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THE BENEFITS OF SPENDING TIME IN THE MOUNTAINS



In the famous Swiss novel "Heidi," a little girl recovers from her fragile health — both physically and mentally — by spending time in the mountains. There are plenty of anecdotal stories about the medicinal effects of mountain air, but how much is supported by research? Here's what there is evidence for so far:

CLEANER, POLLUTION-FREE AIR

One basic but important benefit of getting to a higher altitude is the escape from city pollution. It may surprise some city dwellers that air pollution is linked to asthma attacks for those with sensitive lungs and also to more serious conditions. Research suggests that prolonged exposure to air pollution may lead to chronic illnesses such as cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), emphysema, and other lung diseases.

Up in the mountains, you'll likely be able to breathe a little easier.

REDUCED RISK OF OBESITY AND HEART DISEASE

People who spend more time at high altitudes may also experience a decreased appetite and lower risk of obesity. One study from 2017 even found that living at a higher elevation is associated with a lower risk of metabolic syndrome, which is a cluster of conditions that include high blood pressure, excess body fat, and abnormal cholesterol.

Even more interesting, mountain air may passively improve your weight loss journey as well.

NATURAL WEIGHT LOSS

One German study followed 20 obese men who lived in an environmental

research station below the highest peak in the country. The subjects reached the peak effortlessly by railway or cable car, and they were allowed to eat as much as they liked. By the end of the week, however, each had lost an average of 1.5 kilograms or 3.3 pounds. Two factors are thought to have contributed to the weight loss: A naturally decreased appetite from the altitude (the men ate nearly 700 fewer calories than usual) and an increased metabolic rate.

While there is still more to learn about the potential benefits of spending time in the mountains, these three studies give the greenlight for more high-altitude adventures.



THE VALENTINE'S DAY COOKIE DISASTER

WHAT CHILDHOOD HUMILIATION TAUGHT ME ABOUT PERSPECTIVE

When I was in elementary school, each student had a Valentine's Day "mailbox" created out of a shoe box that was decorated with construction paper. On Valentine's Day, the teacher would announce it was time to exchange cards, at which point everyone would go around stuffing cards into shoeboxes. I would have a card for each classmate — so no one was left out — and would throw some of those heart-shaped candies with slogans in the envelopes for good measure. The exchange of Valentine's Day cards back then was not very ... shall we say ... distressing.

However, when I was in the second grade, what little of an attention span I had was momentarily captured by a girl named Sandy who was in my class. When Valentine's Day rolled around, I mentioned something to my mom about wanting to do something special for Sandy. My mom, who is a fabulous cook and a home economics teacher, suggested we bake a special cookie for her. I agreed. What a terrific idea!

That night, we worked in the kitchen on a massive, heart-shaped cookie. When it was done baking, and had cooled down, we decorated it with pink icing and sprinkles and carefully wrapped it in a protective coating of saran wrap. From there, it was gently laid in my metal Star Wars lunch box.

The next day, Valentine's Day, was unlike any I'd experienced before. I was nervous and feeling a bit uncomfortable. It was like I had a ticking time bomb in my lunchbox. I anxiously waited for Ms. Reese to announce it was time to exchange Valentine's Day cards. And then she made the announcement. The time had arrived. I went over to my cubby-hole, grabbed my lunchbox, and walked over to Sandy's desk. Unlatching the lid, I told her I had made something for her and reached inside.

And that's when it happened. To my horror, the cookie was pulverized. The only thing holding it together was the saran wrap. What was once a beautiful masterpiece had been broken into many pieces. Maybe it had been the game of football at the bus stop. Or maybe I'd been too rough with it on the bus. Whatever the cause, the cookie was destroyed. I was humiliated! I quickly handed it to Sandy and honestly cannot remember what happened next. I'm sure I sprinted to the other side of the room and the safety of my guy friends, never to brave the treacherous waters of elementary school Valentine's Day again!



Traumatic events always look the worst when you're right in the middle of them. At the time, the cookie catastrophe felt like a crushing defeat. But now I can look back on it and laugh. Honestly, I think those trials and tribulations give us a healthy dose of perspective. And I can only hope that this pandemic will turn out to be like that Valentine's Day disaster, just on a massive scale. For those of us who make it through, it might be the learning experience of our lives.

In the meantime, I hope you enjoy your Valentine's Day far more than my second-grade self!

Kevin Mottley

LOVE BOOSTS YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM AND LIFESPAN



It doesn't take a scientist to tell us that a healthy, loving relationship can lessen our stress — but did you know it also boosts our immune system's response and could help us live longer? Multiple studies have shown that couples in happy, loving marriages tend to have lower blood pressure. Marriage itself isn't the key to a healthier life — the love is, researchers find.

How do researchers define a loving relationship? To put it simply, it depends on the couples' own opinion. Married couples with a high quality (aka loving) relationship showed significantly lower ambulatory systolic blood pressure than singles. However, happily married couples and singles had lower blood pressure than people in low quality marriages. Which means, at least in terms of your health, it's much better to be single than unhappily married.

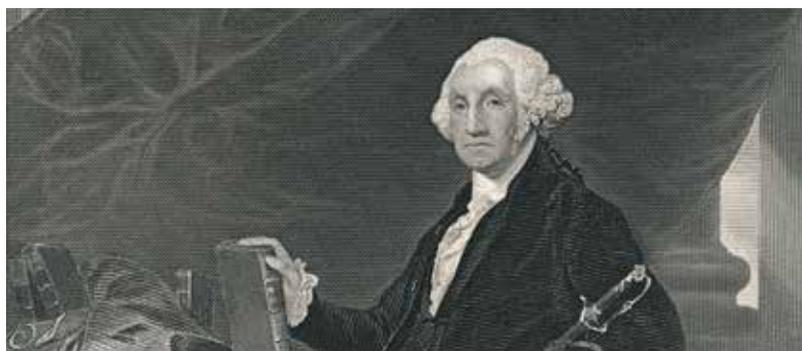
How does it help your blood pressure exactly? Well, when positive events occur, the hormones oxytocin and vasopressin interact with your dopamine reward system. Vasopressin in particular helps control blood pressure.

Of course, getting into a new relationship can be a little stressful! Cortisol, the stress hormone, initially rises when you fall in love. However, it quickly drops in a long-term, stable relationship. Those low cortisol levels sustained for a long period of time contribute to many health benefits.

But how does it improve your immune system? That's a bit of a mystery to researchers. So far, women in love have shown changes in their gene regulation of immune cells compared to women not in love. Some theorize that this is in order to prepare for pregnancy. Unfortunately, we still don't have conclusive research on whether men in love better fight flu and other viruses, too.

High blood pressure is known as the "silent killer" since it has no symptoms, but it will steadily degrade your health over time, significantly increasing your risk of chronic conditions like heart disease. And while love is certainly not the only way to lower blood pressure, it's comforting to know our loved ones can boost our health for a longer, happier life. Happy Valentine's Day!

WAIT, WHO WAS BORN IN FEBRUARY?



I may be a little bit biased, but I think February is the best month for birthdays. A host of fascinating and impactful people were born in the second month of the year, including one of my favorites: my granddaddy, Cecil Burley, who is turning 95 this year!

Granddaddy has lived an incredible life. He served in the Navy during World War II; survived Watergate, the Vietnam War, and 9/11; and is still kicking through COVID-19. His absolute love for his family inspires me every day.

Granddaddy isn't the only one in our family born in February. One of my daughters shares the honor, and I also have a landmark birthday coming up this month: I'm turning 50! In honor of my birthday month, I dug up some fun February birthday facts and a list of famous people Granddaddy and I share this designation with.

DID YOU KNOW THAT ...

- According to Good Housekeeping, people born in February tend to be taller, better behaved, and more even-tempered than others!
- Research shows that babies born in January and February are 10% more likely to be born early.
- People born in February are said to be creative and "right brained" and often grow up to be artists — and if that's not their thing, they might try being a traffic cop, which is another common career for February!
- According to Time Magazine, babies born in the winter (including February babies) are more likely to be famous! Speaking of which ...

FAMOUS FEBRUARY BABIES

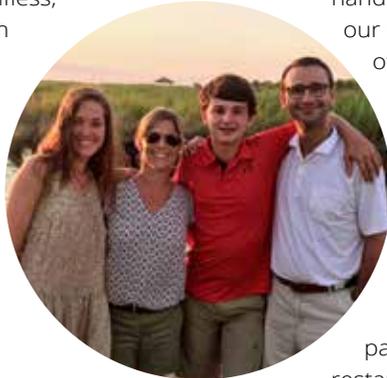
- President George Washington
- Actress Jennifer Aniston
- President William Henry Harrison
- Comedian Chris Rock
- President Abraham Lincoln
- Talk show host Jerry Springer
- President Ronald Reagan
- Rapper Ice-T
- Actor John Travolta
- Singer Harry Styles
- Hotel heiress Paris Hilton
- Astronomer Galileo Galilei
- Actress Millie Bobby Brown (star from "Stranger Things")

Granddaddy and I are certainly in interesting company! If you're in our cohort too, happy birthday — and congratulations on having the best birthday month of the year.

3 BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OUR RESIDENT READER

MEET OUR NEW LEGAL ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT, JULIET MARKOWITZ!

Teachers are some of the most creative, selfless, hard-working people on the planet — which is why we're lucky to have stolen one away from the classroom! A few months ago, Juliet Markowitz officially joined our team as a legal administrative assistant after 25 years teaching third grade in elementary schools and holding classes for a local science company. When asked about making the career change, she joked, "I guess I'm still trying to figure out what I want to be when I grow up!"



handles the completion, filing, and scanning of our paperwork; pays our bills; and manages our office emails accounts and calendars. In other words, she's superwoman!

"It's been interesting talking to clients because The Mottley Law Firm handles all types of situations and cases that people call about. It's been a good learning experience," Juliet says.

When she isn't busy juggling her work, Juliet loves spending time with her husband, Mark; her 19-year-old daughter, Emma; and her 16-year-old stepson, Austin. After the COVID-19 pandemic started, she swapped her usual hobbies of trying new restaurants and hanging out with friends for long walks, Netflix binges, and good books.

Schoolyard humor aside, Juliet has done a fantastic job in her new role. She made the switch because COVID-19 put the brakes on the science classes she was teaching part-time, and she sees a lot of parallels between her old work and her new duties.

If you're looking for something to read this month, she recommends these three books:

"I like organizing, and I like managing," she says. "Of course, managing a classroom of children is very different from managing an office, but I was looking for an administrative role, and that led me here."

- "Anxious People" by Fredrik Backman
- "Little Fires Everywhere" by Celeste Ng
- "American Dirt" by Jeanine Cummins

If you've called our office in the last few months, Juliet was the one who answered the phone. She gathers information for our attorneys;

If you pick one up, let Juliet know your thoughts the next time you call or come into the office. She's always ready to talk about books!

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BUTTER AND HERB BAKED OYSTERS

INGREDIENTS

- Rock salt or uncooked rice (to coat your baking sheet)
- 1 dozen fresh oysters, scrubbed and shucked
- 1 stick butter, softened and divided into 8 tbsps
- 3/4 cup panko breadcrumbs
- 2 tbsp fresh chives, chopped
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp lemon zest
- Lemon wedges and chopped parsley for garnish

DIRECTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 425 F.
2. On a rimmed baking sheet, spread out a layer of rock salt or uncooked rice.
3. Arrange oysters on the baking sheet, meat side up.
4. In a skillet over medium heat, melt half of the butter. Add breadcrumbs and sauté until brown.
5. In a small bowl, combine remaining butter, chives, lemon juice, and zest.
6. Top each oyster with a teaspoon of chive mixture and a sprinkle of sautéed breadcrumbs.
7. Bake for 8–10 minutes and serve garnished with lemon wedges and chopped parsley.

Inspired by [TheSpruceEats.com](https://www.thespruceeats.com)