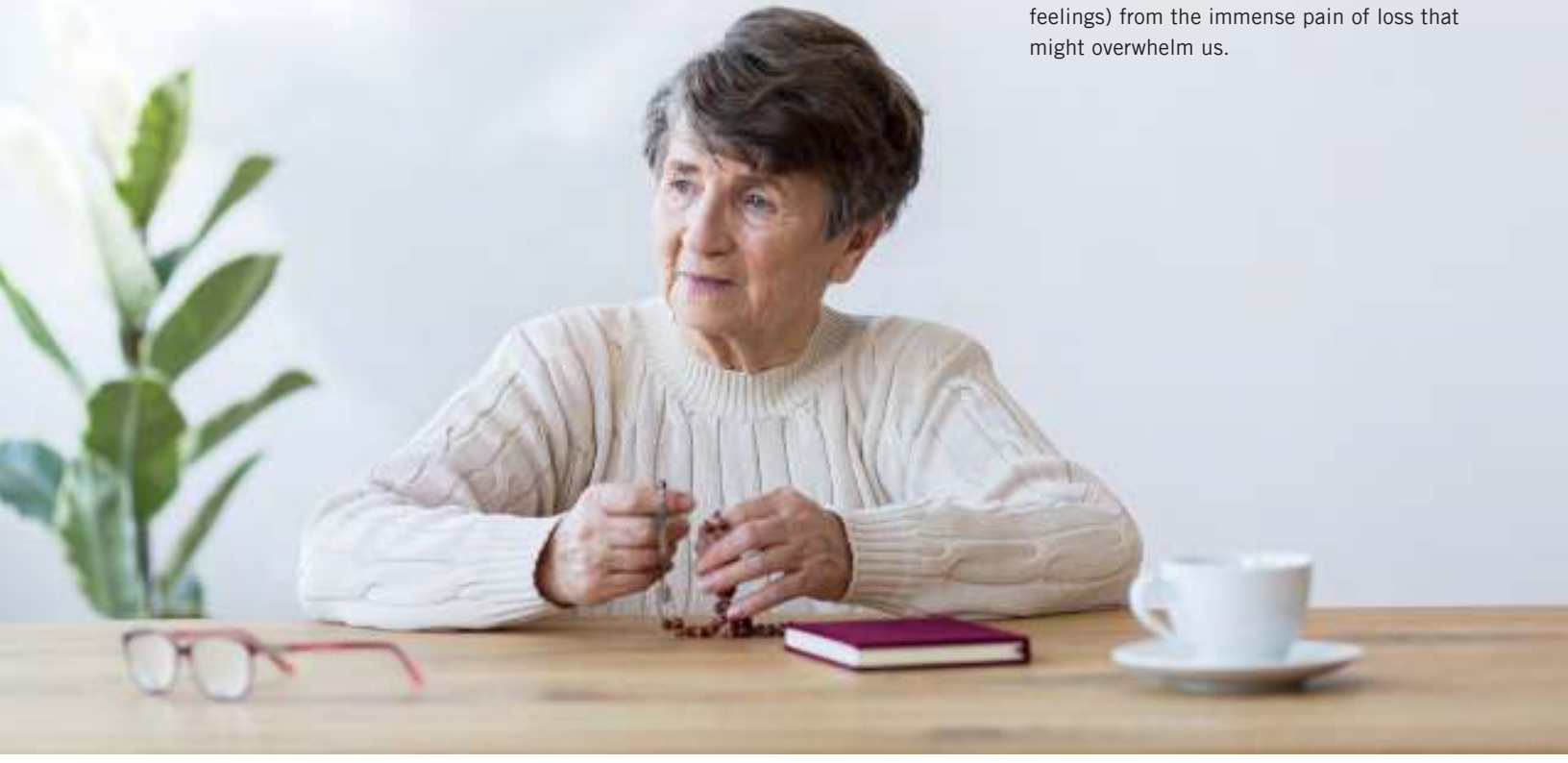
Typical grief gradually fades over time. On the other hand, complicated grief lasts longer. There are cases where adults with intense symptoms suffer for more than 12 months. Children have been known to bear complicated grief for six months.

PGD is now formally recognized in the DSM-5-TR (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fifth Edition, Text Revision) published in 2022 by the American Psychiatric Association. DSM is the authoritative handbook used by healthcare professionals in diagnosing, classifying, and identifying mental disorders.

DSM-5-TR says PGD can become a serious psychological condition because it stalls the natural healing process. It turns the ordinary state of mourning into a chronic and debilitating mental health issue. The greatest threat arising from complicated grief is "emotional paralysis".

This debilitating state is described as a kind of "freezing" or "stuckness". Its hallmarks are overwhelming and unresolved emotions that prevent a bereaved person from functioning or moving forward with his or her life.

Freezing can be a good thing, however. It acts as a shield protecting our psyche (the term for the human mind, soul or our spirit as the core of our thoughts and feelings) from the immense pain of loss that might overwhelm us.





In the end, a bereaved person has to overcome both complicated grief and emotional paralysis for their life to continue and to have meaning. "Moving on" is necessary. Not doing so will make you well and truly crazy.

Therapy and counseling by medical professionals help an individual find ways to remember their loved ones without being overwhelmed by intense feelings of despair, guilt or anger. The future has to be built one small step at a time. Without a future, what is there to live for?

Bad For Health

Complicated grief manifests physically. Its more frequent signs include persistent fatigue, severe sleep disturbances, noticeable weight loss or gain and increased susceptibility to infections. Left untreated, complicated grief is linked to higher mortality because its victims can neglect their physical and mental health. Health decline is a consequence.

Among seniors, prolonged grief can greatly degrade physical health. While it can trigger chronic inflammation, this condition can also weaken their immunity and increase the risk of heart disease. It often causes chronic inflammation, weakens immunity, and increases the risk of heart disease.

Complicated grief is bad for the heart because high stress levels can lead to hypertension. There is also the potential for other cardiovascular issues, such as abnormal heart palpitations (atrial fibrillation, or AFib, and ventricular tachycardia, for example).

For seniors, the red flags for abnormal heart palpitations include fainting or near-fainting (syncope), chest pain, severe shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, sudden confusion and lightheadedness.

Complicated grief can also lead to or intensify frailty. A curse of old age, frailty is a medical condition where an elderly body is wracked by reduced strength, energy, and the ability to recover from illness or injury. It's basically a state of increased vulnerability in which a minor problem, such as a small infection or a fall, can become a major and sometimes life-threatening condition.

Recovering from multiple deaths of your loved ones in old age is difficult. Survivor guilt tends to creep into the picture. "Why him?" or "Why her?" and "Why not me?" are unanswerable questions. I remain shattered by the untimely death of my eldest son's wonderful wife in January 2025. I still haven't come to terms with this loss.

I honor their memories and say prayers for them. I smile and shed tears. And there will come a day when all these will no longer matter to me. ●

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ST. PIER GIORGIO FRASSATI

He Climbed Physical And Spiritual Mountains

By Eva Angcanan

Some months ago, I noticed that a new building across the spacious University of Santo Tomas (UST) campus, along Espana, was directly connected to the UST campus via an enclosed footbridge. At that time, the building was named the Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati building. An exhibit regarding his life was also on display in the UST Main Building lobby.

This youthful saint serves as an inspiration to young people.

Who Is St. Pier Giorgio Frassati?

He was born with the proverbial silver spoon on April 6, 1901, in Turin, northern Italy, to Alfredo Frassati and Adelaide Ametis. Alfredo was the owner of the newspaper *La Stampa*, a senator, and a diplomat. He was an agnostic. Adelaide was a painter. Pier Giorgio saw his life as that of an unholy person.

"Although he comes from a rich family, he decided to live his life serving the poor, the marginalized members of the community and the youth. He lived an ordinary life in an extraordinary way. He insisted on being a Roman Catholic and opposed the ideas and thoughts of his agnostic father," says a youthful Father Dexter Austria, O.P., director of UST's Facilities Management Office, which is one of his many duties and titles within the university.

A story goes that a shoeless young boy and his mother knocked at the door of the Frassati home. Upon seeing the shoeless boy, the young Pier Giorgio gave his shoes and socks to the boy before his family could object to his charitable act.

"He lived his life according to the Eight Beatitudes. That is why then Pope John Paul II called him the Man of the Eight Beatitudes. He was poor in spirit. He wanted to get away from the mentality that being happy means being rich. He wanted to detach himself from materiality in order to serve the poor." He served the poor and the sick, buying food for them with the allowance he received from his parents.

St. Pier Giorgio Frassati indulged in sports, especially in mountain climbing, hiking and swimming. He saw mountain climbing as more than a physical activity; he saw it as a spiritual ascent to God. After his final climb, he wrote in a photograph the words, *verso l'alto*, which means "to the heights" in English. "For St. Pier Giorgio Frassati, being a Roman Catholic is always an ascent to God. We need to go up to God to attain holiness. Life on earth can only give temporary happiness. But, eternal happiness can only be experienced with God," says Father Austria.

"To St. Pier Giorgio, holiness is for everyone. Holiness is not exclusive to the clergy and to the religious." In 1922, Pier Giorgio joined the Third Order of St. Dominic (St. Dominic de Guzman founded the Dominican Order or Order of Preachers), which means that he is a lay Dominican.

But the life of this young and charitable man was cut short when he contracted polio from one of his visits to the sick. He died on July 4, 1925. During Pier Giorgio's funeral, his parents were so surprised when they saw the number of poor people who lined the streets to pay their last respects to Pier Giorgio.

When Pier Giorgio's body was exhumed in 1981, it was found to be incorrupt.

Miracle For His Beatification

A 40-year-old paralyzed and dying Domenico Sellan was sick of Pott's disease (spinal tuberculosis) and paralysis. After he was handed a prayer card, he prayed to Pier Giorgio and asked for his intercession for complete recovery in 1933. Sellan was healed and lived for another 35 years! This



> **St. Pier Giorgio Frassati indulged in sports, especially in mountain climbing, hiking and swimming. He saw mountain climbing as more than a physical activity; he saw it as a spiritual ascent to God**

miracle sealed Pier Giorgio's beatification in May 1990 by then Pope John Paul II.

Miracle For His Canonization

In 2017, an American seminarian named Juan Manuel Gutierrez from Los Angeles, California, suffered from a torn Achilles tendon after playing basketball with friends. Knowing that his recovery would be lengthy and expensive, Juan Manuel prayed to Blessed Pier Giorgio for his complete recovery. Juan Manuel's prayers were heard, and he completely recovered from the injury. This second miracle paved the way for Blessed Pier Giorgio's canonization on September 7, 2025, by current Pope Leo XIV. On that same day, another young saint, Blessed Carlo Acutis, was also declared a saint. St. Pier Giorgio Frassati's Feast Day is on July 4.

The St. Pier Giorgio Frassati Building

"This 22-floor building was built across the wide UST campus during the pandemic years of 2020 to 2021. It houses classrooms, a two-level library, a gym, an auditorium, laboratories, a chapel, and a parking lot." UST's Senior High School students attend their classes there.

Father Dexter suggested to the UST's Council of Regents that the Pontifical University's newest building be named after Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati. To his credit, his proposal was approved. After the lay Dominican's canonization, the building was renamed St. Pier Giorgio Frassati.

UST's Senior High School students have a great patron saint to emulate in St. Pier Giorgio Frassati, who attended daily Holy Mass, received Holy Communion daily, and participated in Eucharistic devotions. His holiness was inculcated in his life. That kind of holiness has to be shared with the people around us and passed on. Love, charity and holiness should be shared. ●

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By Eva Angcanan

BOY SCOUTS OF THE PHILIPPINES

Remembering Those Who Perished in the 1963 Plane Crash

As a child, I read the contents of our school's yearbooks that were handed to each of us at the end of the second semester, usually during the month of April. At times, I came across the street addresses of graduating students that started with the word, *scout*. I quietly wondered, "Who were these *scouts*?" Well, years later, I learned why some streets in Quezon City bore the first word, *scout*, followed by a family name.

During this month of July, let us remember these 24 who became part of the history of the Boy Scouts of the Philippines.

Sixty-three years ago, the Philippine contingent, made up of 20 Boy Scouts and four leaders, left Manila to attend the 11th World Jamboree in Marathon, Greece, on July 27, 1963, a Saturday. They boarded a KLM plane bound for Hong Kong. From Hong Kong, the 24 boarded the plane that should have brought them to Greece via Bangkok, Thailand and Bombay, India.

Unfortunately, the next day, on July 28, 1963, the United Arab Airlines plane carrying the 24 members of the Boy Scouts of the Philippines (BSP) contingent to Marathon, Greece plunged into the Arabian Sea off the coast of Bombay. All 24 perished.

Our country and the Scouting world grieved for the 24. In Marathon, Greece, the ceremonies opened on August 1 with all flags flown at half-mast, as an expression of mourning.

Then President Diosdado Macapagal led our country in mourning the loss of the Philippine contingent. The country's Chief Executive put the government in motion to assist Indian authorities in determining the cause of the crash and to bring the remains of the 24 home. Then Pope Paul VI sent a letter of condolence.

At the 11th Jamboree, the Philippines was represented by Boy Scouts of the Philippines who traveled ahead of the 24 and three boys who traveled to Greece after they were left behind due to lack of funding for the plane fare.

To honor the ill-fated 24, a mausoleum was erected in their memory at the Manila North Cemetery. Streets in Barangay Laging Handa in Quezon City were named after each member of the contingent. There are streets named Boy Scouts Avenue, Marathon Street and 11th Jamboree to memorialize the incident. Parks, monuments and chapels were erected in honor of some of the boys in the provinces where they came from. For instance, a colleague volunteered information that Scout Jose Fermin G. Magbanua, who hails from Dumaguete, has a memorial inside the Dumaguete Memorial Park. At the intersection of Timog Avenue and Tomas Morato Avenue in Quezon City stands a monument to honor the 24 members of the Philippine contingent.

Each of the 24 received a Gallantry and Heroism Award – Special Gold Medal of Honor Category and a Plaque. The book, Diamond Jubilee Year Book of the Boy Scouts of the Philippines, states that the Gallantry and Heroism Award is classified into several categories based on the degree of risk involved in the incident.

In 1988, then President Corazon C. Aquino proclaimed July 28 as Scouts Memorial Day.

Last year, a groundbreaking ceremony was held at the Ala-ala Mausoleum in Manila North Cemetery to mark the start of the building of a Scout Memorial Pavilion.

The 24 members of the Philippine delegation to the 11th World Jamboree in Marathon, Greece who were on board the plane that crashed in the Arabian Sea were:



Dr. Bonifacio V. Lazcano, National Council; Florante L. Ojeda, Agusan Council; Librado L. S. Fernandez, Manila Council; Reverend Father Jose Agcaoili Martinez, S.J., Misamis Oriental; Ramon V. Albano, Manila Council; Patricio D. Bayoran, Jr., Pasay City; Gabriel N. Borromeo, Manila Council; Roberto C. Castor, Quezon City Council; Henry C. Chuatoco, Manila Council; Jose Antonio C. Delgado, Manila Council; Felix P. Fuentebella, Jr., Manila Council; Pedro H. Gandia, Manila Council; Victor C. De Guia, Jr., Baguio City Council; Antonio M. Limbaga, Zamboanga City Council; Roberto P. Lozano, Dagupan City Council; Paulo C. Madriñan, Pasay City Council; Jose Fermin G. Magbanua, Negros Oriental Council; Romeo R. Rallos, Quezon City Council; Filamor S. Reyes, Cavite Council; Wilfredo M. Santiago, Manila Council; Benecio S. Tobias, Tarlac Council; Antonio P. Torillo, Cavite Council; Ascario A. Tuason, Jr., Manila Council and Rogelio C. Ybardolaza, Quezon City Council.

Brief History Of The Boy Scouts

The Scouting Movement was founded by Lord Robert Stephenson Smyth Baden-Powell in 1907 when he took 20 boys to Brownsea Island in Poole Harbour, off the southern coast of England, for the very first Boy Scouts Camp in the world.

In the Philippines, the Boy Scouts of the Philippines was created by Commonwealth Act 111 and signed into law by then President Manuel L. Quezon on October 31, 1936 as a public corporation to promote, according to Section 3 of the law "the ability of boys to do things for themselves and others, to train them in scoutcraft, and to teach them patriotism, courage, self-reliance, and kindred virtues, using the methods which are in common use by boy scouts".

The 7 Charter members (founders) of the BSP were: Josephus Emile H. Stevenot; Arsenio N. Luz; Carlos P. Romulo; Vicente P. Lim; Manuel R. Camus; Jorge B. Vargas, and Gabriel A. Daza. ●

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