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Winter 2024



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Reader letters

You rock, Shirley Marie Lazareth! What a superb article you wrote in the fall issue of *Renaissance* about our trip through the meadows of old age! It was beautifully written and so positive that I found myself saying, “I wish I had been one of Shirley Marie’s students!” How lucky we are to have belonged to a profession that breeds kindness. Go to the head of the class, my colleague, for sharing your wondrous story. I feel better about my future because of your prose.
–Tom Davis (District 36 Peterborough)

To all staff and contributors: Congratulations on the remarkable Wellness issue. There was something for everyone, regardless of one’s state of wellness. In my opinion one of the best *Renaissance* issues ever. WELL DONE!
–Ken Shoemith (District 13 Hamilton-Wentworth, Haldimand)

The fall issue is the most helpful issue yet. The health advice is excellent, and the recipes are great.
–Isabel Wildfong (District 8 London, Middlesex)

RTOERO and *Renaissance* are two of the perks of being a retired teacher. Stuart Foxman’s articles are always one of the highlights. They are thought-provoking and engaging. It was nice to see a picture of him in the Contributors section.
I found Shirley Marie Lazareth’s article on how the unexpected detours in life can change your life plan very moving. She is a great exemplar for us all on how to see the bright side during unexpected times of difficulty. If there was an Order of Canada for caregivers who show positive love, kindness and support, people like Shirley should be a nominee.
–Norm Madill (District 13 Hamilton-Wentworth, Haldimand)

Thank you for an informative and helpful fall issue of *Renaissance*. All the articles are timely and reflect what we, as retirees, should be trying to do. Since COVID restrictions are now done, the opportunities to socialize with others, to get outdoors for walks (and picking up garbage) and to volunteer abound. Keep up the good work!
–Connie Badour (District 33 Chatham-Kent)

The fall issue of *Renaissance* was by far one of the best I have read in several years. The articles explored topics I am particularly interested in at this point of my life. The value of adopting a Mediterranean diet, ways to build up resilience, stress releasers like mindfulness activities, and the rewards of being a caregiver really grabbed my attention. As well, kudos to Shirley Marie Lazareth on her beautifully crafted article “In a Supporting Role.” Her story touched my heart.
–Stephanie Nielsen (District 14 Niagara)

The Fall 2023 issue of *Renaissance* is a keeper. I read it from cover to cover. A great refresher course in what one has to do to enhance wellness. Beautiful to look at too. Well done.
– Erma Collins (District 34 York Region)



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We welcome your feedback, so please send your letters to renaissance@rtoero.ca. Letters may be edited for length and clarity at the discretion of the editor.

RENAISSANCE ALWAYS KEEPS THE ENVIRONMENT IN MIND



Environmental stewardship is one of RTOERO’s main advocacy issues. Responsible use of resources, conservation, and protecting our air, land and water are critical to a sustainable future.
We honour our commitment by printing *Renaissance* on ethically sourced paper and using plant-based ink to

ensure the magazine is produced using materials that are environmentally sound; in addition, more than 10,000 RTOERO members choose to go paperless, receiving only *eRenaissance*.
Occasionally, we bundle other important information with your copy of *Renaissance*. We use a clear wrap made of a

compostable, 100 per cent biodegradable plant-based substance you can simply toss in your compost bin.
If you’d like to change your *Renaissance* subscription preferences to receive only the digital edition, please email membership@rtoero.ca and the RTOERO membership team will update your subscription preferences for you.

We asked RTOERO member Marion Ehrenberg, *Renaissance* art director Josiah Gordon and writer Erin Pehlivan to tell us who they turn to when they need advice.



MARION EHRENBERG
I have people I can rely on, including relationships with “experts” in my life (e.g., doctor, banker), for informed advice. I talk to my partner daily; he knows what’s happening in my life, so picking up a thread is easy. Close friends who’ve known me for a long time offer perspective. My parents have passed; sometimes, when I’m stuck on an issue and trying to fall asleep, I hope they’ll send me a directive on a problem. I’m not sure this works, but I do know I wake up with new ideas and their voices in my head.
(District 47 Vancouver Island)



JOSIAH GORDON
Without question, my wife, Rachel, is my go-to for advice. I’m really great at seeing the black-and-white extremes; she’s expert in seeing the grey. I’m slowly learning from her how to see the grey. She also has an incredible ability to see a problem from all directions and can find the best solution for everyone.



ERIN PEHLIVAN
When I’m seeking advice, I usually chat with my husband, Jamie, because he’s great at seeing situations objectively. I also speak with my therapist, who knows how to ask the right questions to reveal my deeper feelings. Finally, I love to use astrology and tarot as a tool for self-exploration, especially when hanging out with my friend Jyoti. Reading our horoscopes or pulling a card gives us an opportunity to speak openly about what’s going on in our lives, and reflect on things intuitively and without judgment.



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LEFT PHOTO, JASON GORDON. RIGHT PHOTO, PAUL ORENSTEIN

We hear you!

Your feedback helps shape what we do and how we do it



by **Martha Foster**,
RTOERO Chair

Listening. What a great topic for *Renaissance*. There are so many aspects to consider, many of which you will explore as you read through this issue.

Listening is important to us at RTOERO. We need to hear from you in order to serve you as you need, and wish, to be served. As board members, we look for your feedback to ensure that we are making decisions that best serve you and the organization. We thank all of you who take time to respond to our surveys; that feedback helps us not only to plan our strategic goals but also to make our day-to-day decisions.

We also receive input from you through information delivered via your districts. Your district sends representatives to a variety of meetings to provide your district's viewpoint on topics being discussed. The most important opportunity to receive input from districts is at the annual meeting, which is held once a year, and forums, which are held twice a year. Your districts send up to four representatives to these meetings — two are corporate members — who provide your district's voice on motions affecting the organization. At the forums, all four representatives provide input on many issues being discussed.

I'd like to offer a special thanks to those of you who take the time to communicate through emails and letters about the organization's impact on you; your feedback helps us understand what you want and what you need from the organization.

All of this information helps to determine RTOERO direction and inform decisions, so please continue to provide your valuable input.

Let's continue the conversation. 🍷

We're listening!
Martha

RTOERO is always listening



by **Jim Grieve**,
RTOERO CEO

Your contribution to the conversation is important

I can't tell you the countless number of times I've been in social situations and encountered friends and colleagues who are facing retirement with no affordable access to health benefits, because they're not from the education community.

You can imagine the eye rolls I get from my dear wife each time I add to the conversation "You know, if you worked in education, you could be a member of RTOERO and receive the best non-profit health and travel insurance coverage available in Canada."

Eye roll or not, as champions for our organization, our role is to help those who served in the education sectors throughout their careers to have affordable health and travel insurance in their retirement years. After all, our mission is to be the trusted voice on healthy, active living in the retirement journey.

Provincial health plans in Canada are an important safety net, but they don't meet all the needs of older adults. Most retirees need significantly more coverage, particularly for prescription drugs, vision care and paramedical services.

In 2002, RTOERO members listened to the legitimate needs of non-teaching staff in education by welcoming them as members and granting them access to our health and travel plans and peace of mind for their retirement.

In 2018, we listened to our members across Canada and incorporated as a national non-profit association. In 2019, that listening resulted in the creation of our three newest districts. The outcome is a growing national group of deeply engaged new members and a strengthening of our membership and insurance plans.

In our 2023 membership survey, thousands of you said it's important for RTOERO to ensure that "public sector and non-profit professions (e.g., nurses, personal support workers) have access to non-profit group health insurance in retirement." Like me, many of you believe we need to listen to the retirement fears of nurses, paramedical practitioners, PSWs and other essential public servants and professionals who care for older adults in our retirement.

Because RTOERO is always listening, maybe it's time to discuss extending access to our health plans to other like-minded but unserved retiring professionals. 🍷

Best wishes,
Jim

Hello. How are you?

Conversation helps neighbours support neighbours

by **Sue Horner**



Picture this: You stop by your local coffee shop and spot your neighbour. “John” is a Second World War veteran who’s lived alone since his wife passed away three years ago. You notice John’s clothes appear unwashed and he looks dishevelled, quite unlike his usual sharp appearance.

What could you do?

Start a conversation, a new guide developed with funding from the RTOERO Foundation advises. In that conversation, John might reveal he’s having a hard time getting around or making his own meals. You might discover that he has no family in the area and he’s reluctant to ask for help.

During the conversation with you, John might realize there are supports he didn’t know about or hadn’t considered.

The guide, called *Supporting Your Neighbours: A Community Conversation Guide*, highlights the importance of recognizing and using the power of conversation. It offers strategies for starting a conversation with people like John. It includes risk factors to look out for, such as the death of a partner, hearing or vision loss, mobility restrictions and low income. You’ll find signs of social isolation and suggested conversation starters that lead with empathy.

The guide also outlines the type of barriers — transportation, financial, language, physical health and more — that may prevent community participation, and where to go for help.

RESEARCH FOR THE REAL WORLD
Enhancing quality of life for older



PHOTO: MOMO PRODUCTIONS

adults is the mission of the Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging (RIA). A non-profit organization, the RIA connects research to the real world, designing resources, programs and education for older adults. The guide is their creation, part of a five-year project called Supporting Inclusion through Intergenerational Partnerships (SIIP). Its goal is to reduce the social isolation of people living with dementia and their care partners through inter-generational programming in Ontario’s Waterloo Region.

An RTOERO Foundation call for proposals aligned well with the SIIP project plans. The foundation raises and invests funds in research and programs that benefit Canada’s aging population in two areas: geriatric research and social engagement.

The RIA proposal targeted the latter, amplifying their work focused on a small population in the Township of Woolwich, a mostly rural community in the heart of Mennonite country in Waterloo Region. The RIA chose the area because it already had infrastructure that would support the guide’s success and because older adults there were likely to face some of the known risk factors of social isolation.

“The SIIP project aims to contribute new research about effective strategies

to reduce barriers, promote social inclusion and identify individuals in need of support,” says Dana Zummach, manager of dementia programs at the RIA. “With this proposal, we wanted to develop a resource to support community members. Our goal was to identify those at risk, provide guidance on what to do next and how to start a conversation, as well as what to do if the person’s needs are beyond what an individual can handle.”

The RIA received the grant just before COVID-19 hit and produced the *Supporting Your Neighbours* guide in April 2022.

PROJECT SETS THE BAR FOR THE FUTURE

“When we received the first draft of the RIA project results, we were blown away,” says Mike Prentice, executive director of the RTOERO Foundation. “Often research reports are densely academic, but this was a readable, practical guide that was almost ready to release to the public.”

The original guide was specific to the Township of Woolwich, and at the foundation’s request, the RIA created an additional version with a national focus. The foundation then had the national version translated into French.

The foundation had already been making changes to its grant program to

make it more efficient. The experience with the RIA guide highlighted the value of some additional changes for future projects:

- Ensure collaboration between the foundation and the grant recipients.
- Include a more readable layperson summary as well as the usual academic report.
- Share project knowledge in multiple ways, such as infographics, summaries, visuals and specific landing pages with a link to download the resource.

Meanwhile, Zummach reports positive feedback to the guide from community members. “Most said they understood the purpose of the guide, felt confident in recognizing the risks of social isolation among older adults and felt confident supporting a person to connect with a community organization,” she says.

Ready to step up and start your own community conversations? You’ll find practical ways to help when you download *Supporting Your Neighbours*. Get the guide in English or French from the RTOERO Foundation’s list of projects funded at rtoero.ca/rtoero-foundation/our-work/projects-we-fund or SIIP at intergenerationalpartnerships.ca/resources. 📄

RTOERO Foundation by the numbers

2011
Year the RTOERO Foundation was formed

\$770,333
Grants given since 2011

\$35,000
Average grant

23
Grants awarded

12
of months each project typically lasts

2
Grant project focus areas: geriatric research and social engagement

Environmental stewardship

Advocating for a sustainable future

by **Patricia Ogura**



While focusing on issues critical to older Canadians, RTOERO promotes respect for all ages, encouraging generations to engage with and support each other. When intergenerational forces combine, strength, resources, wisdom and achievement abound.

Kelly and Katia Bannister are a dynamic team who demonstrate just that.

Kelly Bannister is the co-director of the POLIS Project on Ecological Governance at University of Victoria's Centre for Global Studies. Bannister's daughter, Katia, is a community organizer and current UVic student. Katia is also an executive member of the UVic Ecological Restoration Club. Mother and daughter have each blazed trails as volunteers and activists on matters related to climate, biodiversity, sustainability and other social issues, sometimes together, sometimes not. When Katia was only 17, they were featured speakers at an RTOERO webinar addressing environmental

stewardship, an RTOERO advocacy pillar. Now 20, Katia remains steadfast in her commitment to the environment and Canada's treasured resources.

The two Bannisters recently shared their observations on intergenerational collaboration. They don't focus on age; they focus on how to get a team to work together regardless of demographic or cultural, ethnic or attitudinal background.

Katia points out that "we are all different people" and "we have to create spaces where people are willing to share and be open, no judgment and no lenses." She emphasizes focusing on the "thread of connection across different ranges of experience" instead of the differences.

What counts: opportunities for people to learn from and mentor each other.

Katia was inspired by a man in his 70s to become involved in white-water rafting, which is also committed to water stewardship. She now instructs people of all ages and rafting experience on the

ways of water stewardship — a focus that transcends demographic or cultural consideration.

The mother-and-daughter team shared their best practices that motivate teams to work together and achieve objectives.

Who will benefit the most?

It's critical to ask for whom the goal in question is most relevant. When goals resonate with people, they are more likely to be invested, enthusiastic and commit to do the work.

Clear goals

Kelly promotes "courage in clarity" when defining objectives and values. Invite the team to contribute to setting the goals, a sure way to harness commitment. Mission and vision statements should be "living statements" so they can be altered or changed as the project moves forward.

Establish relationships

Build community within the group. Establishing respectful, working relationships calls for more than exchanging names. When you introduce the team members, encourage each one to share some personal information and tell the group why the project is personally meaningful.

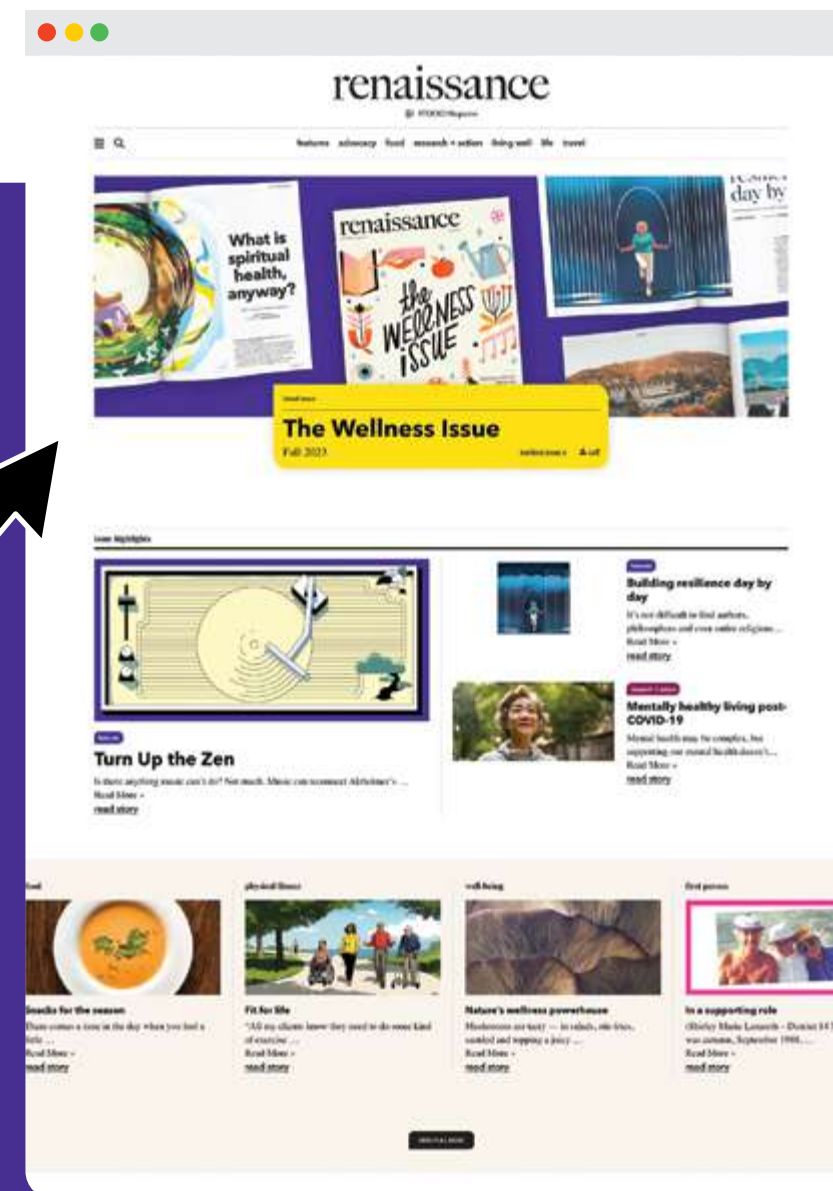
Katia and Kelly believe that the rewards of intergenerational collaboration are boundless: broadening knowledge and sharing skills, stories, experience and problem-solving tools. Younger people working with older people and older people working with younger people inspires, uplifts, reinforces community and builds hope — and hope energizes and achieves objectives.

To learn about RTOERO's advocacy programs and tips on how to advocate as individuals or groups: rtoero.ca/giving-back/advocacy

To view or read a transcript of Kelly and Katia's webinar on environmental stewardship: rtoero.ca/webinar-our-earth-our-responsibility.

PHOTO: SAMI MATIAS

eRenaissance has arrived!



eRenaissance is **RTOERO's** fresh, new, user-friendly digital version of the magazine you count on to live a healthy, active life in retirement.

eRenaissance will be updated as each new issue of *Renaissance* magazine goes to press. You can still read the PDF versions of past issues on the **RTOERO** website, and printed copies will continue to be mailed to members who prefer a hard copy.

Explore eRenaissance at renaissance.rtoero.ca



Are you cooking with the right oil?

Keep these healthy options in your cupboard

by **Fran Berkoff**, registered dietitian

A stroll down the supermarket

oil-and-vinegar aisle shows you a lineup of cooking oils you wouldn’t have seen a decade ago. So, if you’re confused about what’s healthiest and what to use when, you’re not alone.

Dietary fats, including those found in oils, provide energy and essential fatty acids and help your body absorb the fat-soluble vitamins A, D, E and K. They also add flavour, texture and aroma to foods. Oils help you absorb some important protective plant compounds with anti-inflammatory properties. And, many oils are rich in monounsaturated fats, one of the “good fats.”

The best oils to choose for cooking are those with a higher smoke point, the temperature at which oil is no longer stable, starts to burn and smoke, breaks down and oxidizes. The higher-smoke-point oils include extra virgin olive oil,

avocado oil, peanut oil, canola, grapeseed and sunflower oils. It’s also smart to use oils that are not overly processed. Oils with lower smoke points such as flax seed oil, palm oil, hemp oil and walnut oil are better for salad dressings and cold or room-temperature dishes.

Olive oil

Although I have several different oils in my kitchen, extra virgin olive oil is definitely my favourite go-to. It’s a big part of the Mediterranean diet, which has been shown to protect health in lots of ways.

The smoke point of extra virgin olive oil is between 365°F and 410°F (185°C and 210°C), a common cooking temperature for many recipes. Olive oil is versatile, rich in antioxidants and vitamin E, and has a very appealing flavour. Use it for baking, cooking, sautéing and salad dressings.

Light olive oil is refined and lighter

in colour and flavour but not calories. It does, however, have fewer nutrients and, some would say, less taste.

Tip: Choose extra virgin olive oil, which is less processed than other olive oils and has more disease-fighting compounds. Instead of putting butter or margarine on your whole wheat bread, dip it in a little olive oil — or better yet, make a spread such as hummus, which blends olive oil with beans or chickpeas.

Avocado oil

I felt a little disloyal to my EVOO when I first tried — and really liked — avocado oil. I use it in several recipes, and it’s become my backup when I need a change. It has a smoke point of over 500°F (260°C), making it great for high-heat cooking like deep-frying but also very good for all kinds of other uses, such as stir-frying and sautéing. Its nutritional composition is similar to olive oil and it’s also rich in heart-healthy fats. Its mild avocado taste isn’t overwhelming, and it works well in many recipes or drizzled on a winter salad.

Sesame oil

Sesame oil has a medium-high smoke point similar to olive oil. Its distinctive nutty flavour is its calling card, and it’s also rich in powerful disease-fighting antioxidants. Use it for sautéing, stir-fries, stovetop dishes and even as a salad dressing. Toss it with cut-up vegetables such as sweet potatoes before roasting on a sheet pan. And use instead of butter on hot vegetables.

Tip: Regular sesame oil is different than toasted sesame oil. The toasted oil has a nuttier flavour and is more suitable for finishing a dish than cooking one.

Coconut oil

While often touted for many different health benefits, the jury is still out on coconut oil’s real benefits, especially by comparison to other healthy oils, including olive and avocado oil. There’s no evidence that a moderate intake of coconut oil is harmful, so until we know more, it’s probably best to use it in moderation.

Canola oil

Canola oil, developed in Canada in the 1970s, is a good source of healthy fats, has a medium-high smoke point for a wide range of cooking methods, and is neutral in flavour, making it another good standby in the kitchen. 🌱

PHOTO, LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS

Losing your hearing?

Six questions to ask your audiologist

by **Pauline Anderson**



If your hearing is starting to fade, welcome to the club. An estimated 47 per cent of Canadians over age 60 have some degree of hearing loss.

Audiologist Shari Kybal-Syrov, at the London Health Sciences Centre in London, Ont., answers some common questions about hearing loss in older adults.

1. How often should I have my hearing tested?

As you get older, it’s important to get a baseline test so hearing loss can be objectively measured. If your hearing is normal, you would have it checked again within the next three years, but if you’re experiencing some loss, you would get a hearing test yearly.

2. What are the types of hearing loss?

Hearing loss can be sensory neural (originating in the inner ear and often leading to high-frequency hearing loss), conductive (originating in the middle or outer ear and sometimes caused by wax buildup or other blockage) or mixed (both sensory neural and conductive).

3. What causes hearing loss?

The most common cause is simply age, although loud noise

(think persistent music blasting, power tools, revving engines), trauma, medications and infections can also play a role. Sudden loss of hearing is rare and signals that a trip to the emergency department is in order.

4. Can I prevent further hearing loss?

Age-related hearing loss is often pre-programmed, so there’s not much you can do to prevent further loss. But wearing foam or wax earplugs provides a barrier against loud sounds, and custom-made earplugs shaped to your ears offer even more protection.

5. Is hearing loss in one ear typical?

No, major differences in hearing loss is unusual. Your two ears are exposed to the same environmental factors, including medications, so hearing loss in only one ear would be a good reason to get a referral to an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist.

6. Are all hearing aids the same?

There are myriad sizes, styles, prices and related accessories for hearing aids, which are programmed exactly to each ear. Some people want to start with a hearing aid for one ear, but it’s best to get hearing aids for both.

Many hearing aids are now rechargeable, have much-improved sound quality and can connect to other devices through Bluetooth.

Hearing aids typically have a warranty ranging from one to three years.

Some models even have fitness tracking, can detect falls (by identifying a sudden change in velocity) and have remote programming capability so your audiologist can program your hearing aids from their office to your home. 🏠

SO YOU’VE DECIDED TO GET HEARING AIDS; NOW YOU HAVE TO CHOOSE A MODEL.

BEHIND-THE-EAR

These hearing aids sit behind the ear and are visible (although newer versions are quite small), can pick up wind noise and may not be a good option if you have dexterity issues. They’re less expensive than models inserted in the ear, have a wider range of hearing amplification and may be available with a rechargeable battery.

IN-THE-EAR

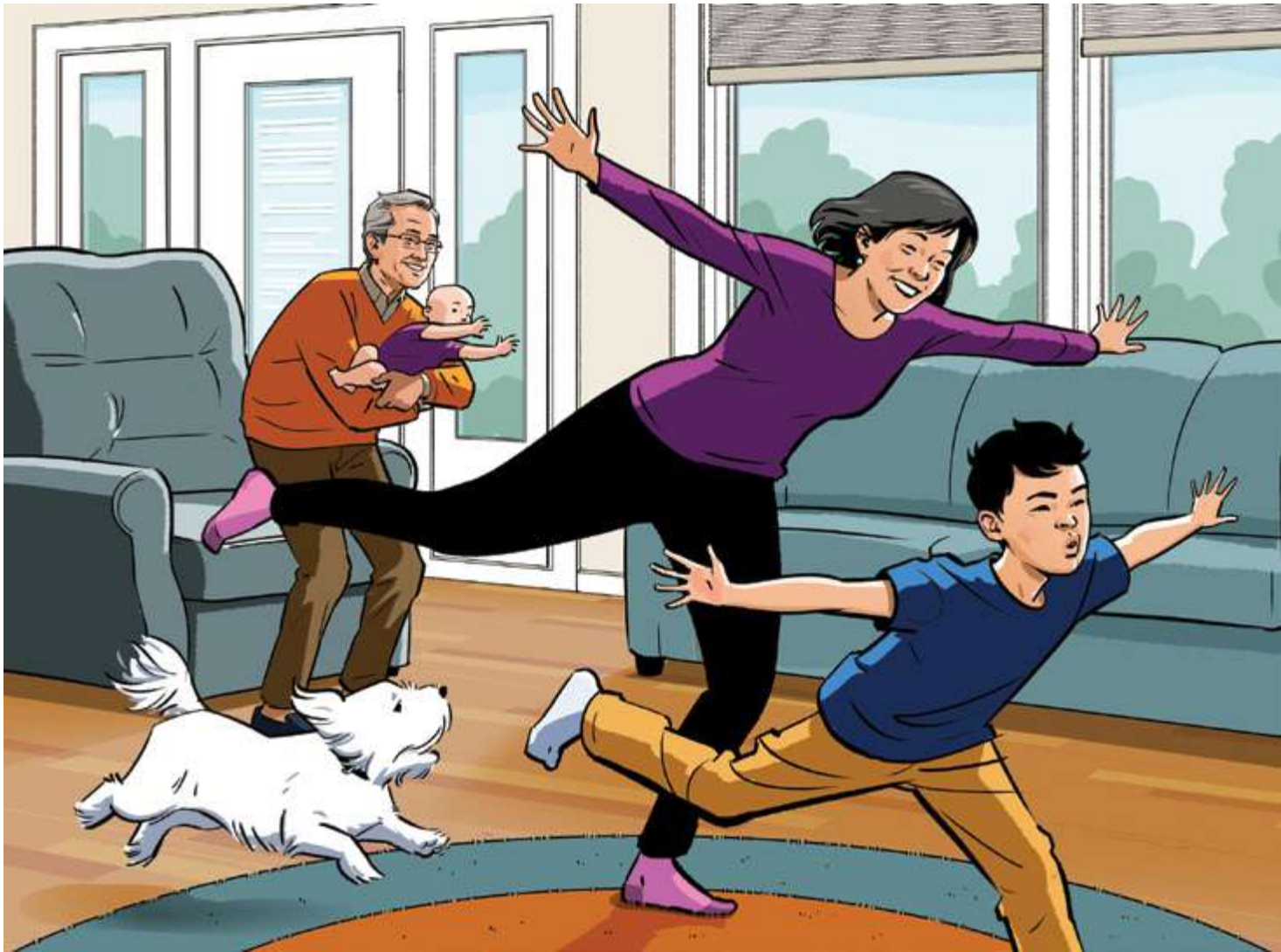
These aids fill most or part of the bowl-shaped area of the outer ear and are visible. They’re more expensive than behind-the-ear options and may be exposed to wax buildup but may include features like volume control and have a longer-lasting battery with options for rechargeable batteries.

PHOTO, MARS BARS

Get the most out of life

Stay active – and able – with our exclusive functional training program

by **Ylva Van Buuren** Illustrations by **Jori Bolton**



What is functional training, you ask? Functional training is a program that builds strength, flexibility and balance, so you can enjoy all the activities you do in your daily life . . . getting up off a chair, carrying groceries, bending down to pick up a grandchild, and walking across a street before the light turns red.

According to functional aging specialist Kate Maliha, “Everyone needs to be able to push things, pull things, do squatting, lunging, rotational or twisting movements, stepping or gait movements, and hinging or bending movements.”

And it’s a fact. Doing specific types of exercise regularly has been shown to have a significant impact on your health and wellness, keeping you strong, protecting against dementia, improving balance and keeping you limber. It even improves your mood!

Here’s a program designed exclusively for *Renaissance* by Maliha, director of Vancouver’s Love Your Age, a facility that provides fitness, exercise and personal training services for healthy aging.

RENAISSANCE FUNCTIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM

If you haven’t exercised for a while or have health challenges, be sure to check in with your doctor before beginning a new program.



Sit to stand

The motion: Sit in a chair and stand up. Return to starting position and repeat.

Beginner’s move: Put your hands on the chair and use them to push yourself up out of the chair to a standing position. Then lower back down into the chair.

More challenging: Cross your arms on your chest and get up a little more quickly. Keep your back straight with shoulders back.

Even more challenging: Stand up and sit back down more quickly while wearing or holding weight (a backpack filled to weigh five to 10 pounds or five- to 10-pound hand weights, one in each hand). Maintain good posture.

Repetitions: Beginners should aim for five to 10 repetitions depending on ability. As you get stronger, repeat the movement a little more quickly for 20 to 30 seconds.



Hauling

The motion: Walk around while holding weights. Use good form with shoulders back.

Beginner’s move: Walk for one to two minutes with a three- to five-pound weight in each hand. Choose the weight that is more comfortable for you. Your route can be flat or walking along a gentle rise of some kind.

More challenging: Pick up heavier weights (an eight- to 10-pound weight in each hand) and lengthen your stride as you walk. Use lighter weights to start if you prefer. Your route should include a rise of some kind — a ramp or gentle hill. Walk around for two to five minutes.

Even more challenging: Wear a properly fitting backpack with waist belt filled to weigh 25 or more pounds, depending on ability. Climb two sets of stairs. Return to the bottom and repeat for two to five minutes.

Repetitions: Repeat for one to five minutes depending on ability and challenge level.



Squats to press

The motion: Hold a weight in a squat position, stand up straight and press arms up overhead.

Beginner’s move: Hold something in your hands (a bag of sugar with both hands or light weights, one in each hand, totalling three to six pounds) and position yourself against a wall in a sitting position (wall sit). Raise the weight(s) up over your head.

More challenging: Hold the bag of sugar or weights, and from a wall-sit position, push up the wall until your legs are straight as you press the bag of sugar or weights overhead. Return to starting position.

Even more challenging: Place the bag of sugar or weights on the floor in front of you. Start in a low squat (with back straight) and lean forward and down to pick up the weight from the floor with both hands. In one smooth move, stand up as you raise the weight up over your head.

Repetitions: Repeat four to 10 times. Increase weight if you can.



Cardio walking

The motion: Walk while maintaining good posture.

Beginner’s move: Walk at a comfortable speed for you.

More challenging: Add walking drills. Do 30-second intervals of longer stride lengths (30 seconds using your regular stride length, then 30 seconds using longer stride lengths). Do 30-second intervals of fast/slow speed (30 seconds regular speed, then 30 seconds at a faster pace).

Even more challenging: Incorporate balance training as well. As you walk, turn your head from one side to the other for 10 seconds, then walk without turning your head for 30 seconds. Repeat up to three times. As you walk, move eyes from left to right and right to left for 10 seconds, then walk with no added eye movement for 30 seconds. Repeat up to three times.

Repetitions: Walk in total for 15 to 20 minutes. 🧘

Good vibrations

Healing yourself with sound

by **Brooke Smith**

The next time you're outside, close your eyes and listen: dogs barking, birds chirping, children laughing, leaves rustling . . . This is your neighbourhood's soundscape — not only the sounds we hear, but also the sounds we make.

And those sounds can heal you, physically and mentally. Sound healing or sound therapy “is like a tuning fork for the piano,” says Constance Au, the owner of Heartspace Massage and Healing Arts in Vancouver. “It harmonizes and retunes our body.”

“It can get into the places where medications can't,” says Philip Jacobs, founder of Toronto Sound Therapy. “It's the interval, not the note. It's the dissonance that's creating that resonance wave that's helping the nervous system reorganize itself.” Jacobs compares sound therapy to standing in the ocean: You can feel the waves, but you also feel the “undercurrent, that pull. That's what sound does.”

“On a physical level, [sound therapy] is affecting your cells,” says sound therapist Narissa Young, the owner of Sea of Sound in Nanaimo, B.C. “Every cell in our body is operating at a frequency. You don't hear them — they're outside of the audible range — but they're operating at a particular frequency in order to become a lung cell, a skin cell, a kidney cell.”



Typically offered solo or in pairs — though there are group sessions — sound therapy is an immersive experience through what's called a sound bath (but there's no water involved). A sound bath “is a vibrational frequency that washes over the body,” says artist Jessica Gorlicky. “It's created on the spot, live.” That might be through instruments (crystal bowls, chimes, gongs), voice or low-frequency vibro acoustics, or any

combination of these.

“Voice is the simplest and most portable instrument we all have,” Young says. “Group singing is super beneficial.” She's right: A 2016 study reported that those who sung together reported “higher psychological well-being” than those who sung by themselves.

But even singing solo has its benefits. “If you're listening to your own voice, it will stimulate the auricular branch of

PHOTO, NIGEL STANFORD

“Sound therapy can get into the places where medications can't.”

Philip Jacobs

the vagus nerve,” Jacobs says. “There's instant feedback when you sing and hear yourself. It makes that connection and brings that parasympathetic nervous system online.” (That's the system that controls the “rest and digest” functions.) Activating the vagus nerve with sound is very therapeutic, Jacobs adds. By toning (producing vocal sounds, even humming) with the vagus nerve, we're bypassing the “fight or flight” response and providing people with the opportunity to actually heal themselves, he says.

Why try it

Jacobs says his clients seek him out because they're not getting any results, and not getting any better. “They've come to me because they've been put on multiple medications over and over again, non-end.”

“The system isn't working for them; they need a new system,” adds Gorlicky, who admits that when the Western medical system no longer worked for her, she moved into “other cultures and realms and options.”

Young agrees. “I notice a lot of people who kind of lost faith in traditional medicine whether through COVID or maybe years before,” she says. They realize, she adds, that Western medicine is there for acute situations or emergencies but recognize that they need a team: Maybe it's acupuncture, sound therapy or massage.

And there are any number of benefits from sound therapy. It may help with

stress-related issues, anxiety, sleep disorders. Jacobs himself has seen a range of issues in his clients: neurological disorders, multiple sclerosis, chronic posttraumatic stress disorder, fibromyalgia, addiction, mental health.

Another 2016 study looked at the effect of sound meditation — using Tibetan singing bowls — on mood, anxiety and pain. Following the sound meditation, the 62 participants (both men and women, mean age 49.7) reported less tension, anger, fatigue and depressed mood.

However, if you don't have access to a sound therapist, don't fret. Just get outside. “Nature is a full spectrum of frequencies. It's like a superfood,” Young says. “Going out into nature is the most simple and elegant sound bath you can have.”

SOUND BITES

- To create and immerse yourself in your own soundscape, go to mynoise.net. You'll find soundscapes for meditation and relaxation, stress and anxiety relief, sound therapy and much more.
- To hear one of Jacobs's sound therapy recordings, go to torontosoundtherapy.com and click on “Listen Now.” Choose from a list of five, including The Awakening, The Greeting and The Heart Journey.
- Cymatics is the science of sound made visible. You can see and hear an example of this at nigelstanford.com/cymatics. 🌀

Don't just hear...



Listen

How to really engage with the people in your life

by **Erin Pehlivan**

Have you ever had a conversation with someone who wasn't really listening to you? As one of the most important communication skills we have, listening to what another person is saying is foundational to building relationships and deeply understanding one another. So why do so many people struggle with it?

According to Stephen Covey, the bestselling author of the classic *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, we tend to filter everything we hear through our individual experiences. We “listen autobiographically,” Covey writes, which shapes our responses in conversations — and it's often not for the best.

PHOTO, JAVIER ZAYAS PHOTOGRAPHY

When we listen to another person talk, Covey says, we judge what we hear and either agree or disagree. When we ask questions, they’re typically from our perspective, and we even give advice we were never asked for. We automatically analyze other people’s motives and behaviours based on our own experiences.

All to say: When we listen autobiographically — or solely from our own lived experience — we’re not really listening to what the other person has to say. So, what can we do about it?

Enter active listening

“Active listening is listening where you’re truly hearing what somebody says,” explains Ruth Greenspan, a registered social worker and sessional professor at McMaster University and Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ont. “It’s showing an interest in what they have to say. You’re not thinking ahead to what you’re going to say next; you’re really trying to understand the person and their perspective, and not make judgments, either.”

This is the key to active listening: It takes away the need to formulate an immediate response. As we listen, we focus on comprehending what’s being said, and then we reflect on it by providing feedback, attentively asking questions or bringing up details in conversation later. This shows that we’re really listening to the other person, because it’s not just about us.

Active listening is central to forming and maintaining relationships, helping us work through interpersonal conflict. The result? Our communication improves. Suzanne Witt-Foley, a mental-health first aid instructor and the owner of Making Connections for Health in Bracebridge, Ont., says that when we listen actively, we can build trust and rapport, and that’s a huge benefit.

“By using those active listening skills, the individual is going to feel [that] this person cares about me, they’re interested in me and what I have to say,” she explains. “This is a safe space where we can have these conversations and sometimes talk about difficult issues.”



The difference between hearing and listening

According to British author Richard Nelson-Jones, hearing emphasizes receiving words or sounds and interpreting their meaning, whereas listening involves actually understanding what those words mean. Listening means being aware of non-verbal cues, too, like eye contact, body language, social and cultural context, and tone of voice.

Unsurprisingly, part of active listening is being aware of what is not said. “Our body language communicates about 95 per cent of what we communicate,” Witt-Foley says. “Making sure we have that open body stance, that we’re at eye level, that we’re not standing over someone . . . and [being] very aware of facial expressions.” It’s the subtle things that send a message, showing you’re fully engaged when listening to another person, that helps them feel like they’ve been heard.

How you respond in a conversation, both verbally and non-verbally, is critical to active listening. Paraphrasing, clarifying and summarizing what the other person has said shows that you’re paying attention and reflecting on the message, which validates the speaker. Asking open-ended questions — instead of seeking answers that will result in a “Yes” or a “No” — is another way to show engagement.

How to listen better when you’re having a conversation

Listening better is about intentionally and consciously being aware in that moment, and environment plays a major role. “What are the surroundings you’re listening in?” Greenspan asks. Is the phone ringing? Is the TV on? “You know the difference if someone’s listening to you or if someone’s distracted by something else.”

It might sound easier said than done, but empathy is also key to making any sort of meaningful connection. “Try to understand what the person’s experience is like. If I was in their shoes, how would I want to be treated?” Witt-Foley says.

So, what is active listening not? “It’s not interrupting,” Witt-Foley says. “It’s about listening to understand as opposed to listening to respond. It’s not about trying to fill up those silences. The focus needs to stay on the individual you’re listening to. It’s not about me as a listener, although sometimes we get excited and want to jump in with our own story.”

When we’re not actively listening in a crucial conversation, the person we’re speaking with can pick up on that and might walk away feeling isolated, alone and as though they’re not being heard. Things like advising, rehearsing and filtering can be toxic to a conversation from the listener’s perspective.

“Advising is acting like I’m the expert and I know everything,” Greenspan says. “Rehearsing is if I’ve made points that I want to cover with you and I’m more concerned about getting that out there. With filtering, I will filter out what I think is important as opposed to giving you the opportunity to tell me what’s important.”

How to listen when someone comes to you with a problem

Empathetic listening involves paying attention to the speaker’s emotional experience by reflecting back the emotions we hear (“You sound really anxious right now”). Witt-Foley says that empathy is the “back-pocket trick” and can make the difference between a good listener and a great one.

Be open to receiving intuitive messages from the person’s voice and body language. Look for volume, word emphasis, facial expression and posture; these can indicate what the other person might be thinking or feeling. Paraphrase what they’re saying to show that you’re an engaged listener who understands, as best as possible, what’s being said. Stay away from judgments, warnings, lectures or shaming language (“Why don’t you just . . .”).

HOW TO AVOID INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT

Whether we like it or not, managing conflict plays a significant role in our lives. More than 96 per cent of the time, the outcome of a difficult conversation can be predicted within the first three minutes. So how can you begin a conversation effectively? Here’s one way to gently open up a conflict conversation without criticizing, blaming or creating a defensive and confrontational environment. To get started, try these communication exercises from the Positive Psychology Toolkit (positivepsychology.com).

DON’T
Begin a comment or conversation with “You always” or “You never”

DO
Begin a comment or conversation with “I feel” or “I need”

For example:

DON’T SAY
You never want to talk about your day.

DO SAY
I feel upset when we don’t reconnect after work, and I need to spend some quality time together this week.

You can even practise these skills through text, email or on Zoom, according to Greenspan. “If you’re on text, [you’re] not responding that very second, but you’re taking a moment to make sure you’re finished your thought.”

We all want to feel validated

It doesn’t matter if you’re listening to your partner, kids, friends or even strangers, because they all want one thing: validation. Validation recognizes and affirms that a person’s feelings or opinions are worthwhile. To validate someone, a listener should remain present and objective while showing emotional understanding and giving the speaker permission to express themselves.

“Validation makes you realize that you’re not alone,” Greenspan says. When you validate someone in a conversation, they feel listened to, and they understand that they’re worth listening to. “You make them realize ‘I am okay to have my opinions. My opinions matter.’” As a listener, you might not completely understand the situation, but you’re open to learning and listening without judgment while fostering a supportive environment.

“Saying things like ‘If that happened to me, I’d feel angry, too’ can help put words to a person’s experiences and emotions,” Witt-Foley says. “Or ‘I can appreciate and understand why you were feeling the way you were’ can help a person feel like they’ve been heard and understood, ultimately bringing them out of their emotional brain.”

“So many people are socialized to believe they’re not worth it,” Greenspan says. “Active listening combats that. Because someone is taking the time to listen to them. And that’s it: Active listening gives someone their voice, because so many people are happy to take it away.”

Active listening is a skill. Like any skill, it requires practice — especially in an open environment. Setting boundaries is a great way to ensure that everyone can talk and listen together. Because active listening isn’t just about sitting back and taking it all in; it’s about collaboration. It’s about considering how you’d respond to what’s being said and, ultimately, walking in someone else’s shoes.

DON’T SAY
You are so irresponsible with our money.

DO SAY
I’m quite worried about our finances and would like to save some money over the next few months. What do you think?

DON’T SAY
You’re so untidy – you never help with the cleaning.

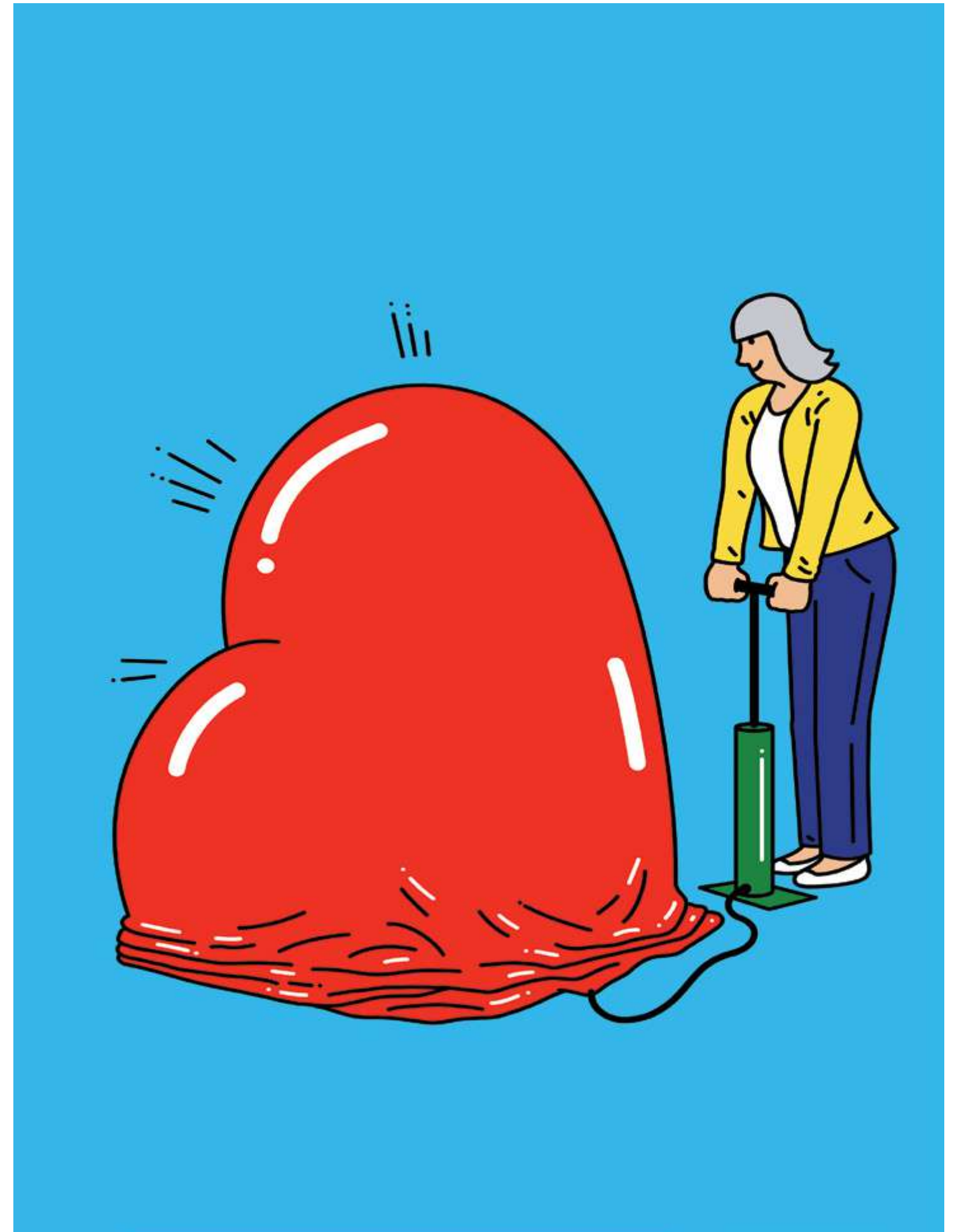
DO SAY
I appreciate it when you tidy up the house; sometimes, I need help. 🧹

Boost your empathy for a better world

Empathy is more than heartfelt conversations and hand-holding

by **Stuart Foxman**

illustrations by **Sam Island**



Every year, the World Economic Forum releases a *Global Risks Report* that explores the most severe and emerging threats we're facing. You'd expect the entries like environmental degradation, violent conflicts, cyber attacks and inequality.

But a few years ago, the report noted a less obvious risk: a loss of empathy. "This is an increasingly anxious, unhappy and lonely world," the authors wrote. "Anger is increasing and empathy appears to be in decline." If so, it's no coincidence that we're also seeing increased friction in society, polarized politics, a decline in civil discourse and a reluctance to examine opposing views.

"To be human is to be able to feel and care. If we fail to learn to relate, we'll have a failed society," says Mary Gordon, the founder of Roots of Empathy, an international not-for-profit based in Toronto that offers empathy-based programs to schools and child-care centres.

Boosting your empathy starts with understanding just what it is, why you might be losing it and how you can nurture it. The classic definition of empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes. But that's only part of it. What matters isn't just how you would feel, but believing how another person says they feel.

Studies of empathy describe three main types. Cognitive empathy is intellectual. You can detect and comprehend someone's perspective yet perhaps remain at a distance. With emotional empathy, you're tuned in to someone else's feelings as if they're contagious. And compassionate empathy enables you to help (if needed or wanted) by doing something concrete or just by being there for someone.

This combination of thoughts, feelings and actions build on each other. We can take what hits us in our head and our



heart and turn that into an appropriate response.

Each of the three types of empathy calls on something different from us. If someone in your life is sick, cognitive empathy might mean simply feeling sorry for them. Emotional empathy is being genuinely upset; you're with the person, not above them. Compassionate empathy is bringing them a meal and keeping them company.

Too often, empathy turns into story-sharing — "I got divorced too, so I know what you're going through"; offering unsolicited advice — "Here's what I would do in your situation"; or, perhaps unintentionally, diminishing someone else's reality — "At least they caught the cancer early."

Part of the problem? Gordon says people like to rush into problem-solving and don't know how to "be still" when all someone else wants is understanding and a connection. "Everybody means well. But we're an emotionally illiterate culture," she says.

Gordon sees a thread between gaining empathetic skills and our ability to navigate relationships, be inclusive, and identify and solve society's problems. Genuine empathy enables us to be

curious and caring. When we're more empathetic, we're better able to embrace people from all sorts of backgrounds and circumstances. We can live and work together more harmoniously. And we're more likely to validate someone's experiences, empower them and join in behaviours that benefit other individuals and groups.

Why do we have an empathy deficit? One theory points to a more insulated world. More and more of us live in cities where we don't know our neighbours. In 2016, living solo became the predominant household type in Canada for the first time. About 4.4 million Canadians, and rising, now live alone.

How we use technology has separated us further — shopping online, working remotely and getting our entertainment from devices and solitary pursuits. "I think we're in a crisis of connection. We have become social isolates," Gordon says.

Social media doesn't help. It can make us feel like we're connected, but the algorithms put us deeper into our own bubbles. We spend more time with like-minded people, often anonymous, and detached from individuals and opinions that differ. That can bake in our biases — and yes, we all have them.

All this on top of a culture that already promotes selfishness in everything from getting ahead at work to buying a home to consumption, says Mathieu Lajante, an associate professor at the Ted Rogers School of Management at Toronto Metropolitan University. "We're a self-centred, individualistic society. It's harder to feel empathy for someone if you see them as your competition," says Lajante, who has an expertise in neuroscience and has studied the role of empathy in consumer services.

That sense of competitiveness isn't new, but it is getting worse, Lajante says. Moreover, a world that seems more uncertain and volatile can create angst and turn us inward. With added stress, even the most empathetic and altruistic people tend to become more selfish, according to a study published in the *Journal of Neuroscience* in 2022.

And there seems to be a society-wide notion that if someone else wins, you lose. That "scarcity mindset" can affect how we weigh all sorts of policies, developments and decisions, and can reduce empathy for others in need or in pain.

"The focus on self is calculating on what can help you or harm you," says Margaret McCuaig-Johnston, a senior fellow at the Institute for Science, Society and Policy and the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa.

Our exposure to trauma and suffering is also a factor for empathy fatigue. Living through the constant crises of our modern world — the COVID pandemic, climate change emergencies, global conflict — can leave us exhausted and desensitized. A 2022 survey from the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and the University of British Columbia asked people which emotions they have felt as a result of the pandemic. Only 13 per cent of Canadians said they felt empathetic, down markedly from two years earlier.

"The decline in empathy that we are seeing is concerning," says Margaret Eaton, the CEO of CMHA. "If we are to resolve our conflicts in relationships, in society and globally, we need to understand one another, even when we don't agree." 🧘

REFILL YOUR EMPATHY TANK



Is your empathy tank running on empty? You may need to make conscious efforts to refill it.

The most important thing you can do is just listen, says Gordon. "Be mindful of listening empathetically. That means listening without judgment or assumptions. Drop your guard. Don't interrupt. And don't jump in to reaffirm. Leave spaces. Just be there with them."

Other strategies can build your empathy muscles. People tend to empathize with others most like them. So spend more time with new people, visit new places, take on new pursuits and read widely. All can make you more curious and open and expose you to different realities and experiences. As a bonus, you just might make new friends.

Try doing a random kindness every day. Even small ones add up to a habit of thinking beyond ourselves. McCuaig-Johnston always carries \$20 bills that she hands out to people who are homeless. Another idea: If you typically support causes/charities that relate to a personal interest or connection, consider donating to others that are addressing urgent needs but may be more foreign to your world.

Beyond actions, part of building empathy involves reflection. Do

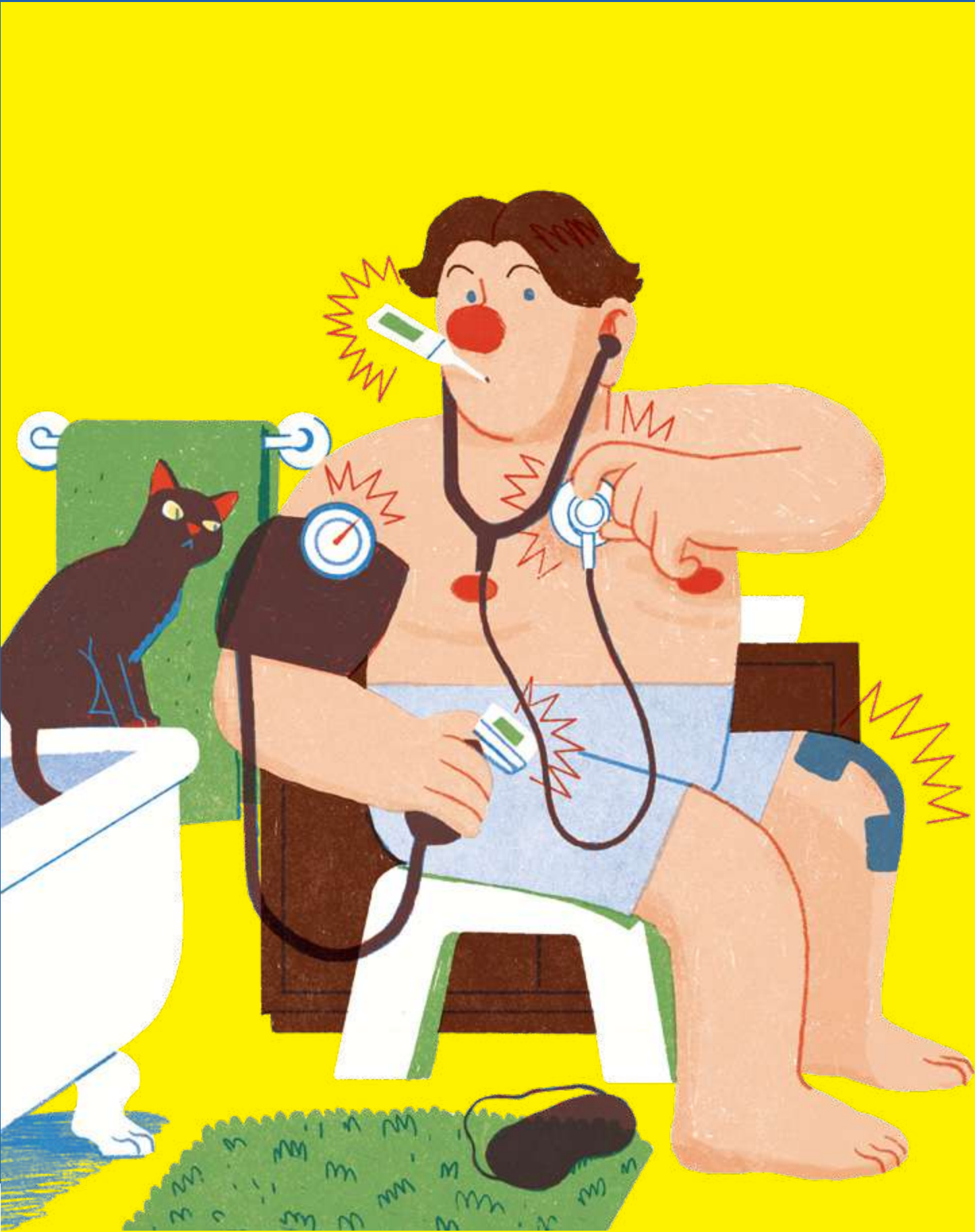
you have biases that can lead to judgments about others instead of understanding? Maybe because of inaccurate or incomplete information? Having biases is human. Exploring yours can help you see the world in a kinder way.

What if you find yourself disagreeing with someone? Resist the urge to lecture, debate or vilify. Hit pause. Give space for each of you to share how and why you arrived at your views. See someone else as a person and not just a viewpoint. Focus on what you have in common rather than on what might divide you.

However you do it, becoming more empathetic pays dividends all around. Empathy helps you manage your emotions and feel less alone, according to the CMHA, which is good for your mental health. Empathy can strengthen personal relationships or make a difference in the day of a stranger whose path you cross, and whom you may never see again. And stepping outside ourselves is a starting point to make progress on major social challenges, from racial discrimination to Indigenous reconciliation.

It's not always easy for people to demonstrate empathy. That's one reason why companies are trying to replicate it in customer service via artificial intelligence (AI). Chatbots can now "listen" and imitate a customer's feelings. In a survey from one software company, 71 per cent of respondents said that AI will make customer experiences more empathetic. Another study, led by a University of California researcher, found that chatbots are just as accurate and far more empathetic than doctors at answering basic patient questions. That said, the jury's still out.

When we've reached the point where we seek artificial empathy, it's time to focus on fostering the real thing. Ultimately, empathy creates communities where people feel seen, heard, connected and supported. "Empathy is at the heart of civil society," Gordon says.



BODY LANGUAGE

How to listen – and respond – to what your body is telling you

by **Alison LaMantia**
illustrations by **Drew Shannon**

“The intellect becomes a far more intelligent tool when it allows the heart to speak; when it opens itself to that within us that resonates with the truth, rather than trying to reason with it.”
— Dr. Gabor Maté in *The Myth of Normal*

Our bodies are miraculous. Consider the autonomic nervous system, which controls breathing, heart rate, blood pressure, sweating and food movement through our intestines. We don’t consciously manage any of that — our bodies keep us alive by design.

And so, knowing what our bodies do for us, it’s not a stretch to consider that they may have more guidance to offer if we stop and listen instead of living by numbers — counting steps, reps, calories and minutes of REM sleep . . .

Our bodies monitor our health every day, sending signals via symptoms both physical and emotional that tell us plenty if we pay attention. Listening to the signals your body sends means tuning in to those sometimes subtle emotional and physical signals and trusting those signals to help you understand more about your health and what your body needs.

“But remember, you know what is best for yourself. That messaging has gotten lost because we’re oversaturated with so much information that it’s overwhelming.”

Huda Adnan



EMOTIONAL CUES – “I’M FEELING AGITATED”
“We get a lot of messaging around us that causes self-doubt,” says Huda Adnan, a psychotherapist based in Pickering, Ont. “But remember, you know what is best for yourself. That messaging has gotten lost because we’re oversaturated with so much information that it’s overwhelming.”
None of us is immune to societal pressures, and tuning out external messaging so you can tune in to your body is easier said than done. Adnan finds that breathing exercises, yoga and her spiritual practice as a Muslim help her feel more grounded and create space to notice her body’s sensations.
If we tune in, she says, one lesson our body can teach us is our unconscious behaviour patterns — how we respond in certain situations. Adnan explains that we all have coping mechanisms we’ve honed over the years, and they’re not necessarily serving us well.
“We need to be willing to be vulnerable,” she says. “When you start to feel uncomfortable in your body, or triggered,

perhaps in response to something your partner is saying, that’s the alarm that there’s something to deconstruct. It’s a chance for reflection. Ask yourself, ‘Why am I responding this way?’”
Adnan says the discomfort is usually sudden. It might feel like nausea, an increased heart rate or body temperature, chest tightening, tingling or sweating.

PHYSICAL CUES – “MY SHOULDER IS REALLY SORE”
While Adnan is a mental health professional, she’s working toward a designation in lifestyle medicine. We can’t separate mental and physical health, she says; it’s all related. She helps her clients return to the roots of well-being by focusing on relationships, nutrition, exercise and sleep, the same areas that Mark Rocca, a chiropractor and clinical educator based in Simcoe County, Ont., suggests starting with.
“If things aren’t feeling right, look to lifestyle first,” Rocca explains. “Am I getting enough exercise, eating well and sleeping well? There’s a ripple effect if any of those three things is off. If they’re okay and you’re still not feeling well, then it’s time to get in touch with your nurse practitioner or doctor.”
Rocca says it’s important to know what’s normal for you so you can notice changes. That can include how often you typically use the washroom, how you sleep, how you feel after exercise, your appetite and any recurring aches and pains you experience.
And there are red flags to watch for — called constitutional symptoms — that are symptoms not specific to a condition but more general. “If you’re losing weight and you shouldn’t be losing weight, if you’re sweating profusely at night, or if you’re



generally not feeling well, then those are signs to take more seriously and get investigated right away,” he explains.
When listening to our bodies, sometimes discomfort may stop us from exercising, but Rocca says that’s not the best approach because exercise is a pillar of health. This is where a professional like Rocca can provide guidance. “We know now, for things like arthritis, exercise is the best thing,” he explains. “You reach a phase of your life when some things are going to feel a little bit sore — and that becomes your normal — but when something starts to become painful, that’s the line when it needs to be addressed.”
It’s not uncommon to put things off or prioritize others’ care needs before our own. But our bodies offer us clues for health promotion and early diagnosis, designed to keep us feeling well. Notes Rocca, “If you be a little bit selfish and take care of yourself, you can be that much more effective for those around you.”
Treat yourself as you would a dear friend or the other people you care for. You’re worth the extra time and attention. 🧘

COMMON SIGNALS AND SYMPTOMS

	MUSCLE SORENESS VS. INJURY Give things a few days. “If you’re exercising regularly, there’s soreness that’ll come with that. If it’s bothering you a week later, get it looked at,” Rocca says.
	STRESS MANAGEMENT Stress is normal, but chronic stress can be problematic. Body clues pointing to stress include irritability, muscle tension, headaches, difficulty falling asleep, constant worry and inability to focus. “If you have a little bit of elbow or knee pain, cortisol, the stress hormone, is like gas and can worsen it,” Rocca says. “The simple act of controlled, slowed breathing — closing your eyes and taking a few slow breaths through your nose — can go a long way for helping with stress management.”
	BURNOUT VS. GENERAL STRESS “When your daily functioning is affected, including being able to eat, sleeping properly, having the capacity to do your work and engage with family, that’s when it is burnout,” Adnan says. “We can start to feel in our bodies when it’s leading that way, and we need to take preventative measures because it’s tough when you’re stuck in the chronic position. You need to listen to and respect the body you’re given.”
	BOWEL MOVEMENTS The state of your bowel movements can be a clue to digestive problems. The Bristol Stool Chart provides a way to talk about shapes and types of poop and can be a helpful tool if you need to explain your bowel movements to a health-care provider.
	LOSS OF APPETITE Not wanting to eat can be a symptom of anxiety. “Ask yourself, ‘What’s causing me to feel this level of distress that I’m unable to nourish my body?’” Adnan says. “Give yourself some grace and remind yourself that your body needs that nourishment. Start with something minimal, like a little cup of milk.”

Perfectly Puerto Rico

This eco-paradise in the northeastern Caribbean Sea – an American territory – bustles with a unique, chic vibe that other islands can’t match.

by **Doug Wallace**

EXPLORE SAN JUAN

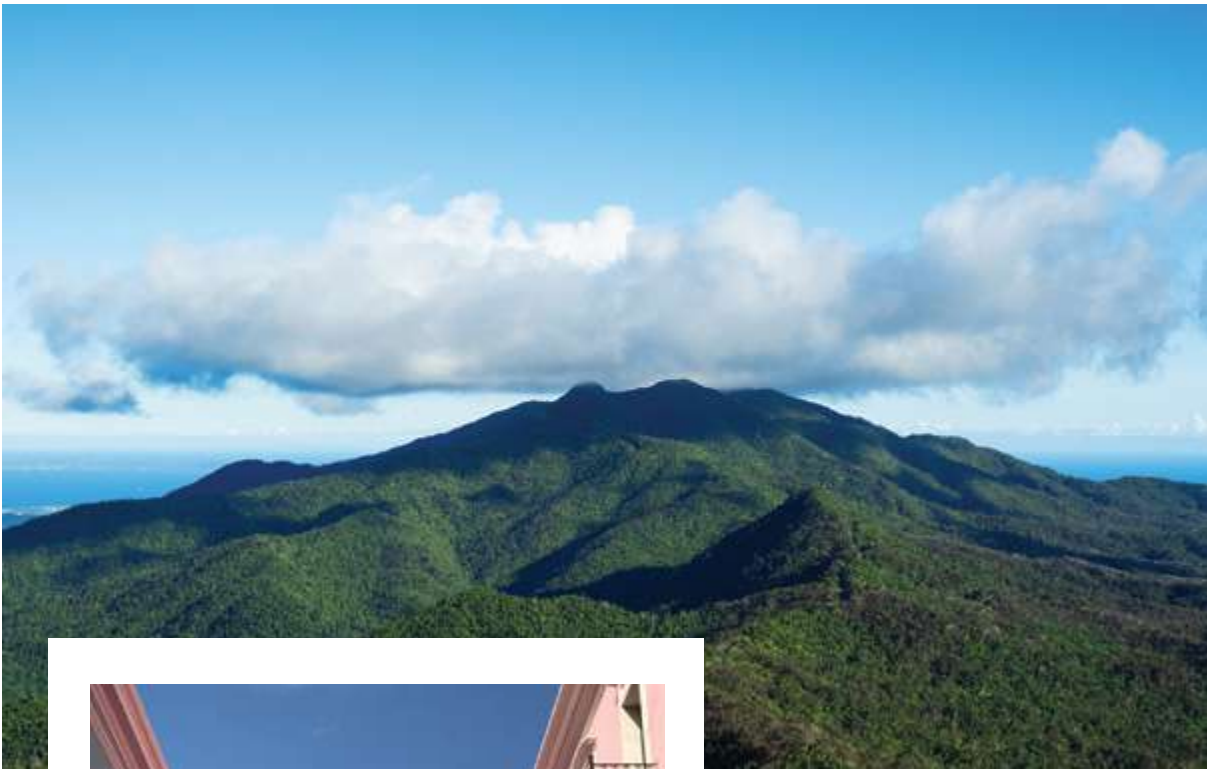
This is not your typical warm-weather getaway. The city is filled with beach clubs, waterfront fun and historic heft, plus a thriving arts scene and a busy café society. And with the 2017 hurricanes six years gone, the welcoming hospitality is back up to speed.

GAD ABOUT TOWN

Take a walking tour through Old San Juan first — one of the oldest walled cities in North America. Weave among the pastel-hued buildings and 16th-century landmarks, the little plazas and cathedrals before spending an hour or so at the forts: El Morro and San Cristóbal. The blue cobblestone San Juan streets were made to last — from iron slag, brought over as ballast on European ships during the 18th century. Sofrito Tours can show you all the sights.

The hip Santurce neighbourhood is home to both the Museum of Art of Puerto Rico and the Museum of Contemporary Art. This is also where you can take The Art Walk PR, an engaging tour past the many murals around Calle Cerra. Across San Juan Bay, the landmark Casa Bacardi rum distillery delivers tours, tastings and mixology classes.

TOP PHOTO, RYAN WENHAO. OTHER PHOTOS, DISCOVER PUERTO RICO



TUCK IN TO THE FOOD

Begin with basic training: a Spoon Experience food tour to learn about the history of the island through its cuisine. Puerto Rican traditional foods — served in large portions — are the most satisfying. Be sure to try ham and mancho croquettes, stewed red beans and rice, stuffed tostones with ceviche, and mofongo — fried and garlic-mashed plantains served with meat or seafood.

Foodie forwardness is on full display at La Placita de Santurce — a square of bars, restaurants and takeout kiosks ringing the old market — as well as at nearby Lote 23, a gastronomic picnic-table park filled with comfort-food trucks.

Out of town, you can indulge in day trips that showcase chocolate or coffee. The chocolate class at Montadero in Caguas or the Semila cacao experience in Barceloneta will fill you in — and up! — on bean-to-bar chocolate goodness. Drive to the mountain town of Jayuya and discover the artisanal wonders of the Hacienda San Pedro coffee tour; the nearby barrio of Ciales is home to the Museo del Café de Puerto Rico.



SOAK UP THE SUN

Puerto Rico’s 435 kilometres of coastline and almost 300 beaches extend across diverse geography, revealing everything from secluded white-sand coves to marinas filled with water-sports adventure. While San Juan’s Condado Beach is popular with tourists, locals head instead to the more swimmable Escambrón Beach or Ocean Park Beach. Closer to the airport, the safe and water-sports-friendly Isla Verde Beach props up a string of hotels, restaurants and cafés.

The beaches of the east islands of Culebra and Vieques are top-level, particularly the spectacular Flamenco Beach, regularly cited in the top-20 lists. Sun Bay is Vieques’s most trendy hangout, a great place to break out the paddles. Over on Puerto Rico’s west coast, the town of Aguadilla Pueblo is noted for a beach called Crash Boat, favoured for the surfing and the sunsets. And the isolated La Playuela in Cabo Rojo is Puerto Rico’s best LGBTQ2SI-friendly beach, replete with azure water and postcard-perfect views.

PHOTOS, COURTESY OF DISCOVER PUERTO RICO

BREAK FOR BIODIVERSITY

Make time to experience the flora and fauna of Puerto Rico’s 36 nature reserves and 19 state forests. Leaving the city behind, a trek in the interior jungles brings about a rejuvenating rainforest nature bath you didn’t know you needed. El Yunque National Forest is a rainforest close to San Juan and filled with rare trees and birds, not to mention the freshest air you will ever experience. Toro Negro State Forest is the highest cloud forest, revealing incredible vistas, hiking trails, waterfalls and natural pools.

Along the coasts, Puerto Rico boasts three of the world’s five bioluminescent bays — what are the chances? — which are filled with microscopic glow-in-the-dark algae. They are the stars of the nighttime tours that boat or paddle through them. Head to Mosquito Bay on the island of Vieques, Laguna Grande in Fajardo or La Parguera bio bay in Lajas.



TOP PHOTO, WEI-ZENG
BOTTOM PHOTO, COURTESY OF DISCOVER PUERTO RICO

WHERE TO STAY

The smallish, adults-only Condado Ocean Club is a modern oasis of four-star fun on Condado Beach in San Juan. Dreamers Welcome hospitality group has a number of high-style apartments and home rentals nearby, plus the gorgeous Dreamcatcher boutique hotel near Ocean Park Beach. The refurbished Fairmont El San Juan delivers the glitz at Isla Verde, and the upscale Palacio Provincial in the old city was once a colonial-era government building, its historic charm restored to luxe good looks.

Out of the capital, Casa Alternavida wellness retreat specializes in personal development in Río Grande, while Combate Beach Resort offers serene seclusion in the southwest at Cabo Rojo. The Hilton and the Ponce Plaza hotels and casinos are also on our radar in the south-coast city of Ponce.

DISCOVERPUERTORICO.COM

Tips about tipping

“When it comes to gratuities – at the hotel, during a bus tour, on a cruise ship – I never know who gets what. Any advice?”



In an age of tip fatigue, the discussion of tipping never seems to abate. Travel seems to amplify this, the different culture and currency of your destination only adding to the confusion. Some nations – Australia, Iceland, Thailand, Japan – don’t tip at all.

I always like to arrive in a new country with a bit of its currency in my pocket so I can pay the cab driver in cash with a tip of 10% to 15%. Helpful shuttle drivers get \$2 per person. When using a transfer service, make sure the tip is not already built into the fare. If my hotel is an hour away from the airport, I’m likely going to give the van driver an extra \$5.

At the hotel, tip valets and bellhops \$2 to \$5. The concierge who scored hard-to-get theatre seats or dinner reservations gets \$5. Give housekeeping staff \$3 to \$5 per day. Spa treatments and restaurant meals (usually) warrant 15%.

Tour operators and guides who show you around for three or four hours should receive \$5 to \$10. Give boat crews 10% to 15% of the fare as a thank-you. If you’re at the pool enjoying all-inclusive drinks, give the servers \$1 per order. Taking pictures of people with snakes or having your own picture taken with a snake.

Cruises are a whole different kettle of fish, the gratuities almost always automatically applied to your account per person, per day. Always check the cruise-line website for their policy.

In the end, tip what you feel. I’m happy to give money to people who deserve it, particularly in less-privileged places where a little extra money goes a long way.

Flight advice: How to err on the side of caution

I’ve always been a go-to-the-airport-early kind of person – it just makes the whole experience more relaxing.

- As so many unpredictable things can go south when you’re flying – the weather, traffic, airline delays disguised as maintenance issues, the stupidity of others, your own stupidity – steel yourself for sudden changes of plan. This makes them easier to roll with.
- When booking a flight with a connecting leg on the same airline, leave at least 90 minutes for the connection, especially if you’re checking a bag. When connecting to a different airline, leave 24 hours. This will give you a day to rebound if the first leg of the journey is delayed or cancelled.
- Expect delays if you’re travelling through airports in snowy climes – or sidestep them if you can. For example, if you’re heading to the Caribbean and there are no nonstop flights, choose to connect in Miami instead of Chicago or Newark.
- Book flights scheduled in the morning, so if there’s a problem, a flight later in the day may get you back on track.
- If you’re taking a winter flight to attend a destination wedding or to hop on a cruise ship, arrive at least one day before. What if your luggage doesn’t turn up – or you yourself don’t and you’re the mother of the bride? 🧐



Doug Wallace
Editor & publisher,
TravelRightToday, and
your in-the-know friend
for travel tips and trends.

TOP LEFT PHOTO, SAM DAN TRUONG

Cozy in the kitchen

Warm up to winter with these simple, simmered dishes
by **Elizabeth Baird**

Summer has its pleasures, and frankly, so do autumn and spring. But if we could look beyond drifting snow, slippery sidewalks and long dark nights, winter has its share of pleasures, too. One of my pleasures? Spending time in my kitchen, trying a new recipe, enjoying the rhythm of chopping and stirring, of slicing and savouring the aroma of hearty dishes as they simmer to perfection.

EASY SEAFOOD CHOWDER

Cooking together is one of the coziest of activities, a little like a symphony – everyone has a part, and when the music (chowder) comes together in the song (bowl), magic takes over.

- 2 tbsp (30 mL) butter
- 2 cups (500 mL) cubed potatoes
- 2 tender stalks celery, diced
- 1 medium carrot, diced
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 tsp (5 mL) dried summer savoury or thyme
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) freshly ground pepper
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) all-purpose flour
- 1/2 lb (225 g) cooked, shelled small shrimp
- 1 cup (250 mL) frozen corn kernels
- 2 cups (500 mL) 18% cream
- 1 cup (250 mL) frozen peas
- Salt
- Sour cream, optional

In a medium-large saucepan, melt the butter over medium-low heat. Stir in the potatoes, celery, carrot, onion, savoury, pepper and bay leaf. Cook, stirring from time to time, until slightly tender, about 8 minutes. Add the flour, stirring to coat the vegetables evenly.

Increase the heat to medium-high; pour in the stock and bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat to simmer the soon-to-be-chowder for about 10 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender. If you like a slightly thicker soup, use a fork to mash some of the potatoes.



Add the shrimp, corn and cream; bring to a simmer. Simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in the peas; taste, adding salt if needed. Remove bay leaf. Serve piping hot with a dollop of sour cream, if desired.

Makes 4 supper-size bowls of chowder.

Substitution: Replace the shrimp with 8 oz (225 grams) of cubed raw cod or salmon; increase simmering time until fish becomes firm. Or, take advantage of your pantry supplies. A can of sockeye salmon, in chunks, can replace the shrimp. Add 1 tbsp (15 mL) of the juice from the can along with the salmon.

Tip: You can nestle a few mussels or bite-size chunks of salmon in with the shrimp.

Tip: You can substitute lighter cream (5% or 10%) or whole milk for the 18% cream called for in the recipe. Or, substitute one 12 oz (355 mL) can evaporated milk and an extra 1/2 cup (125 mL) of stock or water.

PHOTO, FOOD AND PHOTO



BRAISED BEEF WITH FLASHBACKS OF SUMMER

This dish ticks off all the boxes: make-ahead, no-fail, easy to serve to a holiday crowd. It fills the kitchen with robust aromas and is simply delicious over silky mashed potatoes or a wide long pasta such as pappardelle, even rice. In short, a crowd-pleaser.

- 3 lb (1.5 kilos) chuck beef roast
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) canola oil, approximate
- 1 large onion, minced
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 stalks tender celery, diced
- 1 carrot, diced
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 2 tsp (10 mL) dried thyme
- 2 tsp (10 mL) smoked mild paprika
- 1 tsp (5 mL) dried oregano
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) grated orange rind
- 3 cups (750 mL) chicken or beef stock, sodium-reduced recommended, approximate
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) white or red wine
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) orange juice
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) balsamic vinegar
- 3 tbsp (45 mL) each all-purpose flour and soft butter
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) oil-cured wrinkly black olives
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) minced flat-leaf parsley

Make sure you have a large heavy-bottomed ovenproof pot or Dutch oven. Arrange an oven rack just below the centre of the oven. Twenty minutes before transferring the braised beef to the oven, turn the heat to 300°F (150°C). With a sharp knife, trim away excess fat from the roast; cut the beef into 1½- to 2-inch (4 to 5 cm) cubes. In a large heavy-bottomed pot or Dutch oven, heat the oil over medium high heat. Brown the beef in batches, leaving space between the beef cubes to sizzle rather than steam. Transfer to a plate. Leave all the tasty brown bits in the pot, but if there is more than 3 tbsp (45 mL) fat left in the pot, skim it off. To the Dutch oven, add the onion, garlic, celery and carrot, then the salt and pepper, thyme, paprika, oregano, bay leaves and orange rind. Over medium-low heat, gently cook (sweat) this aromatic mixture until the vegetables have started to soften. Stir in the stock, wine, orange juice and vinegar. Cover and bring to a boil. Transfer the Dutch-oven-of-deliciousness to the oven; braise for 1½ hours. Give the braised beef a good stir; cover and braise for about 1 hour more, or until the meat is fork tender and the sauce has reduced slightly and thickened. Remove the

bay leaves. Mash together the flour and butter until smooth. Move the Dutch oven onto the stovetop, and set over medium heat. Whisk a spoonful of the flour mixture (*beurre manié*) at a time into the braising liquid, adjusting the thickness as you wish. If you'd like more gravy, stir in additional stock. Stir in the olives. Taste and season if desired. Sprinkle the parsley overtop and dish it up. Makes 6 to 7 generous servings. Leftovers? You wish! But if there are any, cover the braised beef with a layer of mashed potatoes or a round of pastry, even biscuits. Or, spoon the beef over baked sweet potatoes. Pull the beef into shreds, moisten with the gravy and create a delicious filling for buns, pitas and tortillas.

Tip: An average navel orange yields about 1 tbsp (15 mL) grated orange rind and close to ½ cup (125 mL) orange juice. One average lemon yields 1 tbsp (15 mL) grated rind and ¼ cup (4 tbsp/60 mL) juice. If a list of ingredients calls for rind and juice, it's easier to grate off the rind before squeezing out the juice.

Tip: Grind the black pepper fresh – chefs get around the last-minute fussing this entails by grinding up enough for each day's dishes.

PHOTO, MIRONOV VLADIMIR

GOLDEN CRISP LATKES

Turn a few humble potatoes into a feast. Shredding is not the most exciting cooking technique, but it transforms potatoes into a fine side, appetizer and a traditional Hanukkah treat.

- 6 oval baking potatoes, about 2½ lb (1¼ kilos), peeled
- 2 large eggs
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) finely chopped onion
- 2 tbsp (30 mL) all-purpose flour or matzo meal
- 1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt
- 1/4 tsp (1 mL) baking powder
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) canola oil, approximate

Line 2 rimmed baking sheets with paper towel and set aside. Shred the potatoes on the medium side of a box grater or with a food processor's shredding blade. Scoop the potatoes into a large bowl and cover with cold water. For a quick chill, add a layer of ice cubes and chill for 2 hours. Or, place bowl of potatoes in the fridge overnight. Drain the potatoes well, then press and squeeze out the moisture. A salad spinner works well, too; whiz the potatoes in two batches. In a separate large bowl, whisk the eggs until smooth. Whisk in the onion, flour, salt, baking powder, and finally, use a large wooden spoon to toss the potatoes with the batter. In a large skillet, heat 2 tbsp (30 mL) of the oil until hot but not smoking. Add ¼ cup (60 mL) latke mixture for each latke, leaving about 1 inch (2½ cm) between latkes. Flatten slightly. Fry until golden brown and crisp around the edges, reducing heat if necessary to prevent burning, about 3 minutes. Turn and fry until crisp and

golden, again about 3 minutes. Transfer to prepared baking sheets. Keep warm in the oven at 250°F (120°C). Strain out any bits of potatoes from the oil. Repeat frying the potato mixture, adding and heating oil as needed.

Make-ahead: Let cool; layer with waxed paper and cover. Refrigerate up to 8 hours. Re-crisp in a single layer on baking sheets in 450°F (230°C) oven for about 5 minutes. Makes about 24 latkes, enough for 4 to 6 servings.

Serving tip: Set out toppings – a sweet one of 1 cup (250 mL) sour cream and 2 cups (500 mL) applesauce, or go the savoury route with spreadable cream cheese, crème fraîche or sour cream topped with thinly sliced smoked salmon or chevron-shaped pieces of smoked trout plus scatterings of chopped dill, thin strips of red onion and capers. Thinly sliced cucumber is also a delicious topping.

PHOTO, FASCINADORA

APPLE AND BERRY CRISP GALETTE

A round of flaky pastry holds a juicy apple and cranberry filling, topped, apple crisp-like, with brown sugar and butter crumble. If you’ve never made a galette – a free-form pie; some call it rustic, with the bottom crust wrapping up and over most of the fruit filling – now’s the time in your cozy kitchen. Set out a 14-inch (35 cm) pizza pan or large rimless baking sheet. Cut a 15-inch (38 cm) length of parchment paper. Arrange an oven rack in lower third of oven. When you start to roll out the pastry, preheat oven to 425°F (220°C).

- Pastry:**
2 cups (500 mL) all-purpose flour
2 tbsp (30 mL) granulated sugar
1/4 tsp (1 mL) salt
1 cup (250 mL) cold butter, cubed
1 tsp (5 mL) finely grated lemon rind
1 tbsp (15 mL) fresh lemon juice
Ice water

- Crisp topping:**
1/4 cup (60 mL) all-purpose flour
1/4 cup (60 mL) packed brown sugar
2 tbsp (30 mL) soft butter
Filling:
1/2 cup (125 mL) granulated sugar
1/4 cup (60 mL) all-purpose flour
1 tsp (5 mL) grated nutmeg
2 tsp (10 mL) finely grated lemon rind
6 cups (1,500 mL) sliced apples from 4 large apples such as Northern Spy, Cortland, Idared, Golden Delicious or Crispin
1 cup (250 mL) fresh or frozen cranberries
1 tbsp (15 mL) fresh lemon juice
Icing sugar

Pastry: In a food processor, combine the flour, sugar and salt. Add the butter; pulse until grainy with a generous sprinkling of pea-sized bits of butter. In a liquid measuring cup, combine the lemon rind and juice and enough water to make ½ cup (125 mL). Pour over the flour mixture. Pulse briefly



just until it forms a ragged mixture. Scrape onto a flour-dusted work surface. With flour-dusted hands, gather the pastry together; knead briefly to bring the pastry together, and smooth out cracks. Flatten into a disc; wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour or up to 2 days. Let soften at room temperature, about 45 minutes, before rolling out.

Crisp topping: In a bowl with a fork, mash together the flour, sugar and butter; set aside.

Filling: In a small bowl, stir together the sugar, flour, nutmeg and lemon rind. Spoon over the fruit, sprinkle on lemon juice and toss well. Sprinkle the parchment paper lightly with flour. Using a floured rolling pin, roll out the pastry to a 14-inch (35 cm) round, leaving the edge untrimmed. Slide paper and pastry round onto the pizza pan. Spoon the filling over the pastry, leaving a 4-inch (10 cm) border uncovered. Sprinkle the crisp topping over the filling. Lift the pastry up over the filling to form a 10-inch (25 cm) cir-

cle, letting the pastry fall naturally into folds around the edge and leaving the centre uncovered. Bake for 20 minutes. Reduce heat to 375°F (190°C). Bake until the apples are tender, the filling is bubbling and the pastry golden, about 40 minutes. Slide galette and paper onto a rack to cool. With a wide spatula, or two for support, slide the galette onto a flat cake plate or a dining-table-worthy pizza pan. If desired, dust the galette with icing sugar. Use a pizza cutter to cut into 8 to 10 servings.

Make-ahead: Ideally, serve the galette while it’s still warm from the oven. But you can let it stand at room temperature for up to a few hours. Reheat if desired, and serve with whipped cream or crème fraîche.

Tip: If you can find frozen (or fresh, in season) haskap berries, try them instead of cranberries. This “newish” addition to cultivated Canadian berries is a beautiful midnight blue, oval in shape, and tangy. 🍷

PHOTO, ANNA KAMINOVA



Super snacks

Responsibly sourced and darned tasty
by **Andrew Dobson**

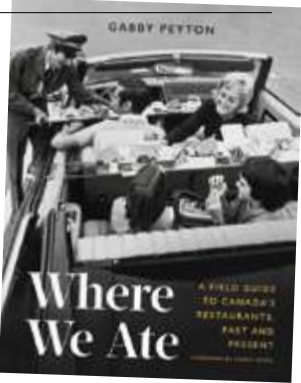
Scout Canning - the brainchild of award-winning chef Charlotte Langley, who originally hails from P.E.I. – is Canada’s leading responsibly sourced canned seafood company. Scout recently launched Scout Seafood Snacks, an innovative product that combines the brand’s popular wild yellowfin tuna with a variety of bold, vibrant and delicious crunchy toppers. With more than 30 grams of protein in each serving, Scout Seafood Snacks make for an easy mid-day snack at home or on the go — and a tasty upgrade to a sandwich or salad. Fun flavours include Chile Jalapeño, Za’atar and Chili Crisp. Find Scout at Farm Boy in Ontario, Spud in B.C. or at your local specialty shops like bakeries, seafood markets and cheese shops. enjoyscout.ca

Smart Living Wine Opener Kit
Ever struggled to open a bottle of wine thanks to a stubborn cork that just refuses to pull free? The ingenious Smart Living Wine Opener Kit uses air pressure to pop the cork from inside out. Simply insert the needle into the bottle, pump it a few times, and the cork slides out with ease! Available online across Canada at undemsales.com.



Where We Ate: A Field Guide to Canada’s Restaurants, Past and Present

Celebrated food and travel writer Gabby Peyton calls St. John’s, N.L., home sweet home. Her first book, recently published by Random House, helps answer the age-old question “What is Canadian cuisine?” Its pretty pages, complemented with historic photographs, celebrate 150 years of restaurants that made a mark on Canada’s culinary landscape. Learn about the history of Canadian inventions like California rolls, foie gras poutine and the ubiquitous butter tart. *Where We Ate* is organized chronologically, starting at pre-Confederation to present day. Gourmands can also prepare 15 recipes inspired by, or contributed by, featured restaurants. Available at Chapters Indigo. chapters.indigo.ca



Wholesome Bar

The Wholesome Bar is a nutrient-dense, minimally processed energy bar that is rich in plant fats and protein. The bars are cold-pressed and made with high-quality whole-food ingredients like pumpkin seeds, almonds, goji berries and chia seeds. The non-GMO, gluten-, grain-, dairy- and soy-free bars make for a great breakfast on the go, pre-workout snack or healthy post-dinner dessert. The Wholesome Bar is available in three delicious flavours: Coconut Macadamia, Almond Crunch and Super Green. Available at retailers across Canada. thewholesomebar.com



Waterllama

Whether you’re looking for a caffeine break, want to boost your immune system with juice and smoothies, or simply want to track your water intake, the Waterllama app helps you stay hydrated from morning to night. The app features healthy challenges, smart reminders, a hydration calculator, the water content of tons of beverages and a whole lot more. The award-winning app can be used on Apple Watch and iPhone. Download for free at the Apple App Store. 🍷



Star-studded sips

Celebrity-created and -endorsed beverages are so popular, there’s an app (GrapeStars)

by **Charlene Rooke**



Canadians were among the pioneers of the celebrity-drinks trend: 15 years ago, comedian Dan Aykroyd launched Crystal Head vodka, around the time hockey star Wayne Gretzky released his namesake Niagara wine (and today offers everything from whisky to cream liqueur, too). Recently, Vancouver-born actor Ryan Reynolds rocketed Aviation Gin to new fame, and Alberta-born former Bachelorette Kaitlyn Bristowe got into the game with Spade & Sparrows wine. Today, Canadian music fans can rock to Tragically Hip wine from Ontario’s Stoney Ridge Estate Winery

or Rush beer, created in collaboration with Toronto’s Henderson Brewing. For the sports fan, a bottle of full-bodied, fruity J-Harden Cabernet Sauvignon created by NBA star James Harden could be just the ticket. (Though upscale ballers might prefer a bottle of LeBron James’s Lobos or Michael Jordan’s Cincoro, both premium tequilas.) Movie lovers can sip Miraval, the rosé from Brad Pitt’s south-of-France wine estate, while watching holiday flicks at home. Soundtrack your holiday entertaining with Bob Dylan and serve his Heaven’s Door whiskeys, or turn up the Pogues and

Mulled wine

Along with spiking coffee, hot chocolate or eggnog, spirits give a dash of flavour to mulled wine. Here’s a versatile recipe to try over the holidays:

For every bottle of fruity, dry red wine, add 2 ounces (60 mL) of liquor: Brandy is traditional, but whisky, gin and even tequila are tasty options. Use a peeler to carve large strips off two citrus fruits, then add a palmful of whole dried spices (such as cinnamon sticks, cloves, star anise or cardamon pods), first crushing them lightly in your palms or using the back of a knife. Sweeten to taste with up to 1/2 cup (125 mL) of maple syrup, white or brown sugar, or honey. Cook over medium heat until sweetener dissolves, then reduce heat to low for about 30 minutes. Garnish with a cocktail pick of fresh or dried cranberries, a clove-studded orange peel or a cinnamon stick before serving in heatproof glasses or mugs. Makes 6 servings.

pour the band’s eponymous Irish whiskey. Hip-hop devotees can rap along with Snoop’s 19 Crimes Cali Red wine bottling, and SelvaRey Rum is the perfect sunny, tropical gift for followers of pop star Bruno Mars, a new owner of the brand.

Your non-alcoholic options can have star quality, too (sites like shopmayple.com are a good source). Singer Katy Perry created De Soi aperitif-inspired non-alcoholic beverages. Supermodel Bella Hadid endorses Kin Euphorics, drinks with functional ingredients like adaptogens and nootropics for a little non-alc buzz. B.C.’s favourite homegrown stoner, Seth Rogen, has his own line of cannabis drinks called Houseplant, with flavours like grapefruit, lime and lemon and 2.5 grams of THC per can. 🍷

PHOTO, HANNAH PEMBERTON

The power of feeling heard

How to listen more and talk less

by Dr. Marion Ehrenberg (District 47 Vancouver Island) as told to **Martin Zibauer**

“As a psychologist, listening is essential — you just won’t accomplish anything with clients unless you listen to them. But I see the power of listening in my personal life, too. If you can listen to a friend, you’ll see them become a little calmer and a little more open. You’ll see it in their body language, or they might tell you it felt really good to talk. For the person you’re listening to, there’s power in being heard and in having someone who cares understand how you feel and your perspective. It makes you feel less alone.

“When I was teaching, even though the exchange has different expectations, listening was an important skill: teachers don’t just deliver a lecture anymore, and we know that students learn better when there’s discussion and conversation. Especially when you’re mentoring, the most effective approach is to draw out ideas from students by asking questions and listening.

“Some people are naturally better at listening. There’s a whole literature in psychology about natural therapists — people who are observers and are emotionally in tune with others. They like to listen and it’s easy for them. In general, women — female-identified individuals — are more socialized to listen and to help, while men are more socialized to assert themselves and to jump in with knowledge or advice. But these differences depend on the individual, and they seem to be lessening.

“In ‘active listening,’ as it’s often referred to, you are being intentional and present. Your goal is to listen and really be there, so I like the term to differentiate from ‘passive listening.’

“In the life of a friendship, when one person is going through something, the other person may be spending a lot more time in that active listening mode. But it’s not natural for friends to do that all the time — active listening doesn’t have the reciprocity of a conversation — and you can become overburdened by a friend or family member who is very needy. That’s when you can say, gently but firmly, ‘I think you need to talk to a professional.’

“Anyone can learn to become a better listener. A good place to start, especially if you sense a friend or family member is troubled, is to express genuine concern: ‘I’ve noticed you



seem a bit out of sorts, and if you’d like to talk, I’m here.’ Showing concern can open the door; even if someone isn’t ready to talk yet, you’ve identified yourself as a person who they can come to later.

“When someone is ready to talk, make space for them. It can be quite a helpful moment just to say, ‘I’ve got lots of time, and I’m going to turn off my phone so I can listen.’ We often talk about having a face-to-face conversation, and eye contact can be an important part of that. But it can also be too intense for some people, especially teenagers. So, walking and talking can be more natural and comfortable.

“Try not to make assumptions while you’re listening. We all do it in conversations, but a good listener asks open-ended questions instead: What do you mean? What happened? But watch that you don’t veer into acting like a therapist, perhaps by over-analyzing or interpreting, or repeating things back too much. If you hear yourself saying things that just don’t sound natural to you, the other person will pick up on it, too. It can be quite unwelcome then; most people don’t want therapy from their friends.

“Making a few small changes in how you listen — perhaps just consciously trying to interrupt less — can go a long way. You don’t have to be a perfect listener to be a much better listener.”

PHOTO, YURI A



Marion Ehrenberg on the beach near where she lives.

After retiring from teaching at the University of Victoria, Marion Ehrenberg wrote her first novel, *The Language of Dreams*. “It’s a story about the relationship between a seasoned psychologist dealing with her own vulnerabilities and a challenging young client – and how they unexpectedly change each other,” she says.

The process of writing, she believes, drew heavily on her listening and observing skills. “Years and years of listening to people carefully,” she says, “have helped me create characters that are, I hope, genuine and believable.” Ehrenberg also used her professional knowledge to explore the reality of psychotherapy and a more nuanced, authentic rendering of mental illness. “I want to encourage compassion for individuals with mental health problems,” she says, “but I’m also striving for an exciting page-turner.”

Ehrenberg advises other RTOERO members who are aspiring authors to take courses and participate in writers’ retreats, rather than going completely solo. “It’s really challenging to write a book, and a very long road, but it’s also exciting,” she says. “There is actually a point when you get in a flow, and you start dreaming about your characters.”

The Language of Dreams was nominated in 2023 for the Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize, one of the annual BC and Yukon Book Prizes. The book trailer and a sample excerpt are available at marionehrenberg.com.

10 TIPS FROM A PRO

1. Be an active and intentional listener.
2. Shift from simply hearing the words to trying to fully understand a person’s meaning of those words: “My day was complete chaos” may mean something different to you than it does to the person you are listening to.
3. Be fully present in the conversation; make room and space for the person you intend to listen to.
 - Stop multi-tasking. You can’t be an active listener when you are doing something else.
 - Make space. It’s OK not to be available to listen at all times; you’re not a therapist on duty for that hour. Unless it’s urgent, plan to speak when there’s space, when you’re rested and able to listen.
 - Turn off or silence your devices.
4. Show your interest; show that you care to know.
 - Show interest with the language you use and your body language.Verbally: “I really want to understand what you went through today.”
Non-verbally: Often interest and connection is shown through good eye contact, but sometimes for a young person or someone who is easily

- over-stimulated, sit side-by-side.
- Be aware of your body language: Are you open, are you checking your watch?
5. Ask open-ended questions to keep the person talking: “What was that like for you?” “What happened then?”
 6. Listen to understand rather than to come up with your response. Drop your agenda for the conversation, at least for the moment, and go into “listening mode.”
 7. Withhold judgment, if at all possible. Judgment expressed verbally or non-verbally tends to shut things down or create conflict that goes nowhere.
 8. Cultivate patience.
 9. Don’t offer advice unless someone asks for it.
Be tentative with your advice: “Have you thought about . . .” “Have you considered calling a therapist?”
 10. By listening better, you will set the stage for good talks with that person in the future, because they had a good experience. A great example would be a parent of a teenager shifting into listening mode. That teenager is more likely to come back to that parent when they need to talk. 🧡

PHOTO, COURTESY OF MARION EHRENBURG

Build your financial dream team

Here are the people you should be listening to

by **Lesley-Anne Scorgie**



As a long-time financial educator, I’m thrilled that financial literacy has become a trending topic post-pandemic. But with all the loud voices on Instagram and TikTok offering financial advice, it can be tricky to know what’s legit and what’s unqualified.

So, let’s cut through the clutter: You want these pros on your money dream team.

MONEY COACH OR FINANCIAL ADVISOR

This is your first hire. You need a money expert to help you make a financial plan to build (or maintain) financial security. A money coach is a strategist and not associated with a financial institution. A financial advisor can create your financial plan and sell you the products, like investments or loans, for your plan because they are backed by a financial institution. Make sure that your money coach or financial advisor speaks your language and is honest and realistic. They shouldn’t be promoting get-rich-quick schemes or setting unrealistic goals. Check their credentials and get a referral or two from them.

INSURANCE AGENT

You’ll also need someone to help you protect your assets. Use an agent or company to which you’ve been referred, and interview a few. A good agent will advise you to insure major things like your life and your home, not minor items. It’s common to have two agents: one for life, critical illness and disability coverage, and one for home and auto coverage.

PHOTO, BEST PIXELS

ACCOUNTANT

An accountant’s job is to legally minimize the tax you pay. They will advise you on how to manage your net-worth growth in the most tax-efficient way in collaboration with your financial advisor. That’s right — these two pros should be talking to each other and not operating in silos. There are a LOT of accountants, so get a referral and read reviews. Once you’ve connected with someone, make an appointment at least once a year to ensure your finances are structured properly.

LAWYER

You’ll also need access to a trusted lawyer. You won’t need their services often, but they’re critical when you buy a house, draw up a will if your situation is complex, sometimes assist with estate planning or business structures, or go to court.

I know that probably sounds like a lot of advisors, and you’re worried about paying for everyone. Yes, you will need to pay fees or commission for this dream team. But I promise you, it will be well worth it as your financial plans unfold and enable you to live the life you want.

CAN’T AFFORD A FINANCIAL ADVISOR, BUT YOU NEED HELP?

Books, podcasts, blogs, vlogs and free webinars can help you grow your financial literacy, too. But a custom plan perfectly suited to your needs? That’s where these DIY strategies fall short.

If you can’t hire your dream team, go to your bank branch for basic financial advice. As a part of your service offering, you can access investment advice and sometimes even basic financial-planning services. These folks are licensed to sell proprietary products offered by the bank, which can skew the advice, but for the most part I’ve found that bank branch advice is generally on-point and balanced, albeit scaled down when you’re starting. The same goes for basic tax-filing services, online and in person, and insurance pros. They get the job done without any bells and whistles. My pro tip if you’re taking advantage of free services is to partner with the advisor who has the best reputation.

Many pros have taken to social media to promote their businesses and enhance financial literacy. I’d soak up all that goodness, but know that a post or a tweet won’t be enough to ensure that you have a fantastic retirement. Only a solid financial plan will. 🧡



Good advice

What would you tell your 21-year-old self today?

Set yourself a dream, then work hard to achieve it. Don't let anyone say you can't. Keep trying until you are successful.
Agnes DeFrancesco
(District 23 North York)

Have confidence in who you are and what you are able to do. Worry less about what other people think and do what you think is right. Always follow your heart.
Alison Sears
(District 20 Frontenac, Lennox & Addington)

Don't be fooled by eloquent or powerful men or women. Listen to the heart of their words. Follow your instincts. Better one solid friend than a stadium filled with sometime friends. Be kind!
Allyson Marzo
(District 23 North York)

Don't think you have to follow what everyone else does.
Elizabeth McLaughlin
(District 8 London, Middlesex)

Shut up and listen.
Andrew Turnbull
(District 39 Peel)

Objectively assess the positive and negative impacts your actions and choices have on the world, and strive for the most positive balance, given the importance and immense difficulty.
Brian Sutherland
Actively employed member

There are experiences and accomplishments you will have, most of them good and many you wouldn't have imagined. Enjoy your life — it's a wonderful gift.
Barbara Evers
(District 23 North York)

Trust your intuition and find a wise spiritual path to help guide you as an adult. Keep looking. Keep asking.
Brian Middleton
(District 47 Vancouver Island)

Remember to enjoy every stage of your life and not live toward retirement.
Johanna Gelling-Vandenbrand
(District 2 Thunder Bay)

Follow your passion and don't be deterred by others!
Christine Bretherick
(District 31 Wellington)

Don't sweat the small stuff. But first, stand back, take a minute and decide what the small stuff is.
Carol Plaus
(District 32 Prescott-Russell)

Realize you're only young once and it goes fast. Be more open to new experiences. Don't wait until you're retired to get a dog.
Carolyn Gotay
(District 42 Mainland British Columbia)

Don't be in a hurry to grow up. Live on your own at least once before you get into a serious relationship — it will make you more aware of who you are.
Carol Broer
(District 13 Hamilton-Wentworth, Haldimand)

Get a good education, work hard, and the doors of life will open to you.
Charlotte Jones
(District 42 Mainland British Columbia)

Keep a record of those people who have loved you and will love you into existence. Note well how their actions serve as guideposts as you make your way through life.
Don Deakin
(District 21 Renfrew)

Live in the present. Learn from the past, but don't live there. Plan for the future, but don't spend your time waiting for things to happen.
Karen Munro
(District 16 City of Toronto)

Look before you leap, but don't overthink a problem.
Kay Baxter
(District 22 Etobicoke and York)

Give more credence to those who have more wisdom . . . meaning my parents.
Lindalee Roberts
(District 5 Cochrane, Temiskaming)

Take time to sit, think, evaluate, then act with conviction!
Mary-Lynn Woolcott
(District 49 The Prairies)

Trust yourself more than anyone else.
Mary Bailey
(District 7 Windsor-Essex) ♿

ILLUSTRATION, DZIANIS VASILYEU

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