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Letter From The Editor

My nephew just came home to Manila for the first time in almost 12 years. He's been working in a hospital in London for most of that time and finally decided to take a few months off and check in with the family.

It's always great to see family, especially after such a long time, and notice the changes and growth in how they have progressed in life.

He was amazed at the change in Manila and how many buildings had sprung up all over the capital. The expressway from Makati out to Alabang shocked him. Some of the family live in Alabang, so he spent much of the time there looking around. Again, he was surprised at the rise in modern hospitals there as well as in the Makati and Bonifacio areas of Manila. So much so, that he's thinking of staying around a while longer to check out job opportunities. That's a great sign of how much our country is moving forward and out of the third-world status that has plagued us for so long. Things are looking up.

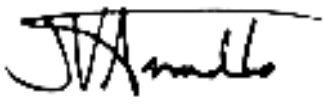
One of this month's feature articles, *Rich Before Old, Or Old Before Rich?* by Arthur Dominic J. Villasanta, goes along with this theme and highlights the prosperity that could be heading our way—if we do things right. Art goes on to say, "The Filipino elderly want nothing more than to make their twilight years as happy as possible. Desiring a Paradise on Earth in their Golden Years is perfectly understandable. It will be up to our national leaders to ensure this Paradise becomes possible. No one wants a Paradise Lost." It will take a joint effort from us all, but we can do it.

Staying with change, *Who Says Old Dogs Can't Learn New Tricks?* by Dexter Umali, shows us how our brain can rewire itself, even in our senior years. Just because we are aging, doesn't mean we can't learn new things and keep up with the pace of life and change. We just need to want to and to keep on enjoying life.

Things are now changing in the workplace also. *From Screening To Support: How DOLE's Cancer Control Mandates Change The Philippine Workplace,* by Norman Karl O. Banayat, M.D., highlights that public health strategies for early detection of cancer used to rely on the individual's initiative and out-of-pocket expenditure. But now the burden has been shifted directly onto corporations. New laws are being introduced to protect our welfare and improve livelihoods.

If you are an avid follower of our social media, you'll know all about our monthly *Enrich Giveaways* gift certificates from Mercury Drug store. Each GC is worth PhP1,000 to the lucky winners, and we give away three each month. If you haven't entered yet, check out our Facebook and Instagram pages - It's easy and free to enter, and also good fun.

As always,



JV Arnaldo

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Enrich is published monthly by Mercury Media Corporation and is produced for Mercury Media Corporation by Jeffery International Media.

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VOLUME 19 • ISSUE 219 • OCTOBER 2026

MANAGING EDITOR
J.V. Arnaldo

DEPUTY EDITOR
Francisco Rodriguez

CONSULTING EDITORS
Charles Greene

COPY EDITOR
Robert Morales

CONTRIBUTORS
Mikee Gan
Eva Angcanan • Henrylito D. Tacio
Edith Legaspi Dexter Umali
Pebbles Mendoza • Dr. Jomar D. Redubla
Luke Johnston • Glecy G. Gamboa
Arthur Dominic J. Villasanta
Norman Karl O. Banayat, M.D.
Mae Anacay-Banayat
Mona Sabalones Gonzalez
Dennis V. Gargantiel • Vince Tajanlangit
Butch Sanchez
Betsy Gacutan-Ochosa

CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER
Chelsea Ablazo Jeffery

SOCIAL MEDIA DIRECTOR
Alexandra Heard

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Wilbert Lamsen

ADMINISTRATION MANAGER
Ara Mhay Guzman

ADVERTISING DIRECTORS
Clarita Ablazo
Abiegal Doroga

PHOTOGRAPHIC EDITOR
Paolo Drilon

RESEARCH MANAGER
Melanie Gonzalez

JEFFERY INTERNATIONAL MEDIA
www.jefferyintlmedia.com

MERCURY MEDIA CORP
7 Mercury Avenue
cor. C.P. Garcia Avenue
Bagumbayan, Quezon City
1110 Metro Manila, Philippines
Tel: **8912-4514**
Fax: **8912-4191**
Advertising — Enquiries
info@enrich.com.ph
www.enrich.com.ph

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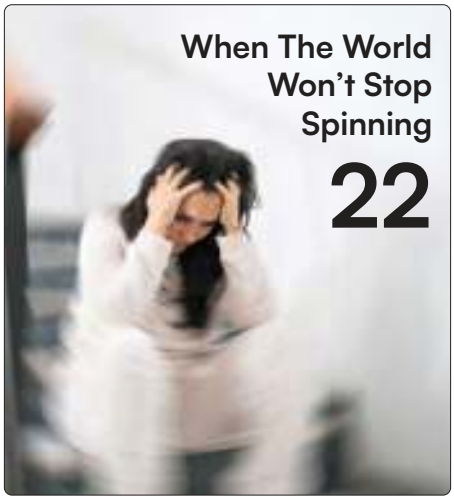
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By Mikee Gan

MEDICApps

Lusog-Isip is the Philippines' first culturally adapted mental health app that puts simple, evidence-based tools for stress, mood, and self-care right in your hands, anytime, anywhere.

Taking care of our minds is just as important as caring for our bodies. Good mental wellness helps us sleep better, stay connected with loved ones, and enjoy life more fully as we age.

That's why the Department of Health (DOH), in partnership with USAID, created Lusog-Isip (healthy minds), the Philippines' first mobile app specifically designed for mental health and self-care. Launched in 2021 and still going strong, it's free, available in English and Filipino, and made with Filipino culture and daily realities in mind.

What Makes Lusog-Isip Special?

Unlike many general wellness apps, Lusog-Isip is:

- Culturally adapted for Filipinos.
- Evidence-based yet simple and non-clinical.
- Focused on self-help and prevention, helping you build resilience before problems grow bigger.
- Backed by the government and designed to reduce stigma around mental health.



It was created during the height of the COVID pandemic to support Filipinos facing stress, anxiety, isolation, and other challenges, and it continues to help people today.

How Does It Work? (Simple & Practical)

Open the app and start with a quick, friendly wellbeing check-in. It asks gentle questions about how you're feeling and how you usually cope with stress. Based on your answers, it suggests personalized tools such as:

- Short workbooks and exercises you can do at your own pace.
- Audio guides for relaxation or calming your mind.
- Mood tracking and a private journal to notice patterns.
- Daily self-care reminders.
- Easy access to a directory of mental health support services (online or near you).

If you ever feel you need more help, the app gently points you toward professional resources. Everything stays private and confidential.

Why It Matters For Healthy Aging And Wellness

Mental wellness is a key part of healthy longevity. Chronic stress and unaddressed emotions can affect sleep, blood pressure, memory, and even physical health. Lusog-Isip gives you small, doable ways to:

- Check in with yourself regularly.
- Learn simple coping skills.
- Build emotional resilience.
- Stay connected to support when needed.

It's especially helpful for midlife adults and seniors who may be juggling caregiving, health concerns, or life transitions. Many users report feeling more aware of their emotions and better equipped to handle daily stresses.

Lusog-Isip is a wonderful self-care tool, but it is not a replacement for professional help in times of crisis. If you or someone you love is in distress, please reach out to a doctor, counselor, or local hotline right away.

A Small Step Toward Bigger Wellness

Prioritizing mental health doesn't have to be complicated or expensive. Apps like Lusog-Isip remind us that caring for our minds is a normal, everyday part of a healthy lifestyle, just like eating well, moving our bodies, and staying connected with family and friends.

Even five to 10 minutes a day of checking in with yourself can make a big difference over time. ●

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THE DAILY GRIND

By Mikee Gan

THE LONG WAY TO PARADISE

A bus, a ferry, and the slow joy of getting to Boracay the old-fashioned way

The Iran and U.S middle east crisis, or is it a war - I'm not sure, but whatever you may call it, it has caused a pretty high rise in the price of airline tickets, especially for domestic flights. I remember paying less than PhP 4,000 for a round trip to Boracay; sad to say, my recent searches couldn't find one less than PhP 8,000.

Fortunately, my memory serves me well, and I recalled many moons ago when a group of us would drive down to Batangas and take the ferry across. A quick online search settled the issue. Starlight and 2GO ferries were still running daily trips across to Batangas Port. And the price was right.

There is a particular kind of anticipation that only builds on a long trip, the sort where the destination reveals itself gradually instead of all at once. I felt it the moment I stepped off the bus terminal curb in Manila before dawn, ticket in hand, bound for Batangas Port and, eventually, the white sands of Boracay. Flying would have been faster. It would also have skipped the part of the journey I now consider the best part.

The bus pulled out just after five in the morning, the city still half asleep, its skyline dissolving into the kind of soft gray light that makes even EDSA look forgiving. I had expected the ride to feel like a formality, three or four hours to be endured before the real adventure began. Instead it became its own small pleasure. Vendors boarded briefly at rest stops selling boiled peanuts and *turon*. Conversations struck up between strangers over shared thermoses of coffee. Somewhere past Santo Tomas, the buildings gave way to open fields, then to the first glimpses of Taal Lake shimmering in the distance, its famous volcano sitting calm and half hidden in haze.

By the time we rolled into Batangas Port, the sun was fully up, and the terminal was alive with the particular chaos of a place where hundreds of people are all trying to get somewhere else.

Porters called out for luggage, ticket windows had their own informal queueing logic that took a few minutes to decode, and the smell of the sea drifted in through the terminal even before I could see the water. I bought a ferry ticket for the direct crossing to Caticlan, resisted the urge to buy a third cup of coffee, and made my way to the boarding gate.

The ferry ride itself was where the trip stopped being transportation and started being travel. The boat pushed off from the pier, and Batangas shrank behind us, and for a while there was nothing to look at but open water and the wake fanning out white against the blue. Other passengers dozed in their seats or clustered near the windows with their phones out, and I found myself doing both in turns. Somewhere in the middle of the crossing, a pod of what I was fairly sure were dolphins broke the surface a few hundred meters off, gone again before I could properly take any decent pictures.



FACT #02

The People's Republic of China was established on October 1, 1949.





With roughly two hours left to go, the outline of Caticlan appeared, low green hills rising out of the water, and the mood on board shifted almost immediately. People who had been half asleep were suddenly at the railing, phones out again, this time for good reason. Boracay itself was still a short banca ride away. Still, Caticlan already carried the feeling of arrival, that particular lightness that comes with knowing the hard part of the journey is behind you.

I have flown into Caticlan airport before, and there is nothing wrong with it. It is fairly efficient, and it gets the job done in under an hour from Manila. But efficiency was never really the point of this trip. Taking the bus and the ferry meant trading speed for texture, for boiled peanuts and Taal Lake and a fleeting glimpse of dolphins, for the sense that Boracay was not simply arrived at but earned, one leg of the journey at a time. By the time the white sand finally came into view, it felt less like a destination and more like a reward. ●

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Diabetes Corner



This tasty drink works well for those suffering from diabetes because it has high water content, low natural sugars and magnesium from greens, which supports insulin sensitivity.

GREEN HYDRATOR



What You'll Need

1 large cucumber (washed, ends trimmed).
3–5 celery stalks.
1–2 handfuls fresh spinach (or kale leaves, stems removed if using kale).
Juice of ½ lemon or lime.
1-inch piece fresh ginger.

Procedure

Wash all produce thoroughly. Cut larger items into pieces that fit your juicer. Juice in this order: celery and cucumber first (they help push greens through), then spinach/kale, ginger, and finish with lemon/line.

You can add a few mint leaves for extra freshness if desired.

Stir and drink immediately for maximum nutrients. You can store any left over in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 24 hours. ●

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FACT #04



October 5, 1962, saw The Beatles release "Love Me Do."

Here's a diabetes-friendly recipe that combines lean pork with plenty of green vegetables. It's high in protein, fiber, vitamins, and minerals, and relatively low in carbohydrates, helping support healthy blood sugar management.



Garlic Ginger Pork with Green Vegetables

What You'll Need

500 g lean pork tenderloin or pork loin, thinly sliced
2 cups broccoli florets
2 cups bok choy, chopped
1 cup green beans, trimmed
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon fresh ginger, grated
1 tablespoon olive oil or avocado oil
2 tablespoons low-sodium soy sauce
1 tablespoon rice vinegar
1 teaspoon sesame oil
½ teaspoon black pepper
¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes (optional)
2 tablespoons water

Procedure

Slice the pork into thin strips and season lightly with black pepper. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet or wok over medium-high heat. Cook the pork for three to five minutes until lightly browned. Remove and set aside.

Add garlic and ginger to the pan and sauté for about 30 seconds. Add the broccoli, green beans, and two tablespoons of water. Cover and steam for three minutes. Stir in the bok choy and cook for another two to three minutes until the vegetables are tender-crisp.

Return the pork to the pan and add the soy sauce, rice vinegar, and sesame oil. Toss everything together for two minutes. ●

This dish is good for diabetes because lean pork provides high-quality protein that helps increase satiety without affecting blood sugar. The broccoli, bok choy and green beans are non-starchy vegetables rich in fiber, which can help slow glucose absorption. Garlic and ginger add flavor without added sugar and may have beneficial effects on heart health, and the low-sodium soy sauce helps reduce sodium intake compared with regular soy sauce.

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FACT #05



The U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan began on October 7, 2001.

Home Safety First

By Mona Sabalones Gonzalez



HEAVY WEATHER DANGERS TO AVOID IN THE RAINY SEASON

It's the rainy season in the Philippines, and we need to be aware of its dangers to prioritize safety. This is critical, as natural disasters such as typhoons, landslides, and lightning can be addressed by anticipating and understanding them and being proactive.

We can significantly enhance safety by being prepared. From preparing emergency kits to recognizing warning signs and staying updated on early warnings, we can better navigate natural disasters that accompany extreme rainfall. Here are some extreme weather conditions we should prepare for.

Typhoons

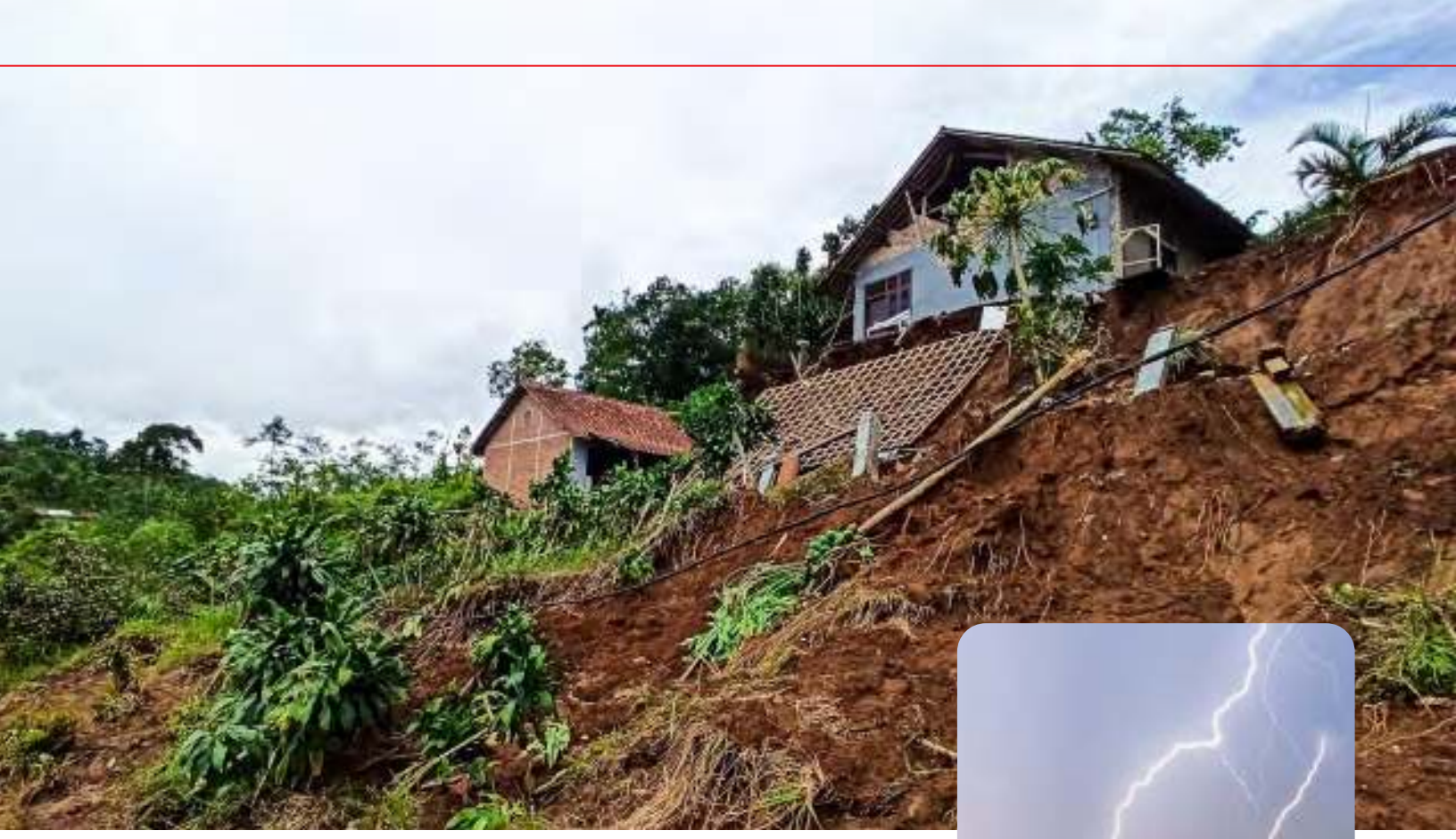
Typhoons in the Philippines go by many names in different countries, such as hurricanes, twisters, cyclones, gales, tempests, and windstorms. Historically, they're the deadliest of all water-related hazards because of their destructive winds. They're life-threatening whether you live inland or by the coast, says the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

Typhoons pose three dangers. First, the possibility of a storm surge. This happens when sea levels rise more than 20 feet above normal tide level. Rising water and breaking waves trigger severe flooding, damaging homes and buildings. The floodwaters can remain hours after the storm has passed, leaving in its

FACT #06



October 10 is World Mental Health Day.



wake drowning, erosion, and widespread destruction of communities.

The second danger of typhoons is inundation. If enormous volumes of seawater are pushed onto normally dry land, entire coastal areas, urban neighborhoods, agricultural fields, and grasslands will be submerged.

The third danger are battering waves that ride atop the elevated storm surge. The website, www.climatecheck.com says these powerful waves relentlessly pound the shoreline, demolishing buildings, washing away roads, and destroying infrastructure. Within minutes, a storm surge can wreak its vast damage.

For this reason, always stay updated on weather developments in your area. Typhoon warnings are usually early. Once you get the news, pack bags for you and your family that will last at least 72 hours. Include non-perishable food, a gallon of water per family member per day, medications, flashlights, radios, cell phones, and waterproof cash, IDs, and other important documents.

If you have a dog, pack its food and water for at least three days. Include treats, water, bowls, medication, flea powder, vaccination records, paper towels, poop bags, and pee pads. Bring your dog's harness, leash, a backup collar with an ID tag, printed photos of you and your dog, and your dog's ID papers, in case you have to prove you're the owner. Finally, bring a favorite toy, a blanket, and a thunder shirt to lessen your dog's stress.

Preparing these in advance will be very helpful when it's time for you to evacuate.

Landslides

Heavy rainfall can provoke landslides. If you live on or near a mountain slope, stay alert, especially during prolonged intense rain. Extremely heavy rainwater weakens the ground. If you live on a steep slope, the added weight will further destabilize the soil, and gravity will pull the loosened earth downhill, causing a landslide.

Regularly inspect your property for warning signs such as tilting trees, clear streams turning muddy, rapidly fluctuating water levels, and windows and doors that suddenly become hard to open or close. The website, www.ready.gov, says these are indications that the ground beneath your home is becoming unstable. If authorities recommend evacuation, leave while it's still safe to do so.

If you're trapped indoors, go to the part of your home that's farthest from the sliding earth and crawl under a strong table or bench for protection. If you're outdoors, move uphill and away from the landslide. You don't want to be in a valley or other low-lying area where falling debris accumulates.



Lightning

The Philippine Statistics Authority says 80 to 118 people die from lightning strikes each year. Some 1,584 Filipinos died from lightning from 2006 to 2021.

A high percentage of people survive lightning strikes, but many survivors suffer long-term physical, neurological, and cognitive complications, University Hospitals says.

A single lightning bolt carries enough electrical energy to cause fires, extensive blackouts, and deaths. To reduce risks, avoid water bodies – swimming pools,

rivers, lakes, and the like. Water is a good conductor of electricity, so avoid it.

If you're at home, lightning can pass through your plumbing and electrical wiring, so don't shower or wash dishes during a thunderstorm. Even concrete conducts electricity, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warns, so don't lean on concrete walls.

If you're outdoors with no nearby shelter, crouch low to the ground but not flat on it. Keep your feet together and hunch down. Don't do this under a tree or near one, as lightning might strike the tree and it could fall on you. Just make yourself as small as can be.

If you're far from home, go inside a sturdy building or a hard-topped vehicle. Avoid tents or picnic pavilions as they may not be strong enough. If you're near home, run inside as soon as you hear thunder. Stay away from windows, doors, lanais, porches, and both concrete walls and floors. Also, unplug small electronic devices such as laptops, televisions, and electric fans, especially during blackouts.

Larger appliances – refrigerators, stoves, etc. should be unplugged because power surges can permanently damage them.



If your home is often empty, you can install surge protectors in anticipation of the rainy season.

Flash Flooding

Heavy rain, strong winds, and widespread destruction lead to flash flooding. It quickly overwhelms your drainage system, resulting in flooded streets that are worsened by strong currents, unseen open manholes, and water so deep it can sweep people away or cause serious injuries.

These same strong winds will cut power lines, destroy temporary structures, and uproot trees from soil weakened by saturation. Once again, you are safest by following weather updates. Bear in mind potential hazards, and calmly decide what to do.

Swimming At The Beach During Rain

People sometimes swim at the beach during light rain. These "waterbabies" don't fear water; they feel at home in it. Waves and gentle rain don't faze surfers. Other people enjoy swimming in the ocean under gentle rain.

Oftentimes, people choose a rainy-day beach vacation because it's cheaper. When the rain starts, most of them head indoors. The rest enjoy having the entire beach to themselves.

Swimming under light rain feels calm and soothing, as the drizzle on the ocean replaces the noise of crowds. The rainwater is also cool, in contrast to the warm ocean, which is pleasing to the skin. And the sight of tiny ripples creates a glassy appearance on the water. Many say they feel free swimming at the beach underneath a drizzle.

But is it worth it? I think not. Because once you are in the water beneath the light rain, you may not feel you have to leave the beach at the sound of thunder, or the sight of lightning.

Here are two dangers that can occur in the seawater during heavy rains:

1. Rip currents are strong, narrow currents that occur in both the summer and rainy seasons. They occur swiftly where the water seems shallow. Suddenly, the waves rise over your head and swiftly pull you far from the coast toward the ocean.

   Storms don't cause rip currents; they intensify them. If you're caught in one, don't panic and don't swim directly against it. You need to preserve your strength, so ride with the current because swimming against it won't get you anywhere.

   Instead, swim parallel to the shoreline. When you reach a narrow channel created by the rip current, swim past it. Then, swim diagonally back to the shore.

2. Undertow. While Rip currents use surface currents to drag you out to sea and possibly drown, undertows are less dangerous but can still be very harmful. Undertows aren't created by rain, but strong winds accompanying rain intensify the waves, making them huge and powerful.

   An undertow can drag you underwater, but you won't be kept there for long. If you're caught by an undertow, the first thing you should do is relax. You'll pop above the water, often on the back of waves breaking near the shore.

   Once you're above water, stay calm and float on your back. Tread water, then swim parallel to the shore until the pull stops. Then swim back to the beach at an angle. Undertow currents usually won't pull you very far out, so they're easier to manage than rip currents. ●

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FACT #07

Andy Green set the first supersonic land speed record on October 15, 1997.



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Just Be

CONQUERING SELF-DEFEATING THOUGHTS

By Mae Anacay-Banayat

You've probably woken up on days when you feel like nothing is going right. You woke up late, stubbed your toe, spilled your coffee, and battled your way through your morning commute. After just two hours of this crazy day, you're probably thinking, "Nothing will go right today! I shouldn't even make an effort." As a result, you go through your day in a foul mood, knowing that everything you try to do won't amount to anything. It's just not your day.

However, nothing really defines what kind of day you should have. Rather, your acceptance of your self-defeating thoughts just influenced how you would react to your day — and now it is going as negatively as you imagined.

Identifying Self-Defeating Thoughts

A provider of psychology services in Australia, TakesCare Specialist Centre, defines self-defeating thoughts as the "negative and self-critical beliefs that hinder personal growth, wellbeing, and success." These habitual, negative core beliefs trigger thoughts that oftentimes are spontaneous, flooding your mind with unconscious mental reactions that can negatively impact your relationships and emotions. Prominent examples are thoughts of "Why do I even try?" or "I'll never be good enough."

What's interesting to note is that self-defeating thoughts are often anchored in self-preservation. They serve a subconscious purpose — a lot of times protective in nature, so you are not exposed to possible pain, any perceived failure, or rejection.

You see, self-defeating thoughts are commonly rooted in your past experiences. You may have experienced traumas or grown up with a critical upbringing from your parents or guardians that you have brought into adulthood. For example, you may have been told repeatedly that you would never amount to anything, and you now think that you are a failure, no matter how well you have done for yourself.

Other common causes of these negative thought patterns are falling prey to social pressures and comparing yourself with your peers. Likewise, you may have unrealistic expectations of yourself and demand perfection at all times — and so when you make a tiny mistake, it all spirals out of control.

Explaining The Biology

It may be surprising for you to know that self-defeating thoughts are actually ingrained in our biology. According to a study published in *Sage Journals*, "Bad emotions, bad parents, and bad feedback have more impact than good ones, and bad information is processed more thoroughly than good."

Psyche, a digital magazine that aspires to help readers know themselves and live well, explains that the brain's natural predilection towards negative thoughts stems from our ancestors. "Human ancestors who were anxious about potential threats were more likely to avoid danger — and to survive long enough to pass on their genes," writes clinical psychologists Joe Oliver and Kristy Potter for *Psyche.* Due to this, "the modern brain is wired to focus on perceived threats, problems and mistakes."

And so we now understand why self-defeating thoughts have such a hold on our minds. These negative thoughts are familiar and sometimes logical, but they are not necessarily your truths today.

Recognizing The Negative Effects Of Your Negative Thoughts

If left unchecked, these negative thoughts become self-reinforcing, and you may then develop self-sabotaging beliefs. For example, if you are frequently thinking that "I will never be enough," then you may be prone to procrastination, social withdrawal, or avoidance. And if you try to

challenge these negative thoughts, then you may experience even more unsavory situations, which only reinforces your belief in the first place.

Let me put it in more concrete terms. Going back to our example of you having a bad morning, you become grumpy and irritable as the day progresses. A colleague you are supposed to be collaborating with notices and asks if you're okay. You snap, "Mind your own business." Because of this statement, you then landed at the HR's office.

Based on this example, it goes to show that your self-defeating thought ("*Nothing will go right today! I shouldn't even make an effort.")* became true. And when you tried to combat it (I.e., by working as much as you could), you got into more trouble.

This negative experience then reinforces the cycle that your self-defeating thought was only protecting you. So in the future, you are more inclined to listen to it rather than trying to conquer it.

Aside from becoming a cycle, self-defeating thoughts can also trigger a host of mental challenges for you. Increased levels of stress and anxiety are chief among these, as you may feel overwhelmed as you go about your day. You may suffer from low self-worth because your negative thoughts are also impacting your confidence and self-image. Lastly, they can significantly affect your relationships, as your self-criticism and negativity may strain your engagement with others.

Conquering Self-Defeating Thoughts

You need to actively change your mindset to unlearn these negative thought patterns. You also need to take a proactive approach to build healthier thinking patterns. You can do so by the following:

Restructure your thoughts: When a negative thought comes up, reframe it with more positive and realistic thoughts. When you think that you won't amount to anything, remember that you have already achieved much. When you feel like you will fail, remind yourself that even if you do, it will be a learning opportunity. If you feel like you are not enough, then remind yourself that you are always enough. The list goes on. Do not simply accept your self-defeating thought as a fact; challenge it, and remind yourself of your reality.

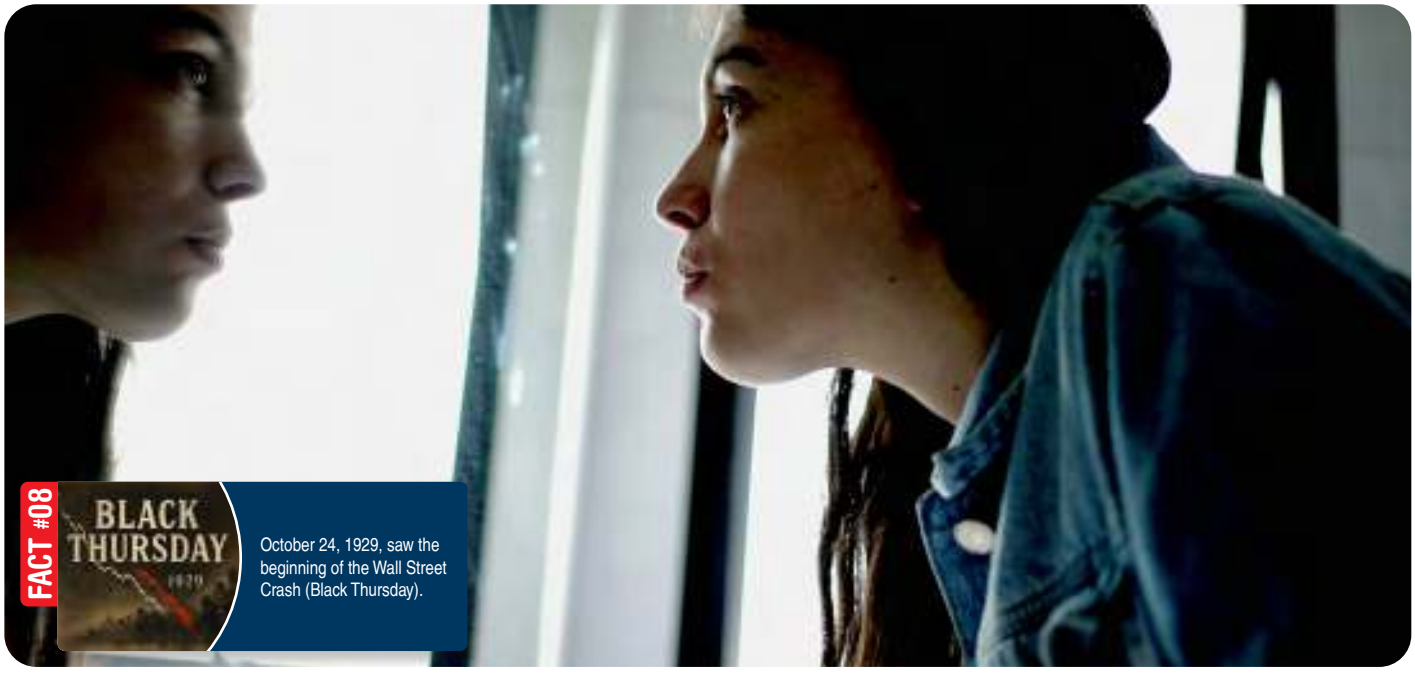
Practice detachment: If your thoughts become too overwhelming, take a deep breath and detach from the situation so you can think objectively. For example, the next time you tell yourself that you will not succeed, take a pause. Look at the situation objectively, address any gaps, and identify a solution. Then, respond to the thought. You may think that "I have prepared as much as I can and I did my best. I am ready." Always remember that your self-defeating thoughts are not your reality, and you are in control.

Take action: A lot of self-defeating thoughts take root in our brains because we do not objectively take action. And so the negativity continues to fester in our minds, sabotaging our efforts to become the best versions of ourselves. When you've practiced mindfulness, tried to ground yourself and practice detachment, and the self-defeating thought is still there — then it is time to seek the help of a professional. There might be a form of therapy or medication that can help you to keep these thoughts under control.

"When you've practiced mindfulness, tried to ground yourself and practice detachment, and the self-defeating thought is still there – then it is time to seek the help of a professional"

Our minds are brilliant and outstanding in the sense that they bring so much clarity into our lives. However, when self-defeating thoughts are front and center in our brains, our potential is limited. You can unlock this by learning how to manage self-defeating thoughts so that you can become the best version of yourself. ●

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By Luke Johnston

SPORTING ICONS

RAFAEL "PAENG" NEPOMUCENO

Sport: Ten-Pin Bowling
Born: January 30, 1957
Birthplace: Quezon City

Rafael "Paeng" Villareal Nepomuceno is widely regarded as one of the greatest ten-pin bowlers in the history of the sport.

Paeng built a remarkable career that has spanned more than five decades. Through his extraordinary talent, unwavering dedication, and consistent success on the international stage, he became a symbol of excellence in Philippine sports and inspired generations of athletes.

Interestingly, bowling was not Paeng's first passion. As a young boy, he dreamed of becoming a golfer. One rainy day, while he and his father, Angel Nepomuceno, were looking for shelter in Baguio City, they entered a bowling center. Curious about the game, Paeng tried bowling for the first time and immediately developed an interest in it. Recognizing his son's enthusiasm, his father enrolled him in a junior bowling league. That unexpected moment would become the beginning of one of the greatest sporting careers the Philippines has ever witnessed.

Paeng's talent became evident at a very young age. At just fifteen years old, he won the Philippine Junior Masters Championship, and by the age of seventeen, he captured the Philippine International Masters title. His greatest breakthrough came in 1976 when, at only nineteen years old, he won the prestigious Bowling World Cup in Tehran, Iran. This remarkable achievement made him the youngest Bowling World Cup champion in history, a record recognized by Guinness World Records.

Rather than being a one-time champion, Paeng continued to dominate international bowling for decades. He won the Bowling World Cup four times: in 1976, 1980, 1992, and 1996, and added other major international championships, including the World Invitational Tournament in 1984 and the World Tenpin Masters in 1999. His ability to remain competitive against the world's best bowlers over such a long period earned him recognition as one of bowling's all-time greats.

Throughout his career, Paeng accumulated more than 130 international titles while representing the Philippines in competitions worldwide. He also won numerous gold medals in the Southeast Asian Games and excelled in Asian championships and other prestigious tournaments. His remarkable consistency and longevity allowed him to remain successful even as he grew older. In 2022, decades after his first international triumph, he won a gold medal at the Asian Senior Bowling Championships, proving that excellence comes from lifelong dedication and continuous hard work.

Paeng's accomplishments have earned him numerous honors beyond tournament victories. He was inducted into the World Bowling Hall of Fame and was named the International Bowling Athlete of the Millennium in 1999. One of his most prestigious recognitions came from the International Olympic Committee, which awarded him the IOC President's Trophy for his outstanding contribution to sports. He remains the only bowler in the world to receive this honor.

His name also appears several times in the Guinness World Records, recognizing achievements such as becoming the youngest Bowling World Cup champion and winning international bowling titles across six different decades.

Despite reaching the highest level of success, Paeng has remained committed to promoting bowling and helping others discover the sport. After his years of international competition, he became a coach, motivational speaker, sports ambassador, and bowling center operator.

Through these roles, he has continued to mentor young athletes and encourage Filipinos to pursue their dreams through discipline, perseverance, and sportsmanship.

Rafael "Paeng" Nepomuceno's story is more than a tale of championships and medals. It is a story of determination, humility, and lifelong commitment to excellence. From a young boy who accidentally discovered bowling on a rainy day to becoming one of the greatest bowlers in history,

Paeng demonstrated that success is built through passion, hard work, and perseverance. His achievements have brought immense pride to the Philippines and secured his place among the nation's greatest sporting heroes. His legacy continues to inspire Filipinos to believe that with dedication and determination, even the most unexpected opportunities can lead to extraordinary success. ●



FACT #09

October 30, 1938, saw Orson Welles' War of the Worlds radio broadcast cause panic among many listeners.

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By Vincent Tajanlangit

FAMOUS FILIPINOS

NORA AUNOR

Nora Aunor, born Nora Cabaltera Villamayor on May 21, 1953, grew up with a simple dream: to share her talent with others. No one knew that this young girl would one day become the "Superstar" of Philippine cinema and one of the country's greatest artists.

Her journey to fame began in 1967 when she won the television singing competition *Tawag ng Tanghalan*. Her powerful voice and heartfelt performances captured the attention of millions of Filipinos. Soon, she became one of the country's most successful recording artists, releasing hit songs and performing before large audiences.

As her popularity grew, Nora entered the world of acting. She proved that she was more than just a talented singer. With her natural acting ability and deep understanding of her characters, she delivered unforgettable performances in more than 170 films over a career spanning nearly six decades. She starred in musicals, romance films, and family dramas, but she became especially known for serious movies that explored poverty, injustice, identity, and the strength of ordinary people.

Some of her most memorable films include *Himala*, *Bona*, and *The Flor Contemplacion Story*. These films were praised not only in the Philippines but also around the world. Her performances were admired for their honesty, emotion, and realism, making them important milestones in Philippine cinema. Many of these films continue to be restored, studied, and celebrated by students, filmmakers, and movie lovers today.

Throughout her remarkable career, Nora Aunor received many prestigious awards, including several FAMAS and Gawad Urian Best Actress honors, along with international acting recognitions. In 2022, she received the highest recognition for a Filipino artist when she was named National Artist for Film and Broadcast Arts. This award honored her lasting contributions to Philippine film, television, and music, as well as her influence on generations of performers and filmmakers.

On April 16, 2025, Nora Aunor passed away at the age of 71. Her death brought an outpouring of love and tributes from fans, fellow artists, and leaders across the Philippines. People remembered not only her incredible achievements but also the way she brought ordinary Filipino stories to life with compassion and authenticity.

Today, Nora Aunor's legacy lives on through her timeless songs and unforgettable films. Her remarkable journey, from a young singer with a dream to the country's beloved "Superstar" and National Artist, continues to inspire Filipinos to pursue their passions with courage, dedication, and heart. ●



FACT #10

October 31 is Halloween. A festive occasion renowned for ghostly tales and trick-or-treating.

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Healthy Habits To Help Protect Against Flu



Source: www.cdc.gov

The single best way to reduce the risk of seasonal flu and its potentially serious complications is to get vaccinated each year.

But good health habits can help stop the spread of germs and prevent flu.

Avoid close contact.

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. When you are sick, keep your distance from people to protect them from getting sick too.

Stay home when you are sick.

If possible, stay away from work, school, and errands when you are sick. This will prevent spreading your illness to others.

Cover your mouth and nose.

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when coughing or sneezing to prevent those around you from getting sick. Flu viruses spread mainly by droplets made when people with flu cough, sneeze or talk.

Clean your hands.

Washing your hands often will help protect you from germs. If soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand rub.

Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth.

Germs can be spread when a person touches something that is contaminated with germs and then touches his or her eyes, nose, or mouth.

Practice other good health habits.

Clean and disinfect frequently-touched surfaces at home, work or school, especially when someone is ill.

Health Tips For Staying Healthy In The Rainy Season

Source: www.continentalhospitals.com

Staying healthy during the monsoon season can be a bit challenging due to increased humidity and the potential for waterborne diseases. Here are some simple tips to help you stay healthy during this time:

1. Stay Hydrated

Despite the cooler weather, it's essential to drink enough water. Monsoon weather can be deceptively dehydrating due to increased humidity.

2. Eat Clean and Cooked Food

Avoid street food or raw foods like salads, as they may carry waterborne infections. Opt for well-cooked and hot meals.

3. Practice Hand Hygiene

Frequent handwashing is crucial, especially before meals. Carry a sanitizer when you can't access soap and water.

4. Use Umbrella and Rain Gear

Always carry an umbrella and wear appropriate rain gear to stay dry and avoid getting soaked. Damp clothes can lead to illnesses.

5. Choose Your Footwear

Wear closed shoes or waterproof sandals to protect your feet from dirty water and prevent fungal infections.

6. Protect from Mosquitoes

Mosquitoes are more prevalent during the monsoon. Use mosquito repellent, and if possible, install mosquito nets in your home.

7. Stay Active

Engage in indoor exercises to stay active during rainy days. Regular physical activity helps boost your immunity.

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Source: www.vitalcuore.com

TRIVIA

It is believed that the main purpose of eyebrows is to keep sweat out of the eyes.

Motorists who talk on cell phones are more impaired than drunk drivers with blood-alcohol levels exceeding .08.

Ever wondered why there are mirrors in front of the cardio section at the gym? Watching yourself run in a mirror can make a treadmill workout go by faster and feel easier.



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.



WHEN THE WORLD WON'T STOP SPINNING

LIVING WITH VERTIGO: WHAT IT IS, WHY IT HAPPENS, AND A RANGE OF TREATMENTS AVAILABLE TO US.

By Pebbles Mendoza

The first time it happened, I thought I was dying. I woke at three in the morning, rolled onto my side, and the room simply lurched. Not swayed, not tilted gently the way it might after a glass or three of wine, but lurched, with violent conviction, as though the house had been lifted by a crane and dropped. I grabbed the mattress with both hands.

The ceiling fan above me was spinning in two directions at once, or so it seemed. My stomach flipped. I lay perfectly still, too frightened to move, listening to my own heartbeat and wondering whether something had broken inside my head.

Nothing had broken, as it turned out. What I had was a condition called vertigo, and it would take me the better part of a year to understand it well enough to manage it. If you are reading this, chances are you already know something of what I felt that night.



Perhaps the spinning comes for you in the morning when you sit up in bed. Perhaps it arrives when you tilt your head to look at a high shelf, or when you are lying down and turn from one side to the other. Perhaps yours is more persistent, a constant low hum of imbalance that never quite leaves you alone. However it presents itself, vertigo is not a diagnosis in itself. It is a symptom, and understanding what is causing it changes everything about how you approach treatment.

What Vertigo Actually Is

The word comes from the Latin *vertere*, to turn, and that is exactly what it feels like: you are turning when you are not. Or, more precisely, your brain has received a report from your balance system that contradicts what your eyes are telling it, and the result is this overwhelming, disorienting sense of movement. True vertigo is distinct from lightheadedness, from the swimmy feeling that can come with low blood pressure when you stand too quickly, or the faintness that accompanies anxiety or dehydration. True vertigo is rotational. The room spins, or you spin, and you cannot talk yourself out of it because it is not coming from your imagination. It is coming from a mismatch in the sensory signals your nervous system is processing.

The body's balance system is a joint effort between three sources of information: the vestibular apparatus in your inner ear, your eyes, and the sensors in your muscles

"Your inner ear contains structures called otoliths, small calcium carbonate crystals that sit within a gel layer and help detect linear motion and gravity. Over time, and particularly as we age, these crystals can become dislodged and move into the semicircular canals, the fluid-filled loops that detect rotational movement"



and joints that tell your brain where your limbs are in space. When all three agree, you feel stable. When the inner ear sends a signal that conflicts with the others, vertigo often appears. This is why inner ear conditions account for the vast majority of vertigo cases, particularly in people over sixty, whose vestibular systems have begun to show the same wear and gradual change that affects all of our senses over a lifetime.

The Most Common Culprit: BPPV

Benign Paroxysmal Positional Vertigo, known by its initials BPPV, is responsible for approximately half of all vertigo cases in older people. The name, while ungainly, is reassuring once you understand it: benign, meaning it carries no sinister underlying cause; paroxysmal, meaning it comes in brief, sudden spells; positional, meaning it is triggered by changes in your head position. What causes it is a tiny mechanical fault deep inside your ear.

Your inner ear contains structures called otoliths, small calcium carbonate crystals that sit within a gel layer and help detect linear motion and gravity. Over time, and particularly as we age, these crystals can become dislodged and move into the semicircular canals, the fluid-filled loops that detect rotational movement. When you move your head, these wayward crystals shift through the fluid and create a false signal of rotation. The brain, confused by this rogue message, produces the spinning sensation you experience. The episodes typically last less than a minute, which can feel both like a mercy and a kind of taunt, because they return every time you make the triggering movement.

BPPV is common, it is not dangerous, and it responds well to a specific mechanical intervention. But more on that shortly.

You are not imagining the spinning. It is coming from a real mismatch inside your balance system that your body depends on every waking moment.

When Something Deeper Is At Work

Not all vertigo is BPPV. Two other inner ear conditions deserve attention, because they feel different and they call for different responses.

Vestibular neuritis and labyrinthitis both involve inflammation of the inner ear, most often following a viral illness. Vestibular neuritis affects the vestibular nerve itself, producing sudden, severe vertigo that can last for days and be accompanied by nausea and difficulty walking, though hearing typically remains unaffected. Labyrinthitis reaches further and inflames the entire labyrinth of the inner ear, which includes the hearing structures, so hearing loss and tinnitus join the vertigo as symptoms. Both conditions tend to improve over weeks as the inflammation resolves, though the brain's compensation process, sometimes called vestibular rehabilitation, may take longer.



Meniere's disease is a separate and more complex condition characterized by recurring episodes of vertigo that can last anywhere from twenty minutes to several hours, combined with fluctuating hearing loss, a sensation of fullness or pressure in the ear, and tinnitus. It is thought to result from abnormal fluid pressure in the inner ear, though its precise mechanisms remain an area of active research. Meniere's tends to be episodic and unpredictable, which makes it particularly difficult to live with, and it requires a more sustained and often multi-layered management strategy than that of vertigo.

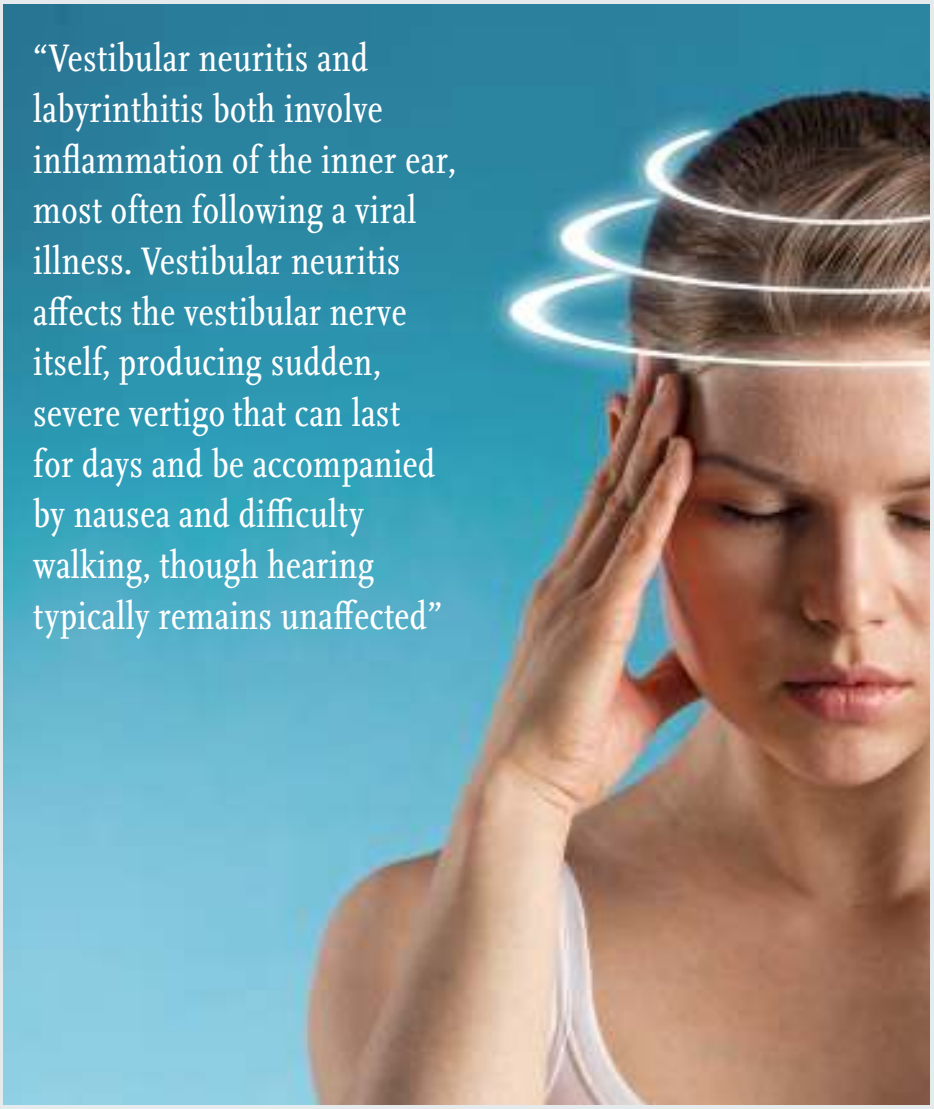
Less commonly, vertigo can signal something that requires urgent attention: a stroke, a transient ischaemic attack, a tumor pressing on the auditory nerve, or central nervous system disease. If your vertigo is accompanied by sudden, severe headache, double vision, difficulty swallowing or speaking, weakness or numbness on one side of your body, or if it appears with no positional trigger and does not resolve within a day or two, please seek medical evaluation promptly. These are red flags that distinguish inner ear vertigo from something originating in the brain, and the distinction matters enormously.

The Pharmaceutical Toolkit

Once you've been diagnosed, the question of treatment opens into two wide territories: pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical. Doctors reach for medication most often when vertigo is acute and severe, when nausea is disabling, or when an underlying inflammatory cause needs targeted treatment.

Vestibular suppressants are the most commonly prescribed class of drugs for vertigo symptoms. Meclizine, sold under brand names such as Antivert and Bonine, is an antihistamine that reduces the excitability of the vestibular system and is used widely for BPPV and Meniere 's-related episodes. It is generally well tolerated, though it causes drowsiness in many people, which can itself be problematic if you are trying to remain active and functional. Promethazine and dimenhydrinate work through similar mechanisms and are often used when nausea is the dominant complaint.

Benzodiazepines, including diazepam and lorazepam, suppress vestibular activity through the central nervous system and can be highly effective in acute, severe vertigo episodes. However, these carry real risks for older adults, including sedation, falls, cognitive effects, and the potential for completely relying on them. Most specialists are cautious about recommending them for anything other than short-term, episodic use.



"Vestibular neuritis and labyrinthitis both involve inflammation of the inner ear, most often following a viral illness. Vestibular neuritis affects the vestibular nerve itself, producing sudden, severe vertigo that can last for days and be accompanied by nausea and difficulty walking, though hearing typically remains unaffected"

For Meniere's disease specifically, a low-sodium diet combined with a diuretic, often hydrochlorothiazide or acetazolamide, is frequently prescribed to reduce inner ear fluid pressure. This approach addresses the mechanism rather than the symptom and can significantly reduce the frequency of attacks in many patients, though it does not work for everyone.

Corticosteroids such as prednisone are sometimes used in vestibular neuritis and labyrinthitis to reduce inflammation, and there is growing evidence that intratympanic steroid injections, delivered directly into the middle ear space through the eardrum, can help certain Meniere's patients. In cases where Meniere's is severe and unresponsive to conservative treatment, intratympanic gentamicin can reduce vertigo by selectively damaging the affected ear's vestibular function, accepting some hearing risk as a trade-off.

Something Different

For BPPV specifically, the most effective treatment is not a drug at all. It is a sequence of head movements performed over a few minutes by a physiotherapist or vestibular specialist, known as the Epley canalith repositioning maneuver. The goal is to guide the moving calcium crystals back out of the semicircular canals and into a part of the inner ear where they can be safely reabsorbed.

The maneuver involves moving the head and body through a series of precise positions, held for around thirty seconds each. When it works, and it works in the majority of BPPV cases, often within one or two sessions, the relief is dramatic. People who have been unable to turn over in bed without triggering a violent spinning episode find it simply gone. Many people can be taught a modified version, the Epley or the Semont maneuver, to perform at home when episodes recur. If you have BPPV and you have not yet been assessed for canalith repositioning, it is worth asking your doctor specifically about a referral to a vestibular physiotherapist.

Training Your Brain To Adapt

For vertigo that stems from vestibular neuritis, labyrinthitis, or chronic inner ear damage, vestibular rehabilitation therapy offers a structured pathway to recovery. The brain is capable of compensating for a damaged or impaired vestibular signal by relying more heavily on visual and proprioceptive information, but it needs to be coaxed into making this adaptation through practice.

Vestibular rehabilitation exercises typically include gaze stabilization drills, in which you focus on a fixed target while moving your head; balance training on surfaces that challenge proprioception; and habituation exercises that gradually expose you to the movements that trigger your symptoms. They are not comfortable in the short term, and that is intentional. The controlled exposure provokes your brain's compensatory mechanisms. Over weeks, most people find that their symptoms diminish significantly as the nervous system learns to function reliably without depending on the damaged inner ear signal.

Minerals, Supplements And The Evidence Behind Them

Outside the clinic, a considerable number of people with vertigo, particularly those with Meniere's disease or recurring episodes without a clear cause, turn to nutritional and mineral approaches. The evidence here is more varied in quality than the evidence for the Epley maneuver or vestibular rehabilitation, but some approaches have enough support to be worth discussing with your doctor.

Magnesium has attracted attention for its potential role in inner ear health. The inner ear is metabolically very active and relies on a well-maintained electrolyte environment.

There is some evidence that magnesium deficiency may compromise inner ear circulation and increase susceptibility to noise-related and age-related inner ear damage. Magnesium glycinate and magnesium citrate are the forms most readily absorbed and gentlest on the digestive system. Whether supplementation reduces vertigo episodes directly remains an open question, but magnesium deficiency is common in older adults and worth investigating through a simple blood test.

Vitamin D deficiency has been associated with BPPV recurrence in a handful of studies, which makes biological sense: the calcium crystals that cause BPPV are partially regulated by vitamin D metabolism, and deficiency may affect how these crystals behave. A 2020 study in the journal Neurology found that vitamin D supplementation in patients who were deficient significantly reduced the rate of BPPV recurrence over a twelve-month period. This is a relatively inexpensive and low-risk intervention that is worth discussing if you have recurrent BPPV and your vitamin D levels have not been checked recently.

Ginkgo biloba extract, specifically the standardized preparation EGb 761, has been studied for its potential to improve inner ear microcirculation and has a modest evidence base in European research for vertigo and tinnitus. It is not a first-line treatment in most clinical guidelines, but some patients with circulation-related vestibular symptoms find it helpful. If you take blood-thinning medications, discuss this with your doctor before adding ginkgo, as it has mild anticoagulant properties.

Reducing dietary sodium is not a supplement strategy, but it belongs in this section because the evidence for it in Meniere's disease is genuinely strong. Excess sodium increases fluid retention throughout the body, including in the endolymph of the inner ear. Many Meniere's patients who try a consistent low-sodium diet, typically targeting below 1,500 milligrams per day, experience a noticeable drop in the frequency of their attacks. Caffeine and alcohol, both of which affect inner ear fluid dynamics, are also commonly implicated and worth reducing or eliminating on a trial basis.



White Noise, Sound Therapy, And Neuromodulation

One of the increasingly supported approaches to vertigo-related symptoms, particularly tinnitus and the sense of aural fullness that often accompanies inner ear conditions, is sound therapy. The underlying idea is that the auditory system, when deprived of normal input by inner

ear damage, can become hyperactive and generate phantom signals. Introducing a neutral, continuous sound stimulus can reduce the contrast between the perceived internal noise and the ambient environment.

White noise devices, whether bedside machines, in-ear generators, or smartphone applications, produce a broadband sound that the brain learns to filter out as unimportant background noise. Over time, through a process called tinnitus retraining therapy, the emotional and attentional response to the tinnitus signal can be significantly reduced. This does not cure the underlying inner ear condition, but it can greatly reduce the distress and impact of tinnitus, which often co-occurs with vertigo in Meniere's and labyrinthitis patients.

Pink noise, which emphasizes lower frequencies more than white noise, is preferred by some patients and may be slightly more tolerable for longer periods. Brown noise, which is even lower in frequency emphasis, is reported to be particularly calming by people whose tinnitus pitch is in the mid-to-lower range. The optimal sound type is individual; experimentation under the guidance of an audiologist is the most practical approach.

Transcranial magnetic stimulation and transcranial direct current stimulation, while still experimental for vestibular problems, are being investigated as ways to recalibrate our balance between the two sides of the vestibular cortex when one inner ear has been damaged. These are tools for specialist centers rather than general clinical practice, but they signal the direction in which treatment is evolving.

Living With Vertigo

The year after that first terrible night taught me something I wish someone had told me before it happened: vertigo responds to understanding. Once I knew that my episodes were BPPV, triggered by rolling onto my right side, I stopped feeling ambushed. The Epley maneuver, which my physiotherapist taught me in a single forty-minute appointment, reduced the frequency of my episodes dramatically. Vestibular rehabilitation exercises, faithfully performed for twelve weeks, did the rest. I still keep a white noise machine on the bedside table, not because I need it for symptoms but because it steadied my nervous system during the worst months, and I have grown fond of it.





Your path will not be identical to mine, because no two vestibular systems are the same, and the cause of your vertigo may be quite different from the cause of mine. But the principles are the same: seek a precise diagnosis, understand the mechanism, and consider the full range of available tools. Pharmaceuticals can provide essential relief in acute episodes. Repositioning maneuvers and rehabilitation exercises address the structural and adaptive dimensions. Minerals and dietary changes may reduce the frequency of attacks when inner ear fluid balance or crystal metabolism is involved. Sound therapy can address the auditory dimension that so often accompanies vestibular dysfunction.

You do not have to simply endure the spinning world. There is more help available than many people realize, and it is worth pursuing every avenue, methodically and patiently, until you find the combination that restores your steadiness. ●

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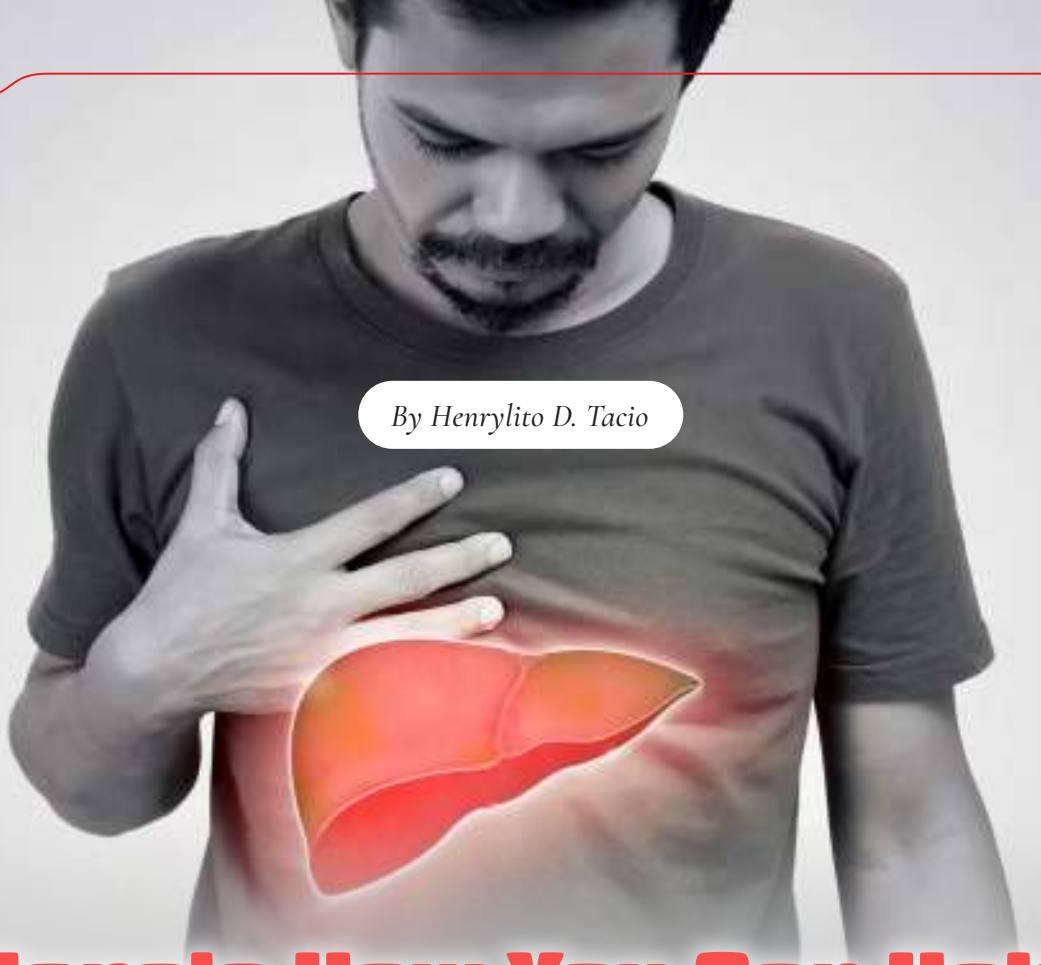
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By Henrylito D. Tacio

Here's How You Can Help

PREVENT FATTY LIVER DISEASE

Bad news: **You might not know this, but you could be one of the nearly 20 million Filipinos at risk for silent liver disease, with signs of liver damage appearing in people as young as their 30s.**

Doctors refer to it as fatty liver disease, which can be a serious condition. Yet many Filipinos don't realize it because it's often thought to only affect heavy drinkers. The truth is, fatty liver disease is becoming more common these days, thanks to modern Filipino lifestyles that include poor eating habits, lack of exercise, stress, obesity, and diabetes.

As a matter of fact, fatty liver disease is now one of the fastest-growing but least recognized health threats in the country. Right now, nine out of 10 obese people and seven out of 10 diabetics in the country are at risk of liver damage.

"FATTY LIVER CAN LEAD TO LIVER INFLAMMATION, WHICH MAY INITIATE LONG-TERM CELLULAR CHANGES AND ULTIMATELY RAISE THE RISK OF LIVER CANCER"

What's even more concerning is that, according to recent studies, the average age of Filipinos suffering from fatty liver disease has dropped to just 38 years old.

The Largest Internal Organ

The liver is the largest internal organ in the human body and serves as a crucial gland. Weighing approximately 1.36 kilograms and comparable in size to a football, it is located in the upper right quadrant of the abdomen, just beneath the diaphragm.

"Your liver performs over 500 functions in your body every single day," says Davao-based Dr. Paolo Dillera, a board-certified internist, gastroenterologist, and interventional hepatologist.

Similar to other organs, the liver is vulnerable to various diseases. One such condition is fatty liver disease, which occurs when there is an accumulation of excess fat in liver cells. This condition is primarily categorized into two types: Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD), associated with obesity and diabetes, and Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (AFLD), which results from excessive alcohol consumption.

Alcohol Fatty Liver Disease

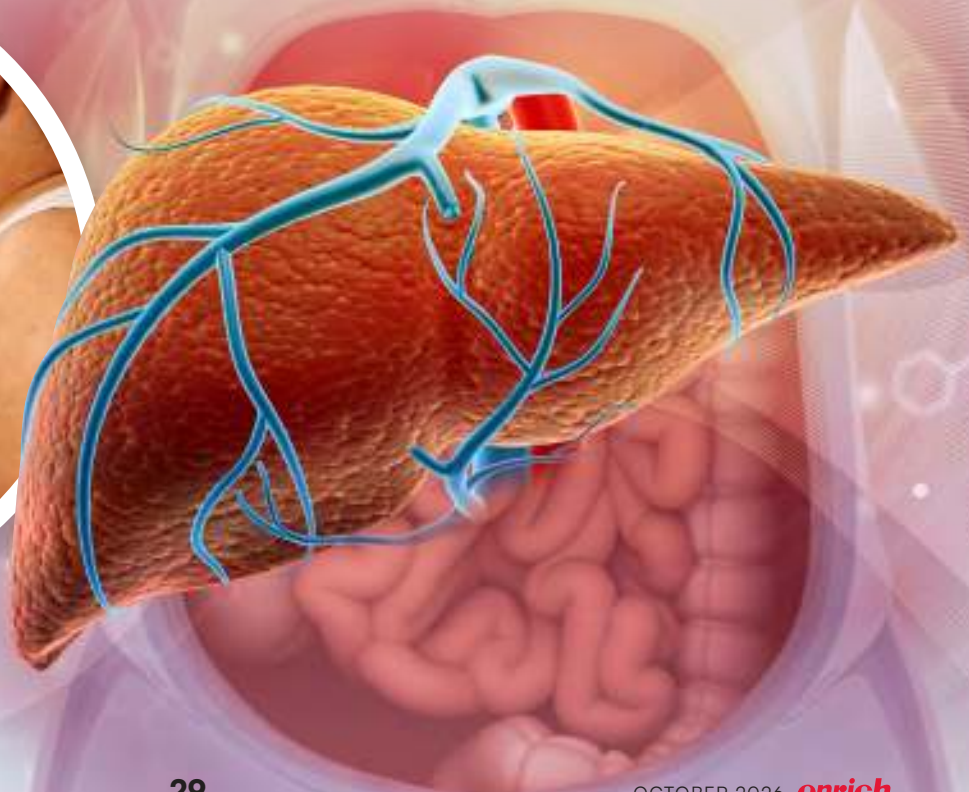
AFLD represents the initial and reversible phase of alcohol-related liver disease, marked by a harmful accumulation of fat within liver cells. This condition is predominantly caused by heavy drinking.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, the liver plays a crucial role in metabolizing alcohol to eliminate it from the body. During this metabolic process, alcohol is transformed into acetaldehyde, a harmful byproduct that can inflict damage on liver cells and provoke



▶ Dr. Paolo Dillera





inflammation. When alcohol consumption surpasses the liver's ability to process it, the liver prioritizes the breakdown of alcohol over other metabolic activities, including the metabolism of fats.

If this condition is not addressed while continuing alcohol consumption, AFLD may advance to severe inflammation known as alcoholic hepatitis and lead to irreversible scarring referred to as cirrhosis.

Processed Food Consumption

Processed foods are a staple in many Filipino households due to their convenience, affordability, and long shelf life. Popular examples include processed meats such as hot dogs and *tocino*, canned items like sardines and corned beef, pantry staples including instant noodles and 3-in-1 coffee, as well as various condiments and packaged snacks.



Dr. Brian Sullivan, an American gastroenterologist affiliated with the Chesapeake Regional Medical Center in Virginia, explained that processed foods are a significant contributor to fatty liver disease, primarily due to their high content of added sugars, such as fructose, and unhealthy fats. When the liver is inundated with these excess simple sugars, he said, it transforms them into triglycerides (fat), which then accumulate within liver cells, resulting in insulin resistance and inflammation.

Obesity

Unknowingly, the consumption of highly processed foods greatly elevates the risk of obesity. These foods are engineered to be "hyper-palatable" (convenient and quick to consume), which allows them to circumvent the body's inherent signals of fullness.

Due to their high calorie density and lack of natural fiber, they lead to an average intake of 500 additional calories per day, resulting in weight gain, according to the US National Institutes of Health (NIH).

The NIH says obesity leads to MASLD as excess weight, particularly visceral fat, overwhelms the liver's capacity to metabolize and transport fat. This accumulation is primarily influenced by insulin resistance, which compels fat cells to discharge fatty acids directly into the bloodstream, along with heightened fat synthesis that takes place when the body transforms surplus calories into liver fat.

Sedentary Lifestyle

A sedentary lifestyle is defined by extended periods of sitting, reclining, or lying down, accompanied by minimal energy expenditure (1.5 metabolic equivalents or less). Commonly known as "sitting disease," this lifestyle is marked by insufficient daily physical activity.

According to the NIH, a sedentary lifestyle contributes to the development of fatty liver disease, as prolonged periods of inactivity and the absence of muscle contractions diminish the body's capacity to burn energy. The surplus energy is then transformed into fat (triglycerides) and stored. In addition, a lack of physical activity leads to insulin resistance, compelling the liver to generate and accumulate more fat, which ultimately results in fatty liver disease.

Diabetes

The *Canadian Journal of Diabetes* elaborates that diabetes primarily contributes to MASLD through mechanisms of insulin resistance and hyperglycemia. When the cells in the body become resistant to insulin, the liver is exposed to an excess of free fatty acids derived from adipose tissue. It processes this surplus, along with elevated blood sugar levels, into fat, which subsequently accumulates in the liver.

Stress

A research article published in *Scientific Reports* indicates that stress can contribute to MASLD by stimulating the release of cortisol. This hormone elevates blood sugar levels, induces insulin resistance, and promotes fat storage in the liver. Furthermore, chronic stress leads to oxidative stress and inflammation, while also fostering detrimental lifestyle choices such as poor dietary habits and increased alcohol intake.

Consequences

The risks associated with fatty liver disease encompass a heightened likelihood of liver scarring (cirrhosis), an elevated potential for heart disease due to its connection with cardiovascular problems, liver inflammation, and a reduced life expectancy stemming from these complications.

"Fatty liver can lead to liver inflammation, which may initiate long-term cellular changes and ultimately raise the risk of liver cancer," warns Dr. Dillera.

The Hepatology Society of the Philippines reports that liver cancer is a critical health challenge in the Philippines, where it ranks as the fourth most common type of cancer. It is even more deadly, being the second or third leading cause of cancer fatalities in the country.

Preventable

"Fatty liver disease is one of the most preventable conditions I see in my clinic, and yet it is quietly becoming an epidemic right here in the Philippines," says Dr. Dillera. Here, he shares actual evidence-based steps that protect your liver – not detox teas, not supplements with big claims, "but real habits that work."

1. Cut added sugar

"You have to cut back on added sugar and soft drinks," he says. "The fructose in sweetened beverages like your juice drinks, energy drinks, and ultra-processed snacks is directly converted into fat by your liver. This is one of the biggest dietary drivers of fatty liver disease, and it is something many Filipinos are consuming every single day without realizing the damage it causes."



2. Move your body

"You have to move your body," Dr. Dillera says. "You do not need a gym; just 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week. Whether that is brisk walking, swimming, or cycling, exercise has been shown to reduce liver fat even without significant weight loss.

3. Lose weight

"If you are carrying extra weight, losing even just five to 10 percent of your body weight can meaningfully reduce fat in the liver," he says. "The liver response quickly and well to lifestyle changes, especially in the early stages."

4. Limit alcohol intake

"Limit your alcohol intake," Dr. Dillera points out. "Even moderate and regular drinking worsens fatty liver, especially if you already have diabetes or high blood pressure."

5. Have regular check-ups

"You have to get your metabolic numbers checked," he advises. "Blood sugar, cholesterol, triglycerides, blood pressure – all these are directly connected to liver health and managing them protects your liver long term."

Dr. Dillera concludes, "Your liver deserves your attention, so you have to start now because your liver is counting on you." ●

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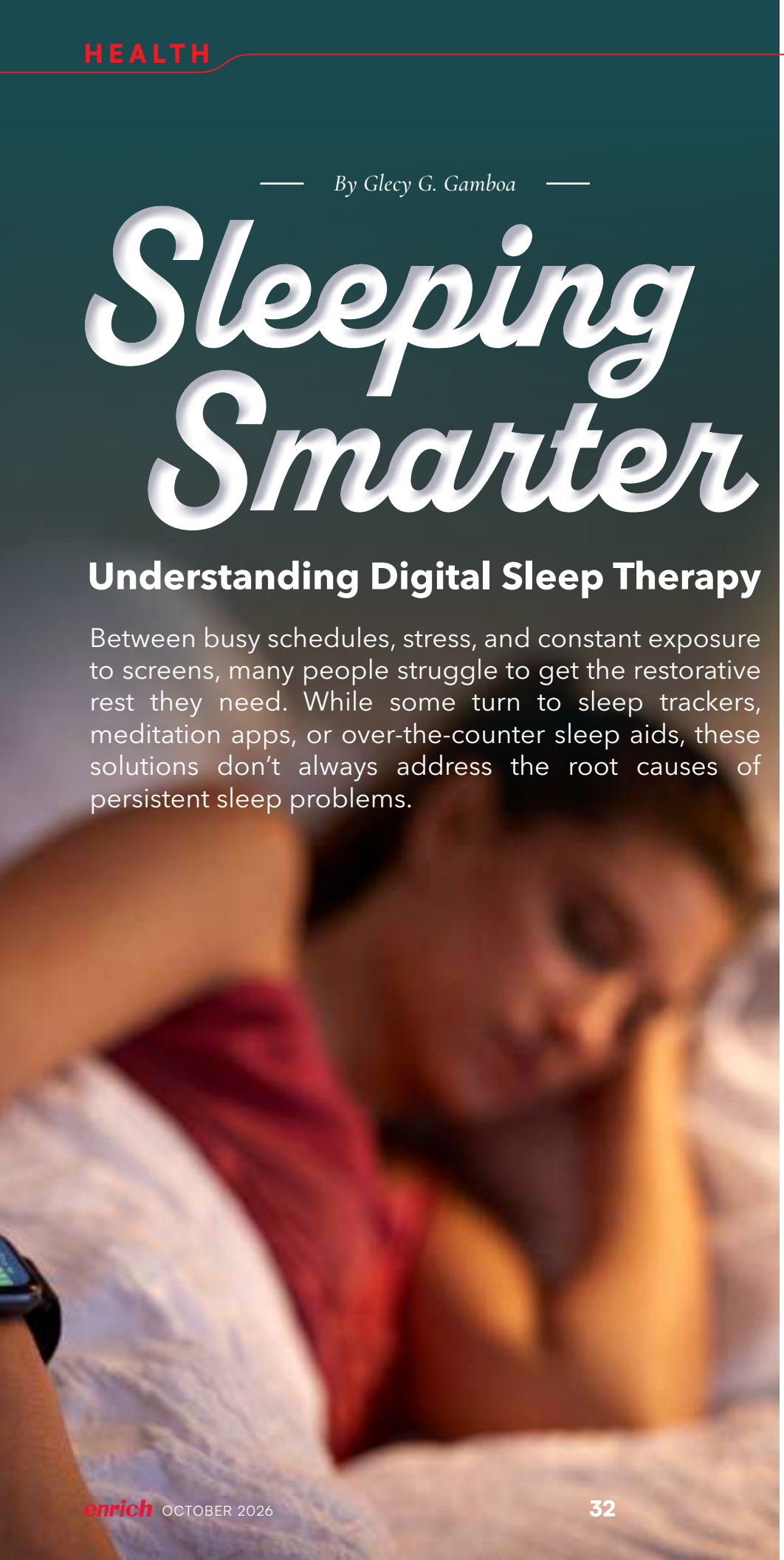
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By Glecy G. Gamboa

Sleeping Smarter

Understanding Digital Sleep Therapy

Between busy schedules, stress, and constant exposure to screens, many people struggle to get the restorative rest they need. While some turn to sleep trackers, meditation apps, or over-the-counter sleep aids, these solutions don't always address the root causes of persistent sleep problems.



A newer approach, known as digital sleep therapy, is changing the way insomnia is treated. Rather than simply monitoring sleep or promoting relaxation, these evidence-based programs deliver structured therapy designed to help people develop healthy sleep habits and overcome behaviors and thought patterns that interfere with sleep. Many are based on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I), which sleep experts recommend as the first-line treatment for chronic insomnia.

As digital health technologies become more widely available, researchers are finding that they may offer an effective and accessible way to help people sleep better. But how do these programs work, and can they really improve sleep?

Why Treating Insomnia Matters

Everyone has occasional restless nights. But when we have difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or waking too early becomes a regular pattern, it can take a toll on both our physical and mental wellbeing. Chronic insomnia affects an estimated 10 to 15 percent of adults, and it is a medical condition that can interfere with daily life.

Poor sleep can affect our mood, concentration, memory, and productivity. Over time, it has also been linked to an increased risk of anxiety, depression, high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and weakened immune function. While researchers continue to study these relationships, experts agree that healthy sleep is an essential pillar of our overall health.

Despite its impact, many of us do not seek treatment. Some assume that poor sleep is simply part of getting older or living a busy life, while others rely on over-the-counter sleep aids that may offer only temporary relief. Digital sleep therapy offers another option that aims to address the behaviors and thought patterns contributing to chronic insomnia rather than simply helping us to fall asleep for a night.

What Is Digital Sleep Therapy?

Digital sleep therapy uses web-based or mobile platforms to deliver structured treatment for insomnia. Although it may resemble a typical sleep app, its purpose is quite different. Instead of simply tracking



sleep patterns or playing soothing sounds, digital sleep therapy aims to change our habits and thinking patterns that contribute to ongoing sleep difficulties.

Most evidence-based programs are built on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I), a treatment that has been extensively studied over the past decades. According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine, CBT-I is recommended as a first-line treatment for adults with chronic insomnia because it addresses the underlying causes of sleep problems rather than simply relieving symptoms.

Digital CBT-I programs typically combine several strategies. These may include establishing a consistent sleep schedule, limiting time spent awake in bed, improving bedtime routines, learning relaxation techniques, and addressing unhelpful beliefs about sleep. Many programs also include sleep diaries, personalized feedback, and interactive lessons that allow users to monitor progress over time.

"CBT-I is the gold standard empirically supported treatment for insomnia," says sleep psychologist Aric Prather, Director of the Behavioral Sleep Medicine Research Program at the University of California at San Francisco. By making this evidence-based therapy available through digital platforms, these programs have the potential to reach people who might otherwise have limited access to trained sleep specialists.

In a recent randomized controlled trial published in the journal *Sleep*, university students who completed a five-week digital CBT-I program reported improvements in insomnia symptoms, sleep quality, and mental wellbeing compared with those who received sleep education alone. The findings suggest that structured digital programs help users develop lasting behavioral changes that support healthier sleep.

Researchers have also found that improvements in sleep are often accompanied by reductions in stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, highlighting the close relationship between sleep and mental health.

Benefits Of Digital Sleep Therapy

One of the greatest strengths of digital sleep therapy is its accessibility. Finding a sleep specialist or therapist trained in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I) can be difficult, especially for those living in rural areas or communities with limited healthcare resources. Digital programs make evidence-based treatment available wherever there is an internet connection.



Convenience is another advantage. We can complete sessions at home and progress at our own pace. Many programs also provide sleep diaries, personalized feedback, reminders, and progress tracking, helping us stay engaged throughout the course of therapy.

For some, digital sleep therapy may also feel less intimidating than seeking in-person care. The privacy and flexibility of an online program can encourage us to seek help sooner, rather than waiting until sleep problems become more severe.

Perhaps most importantly, digital sleep therapy helps us to develop long-term skills for improving sleep. Instead of providing temporary relief, it teaches practical strategies that we can continue using long after the program has ended.

Despite its promise, we also need to be cautious of apps that promise instant results or rely on unsupported claims without citing clinical research.

Digital sleep therapy requires commitment. Because it focuses on changing habits and behaviors, we must be willing to practice the techniques consistently over several weeks. Like any behavioral therapy, success depends on us taking part.

In addition, some sleep problems require medical evaluation rather than self-guided treatment.

Conditions such as obstructive sleep apnea, restless legs syndrome, or narcolepsy may need diagnosis and management by a healthcare professional. And for many people with chronic insomnia, digital sleep therapy offers an effective first step, while others may benefit from combining it with guidance from a healthcare provider.

How Digital Sleep Therapy Works

Most digital sleep therapy programs begin with an assessment of a person's sleep habits and insomnia symptoms. Users are then guided through a series of structured lessons over several weeks, often at their own pace.

One of the first tools is a sleep diary, where users record when they go to bed,

how long it takes them to fall asleep, how often they wake during the night, and how they feel the next day. This information helps identify patterns that may be contributing to poor sleep.

The program then introduces practical CBT-I techniques. These may include establishing a consistent sleep schedule, limiting time spent awake in bed, developing a relaxing bedtime routine, and learning strategies to manage worries or unhelpful thoughts about sleep. Many programs also provide personalized feedback, reminders, goal setting, and progress tracking to encourage long-term habit change.

Choosing A Digital Sleep Program

Sleep scientist and Instructor at Harvard School of Public Health, Rebecca Robbins, encourages consumers to choose digital health tools that are supported by scientific evidence and developed with sleep experts. While technology can play a valuable role in improving sleep, she emphasizes that not every sleep app has been clinically evaluated, making it important to look beyond marketing claims.

Not all sleep apps are designed to treat insomnia. Many focus on relaxation through soothing sounds, guided meditation, or sleep tracking. In contrast, evidence-based digital sleep therapy programs are built around Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Insomnia (CBT-I).

Here are some examples of these digital sleep therapy programs:

Sleepio. One of the best-known digital CBT-I programs, featuring a sleep assessment, interactive weekly sessions, sleep diary, and personalized feedback.

"Digital sleep therapy requires commitment. Because it focuses on changing habits and behaviors, we must be willing to practice the techniques consistently over several weeks. Like any behavioral therapy, success depends on active participation"

It has been evaluated in multiple clinical trials and is recommended by the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Excellence for treating insomnia in appropriate patients.

Somryst. A prescription digital therapeutic for adults with chronic insomnia that delivers CBT-I through a structured mobile program.

CBT-i Coach. A free app developed to support CBT-I with tools such as a sleep diary, relaxation exercises, and educational resources.

Stellar Sleep. A newer program that combines CBT-I principles with personalized digital coaching.

As technology and sleep science continue to advance, digital sleep therapy may become an increasingly important part of how insomnia is managed, helping more people move beyond restless nights toward healthier, more restorative sleep. ●

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WHY FLUIDS AND REGULAR MEALS ARE THE FOUNDATION OF OUR HEALTH

By Edith Legaspi

It began quietly. A faint headache behind my eyes. A flicker of fatigue that coffee no longer relieved. A sluggishness in my joints that I blamed on the weather. What many people describe as the toll of a busy life, I have learned, over more than two decades as a nurse in clinical practice, is often something far more fundamental: the body signaling that it is running dry.

Dehydration and irregular eating are among the most consistently underestimated threats to long-term health. They are not dramatic in the way that a cardiac event is dramatic, or sudden in the way an infection appears. Instead, they eat away at our wellbeing slowly, silently, and persistently, until the combines damage becomes impossible to ignore.

I want to speak plainly about what the evidence tells us: about what fluids do inside the body, what happens when we go without enough of them, why the timing and composition of our meals matter as much as it does, and what we can do, starting today, to give our bodies the conditions they need to thrive.

"OUR BODY DOES NOT OPERATE AS A STATIC PROCESSING MACHINE. IT FUNCTIONS ACCORDING TO INTERNAL BIOLOGICAL CLOCKS, KNOWN AS CIRCADIAN RHYTHMS, WHICH GOVERN HORMONE RELEASE, METABOLIC RATE, DIGESTIVE ENZYME PRODUCTION, GUT MOTILITY, AND CELLULAR REPAIR ACROSS A 24-HOUR CYCLE"







The Body Is Water, And That Changes Everything

Approximately 60 percent of the adult human body is composed of water. In young children, that figure rises to 75 percent. In muscle tissue, it is closer to 79 percent. These numbers are not incidental. Water is not just a medium in which biological processes occur; it is an active participant in almost every function the body performs.

Blood, which is roughly 90 percent water, sends oxygen and nutrients to every cell and carries metabolic waste away for excretion. Our lymphatic system, which forms the backbone of our immune defense, relies on fluid to move white blood cells and clear pathogens. Our kidneys, which filter the blood approximately 50 times each day, need adequate water to do their work without sustaining damage. Our brain, which is suspended in cerebrospinal fluid, is acutely sensitive to fluctuations in hydration, so much so, that a drop of even two percent in the body's water volume has been shown in controlled studies to measurably impair bodily function, including memory, attention, and reaction time.

Our joints, too, depend on synovial fluid, a water-based lubricant, to move without friction and pain. Our mucous membranes lining the respiratory tract need moisture to trap airborne particles and bacteria. Our gut requires fluid to process food, absorb nutrients, and move waste through the colon. When we speak of hydration, then, we are speaking of something that touches virtually every organ and tissue in our body.

When Our Body Runs Dry

Most people think of dehydration as something that happens to athletes collapsing on a track or to travelers stranded in a desert. Clinical reality is much more mundane. Mild chronic dehydration, drinking less fluid than the body needs over days, weeks, or years, is extraordinarily common, particularly among older adults, young children, and those whose work or lifestyle leaves little time for deliberate drinking.

The consequences reveal themselves in stages. In mild dehydration, representing a fluid deficit of one to two percent of body weight, the earliest symptoms are thirst, reduced urine output, slightly darker urine, and a beginning decline in concentration. Many people operate in this state chronically without recognizing it as a medical issue. They simply assume they are tired, or distracted, or not sleeping well enough.

As dehydration deepens to three to five percent of our body weight, the picture grows more concerning. Headaches intensify. Muscle cramps begin. Our skin loses its elasticity. Blood pressure can drop as blood volume decreases, leading to dizziness and fainting. Our kidneys, working harder to save water, begin concentrating urine to the point that the risk of kidney stone formation rises substantially. Studies have shown that people who drink fewer than 1.5 liters of fluid per day are significantly more likely to develop recurrent kidney stones than those who drink two liters or more.

Beyond a five percent deficit, dehydration becomes a medical emergency. Our heart rate accelerates to compensate for reduced blood volume. Core body temperature rises. Confusion, slurred speech, and loss of coordination show neurological compromise. At eight to 10 percent deficit, organ failure becomes a real

and present danger. Death can follow at around 15 percent in adults.

Elderly people have to be especially aware and careful. The sensation of thirst diminishes significantly with age; elderly people simply do not register dehydration the way younger people do. Their kidneys also lose some of their ability to concentrate urine over time, meaning the body has less flexibility to compensate for reduced fluid intake. Falls, confusion, and urinary tract infections in the elderly are frequently dehydration-related presentations that go unrecognized by families and, regrettably, sometimes by clinicians as well.



How Much Fluid, And What Kind?

The old prescription of eight glasses of water a day, while being reasonable, is more nuance than that simple formula suggests. Fluid needs vary substantially by body weight, ambient temperature, physical activity, dietary composition, and individual metabolic rate. The European Food Safety Authority recommends 2.5 liters of total water intake per day for adult men and 2.0 liters for adult women, including water obtained from food. Under conditions of heat or exercise, these figures must rise considerably.

Plain water is the gold standard for hydration. It contains no calories, no sugar, and nothing the body must metabolize before it can be absorbed. But it is not the only valid source of fluid. Herbal teas, diluted fruit juices, milk, and water-rich foods such as cucumber, watermelon, celery, oranges, and leafy greens all contribute meaningfully to daily fluid intake. Soups and broths are particularly valuable, combining fluids with electrolytes such as sodium and potassium.

A word of caution about beverages that many patients assume are hydrating. Alcohol is a diuretic: it suppresses the hormone vasopressin, causing the kidneys to excrete more fluid than the drink itself provides. A standard glass of wine or spirit will, on balance, leave the body slightly more dehydrated than before it was consumed. Caffeinated beverages in moderate amounts (one to three cups of coffee or tea daily) are largely neutral in their hydration effect for habitual drinkers, though they can contribute to fluid loss in those who consume them rarely or in large quantities. Highly sweetened commercial drinks and energy beverages are best avoided as primary sources of hydration, as their sugar and stimulant content create additional metabolic demands.

The Science Of Regulated Meals

Nutrition science spent much of the twentieth century focused almost exclusively on what we eat. The understanding of chrononutrition, when we eat, has seriously complicated that picture, and for good reason. Our body does not operate as a static processing machine. It functions according to internal biological clocks, known as circadian rhythms, which govern hormone release, metabolic rate, digestive enzyme production, gut motility, and cellular repair across a 24-hour cycle.

When we eat at irregular times, we disrupt these rhythms. Our pancreas, which secretes insulin in response to food, is calibrated to release it most efficiently in the morning and early afternoon. Late-night eating, when insulin sensitivity is naturally lower, results in the same meal producing a much higher blood glucose spike than it would have if eaten at midday. Over months and years, this disruption speeds up the development of insulin resistance — this paves the way to type 2 diabetes.

Also, our liver's ability for fat metabolism follows a daily rhythm. Studies using time-restricted meals in which participants ate the same number of calories but confined intake to a window of eight to 10 hours showed improvements in metabolic markers, including fasting glucose, triglyceride levels, and blood pressure, independent of weight loss. The composition of the meal mattered less than whether the liver was given an extended overnight period to repair and recycle without causing new caloric input.



What Regular, Balanced Meals Actually Deliver

When people ask me what a regulated meal pattern gives me, I summarise it as stability: stable blood sugar, stable energy, stable hormone function, and stable gut health.

Blood glucose regulation is probably the most immediate and measurable benefit. Eating at consistent intervals, with meals that include enough fiber, protein, and healthy fats alongside carbohydrates, flattens the blood glucose curve. Those sharp spikes and crashes we get with skipped meals and large bolus feeding are replaced by a more sustained, even energy supply to our brain and muscles. We experience fewer afternoon energy slumps, improved concentration, and reduced carbohydrate cravings — all of which are direct consequences of more stable glycemia.

Gut health is the second major beneficiary of regulated eating. Our gastrointestinal system contains its own nervous system, the enteric nervous system, sometimes called our second brain, which coordinates the complex wave-like muscle contractions known as peristalsis that move food through our digestive tract. This system works optimally when eating occurs at predictable intervals. Irregular eating disrupts the migrating motor complex, the housekeeping contractions that sweep the small intestine clear between meals, increasing the risk of bacterial overgrowth and bloating. Consistent meal timing is one of the most effective non-pharmacological interventions for irritable bowel syndrome, and gastroenterologists have observed this clinically for decades.

Hormonal balance is the third pillar of benefit. Ghrelin, the appetite hormone, is highly responsive to meal patterns: it learns to rise before regular meal times and drop after them, creating a natural hunger pattern. When meal timing is chaotic, ghrelin secretion becomes erratic, hunger pangs come unpredictably, and portion size becomes far more difficult. Leptin, the satiety hormone, similarly works more effectively in a regulated pattern, allowing our brain to accurately register fullness and stop overconsumption.

Immune function and inflammation round out the picture in ways that take longer to manifest but are no less significant. Chronic irregular eating is associated with elevated levels of inflammatory markers, including C-reactive protein and interleukin-6. Sustained low-grade inflammation, now understood to underlie conditions ranging from cardiovascular disease and arthritis to certain cancers and neurodegenerative disease, can be changed through diet. Anti-inflammatory eating patterns, especially

"GUT HEALTH IS THE SECOND MAJOR BENEFICIARY OF REGULATED EATING. OUR GASTROINTESTINAL SYSTEM CONTAINS ITS OWN NERVOUS SYSTEM, THE ENTERIC NERVOUS SYSTEM, SOMETIMES CALLED OUR SECOND BRAIN, WHICH COORDINATES THE COMPLEX WAVE-LIKE MUSCLE CONTRACTIONS KNOWN AS PERISTALSIS THAT MOVE FOOD THROUGH OUR DIGESTIVE TRACT"



oily fish, olive oil, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains at regular intervals, reduce systemic inflammation measurably over a period of months.

The Harm We Cause By Neglecting Both

It is worth being direct about the downstream consequences of regular dehydration and disorganized eating, because the clinical literature is unambiguous. Inadequate hydration combined with irregular nutrition creates a huge burden on our body that, over the years, speeds up the development of conditions that most people consider inevitable problems of aging. They are not.

Our kidneys, as already noted, are one of the first organs to suffer. Chronic mild dehydration reduces the glomerular filtration rate over time, contributing to chronic kidney disease, a condition affecting approximately 10 percent of the global adult population and rising. Adequate fluid intake is one of the best protective measures against kidney disease progression, yet it is one of the most frequently overlooked in clinical consultations.

Cardiovascular risk rises alongside poor hydration and erratic eating. Blood that is insufficiently diluted becomes more viscous, increasing the risk of clotting and placing greater strain on our heart with every beat. Meal-induced blood glucose swings cause those spikes in insulin, which, over time, damage the endothelial lining of blood vessels. Combined, these greatly increase the risk of atherosclerosis, hypertension, and ultimately cardiac problems.

Cognitive decline is the outcome I find as the least expected. Our brain is exceptionally metabolically demanding, consuming approximately 20 percent of the body's total energy despite accounting for only two percent of our body weight. It requires a steady, well-timed supply of glucose and oxygen, both of which depend on good vascular health and stable blood glucose levels. Some research links chronic dehydration to accelerated brain volume loss and impaired neural connectivity. Long-term irregular eating patterns are associated in many studies with a higher risk of mild cognitive damage and dementia. These are not catastrophic findings if we change our behavior early. They are, however, a reminder that what we choose to do at the dinner table is a decision being made about our brains and our future.

Some Practical Guidance

Clinical advice, to be useful, must be actionable. For hydration, I recommend beginning simply: place a 500ml glass of water beside your bed each night and drink it before any other beverage in the morning. This replenishes the fluid lost during sleep through breathing and perspiration, kick-starts our kidney function, and creates a daily habit that requires almost no effort. From there, I try to drink a glass of water thirty minutes before each main meal, which also supports digestion and helps with hunger pangs before food is even placed on the plate.

Monitoring urine color is the most practical and reliable self-assessment tool available. Pale straw yellow indicates adequate hydration. Dark amber or brown signals a deficit. Many of us are surprised to discover, once they begin paying attention, how frequently they are mildly dehydrated by mid-afternoon, and how straightforwardly that is remedied.

For meal regulation, I try not to aim for perfection but for consistency. Three main meals at approximately the same time each day, with the largest of them in the morning or early afternoon rather than in the evening, is the single change that I have observed to produce the most reliable metabolic improvement. Breakfast need not be elaborate: eggs, oats, yogurt with fruit, or wholegrain toast with a protein source all provide a complex, sustained energy release. The important thing is that breakfast is eaten, and that it is not replaced by coffee.

You do not need a specialist. You do not need an expensive supplement protocol or a complicated dietary regimen. You need water consistently and throughout the day. You need food, three times a day, at roughly the same times, built around plants, protein, and whole grains. These are not novel prescriptions. They are what the evidence has told us for generations.

The question is simply whether we choose to listen. ●

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By Noman Karl O. Banayat, M.D.

FROM SCREENING TO SUPPORT

How DOLE's Cancer Control Mandates Change The Philippine Workplace



According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), cancer is still the second most common cause of death in the Philippines as of 2025. Historically, public health strategies for early detection of the disease relied on the individual's initiative and out-of-pocket expenditure. But now the burden has been shifted directly onto corporations.

Under Labor Advisory No. 20, Series of 2023 (LA 20-23), issued by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), private-sector employers are now tasked with implementing a structured workplace policy and program for cancer prevention and control. This directive explicitly operationalizes the broader statutory requirements of the National Integrated Cancer Control Act (NICCA), or Republic Act No. 11215, in relation to the core provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Standards (RA 11058). In this way, the observance of Breast Cancer Awareness Month in October shifts from a corporate responsibility to a compliance requirement that must be monitored and documented.

The Legal Imperative: LA 20-23 And National Mandates

LA 20-23 applies to all employers and employees within the private sector across the Philippines. The advisory transforms cancer care programs from optional employee wellness perks into formal components of a firm's legal compliance framework.

In accordance with Section 18 of RA 11215, DOLE is tasked with developing technical policies to eliminate environmental carcinogens and protect workers navigating an active medical diagnosis. Under these rules, a compliant workplace cancer prevention and control policy should be able to cover at least five different components to have a solid base: primary prevention, access to screening and treatment referral, anti-stigma workplace policies, return-to-work frameworks, and state compensation alignment.

Primary Prevention And Workplace Hazard Controls

This involves identifying and mitigating exposure to workplace carcinogens, toxic chemicals, and hazardous working conditions. While breast cancer development is heavily tied to genetic and systemic lifestyle variables, occupational exposures — such as endocrine-disrupting chemicals found in certain industrial plastics, electronics manufacturing solvents, and any long-term disruptions to the endocrine system caused by continuous night-shift rotation — represent direct physical hazards that can be actively addressed.

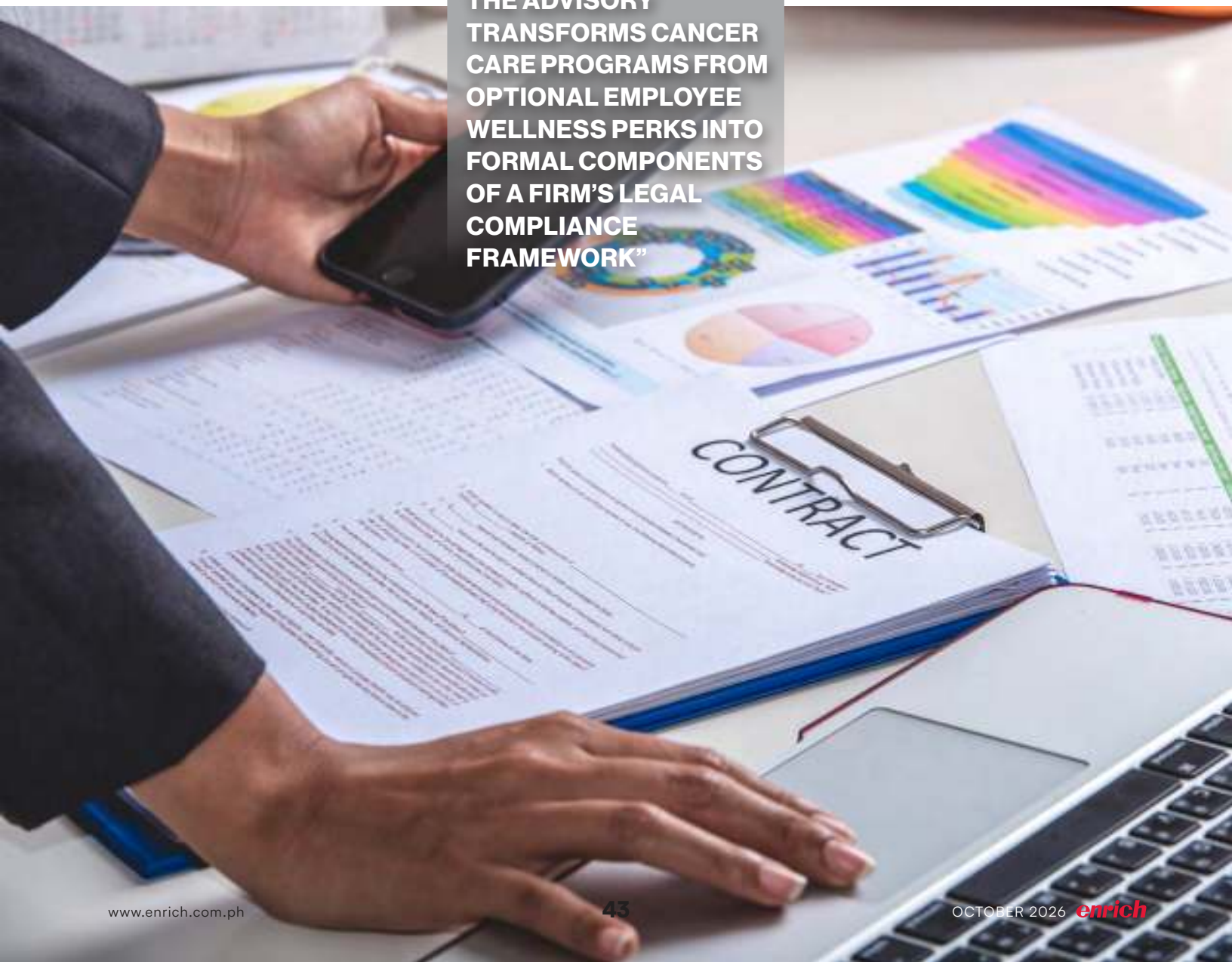
There are different levels of control that can be used depending on the workplace to minimize these risks:

"LA 20-23 APPLIES TO ALL EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES WITHIN THE PRIVATE SECTOR ACROSS THE PHILIPPINES. THE ADVISORY TRANSFORMS CANCER CARE PROGRAMS FROM OPTIONAL EMPLOYEE WELLNESS PERKS INTO FORMAL COMPONENTS OF A FIRM'S LEGAL COMPLIANCE FRAMEWORK"

Engineering Controls: Ensure high-efficiency ventilation systems are operational in industrial spaces to minimize the inhalation of airborne chemical mixtures. Install physical shielding and automated extraction systems where chemical components are actively processed.

Administrative Controls: For workplaces operating on continuous 24-hour cycles, such as the BPO and manufacturing sectors, administrative controls must include optimized shift rotation schedules. Limiting the consecutive number of graveyard shifts reduces severe circadian rhythm disruption, which has been identified as a probable risk factor for hormone-related illnesses.

Medical Surveillance: OSH personnel must adapt existing medical surveillance



"WHEN A WORKER IS DIAGNOSED WITH BREAST CANCER, THE ROLE OF THE HEALTH TEAM IN THE COMPANY SHIFTS FROM TRACKING THE CONDITION TO ACTIVELY GUIDING THEM THROUGH THE STATE-MANDATED SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS"

procedures to collect targeted health information from workers engaged in high-risk chemical handling or in high-stress operational environments.

Deconstructing Workplace Stigma

One of the biggest hurdles that is faced during workplace screening drives isn't finding the place or time for it, but the frequently deep-seated local cultural resistance. In many workplaces, employees are hesitant to undergo screening programs for fear of identifying medical vulnerabilities. Workers who get to identify physical changes, such as a breast lump, will conceal their condition from the company for fear of termination from the company or the anticipated financial burden of treatment.

The Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) of RA 11215 counters this dynamic by making any form of discrimination against cancer patients, cancer survivors and people living with cancer entirely illegal. The anti-discrimination mandate covers the entire employment lifecycle, including the initial recruitment pipeline, tenure retention, vertical promotion opportunities, and access to internal corporate benefits.

When workers have concrete guarantees that their health data will not be leveraged to justify termination, disclosure rates improve, enabling early clinical intervention.



Finding It Early

Late-stage diagnosis is still one of the biggest drivers of breast cancer deaths, either through a lack of education about the condition or the fear of their potential medical bills. Here are some ways that companies can help their workers beyond the pinning of pink ribbons or sending digital flyers during October

Make Breast Health Education Routine: Instead of just focusing on holding one-off seminars, there could instead be integrated short, practical health talks in safety training. In the same way that training for earthquake and fire drills are held, health monitoring talks can also be given. These sessions can teach workers how to perform monthly self-breast examinations to identify early warning signs of breast cancer.

Connect workers with PhilHealth Konsulta/ Yakap: Companies without an HMO benefit can help their workers register for these government benefits. This would give their workers access to free, government-subsidized primary care check-ups, medication and laboratory tests. By removing the upfront cost of health care, we remove the fear of getting checked.

Navigating Statutory Leaves, Allowances And Financial Benefits

When a worker is diagnosed with breast cancer, the role of the health team in the company shifts from tracking the condition to actively guiding them through the state-mandated social security benefits. These are designed to ensure that the worker's financial and professional status is secured during long-term medical absences.



SSS Sickness benefits: Under the Social Security Act of 2018, workers who are undergoing surgery or chemotherapy are entitled to a cash allowance equal to 90 percent of their average daily credit for up to 120 days per year.

PhilHealth Z benefit: For workers who have to undergo advanced treatments, the health team should be able to guide them towards this specialized package, which provides up to PhP 1.4 million to cover expenses for surgery, chemotherapy, and follow-ups.

PWD cards: With the provisions indicated on NICCA and the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, cancer patients are eligible to get a Person with Disability card from their local government. This would then give them additional discounts on goods and services.

Design A Return-To-Work Framework

Being able to reintroduce a worker who has undergone cancer treatment, surgery, or radiation would require thorough physical and operational adjustments to make sure that they are not exposed to any secondary health risks or excessive physical exhaustion.

Implement physical task modifications: Aside from making sure that the worker is given clearance by their primary health provider to go back to work, breast cancer survivors who have undergone axillary lymph node dissection would be faced with a lifelong risk of lymphedema, which is a painful, chronic swelling of the arm. To prevent this, the returning worker must be assigned duties exempting them from heavy manual lifting, high-force pulling and operating vibrating tools.

Provide schedule flexibility: To help deal with the strain that is caused by oncology treatments, once the worker is back to work, implement scheduled rest breaks into the workday and assign them to fixed daytime shifts to protect their recovering immune system.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month in the Philippines has evolved past symbolic marketing drives and corporate pink branding. By actively dismantling cultural barriers to medical disclosure, building clear diagnostic referral pathways, accelerating access to state sickness benefits, and enforcing structured return-to-work frameworks, OSH practitioners protect the health of the workforce while securing full regulatory compliance for their organizations. ●

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The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA) indicates that the rainy season in the Philippines generally commences in June and continues until November, with its peak occurring from July to September.

By Henrylito D. Tacio

LEPTOSPIROSIS

A Silent Killer In Flood Waters

On average, around 20 tropical cyclones, referred to locally as *bagyo*, enter the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) annually, rendering the country the most vulnerable in the world to tropical storms. The typhoon season typically occurs from June to September, with August recognized as the month featuring the highest level of activity.

During periods of heavy rainfall due to typhoons, the country faces familiar challenges. Continuous downpours result in extensive flooding. From Metro Manila to the surrounding provinces, overflowing rivers and blocked drainage systems inundate communities.

While floods disrupt everyday activities, a more significant and often overlooked threat is the health risks associated with flooding. Floodwaters not only inflict damage on properties but also harbor bacteria, viruses, and parasites that can lead to serious health issues.

In areas where rats are prevalent, the primary health risk that individuals may face is leptospirosis. This waterborne







illness tends to be more prevalent following flooding events. That's why the Department of Health (DOH) typically advises the public against wading through floodwaters and recommends wearing rubber boots when traversing flooded areas.

Rats are primary carriers of leptospirosis due to their ability to harbor and shed Leptospira bacteria without showing symptoms. Aside from rats, many animals can spread the disease, including pets (dogs, for instance) and farm livestock (cattle, swine, horses, sheep, and goats). They can spread only if they are infected with the bacteria causing it.

"Leptospirosis occurs in many wild and domestic animals," explains *The Merck Manual of Medical Information*. "Some animals act as carriers and pass the bacteria in their urine; others become ill and die."

Actually, there are two primary methods through which one can contract leptospirosis. The first involves direct exposure to the urine or bodily fluids of infected animals. The second method is through the ingestion of or contact with water or soil that has been tainted with the urine or bodily fluids of these infected animals.

According to the health department, leptospirosis bacteria can enter the human body via cuts and abrasions on the skin or through the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose, and mouth. Once they enter the bloodstream, these bacteria can disseminate throughout the body, leading to various signs and symptoms of illness.

Research conducted internationally has indicated that leptospirosis results in mild illness in approximately 90 percent of those infected, while the remaining 10 percent may experience severe, potentially life-threatening disease that impacts multiple organs.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, leptospirosis occurs in two distinct phases. During the initial phase, the illness may be easily confused with a typical cold or flu. Symptoms include a high fever accompanied by chills, severe headaches, intense muscle pain (particularly in the calves and lower back), red eyes, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and abdominal discomfort.

Some patients may experience a temporary improvement in their condition, only to relapse into a more severe second phase. This advanced stage can result in Weil's disease, which can cause significant damage to vital organs.

Key indicators of this critical stage include jaundice (characterized by yellowing of the skin and the sclera of the eyes), kidney problems (such as reduced urination, presence of blood in urine, or dark, tea-colored urine), bleeding (including nosebleeds, vomiting blood, black or tarry stools, or small red spots resembling rashes on the skin), respiratory complications (such as chest pain, difficulty breathing, or coughing up blood), and neurological symptoms (including severe headaches, stiff neck, or changes in mental status).

Leptospirosis is an infection caused by the Leptospira, a bacterium that is typically transmitted through water or soil that has been contaminated by the urine of infected animals.

"Leptospirosis bacteria, the cause of a serious infection, generally have limited survival time on dry surfaces, typically ranging from a few hours to a day under optimal conditions, but less in warm, dry environments," notes Dr. Sarah Patel, a practicing neurologist who writes for the website of Advance Study.

> "Rats are primary carriers of leptospirosis due to their ability to harbor and shed Leptospira bacteria without showing symptoms"

In controlled laboratory settings, Dr. Patel indicates that certain strains of *Leptospira* can survive for a few hours on dry surfaces. Nevertheless, in real-world scenarios, particularly due to influences such as sunlight and temperature variations, this survival time is typically diminished even more. "It's important to note that the virulence (ability to cause disease) of the bacteria decreases rapidly after drying," she points out.

Leptospirosis is not spread from human to human, the health department says. If you are either residing in a flooded area or have high-risk exposure (wading in

flood waters, swimming in flood water or ingestion of contaminated water with or without cuts or wounds), DOH suggests that you should see a doctor immediately.

"Early recognition and treatment within two days of illness to prevent complications of leptospirosis, so early consultation is advised," the health department urges.

Most instances of leptospirosis are mild and do not require treatment. However, the Cleveland Clinic advises that you should visit the nearest emergency room if you experience symptoms of severe leptospirosis, which include coughing up blood, chest pain, difficulty breathing, jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes), blood in your urine, minimal urination, and rash-like red or dark spots on the skin.

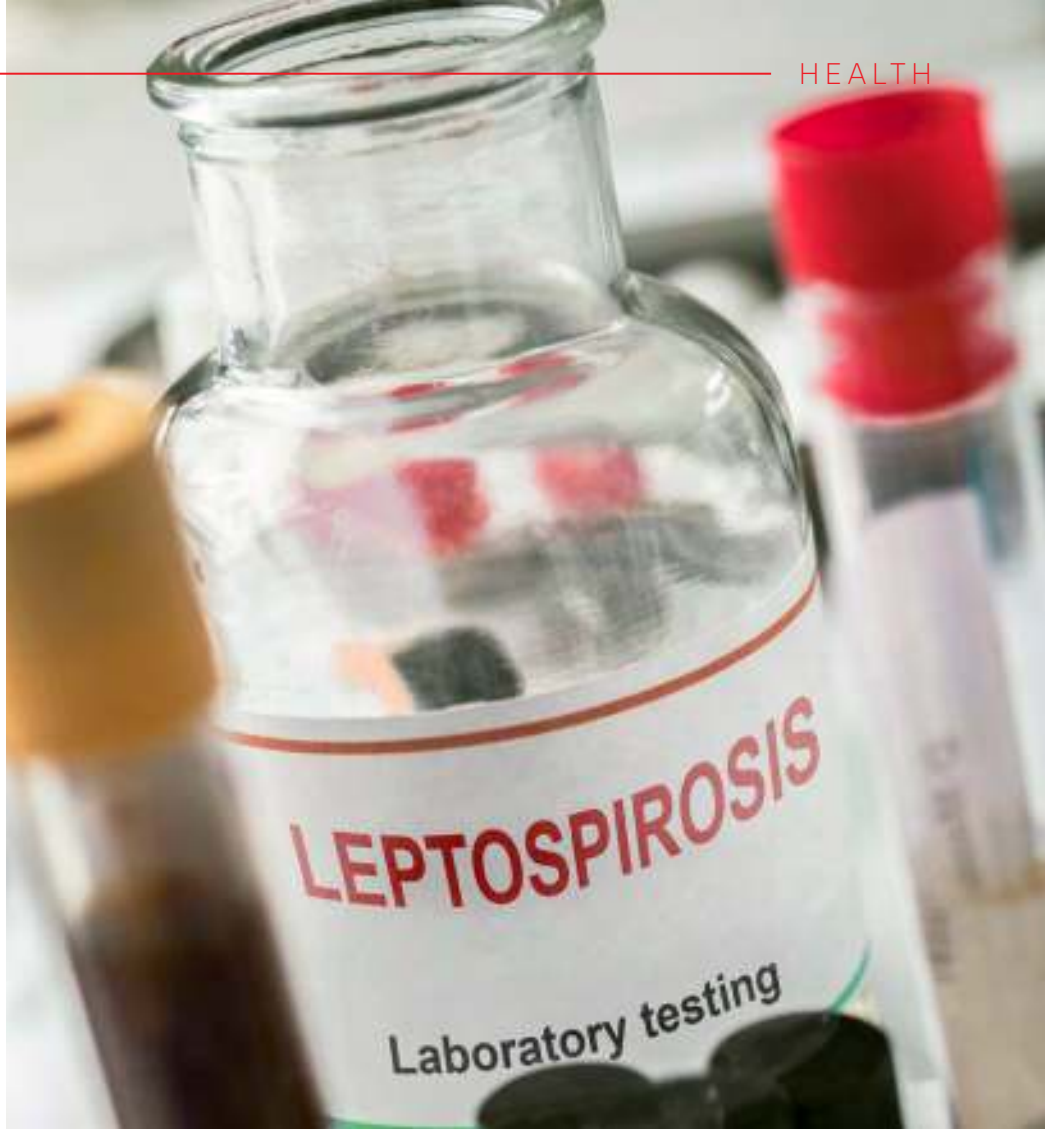
According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, untreated severe leptospirosis may result in organ damage or failure, particularly affecting the kidneys and liver; it can also lead to acute respiratory distress syndrome, respiratory failure, and inflammation surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis).

Only a doctor can confirm the diagnosis of leptospirosis. The doctor does this by identifying *Leptospira* in cultures of blood, urine, or cerebrospinal fluid samples or, more commonly, by detecting antibodies against the bacteria in the blood.

"Once your doctor has confirmed that your symptoms are those of leptospirosis and by doing a test," the health department states, "you should be treated with antibiotics." Treatment is most effective when started as soon as possible.

An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure. The health department says leptospirosis can be prevented by doing the following:

- Avoid contact with animal urine or body fluids, especially if there are cuts or abrasions of the skin.
- Wear protective clothing or footwear near soil or water that may be contaminated with animal urine.
- Consume boiled water, especially during the rainy season.
- Avoid swimming or wading in muddy ponds and slowly moving streams, especially those located near farms or stagnant water.
- Control rats and mice around the home on a regular basis. ●





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By Butch Sanchez

DIZZY ON STANDING? SWOLLEN ANKLES What It Means

Practical guidance for staying steady, comfortable, and informed in midlife and beyond

You finish your afternoon merienda, push back from the table or get up from your favorite chair, and the room tilts for a moment. Or maybe your ankles feel tight and look puffier by evening, especially after a warm day. These sensations of feeling giddy or lightheaded when standing quickly, along with swollen ("bloated") feet and ankles, are surprisingly common as we age. They don't always signal something serious, but they are your body's way of asking for attention.

At *Enrich*, we focus on practical wellness for healthy aging. Here's what these symptoms often mean, when to take them seriously, and simple steps you can start today to feel steadier and more comfortable.

What's Happening When You Feel Giddy When Standing

This is commonly called orthostatic (or postural) hypotension, a temporary drop in blood pressure when we change position from sitting or lying down to standing. Gravity pulls blood into our legs and lower body. Normally, our body quickly adjusts by tightening blood vessels and increasing heart rate to keep blood flowing to our brain. When this adjustment is slow or incomplete, we feel lightheaded, dizzy, or "giddy." Symptoms often ease once we sit or lie down again.

It can happen occasionally (dehydration after a hot day, skipping meals, or standing too long) or more frequently due to medications, aging changes in blood vessels, or underlying health factors.

"Swelling (peripheral edema) occurs when fluid builds up in the tissues of our lower legs and feet. It often worsens toward the end of the day or after long periods of sitting or standing and can create a feeling of tightness or heaviness that affects joints and mobility"

Helpful habit: Rise slowly. Sit on the edge of the bed or chair for a minute, dangle your legs, then stand while holding onto something stable. This gives your body time to adjust.

The Swell Story: Why Ankles And Feet Puff Up

Swelling (peripheral edema) occurs when fluid builds up in the tissues of our lower legs and feet. It often worsens toward the end of the day or after long periods of sitting or standing and can create a feeling of tightness or heaviness that affects joints and mobility.

Common contributors include prolonged standing or sitting, heat and humidity (especially in our climate), higher salt intake, certain medications, and reduced circulation as we age. In some cases, it ties into heart, kidney, or vein function.

Quick relief tip: Elevate your legs above heart level for 15 to 20 minutes a few times a day (prop them on pillows while resting or watching TV). This helps fluid drain back toward your heart.

When These Symptoms Overlap

Dizziness when we stand, and leg swelling sometimes appear together. Possible connections include:

Dehydration or low blood volume. This is common in warm weather; it reduces our body's ability to maintain blood pressure and can worsen swelling.

Heart or circulation factors. Our heart works harder to pump against gravity; fluid can pool in the legs.

Kidney function or protein levels. Can lead to fluid retention.

Medications. Blood pressure drugs, diuretics, or others may contribute to both.

Venous issues or reduced muscle pump. Veins struggle to return blood; muscles weaken with less activity.

Aging and autonomic changes. Slower reflexes and vessel flexibility play a role.

Joint discomfort can accompany swelling simply from extra pressure or inflammation.



Important: These are general possibilities only. Only a healthcare professional can determine what's happening in your body through proper checks (blood pressure lying/sitting/standing, blood tests, etc.).

Red Flags. See a doctor promptly. Most episodes are mild, but contact your doctor or visit a clinic if you experience:

- Frequent or severe dizziness, fainting, or falls.
- Sudden or one-sided swelling, redness, warmth, or pain (possible clot).
- Shortness of breath, chest pain, or rapid weight gain.
- Swelling with foamy urine or extreme fatigue.
- Symptoms that worsen or don't improve with simple measures.

Early attention supports better outcomes, especially important for preventive healthy aging.

Practical Steps You Can Take Today

Small, consistent habits make a real difference:

Hydrate smartly. Aim for plenty of fluids daily (more in hot weather). Water, buko juice and hydrating fruits like watermelon or papaya help. Limit excessive caffeine or alcohol, which can dehydrate.

Move with intention. Walk regularly, do ankle pumps (flex and point your feet while seated), and avoid long periods of sitting or standing still. Gentle strength and balance exercises support circulation and stability.

Mind your salt and potassium. Reduce processed foods and added salt. Enjoy potassium-rich local foods (bananas, leafy greens, avocados, beans) to help balance fluids and always within your doctor's dietary advice.

Support your legs. Consider graduated compression socks if recommended by your healthcare provider. Elevate legs as noted above.

Review medications and health. Bring a list to your doctor or pharmacist. Stay on top of regular check-ups for blood pressure, heart, and kidney health.

Cool and comfortable. In our tropical climate, stay in shaded or air-conditioned spaces when possible, wear breathable clothing, and avoid sudden hot environments.

These symptoms are common signals, not inevitable parts of aging. Many people regain steadiness and comfort with simple lifestyle adjustments, medical guidance, and consistent self-care. The goal of healthy aging isn't perfection; it's staying active, independent, and enjoying life with family and community.



Stay steady, stay well, and keep moving forward - one step at a time. ●

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Enchanted Kingdom Elevates AGILA The EKsperience

SARIBUHAY With Magic, Hope, And Sustainability



The majestic structure of AGILA The EKsperience: SARIBUHAY pays tribute to the Philippines, with its pillars symbolizing the rays of the sun on the national flag and its three outer rings representing the country's three major island groups.



EK Chairman and President Cesar Mario O. Mamon and Chief Operating Officer Cynthia R. Mamon, Ph.D., received the Best ASEAN New Tourism Attraction award for AGILA The EKsperience: SARIBUHAY from ASEANTA in Cebu last January 27, 2026.



EK has continuously supported the care and breeding of a Philippine eagle named Enchanting Kagitingan, in partnership with the Philippine Eagle Foundation since the launch of the original AGILA The EKsperience in 2016.

For 31 years, Enchanted Kingdom (EK) has been more than just the first and only world-class theme park in the Philippines. It has been a magical escape where generations of Filipinos have created enchanting memories, celebrated milestones, and strengthened bonds with their families and loved ones.

As EK celebrates its 31st anniversary this October, the park welcomes a new chapter of enchantment with fresh experiences that celebrate Filipino pride and inspire moments of magic, joy, and hope, all rooted in its Love Saribuhay campaign that started last July.

At the heart of the festivities is AGILA The EKsperience: SARIBUHAY — an attraction that has evolved from a flying theater into an immersive journey celebrating tourism, education, and environmental advocacy.

A Soaring Tribute To The Philippines

First launched in 2016, AGILA The EKsperience has become a celebration of Filipino pride — showcasing the country's natural beauty, rich culture, and the warmth of its people.

Serving as EK's educational and tourism anchor, this 105-seater indoor flying theater takes guests on an immersive simulation across the breathtaking landscapes and natural wonders in the archipelago through the perspective of the Philippine eagle or *Agila*.

Fittingly a national symbol of strength, resilience, freedom, and connection to nature, *Agila* is renowned for its sharp eyesight that sees clearly as it soars above the skies.

However, beyond its majestic image lies a pressing reality. The Philippine eagle's plight as one of the world's most critically endangered birds underscores the urgent need to protect its natural habitat — the planet Earth we all share and call home.

The attraction's striking architecture is likewise rich with symbolism, with pillars and outer rings representing the sun rays on the national flag and the country's three major island groups, respectively.

Relaunched With A Renewed Mission

Nearly a decade after its debut, AGILA The EKsperience evolved alongside EK's growing purpose and advocacy — to create



The Taniman Hydroponics garden, located just outside the AGILA building, demonstrates sustainable farming and the concept of circular economy through the innovative liquid-based growing of herbs.

meaningful experiences that go beyond entertainment.

As part of its 30th anniversary in 2025, EK reimagined this iconic attraction as AGILA The EKsperience: SARIBUHAY, expanding its mission beyond tourism to promote sustainability and environmental awareness.

The attraction features enhanced theming and storytelling experiences that highlight biodiversity and the impact of human activities on natural resources.

Supplementary experiences such as augmented reality (AR) that brings featured wildlife in the lobby murals to life, and Taniman Hydroponics garden, which introduces sustainable farming and circular economy, makes learning more magical and engaging.

The enhanced film also takes guests beneath the Philippine waters to explore the marine ecosystems and wildlife, guided by *Agila*'s new companion, *Sinag* the eagle ray.

This iteration of the beloved ride has since exemplified Filipino excellence, earning international recognition as the Best ASEAN New Tourism Attraction from the ASEAN Tourism Association (ASEANTA) in January 2026.

The featured wildlife murals at the AGILA lobby come to life right on the guests' mobile phones through the integration of Augmented Reality (AR) technology.



Hatching New Adventures

This month, AGILA The EKsperience: SARIBUHAY continues to soar as EK unveils another set of refreshed pre- and post-show experiences that reinforces its call to action.

Guests entering AGILA will discover an immersive walkthrough that reveals the story behind the attraction — from its inspiration, symbolic structure, and the all-Filipino team that brought this vision into reality.

Venturing further, they will discover more about the Philippine eagle's lifecycle, its natural habitat, and the diverse lifeforms thriving alongside it.

EK also enhanced the interactive retail experiences at Pugad, the concept store located inside AGILA The EKsperience: SARIBUHAY, incorporating education and entertainment to encapsulate the overall essence of the attraction.

Reflecting on these developments, EK looks ahead with renewed commitment to continuously bring Filipinos together, serving as a beacon of magic, hope and optimism for the years to come. ●

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Behold The Beauty

Finding beauty in the extraordinary and the mundane

Behold And Light

— By Betsy Gacutan-Ochosa —

"She walks in beauty, like the night
Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes..."
- She Walks in Beauty by Lord Byron

Have you ever encountered a person whose mere presence lights up any room they walk into? One who exudes warmth and grace. They need not call attention to themself because people just naturally gravitate towards them. They are just that – an embodiment of peace and light.

Don't We All Want To Be That Person?

Yet life is not always easy. Each day is like an adventure; we just don't know what will be thrown at us. It doesn't matter what age you are or what stage in your life you're at; we all face challenging situations. There are moments when it is just so hard to show grace, let alone peace and calm.

But we can always try. We may be having a bad day, but instead of biting someone's head off or spreading negative vibes, we can choose to take the high road. We can be intentional in being that person other people want to be around, regardless of our circumstances, past or present.

We can still choose to smile.

I like smiling at people – even ones I don't really know and who are just walking past. I am very friendly to the guards, salespeople and even strangers. I smile, I say hello, I say good morning.

But I wasn't always like that. When I was much younger, my friends used to tell me that I walked with a pout on my lips, and I strut the hallways like I am on a catwalk. Picture Zoolander's *'Blue Steel'* look. With my chin up and unsmiling face, I looked and felt untouchable.

When I worked as a frontliner for a well-known multinational company, I had to forget about the perennial pout and had to bring out my smile. I was pretty much the welcoming face of the company, so I had to be warm, friendly and accommodating. To

others, it would seem like I was getting paid just to smile and to look good. In a sense, I was. But I learned so much from that seemingly basic and simple job.

For one, I learned to be more patient with people. I met and dealt with people from all walks of life, having different temperaments and moods. On any given day, I got face-to-face with either an over-friendly, over-eager, and excited company guest… or an irate customer who simply had nothing good to say. I had to entertain the first and pacify the latter. And then there are people oozing with self-importance who walked past me like I wasn't there. I had to humble myself and be patient with them, as well.

I learned to listen – really listen – to people, and empathize. I learned how a person's demeanor changes when you show them warmth and you give them a genuine smile. I learned how valuing people, making them feel seen, can change not only the course of their day but yours, as well.

It was from that job that I discovered and understood the importance of carrying oneself with grace and dignity every single time.

I would like to share some learnings I have gathered through the years… From my frontliner days as a young and naïve person, to who I am today – not so young, not anymore naïve, toughened by life's experiences, but someone who still just wants to keep walking in grace, beauty and light…

- ***A person's true character is revealed during difficult or trying times… not when things are good***.
- ***It's all about perspective***. When you feel like your world is closing in on you, step back a little. Find a better view. Pause. Breathe. You may not be able to change the situation, but you can change your outlook.
- When life throws you a curve ball: ***Respond, don't react***. Reactions are more unconscious and emotional. Responding entails deliberate thought process. Responding instead of reacting shows maturity. Flinch if you must, then get it together.
- ***Respect.*** Yourself. People. Animals. Belongings. Don't be rude and self-absorbed. The amount of respect you expect from others is commensurate to the respect that you give.
- ***Learn to forgive yourself***. We all make mistakes. Sometimes we make small slip-ups; sometimes we do major tumbles and fall hard. When you do, don't wallow nor condemn yourself. Own up to your faults, dust yourself off, then move on.
- ***Learn to apologize***. Know when to say sorry and know how to forgive. Be the bigger person.
- ***Humility is attractive.*** I heard one pastor say that *humility is thinking of yourself less,* ***not*** *thinking less of yourself.* We should know the difference.
- ***Stick to your non-negotiables***. They define who you are.
- ***In everything, give thanks.***
- ***Be kind***. A little kindness, a heartfelt smile, a generous act, selfless actions, go a long way. Some people need to see light shining on them. *Be that light*.
- ***Show up.*** For others. For yourself.
- ***There's joy in valuing other people.***
- ***Share yourself, share your wisdom***. Share what you know. Allow others to learn from you. Leave a lasting legacy.

As we get older, we realize that one of the best compliments we will hear is when people say how fortunate they are to have us in their lives and that we are indeed a *blessing* to them.

So, let's go and be that blessing. Let's light up every room we enter.

You Glow, Girl!!

True beauty is a fusion of a person's physical appearance and inner grace and charm. But it can't be denied that one's outer appearance is the first thing that people notice.

"I learned how valuing people, making them feel seen, can change not only the course of their day but yours, as well"



A person with healthy, beautiful, glowing skin is attractive, commands a double look, and certainly leaves a lasting impression on other people.

Here are some tips on how we can achieve skin that glows.

- **Water is life**. Much like how a plant wilts when not watered, our skin needs water to keep its elasticity and not to dry up. Stay hydrated. Your skin needs it.
- **Eat your fruits and veggies**. We were taught in our elementary science class about *Go, Grow and Glow* food classification. Fruits and vegetables are classified under Glow precisely because this is what they can do to the body, particularly to our skin. Fruits and veggies are both a good source of vitamins and antioxidants that the skin needs for cell protection, rejuvenation and repair.

  Leafy greens, like spinach and kale, and fruits like berries and tomatoes provide natural hydration, making your skin firm and supple.

  Cucumber can keep you hydrated and also has anti-inflammatory properties that can reduce skin swelling or puffiness.

  Those carrots you munch? They provide your body with beta-carotene that will give you a healthy complexion.
- **Sleep.** Do you remember the saying, "Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise". Going to bed early and having a decent number of hours of sleep every night can do wonders for your body. It is when we are asleep that the body gets the chance to repair its cells. As your body rests, your skin rests, as well. When you have a good night's sleep, you wake up feeling invigorated and fresh, and your skin less tired.
- **Good skin care regimen.** Cleanse. Exfoliate. Moisturize. Make this a habit. There are a lot of skin care products available in the market. Moisturizers for the face, body lotion or body oil for the rest of the body. Find the ones that are suitable for your skin type.

  You can exfoliate two or three times a week, but the cleansing and the moisturizing should be done daily. Yes, I mean, DAILY. Please don't be lazy about this. Believe me, your future self will thank you.
- **Sunscreen.** We need sunlight, but we also need protection from too much exposure to UV rays. I used to not like wearing sunscreen on my face because I find it sticky. But when I started having freckles, which got more pronounced every time I go under the sun, I knew I had to do something.

  My go-to facial sunscreen is the ones with tint that match my skin color.

  When going outdoors, dermatologists recommend using sunscreen with an SPF of at least 30.
- **Vitamins and supplements.** Oral vitamins and supplements are essential in filling the body's nutritional gaps. They aid in cell repair and protection and help foster the skin's healthy aging. Vitamins C, E and A are good antioxidants and are beneficial to the skin. Collagen supplements aid in skin elasticity.

  Most supplements are available over the counter. Ask your friendly Mercury Drugstore pharmacists for recommendations.
- **Exercise**. Regular exercise not only helps one lose weight but increased heart rate, which boosts blood circulation and pumps fresh blood to our skin, giving us that "workout glow." Exercise also boosts the body's production of collagen.

  Don't wear heavy makeup when working out because sweating can cause makeup to clog your pores.

  Besides, that natural workout glow will already give you the radiance you can bask in!

  Don't forget: Post-exercise cleansing is a must.
- **Inner peace**: Nothing ages one faster than stress and inner chaos, and it shows on your face! Skin looks dry, facial lines seem to multiply fast and become prominent.

  Be aware that every time you worry, frown, and crease your forehead, you create more lines, which over time remain permanently visible and turn into wrinkles.



Worse, permanent frown lines can make you look sad, worried or angry even when you're not.

So smile. Stay positive. Keep calm. Be a good person with a clear conscience.

Prayer, praise, peace, and gratitude make for a joyful heart. When you have inner peace, you can expect that outer glow. ●

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We've all heard it before: You can't teach old dogs new tricks. Zebras can't change their stripes. Once a whatever, always a whatever. It's been gospel truth for the longest time. But thanks to biological proof provided by neuroscience, we can now lay the folk wisdom to rest.

By Dexter Umali

WHO SAYS OLD DOGS CAN'T LEARN NEW TRICKS?

The Brain Can Rewire Itself Even In Our Senior Years

Nobody likes to prove the ancients wrong. After all, we owe them a lot of what we know about life. However, back in their day, they didn't have two things: cutting-edge technology to take a close-up look at how our brain works, and a growing demographic of seniors who'd be completely lost if they didn't have grandkids to work their phone apps for them! Neuroimaging research in the last few decades has revealed the brain's neuroplasticity, or its remarkable ability to reorganize and rewire itself when it has to, continues throughout life. It is the scientific proof some seniors might need to be convinced that learning novel skills and adapting to environmental changes are indeed possible no matter how challenging or disruptive.



"More gray matter means more processing power for motor control, emotional management, building memories and decision making. Of course, the youngsters learned to juggle more quickly, but researchers pointed out that the increase in gray matter is essentially the same for young and old alike - proof that oldsters are biologically capable of learning the same stuff as youngsters, albeit a step or two behind"

Our Miraculous Brain

Lizards that can grow their tails back amaze us. So do flatworms that when cut up can grow each piece into full, independent worms. Well, no need to look to other creatures to be amazed because our brains can do tricks just as awesome. Called *neuroplasticity*, it became publicly known largely due to unbelievable medical cases where people continued to lead normal lives despite having big chunks of up to half their brain surgically removed out of necessity (e.g., to stop violent seizures). Once considered medical miracles, we now know that it is simply how the brain works, making us realize the wrinkly pinkish gray thingy between our ears is far more wondrous than we thought.

What those rare cases revealed is that the brain is not a rigidly-fixed organ but a super-adaptive dynamic network capable of reinventing itself in terms of structure and function. If a brain part normally tasked with language processing or facial recognition, for example, is compromised, the remaining parts compensates and picks up the slack. Not headline-grabbing but no less amazing are numerous cases of stroke survivors who regain movement and dexterity in their limbs after the brain does a workaround by creating entirely new neural pathways around damaged tissue.

Gray Matter Increase

Latest research into the brain's superpower focuses on its retention in older adults. Examining brain scans of seniors learning new skills, scientists found measurable increases in gray matter or the "working" parts of the brain. One study in 2008 that asked young and old folk to learn how to juggle balls noted similar increases in the visual cortex, hippocampus, and nucleus accumbens in both age groups. More gray matter means more processing power for motor control, emotional management, building memories and decision making. Of course, the youngsters learned to juggle more quickly, but researchers pointed out that the increase in gray matter is essentially the same for young and old alike – proof that oldsters are biologically capable of learning the same stuff as youngsters, albeit a step or two behind.

Another study in 2025 took a look at brain chemistry. Pitting young and old adults against each other in a bimanual tracking task (simultaneously using both hands to manipulate a joystick or mouse to follow a moving target on a computer screen) to measure differences in brain chemistry associated with motor skill learning, they found none. Again, the youngsters demonstrated faster learning abilities, but the brain mechanisms and chemistry involved were essentially unchanged in both age groups. What these as well as other studies show is that the learning process manifested by structure and functional changes in the brain occur in a similar manner in both young and old.

"Extinction Of Fear"

At some point, oldsters' wealth of life experiences would start to work against them, making them less of a risk-taker. In



contrast, youngsters are more apt to boldly go where they haven't been and to try new things. Seniors? Not so much. What stops them (more than youngsters) in many cases is a powerful emotion: Fear. Whether it's fear of falling flat on their behinds, fear of being laughed at, or fear of the sheer difficulty involved, it's a real deal-breaker for many old schoolers. The good news is that all it takes to overcome paralyzing fear is just a bit of good old bravery. What it takes, in a sense, is to be a kid again – a wise old kid, mind you.

We now know that plain old bravery works because it can be tracked in brain scans. Neuroscience labels the underpinning neurobiological process as *extinction* of fear. Mercifully, it's simpler than it sounds! Brain scans show that when we tell ourselves, "Relax, you are fine. You got this," the medial prefrontal cortex starts to override the fear-mongering part of the brain, the amygdala, shutting off the alarm bells. Stacks of published research have taken a good look at the process at work, which should be enough to fire up anyone toying with the idea of stepping out of their comfort zones and venturing into uncharted territory.



Practice Makes Plastic

When trying something for the first time, the first step is, of course, critical. However, it won't get the ball rolling. You'll need to keep doing it, to practice – whether it's playing the guitar, learning a new language, using a new phone app, or driving a smart car. Learning doesn't change when we grow old, and neuroimaging studies have shown that the same exact process and changes in brain structures occur as when we were young.

In 2017, a study that similarly employed the bimanual tracking task mentioned above compared the learning progress of young and older adults after two weeks. Again, the findings aligned with the other studies. As expected, the youngsters progressed more quickly, but the learning curve in both groups was essentially the same, as indicated by decreased prefrontal cortex brain activity associated with task planning and execution.

Meanwhile, numerous other studies have found that sustained practice fosters



"Some studies suggest that for seniors to learn new stuff more effectively, the way to go is to make it sufficiently difficult or challenging. Rather than performing subtasks in a sequential or blocked manner (the easy way), one can try random mixing with other tasks (the hard way), making practice regimes more challenging each time for the brain"

neuroplasticity in brain white matter as well. White matter is the connecting tissue that transmits electrochemical signals between gray matter areas, making the entire brain function more efficiently. Brain scans have revealed white matter increases in brain regions recruited during task performance. Mental health experts further underscore that enhancing neural connections through sustained practice has far more benefits than mere learning, as it enhances memory and protects overall cognitive health to boot.

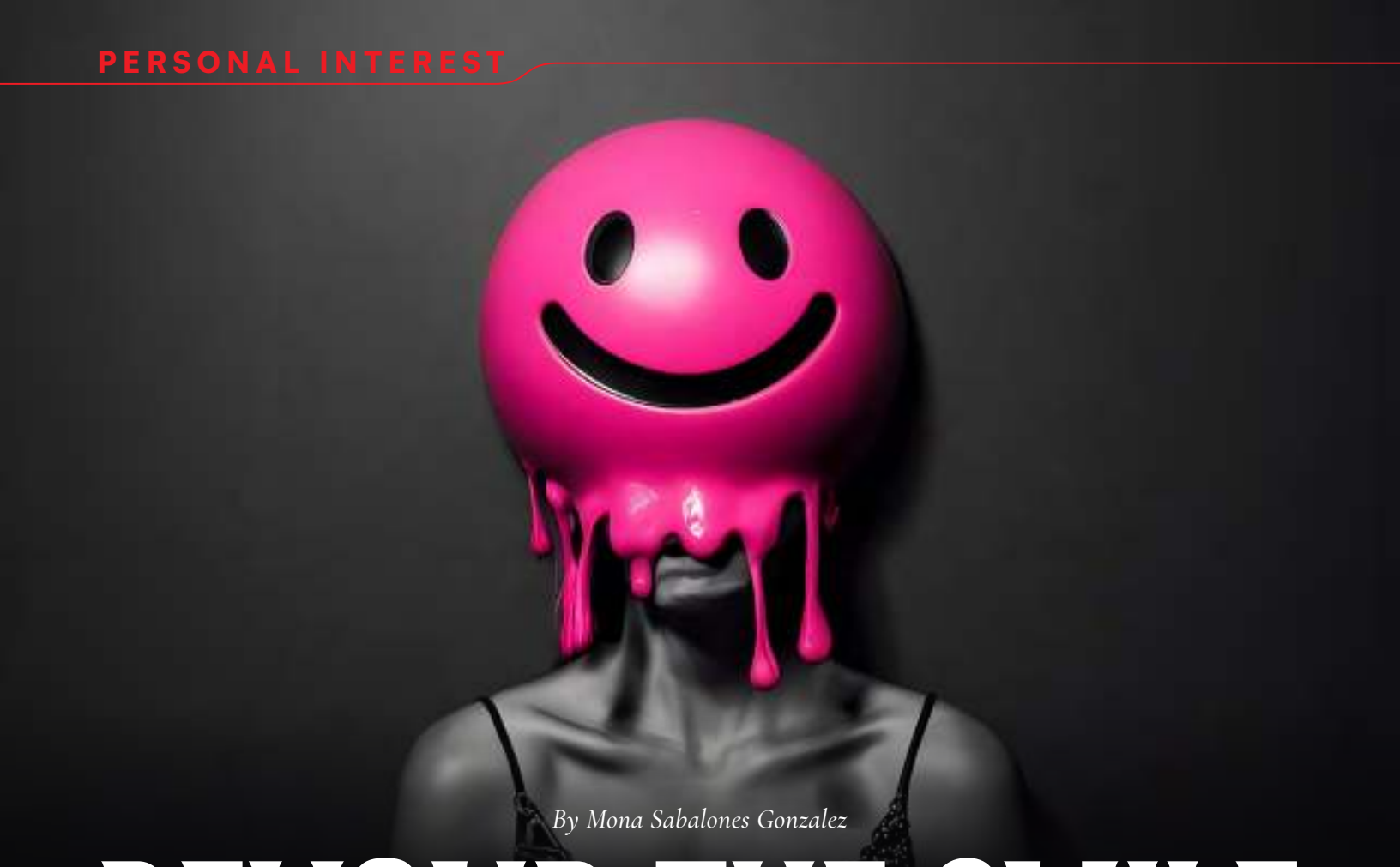
The Harder, The Better

One recent research finding is somewhat counterintuitive. Some studies suggest that for seniors to learn new stuff more effectively, the way to go is to make it sufficiently difficult or challenging. Rather than performing subtasks in a sequential or blocked manner (the easy way), one can try random mixing with other tasks (the hard way), making practice regimes more challenging each time for the brain. The idea is based on the learning phenomenon called *contextual interference*, where introducing variables that "interfere" with normal learning results in slower performance initially, but significantly more enhanced long-term retention and skill transfer.

Mixing it up forces the brain to problem-solve while it learns. The extra work entailed in actively comparing, contrasting, "forgetting," and reconstructing motor or cognitive programs instead of relying solely on rote repetition makes the cognitive representation of each skill more distinct, more meaningful, and hence, more memorable in the long term. When learning to play the guitar, for example, you might try alternating different sections of a song or different tempos instead of practicing the same way every time until it's perfect. A word of caution, though: Experts say it's great for established learners, but for beginners, young and old, it may be overwhelming at first, so be prepared.

So, old dogs can't learn new tricks? Na-ah, you can't use that excuse anymore, grampa. You can't afford not to in these days of rapid technological and societal change. It's adapt or get left behind; reinvent or be obsolete. Learn how to maximize your phone, what all those icons are for, and how to do things online – lots of stuff can now be done remotely, and more is certainly coming. Learn to avoid and protect yourself against modern scams. Keep updating yourself. And stop bothering your grandkids! ●

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By Mona Sabalones Gonzalez

BEYOND THE SMILE

The Hidden Cost of Toxic Positivity

Having a positive disposition is a good thing. But when positivity denies pain instead of facing it, it's unhealthy and harmful. It's called toxic positivity, which is the belief that people must maintain a positive front no matter what they are feeling inside.

Toxic positivity and optimism are very different. Optimism inspires hope. Toxic positivity suppresses painful emotions and hides them. This leads to damaged relationships and delayed inner healing. We need to know the difference between genuine positivity and forced optimism.

The first step toward genuine positivity is to accept one's pain and vulnerabilities and process them. Conversely, suppressing negative feelings and maintaining a cheerful front at all costs can be psychologically harmful.

According to *Psychology Today,* toxic positivity isn't an official psychological diagnosis. Rather, it's a mentally harmful pattern of behavior. Mental issues arise when positive toxicity becomes so extreme that it dismisses or invalidates normal human emotional vulnerabilities. *Verywell Mind* says an excessive focus on optimism that rejects normal human feelings of sadness, anger, and mourning, among others, only encourages emotional avoidance. The result is a lost, much-needed opportunity to focus on building true emotional strength.

Well Meaning

People with toxic positivity aren't skilled in comforting and nurturing others who are in deep pain, even when they mean well. Just as someone with toxic positivity has lived by suppressing painful emotions, they believe the same is what the person





in sadness needs to be well again. So they try to help by advising the one in grief to suppress their pain.

The person with toxic positivity gives advice to a grieving person with a collection of glib slogans that they believe will minimize another's bereavement. Because people with toxic positivity are unable to have genuine conversations about pain, they are unable to impart the kind of nurturing that a person in grief needs.

"People with toxic positivity aren't skilled in comforting and nurturing others who are in deep pain, even when they mean well"



Medical News Today states that some examples of glib comfort from a person with toxic positivity are to tell someone who has lost a child to "Be grateful, you can still have more children." Other glib slogans are "Focus on the good memories," or "It could be worse," or "Look on the bright side." These statements, rather than comforting, make the grieving person feel more isolated.

Psychotherapist Whitney Goodman said in her book *Toxic Positivity: Keeping It Real in a World Obsessed With Being Happy* that toxic positivity shuts down necessary emotional conversations because it assumes painful feelings are wrong and should immediately give way to happiness. Instead of processing difficult emotions, they dismiss them.

How People Have Toxic Positivity

Where does toxic positivity begin? Oftentimes, it's in the family. Parents with toxic positivity pass their patterns of living to their children. They tell their little children slogans like "Don't cry," "Be brave," or "Good children don't get angry". These are their first lessons in toxic positivity, passed on to their children very early in life.

Toxic parents encourage their children to hide their emotions rather than validate their children's feelings. The young one learns that suppressing negative feelings earns parental approval.

As the children grow older, they continue to suppress or hide painful feelings such as sadness, fear, or acrimony because they crave acceptance and know it's had by controlling their emotions and maintaining a happy front.

With a lifetime of "practice," the child learns the importance of disingenuousness. One must always feign cheerfulness, confidence, and strength. They believe

vulnerability signifies weakness, and so it must always be hidden. A constant smile is their false anchor of strength as they grow. But they fail to build true friendships and romantic relationships because trust is built on honesty and truth, not perfection and pretension.



People with toxic positivity are often intolerant of others who express their normal, difficult human emotions because they have ingrained their learning from their family culture.

Healing won't happen if a person buries their painful emotions. Instead, they have stunted their emotional growth because they deliberately ignore, reject, and do not process their real feelings.

Toxic positivity is further reinforced by social media, which features a plethora of images of happiness and success, further encouraging people with toxic positivity to quell their feelings of failure and dissatisfaction, and instead to approximate those social media images.

And then, there is a profusion of self-help messages that oversimplify emotional health by saying that a positive attitude is the only way to solve every problem. These messages promote a false belief, belittle the value of being human, and discourage exploring one's humanity and vulnerabilities, thereby deepening their lack of self-awareness.

Defense Mechanism

People with toxic positivity use it as a defense mechanism, encouraging emotional avoidance. But constant optimism can be tiresome, and any relief felt is only temporary. As long as the underlying problem is unresolved, unresolved pain will always remain beneath the surface.

Another cost of toxic positivity is low self-esteem and/or anxiety. These qualities manifest in the face of criticism, failure, or rejection, so constant cheerfulness becomes their protection.

Oftentimes, people with toxic positivity are people-pleasers. They avoid difficult conversations to keep everyone happy. But the conflict will only be temporarily reduced.

If a true conflict exists and remains unaddressed, it will eventually manifest. A people pleaser also prevents understanding and trust, which form the basis for honest relationships to thrive.

Over time, a person will measure their self-worth by their ability to appear cheerful. Behind the smile, they have unresolved heartache, trauma, disenchantment, repudiation, and other forms of negativity. Pretension will never make these emotions disappear because true emotional strength requires the courage to face one's feelings with openness, honesty, and a willingness to process them.

The Healthy Path

Healthy positivity is had by acknowledging reality rather than suppressing and denying it. The true optimist knows that joy and suffering can coexist. If a person has the capacity to acknowledge the presence of disappointment, fear, or heartbreak within themself, healing and hope are possible.

Healthy people know that no one's life is perfect. If someone with toxic positivity allows themself to experience their painful emotions without letting themself be defined by them, there is hope. Medium says genuine positivity starts with honesty, followed by examining all their emotions without suppressing any. Doing this will lead to deeper self-understanding and self-awareness.

Someone with toxic positivity needs to learn that negative feelings aren't





their enemies. Take, for example, grief. It reminds us that once, we had loved deeply. Fright alerts us to danger. Wrath can unearth injustice or help one realize their unmet needs. Sorrow opens the door to reflection and helps us to adjust after loss. These emotions are uncomfortable, but each provides psychological value. We gain their value by acknowledging their existence. This is the first step toward healing and acceptance.

Emotional validation may be one of the greatest gifts we can give ourselves and others. Validation doesn't mean agreeing with every feeling or encouraging someone to suppress their sadness and put on a good front. It simply means recognizing that another person's emotions are real and understandable.

If we deal realistically with our toxic positivity, we will become better nurturers. We understand why presence supercedes verbal comfort when another is in pain. Instead of slogans, we can acknowledge their pain by saying, "I'm sorry you're going through this" or "That sounds incredibly difficult." This makes the other person feel heard. It helps the person to heal because it assures them they aren't alone.

"Realness means listening to our emotions and accepting both happiness and hardship. We give time to help us identify what every emotion is telling us. We open up to experiencing all our feelings, one by one, without judgment"

Self-examination is also a way to be healed from toxic positivity by reflecting on how our childhood, culture, or society trained us. Toxic positivity is learned. Knowing that, determining its source, and how it was passed on to us were not done out of deliberate cruelty, but out of the sincere, flawed belief that "staying positive" is the right way to navigate negative emotions. Upon this realization, we can replace emotional avoidance with emotional honesty.

Authenticity

Realness means listening to our emotions and accepting both happiness and hardship. We give time to help us identify what every emotion is telling us. We open up to experiencing all our feelings, one by one, without judgment. We seek help from trusted friends, supportive family members, or professional counselors. We process difficult experiences. We can dispose of forced optimism.

Honest positivity tells us that difficult seasons will not last forever. And in its midst, we can learn from our experiences. Doing so builds inner resilience and vigor.

Toxic positivity oversimplifies life. By embracing the full range of human emotions, we become authentic people. By learning self-authenticity, we can discover true peace within us. ●

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RICH BEFORE OLD, OR OLD BEFORE RICH?

By Arthur Dominic J. Villasanta

Two disparate futures await the millions of Filipino elderly starting in 2027. The first future is great: the Philippines transforms into an Upper-Middle-Income Country (UMIC) where it's blessed with a higher standard of living, vastly improved healthcare, and enhanced social safety nets for seniors, such as inflation-indexed pensions. The Philippines exploits its newfound "richness" to the hilt.

The second is awful: the Philippines finds itself ensnared in the "middle-income trap" where it moves out of poverty but struggles to reap the full benefits of being a UMIC or a middle-income country. Economic stagnation fuels inflation, shrinks salaries and pensions, boosts healthcare costs, and impedes access to essential healthcare. The Philippines fails to exploit its newfound "richness" to the hilt.

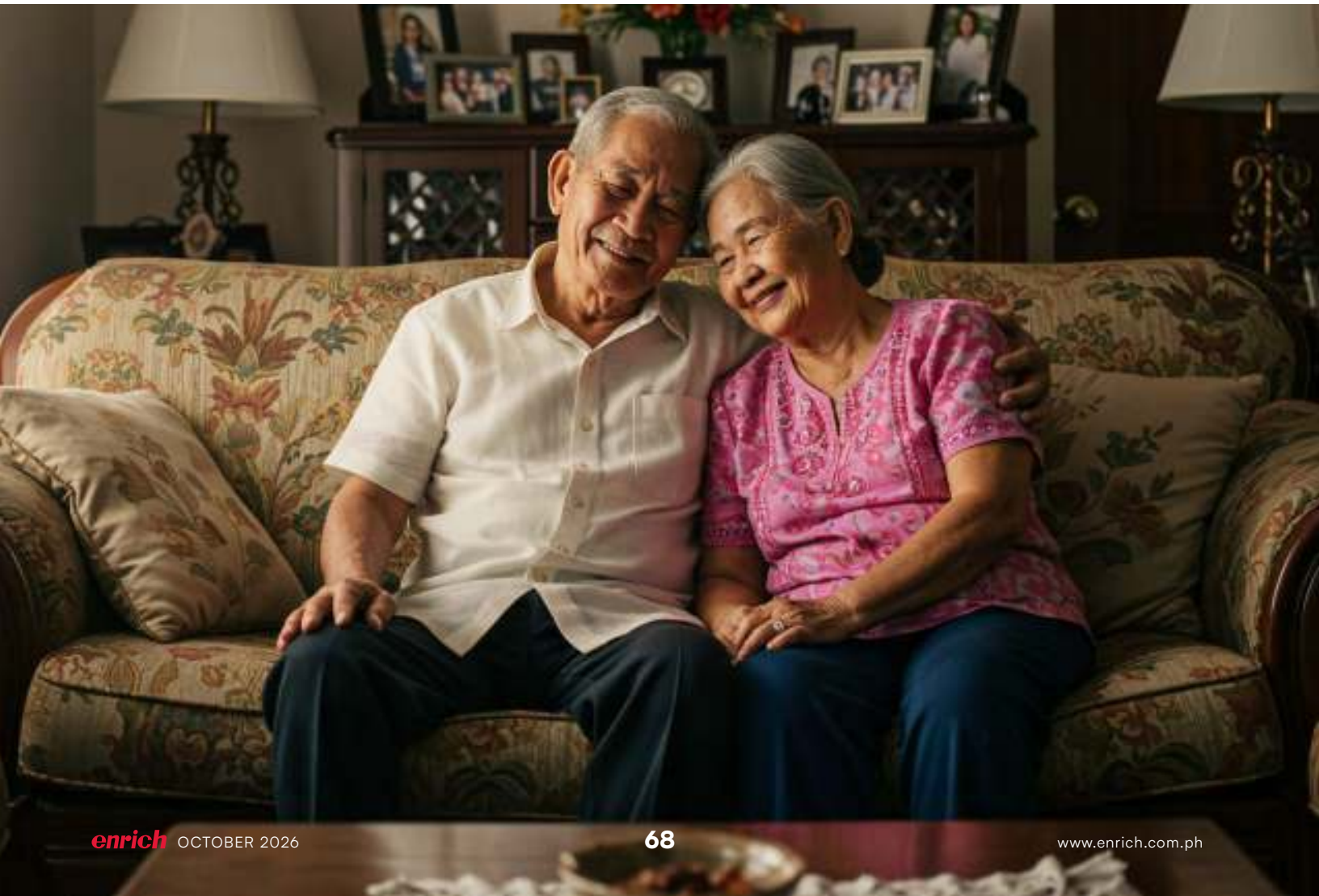
The existential conundrum facing a future Philippines comes down to two options: Will the Philippines become a rich country before it becomes an old country, and follow in the development footsteps of Taiwan and South Korea that attained this status more than 50 years ago?

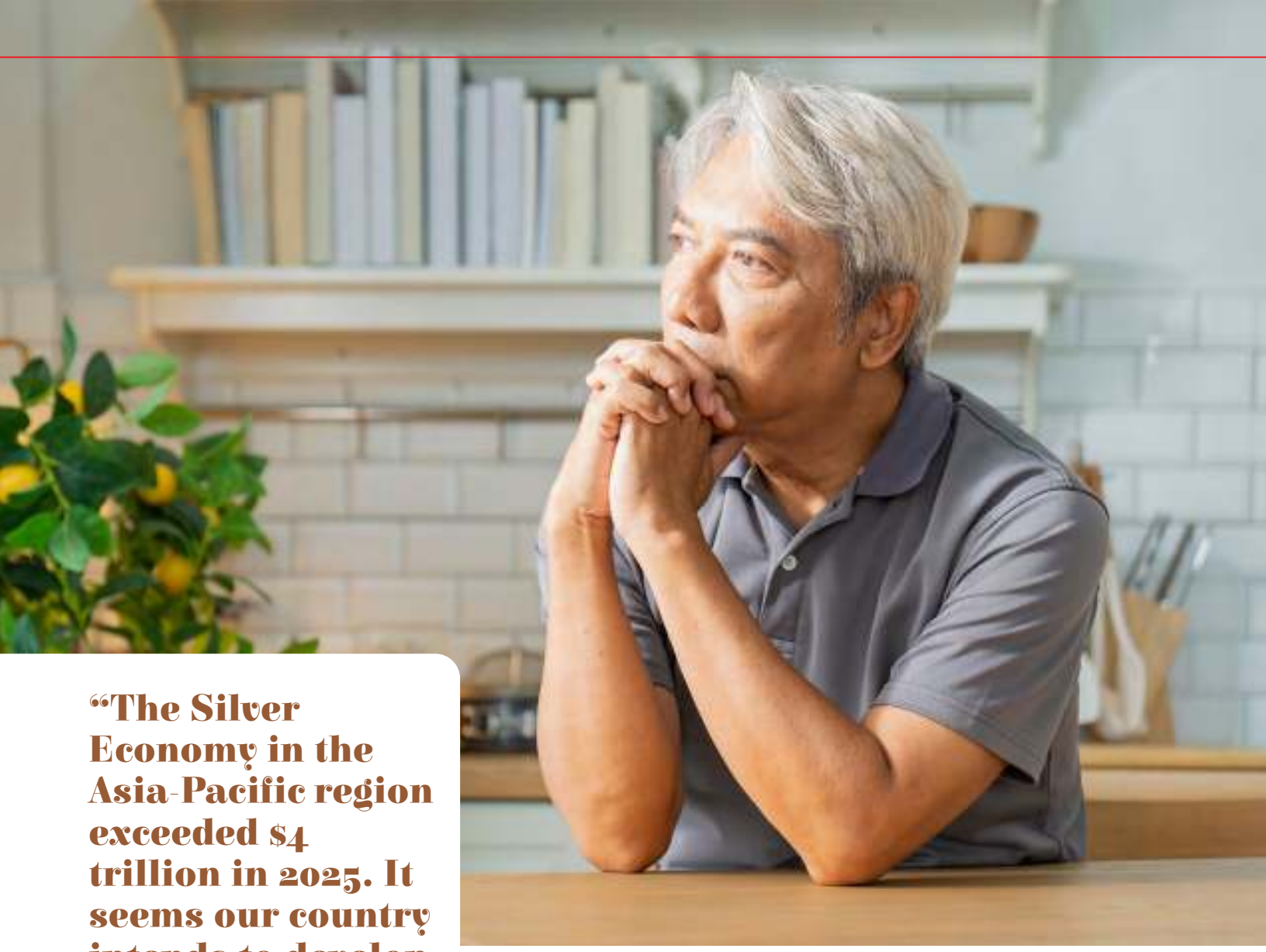
Or will the Philippines become an old country before it becomes rich, and suffer the same sordid fate as China, whose demographic collapse, high youth unemployment, and massive household debt have negated the benefits accruing to a middle-income country?

The option our seniors prefer is, obviously, the first. It also seems the most realistic given our greatly improved economic situation.

The Philippine economy's steady expansion is confirmed by its GNI, which grew 3.0 percent year-on-year in the first quarter of 2026 and 6.1 percent in 2025, said the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). This improvement aligns with the country's target of a $5,000 GNI per capita by 2027.

Our Gross National Income (GNI) per capita stood at approximately $4,850 in 2025. The World Bank reclassified the Philippines as an Upper-Middle-Income Country (UMIC) based on this data. The





"The Silver Economy in the Asia-Pacific region exceeded $4 trillion in 2025. It seems our country intends to develop its very own Silver Economy to align with regional opportunities"

Philippines adheres to the World Bank definition of a UMIC as a state with a GNI per capita ranging from $4,636 to $14,375.

Transitioning to a UMIC will fundamentally reshape the quality of life for *lolo* and *lola*, either for good or ill. The near future will see our senior citizens discover if their Golden Years will either be an idyllic haven or a hellish prison.

UMIC

What does being a middle-income country mean for the Philippines, especially for the elderly in terms of healthcare and social support? Our seniors stand to benefit from improved healthcare and medical services; higher pensions; more comprehensive social protection programs; and higher family incomes that improve financial support for their elderly—if the national government plays its cards right.

Seniors will also benefit from what economists call "The Silver Economy". The Silver Economy refers to those products, services, and economic activities designed to meet the needs of seniors. It aims to transform an aging population into a driver of economic growth.

It focuses on enhancing the quality of life of the elderly, boosting their income, and fostering active aging. Active aging encourages seniors to remain actively engaged in society. Core pillars of this movement are Health, Community Participation, Financial Security, and Lifelong Learning to ward off cognitive decline.

The Silver Economy in the Asia-Pacific region exceeded $4 trillion in 2025. It seems our country intends to develop its very own Silver Economy to align with regional opportunities.

It will be fruitful for the Philippines to transition from the "Graying Economy" we have today to a Silver Economy to ensure that elderly Filipinos live with dignity and independence. A healthy and productive population of Pinoy seniors can better contribute to our economic growth, thereby turning the aging burden into a "Silver Dividend".

The biggest question facing the Philippines is whether it can transition from a family-centered model of elderly care to a system combining family support with stronger public healthcare and social services.

The most enduring benefit, however, will occur when the national and local



governments and society as a whole use the increased national wealth to greatly improve healthcare, pensions, and elder care.

Aging Society, Anyone?

The choice between rich and old and old and rich springs from the certainty that the Philippines is now on a clear demographic trajectory toward becoming both an "Aging Society" and a UMIC at almost the same time. Experts such as the PSA declare we'll trod these two parallel roads by 2030. We're now in what they call the "transition phase" to an aging society.

The Philippines will turn into an aging society when 10 percent or more of its population is 60 years old and above, according to the Commission on Population and Development (CPD) and the PSA. An aging society is one characterized by rising longevity and falling fertility rates. A senior citizen population reaching 10 percent is the established international benchmark for an aging society.

CPD is the national government agency responsible for formulating population policies and programs. It was formerly called POPCOM (Commission on Population).

Longevity is defined as living a life that extends far past average life expectancy. The living proofs of longevity are octogenarians, nonagenarians, centenarians, and supercentenarians.

By 2030, the number of Filipino senior citizens will comprise some 11 percent of our estimated total population. The number of Filipinos aged 60 and above is expected to rise substantially over the coming decades. The sustained growth in our elderly population will boost demand for healthcare, pensions, caregiving services, and age-friendly infrastructure.

What seems clear from the evidence is that the Philippines is on track to become an aging society, and an "aged society" where 14 percent are elderly in the decade of the 2030s.

This shift to an aging society is primarily being driven by an unwanted decline in the population growth rate and not by the modest increase in life expectancy. Our population growth rate has fallen from 1.6 percent to 0.8 percent annually in recent years.

The two main reasons for this are that couples are having fewer children and the elderly population is surviving longer. Both facts have the effect of aging our population and our economy, as well.

"The Philippines is undergoing demographic changes, with the share of the younger population (0 to 14-year-olds) decreasing and the shares of working-age population (15 to 64-year-olds) and older persons (65 years old) increasing," said CPD Executive Director Lisa Grace Bersales in 2024.

"As of 2020, Filipinos aged 65 years and above comprise 5.4 percent of the total Philippine population. There are indications that the older population of Filipinos would reach seven percent by 2030," she added.

It's for these reasons that achieving UMIC status isn't merely a symbolic economic milestone to be proud of. Becoming a middle-income economy will provide the vital resources demanded by our looming aging society.

Fertility And Longevity

Both CPD and PSA said another key reason for their predicting the Philippines will officially cross the 10 percent threshold by 2030 is our steadily declining birth rate. While higher life expectancy accelerates the creation of an aging society, a collapsing total fertility rate (TFR) is quite capable of aging a society all on its own by thinning out the younger generations.

Our TFR plummeted to a record low of 1.7 children per woman in 2025, revealed the PSA in its 2025 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS). This number was 1.92 children per woman in 2023, 2.8 in 2015 and 3.5 in 1995. New government data shows that six in 10 married women want no more than two children. Teenage pregnancies have also decreased.

Our TFR is below the replacement threshold of 2.1. This will eventually result in a smaller population of young Filipinos supporting the increasing numbers of elderly.

This phenomenon, called the "dependency ratio crisis," occurs when a shrinking working-age population (those 18 to 64 years old) must support a growing elderly population. It's often caused by low birth rates and increased life expectancy.

Our senior citizen population is the fastest-growing demographic in our country today. This trend is expected to continue until 2050, when this cohort is forecast at 24 million persons, or twice today's total. Seniors will account for 15 percent of our total population in 2050, according to the Filipino news organization Rappler.

Our country will further transition to an "aged society" in 2069 when the elderly population accounts for 14 percent of the total number of Filipinos, predicted PIDS Research Fellow Michael Abrigo in a public seminar.

"Population aging is not a bad thing," contends Abrigo. "It represents a story of our collective success as Filipinos. It means that we were able to conquer the challenges such as those related to income, health, and education."

He believes the rising tide of elderly Filipinos might impose a heavy burden on the country's resources.

"More elderly people mean more subsidies for healthcare expenses. Moreover, the elderly tend to have medical conditions that are more expensive on average," he added.

He did, however, say the same economic and demographic forces that will trigger an aging society will also provide potential for economic growth. He noted that aging, along with rising life expectancy, also leads to higher savings and investment. This outcome might result in faster economic growth and improved living standards.

"Because we expect a longer lifespan, we also tend to save more, and this leads to greater productivity," he pointed out.

The World Bank reveals that only 34 out of 108 UMICs have successfully transitioned to a High-Income Country since 1990. This record of failure will be a massive challenge for the Philippines to overcome.

The Filipino elderly want nothing more than to make their twilight years as happy as possible. Desiring a Paradise on Earth in their Golden Years is perfectly understandable. It will be up to our national leaders to ensure this Paradise becomes possible. No one wants a Paradise Lost. ●

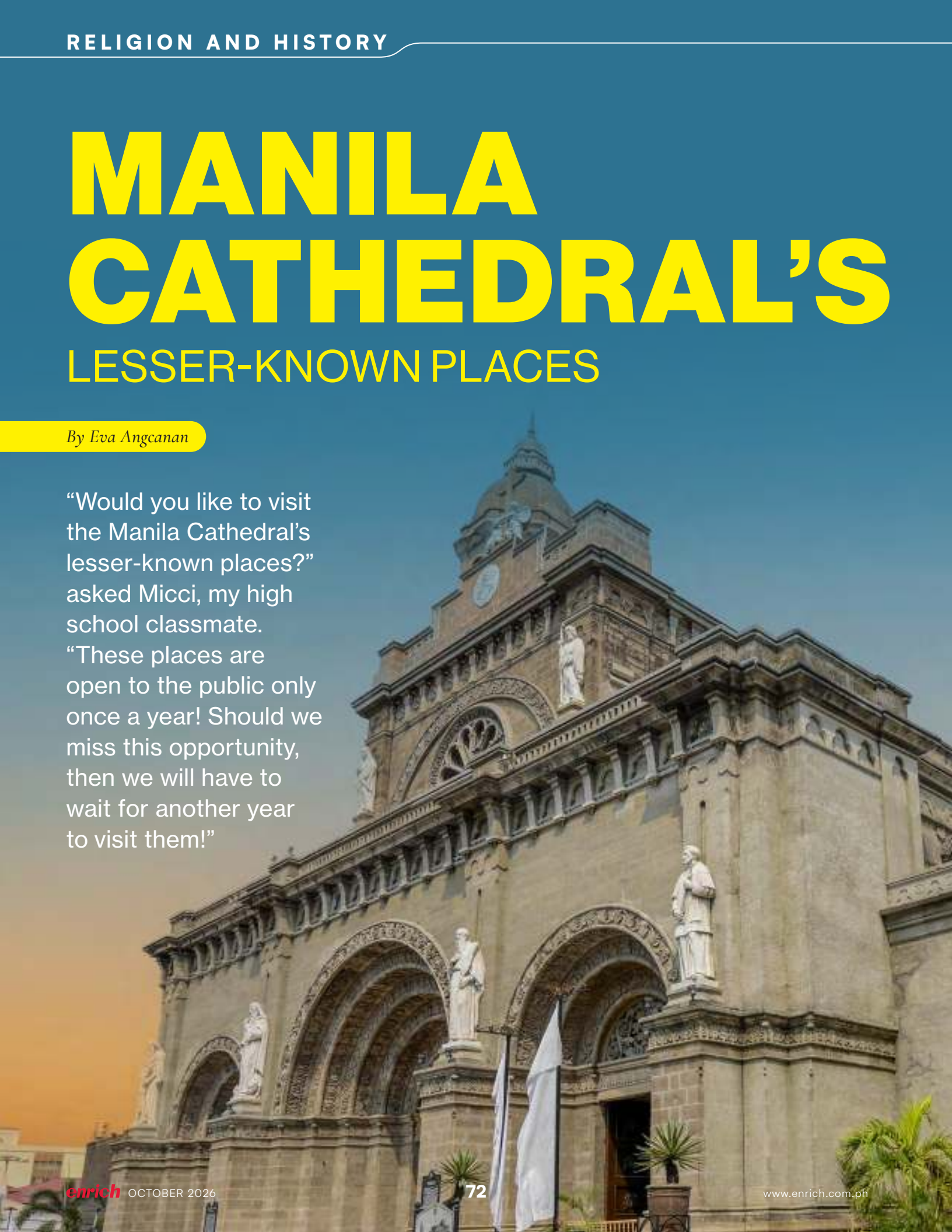
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MANILA CATHEDRAL'S LESSER-KNOWN PLACES

By Eva Angcanan

"Would you like to visit the Manila Cathedral's lesser-known places?" asked Micci, my high school classmate. "These places are open to the public only once a year! Should we miss this opportunity, then we will have to wait for another year to visit them!"





▶ The Roof Deck

So, Micci and I hurried to the Manila Cathedral for that rare chance of seeing the Cathedral's roof deck, choir loft and crypt on June 12, our country's Independence Day, for free.

Since the scheduled tour was on a special holiday, many joined this free tour. Upon arriving at the Plaza de Roma (the plaza fronting the country's Mother Church) at 2:00 p.m, we saw a long line of curious visitors in front of the Cathedral's doorsteps. People stood patiently under the scorching heat of the summer sun, holding their umbrellas and fiercely guarding their belongings with their lives. From the Cathedral's doorsteps, the line stretched toward Don Andres Soriano Street (formerly Aduana), turned left onto Cabildo Street and ended almost right in front of the Manila Cathedral, thus encircling half of Plaza de Roma.

Once we entered Manila Cathedral, we followed the long line that led to the roof deck. Volunteers carefully checked on the physical conditions of the senior citizens. Some senior citizens were asked, 'Are you capable of walking up the spiral stairs leading to the roof deck? An elderly lady who was unable to respond was gently asked to be ushered to one of the pews. The lady heeded the gentle reminder of the volunteers and sat in one of the pews. For her, it was better to be safe than to be sorry.

The way to the roof deck was a narrow, steep and winding flight of stairs.

All About Manila Cathedral

Her official name is the Minor Basilica and Metropolitan Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. The first Manila Cathedral was a nipa hut built on the same site in Intramuros in 1571, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. She is known as the first parish church in the country, for which she is called the Mother Church of the Philippines. She has risen up after every catastrophe that has struck her – be it fire or earthquake. Her present façade is a faithful reconstruction inspired by the

▶ View of Manila Cathedral's interiors from the Choir Loft



1879 cathedral (the 7th Cathedral built on the present site), incorporating surviving design elements from that structure. She is currently the 8th Cathedral built on the original site.

In recognition of her importance in devotion, her role in the whole Philippines, she was bestowed the title 'Minor Basilica' in 1981 by then Pope John Paul II. She became the only church in our country to be elevated to a Minor Basilica through the Pope's own initiative, meaning it was the Pope's own decision without any formal petition from a local church.

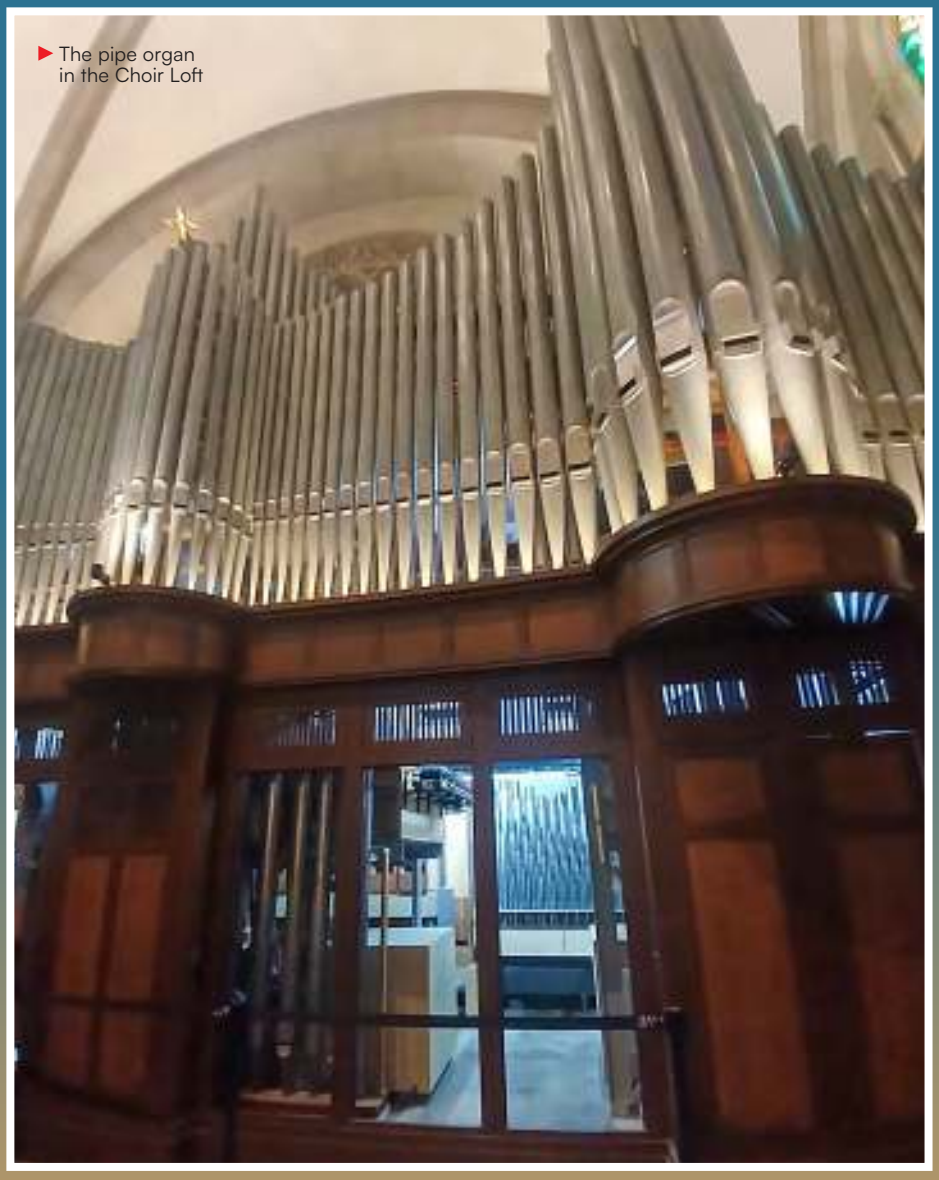
Three popes celebrated Holy Mass on her altar: Pope Paul VI, on November 27, 1970, during the first-ever papal visit to the Philippines; Pope John Paul II, on February 17, 1981, during his papal visit (and during the 1995 World Youth Day); and Pope Francis, on January 16, 2015, during his apostolic visit to the country.

So let us proceed to the three lesser-known parts of our country's Mother Church: her Roof Deck, her Choir Loft and her Crypt.

Roof Deck: We reached the roof deck after climbing a flight of narrow and steep spiral stairs. Our efforts were rewarded with an aerial view of the tree-lined Plaza de Roma below, of the Palacio del Gobernador's side located diagonally across from the Manila Cathedral and of views of buildings elsewhere. On this special day, we, the visitors, turned the Roof Deck into a venue for endless picture taking in this rarely accessed part of the Manila Cathedral.

The Choir Loft from the roof deck: We went down carefully until we reached the Choir Loft, which is located above the entrance to the Manila Cathedral. It is where the Cathedral's musicians play musical instruments and where the choir sings during Liturgical Celebrations at the Manila Cathedral.

The Choir Loft holds the largest pipe organ in the Philippines and in Southeast Asia and is among the largest pipe organs in Asia. This pipe organ has approximately 6,500 pipes and 88 stops (including couplers), four keyboards and a pedalboard. It was originally made by Pels & Zoon (also known historically as Pels & Sohn) in the Netherlands in 1958. The pipe organ recently underwent restoration, renovation and technological upgrade by Philippine-



▶ The pipe organ in the Choir Loft

"The Choir Loft holds the largest pipe organ in the Philippines and in Southeast Asia and is among the largest pipe organs in Asia. This pipe organ has approximately 6,500 pipes and 88 stops (including couplers), four keyboards and a pedalboard"



▶ The altar inside The Crypt

based and internationally-recognized Diego Cera Organbuilders.

The Crypt: This is the official burial place of the Archbishops of Manila. Dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows, it contains the mortal remains of four archbishops of Manila: Michael J. O'Doherty (1874 to 1949), the 27th Archbishop of Manila, the last foreigner to be appointed Archbishop of Manila and the longest serving Archbishop of Manila with a record of 33 years of tenure; Gabriel M. Reyes (1892 to 1952), the 28th Archbishop of Manila and first Filipino to be appointed Archbishop of Manila; Rufino Jiao Cardinal Santos (1908 to 1973), the 29th Archbishop of Manila and the first Filipino elevated to the College of Cardinals; and Jaime Lachica Cardinal Sin (1928 to 2005), the 30th Archbishop of Manila.

The mosaic on the central wall is by Italian artist Marcello Avenali. It depicts the three sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Mary meeting Jesus on His way to Calvary; Mary standing at the foot of the Cross; and Mary holding the lifeless Body of her Son Jesus after His crucifixion.

Micci and I were happy to have joined this free tour of the Manila Cathedral's Roof Deck, Choir Loft and The Crypt. This unplanned "field trip" took us out of our daily routines, instilled in us a new set of knowledge and made us look at the Manila Cathedral with a fresh pair of eyes!

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▶ Archbishop Michael O' Doherty



▶ Archbishop Gabriel Reyes



▶ Eminence Rufino Cardinal Santos



▶ Eminence Jaime Cardinal Sin



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