

Magazica

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Health
Hope, Happiness

Parkinson's
Awareness:
Separating Fact
from Fiction

Asthma
Awareness:
Navigating the
Shift into High
Pollen Season

Canadian
Indigenous
Seed Saving:
Preserving
Culture and
Food Security

The Gut-
Brain
Connection:
How Early
Spring
Produce
Feeds Your
Mood

Digital Detox
Weekends:
Reclaiming
Your
Attention
Span in
Nature

*Amy
de Nobrīga*

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Interview

A portrait of Amy De Nobriga, a woman with curly brown hair, wearing a white sweater, smiling slightly. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

WALKING BESIDE PEOPLE:

AMY DE NOBRIGA

**ON TRAUMA, HEALING, AND THE FUTURE
OF SOCIAL WORK**

Amy de Nobriga, MSW, RSW, is a seasoned social worker with more than two decades of frontline experience in maternal and child health, mental health, and crisis intervention. Her career spans leading institutions, including Mount Sinai Hospital, Humber River Hospital, and SickKids, where she has supported families through some of life's most vulnerable moments. As the founder of The Walking Therapist, Amy brings a fresh, accessible approach to counselling - meeting clients exactly where they are, both literally and emotionally. Her work blends clinical expertise with deep compassion, advocacy, and a commitment to systemic change, making her a trusted voice in trauma-informed care and community mental health.



Some people run toward the fire when others run away. Amy de Nobriga is one of them. For more than twenty years, she has stepped into the hardest moments of people's lives - crisis, grief, trauma, and uncertainty - and offered something deceptively simple yet profoundly rare: presence. Her work spans NICUs, mental health units, shelters, and family homes, but her mission remains constant - to meet people exactly where they are and walk beside them until they can walk on their own. In this conversation, Amy de Nobriga shares the lessons, stories, and hard-earned wisdom that shape her practice and remind us that hope is never out of reach.

Magazica: Dear readers and viewers, today we have Amy de Nobriga here with us. She has spent the last two decades helping individuals across age groups - children, young adults, and families - navigate some of life's toughest challenges. She is an experienced social worker specializing in maternal, child health, mental health, and crisis intervention.

She has worked with leading institutions such as Humber River Hospital, Mount Sinai

Hospital, and SickKids, among others. Beyond direct support, Amy de Nobriga is deeply committed to advocacy and systemic change, ensuring families receive the resources they need. Her work is a testament to resilience, compassion, and empowerment. Today, she's here to share the lessons she has learned along the way. Amy de Nobriga, welcome to Magazica. It's a pleasure to have you.

Nobriga de Nobriga: Thank you for that lovely introduction. Thank you so much.

Magazica: So first, let's start with the note of passion. What drew you to this field? Was there a defining moment or specific experience that shaped your career in maternal and child health?

Amy de Nobriga: Yes. Well, I feel like since I was really little, my parents have always instilled the importance of supporting and helping people along the way. I think I've always gravitated toward that work. When I first started out as a baby social worker, I was working in a youth shelter, a family shelter, and in domestic violence settings. I then started working in child welfare, did some family mediation work, and worked at a legal clinic. A lot of my work centred around children and families.

That eventually led to working at Mount Sinai in the NICU, at Humber River in the maternal-child program, and at SickKids in their mental health unit. I think my career just naturally evolved in that direction. I've always been interested in working with families because there are so many dynamics and so many people involved - parents, children and extended family. A lot of what shapes us begins at home and in childhood. If we can have an impact from the very beginning, it can make such a difference in people's lives going forward.

I also had a defining moment years ago when I worked in child welfare, doing supervised access visits.

Years later, I was at a graduation, and a young man came up to me. He said, "Amy I was a real jerk to you growing up, and I just wanted to say I'm sorry." I told him there was no reason to be sorry - he had been struggling through a lot. He shared that he now had a baby and was doing really well.

That was lovely to see.

Magazica: That's so inspiring. Impact begins at home is a powerful statement. The inspiration you received from your own family clearly guided you toward the supportive role you've embraced in your career.

Most people don't fully grasp the role of social workers in hospitals. You mentioned Mount Sinai Hospital, among others. What does your work involve, and why is it so crucial?

Amy de Nobriga: That's such a good question. Usually, if I'm going to the hospital in the morning and taking an Uber, the driver will ask if I work at the hospital. The next question is almost always, "Are you a nurse?" I say, "No, I'm a social worker," and that usually leads to, "Oh, what does a social worker do?"

Social workers in hospitals work across many different units, but our main goal is to complete a psychosocial assessment. Essentially, we look at the story of the person, who they are outside of their medical diagnosis or whatever they're going through at the hospital.

We provide context to the medical team about who this person is and what they need while

they're in the hospital, as well as after discharge. We look at the supports they already have - family, friends, community - and identify what additional resources they may need through organizations or agencies.

We also help ensure that when they go home, they have what they need to avoid unnecessary re-admissions. There's a lot of advocacy work, emotional support, and coordination involved, especially in traumatic situations.

Ultimately, people are more than their medical challenges. Our role is to look at them from a holistic point of view.

Magazica: That's wonderful. Now our readers and viewers will understand the role of a social worker. But still, you have worked with families facing trauma and hardship. What does crisis intervention look like in practice? When a person or a family is going through a traumatic experience, and you are working with them, how does the intervention look, and how do you specifically help people move forward?

Amy de Nobriga: I hear that. I think with a crisis, depending on what is going on, the first sense is providing stability and grounding. For example, unfortunately, I have had to work a lot with the death of children and help people experiencing that.

In that moment, there is nothing you can say when someone is losing a child. They have not even been able to process it after leaving at the hospital. When it is happening right there, the main thing is making sure they know somebody is there and really holding space for them -

allowing what they need to do, whether that is crying in despair or feeling anger, however grief shows up for them. It is a very common and human experience to feel the way they are feeling.

Providing stability and guidance to move forward is essential, especially from a logistical point of view. Depending on where people are in their stages of grief, the next steps are often logistical. Many people have never planned a funeral before. They do not know the process or how to go about it. So, part of the work is helping navigate the steps they must take so they do not feel alone.

There is also the emotional support - being there with them, helping them process, and making sure they are not alone. There are really great groups for people who have lost children or loved ones, such as Bereaved Families of Ontario or the PAIL Network through Sunnybrook Hospital, where they can connect so they are not alone. In time, they can move forward and do something meaningful to honour their child if they choose to.

That is what crisis work really is - listening, providing space, making people feel heard and understood, and showing that there is a path forward. It should not feel hopeless. We are here to work with them in whatever way they need.

Magazica: I really liked the two words you said at the beginning of this part of the conversation: stability and grounding. You are completely on thin ice whenever you are in crisis. The ground beneath your feet feels very shaky.



So, when you talk about stability and grounding, I think these are the two things most needed when a person or a family goes through trauma. This is so true. I never realized it in this way. Thank you for that.

Thank you very much for that. But still, many people and many communities, as I know, still struggle with stigma. There is a certain kind of stigma around mental health. What are some misconceptions you have encountered along the way? And when you find that a person or family has stigma around mental health, how do you shift the conversation into a proactive direction?

Amy de Nobriga: Unfortunately, although we have made strides in mental health - there is the Bell Let's Talk campaign and many other initiatives - there is still the idea that struggles with mental health are due to a weakness, that something is wrong with you. We have really personalized it.

People struggling with mental health often feel shame. For example, when we think about postpartum anxiety for women, it is important to realize that it is very normal to be anxious. There is nothing wrong with being anxious. What matters is how long we stay in that state and how long it impacts our ability to function. Is it affecting your ability to function as a mom? Is it impacting your ability to sleep or eat?

So we think about how to manage that anxiety. It is okay to feel anxious, or angry, or sad, or overwhelmed. But how do we manage and contain it so it does not overpower every aspect of our lives? That is the main shift.

We also have to look at what is going on in our society - the political climate, economic pressures. If people are feeling depressed, it might be because we live in a capitalistic society where people's identities are tied to what they do. When you lose your job, you might lose a sense of identity. If we are going through a recession, that affects people deeply.

It is not just the individual. It is what is going on around them. We live in systems. People are impacted by job loss, racism, and many other factors. We do not live in a vacuum. We are social beings affected by what is happening around us.

Magazica: Fascinating the way you put it, because the last part of the conversation about anxiety - I'm personally a college teacher, so I deal with a lot of Gen Zs and the Gen Alphas coming in. They're anxious. And whenever they're anxious, for example, just before an exam or before any case study or group assignment, they're anxious. And whenever they feel anxious, they stop working. So I first say to them, whatever you said fantastically so far - I get the essence of your answer - is that first accept it.

Accept that you are anxious, and there is nothing wrong with it. That is not devaluing you. It is not making you smaller. It is not making you appear negatively in the eyes of others. You are anxious. Anybody can be anxious. Anybody can be angry. Anybody can be frustrated or depressed. So I first say that if you want to overcome the exam, just accept your anxiety and then work with it.

And lastly, what I said about - there's a big term in philosophy I was reading the other day. It is called status anxiety. We live in a very hyper-consumeristic society. So even if for nothing else, just being in a tough time can create some anxiety. And the way you put it - first accept it, acknowledge it, that it is there, so I have to work with this - fantastic. Thank you for that.



And let's go to some family challenges. From domestic violence to addiction, families often face overwhelming situations. What advice would you give to someone supporting a loved one in that crisis or in such a crisis?

Amy de Nobriga: I think if you're witnessing someone going something, there's always this idea of, "I have to help, but I feel overwhelmed. "What should I do? I don't know what to do."

The most powerful thing you can offer someone is simply your presence. Showing up, being there, and truly listening — sometimes that's enough."

Sometimes, we might not be able to solve the problem.

And if people are feeling overwhelmed, it's like, "I might not know what to do, but I can support you, and we can figure out together how we can move forward." If you're feeling really low and not moving forward, maybe your support parent can connect you with a therapist, a support group, or someone with the skill set you need. If you're struggling with finances, having someone to sit down with you and help you so you feel less anxious and more in control, and able to make the changes you need. So I think the first thing is sitting with them and letting them know you're going to be there through this process, and that there is a light.



And I bring it back to when someone has passed away - there's no way that person can come back. But really just showing up and being there for that person. You don't have to say anything. You don't have to come up with beautiful language or flowery language. It's really just, "I'm sitting with you. I'm here for you. I'm here, and together."

Magazica: One of the doctors we were talking to in another interview - he's not a specialist like you in social work; he was a cardiologist - but he said something that reminds me of what you're saying. He said sometimes people are not looking for solutions. Sometimes people are looking for a person who will listen to them.

In that context, is it true? Have you found it true? And in that context, how important is it, as a common person, even in our day-to-day family life or professional life, how important it is to develop the skill of listening?

Amy de Nobriga: Oh, I think it's so important to listen. The act of listening makes people feel they're not alone, that there is someone here willing to listen to them. And going back to your thinking, some people don't want solutions. There is also a theory in therapy and counselling that if you allow people to talk long enough, they solve their own problems.

Magazica: I didn't know that. That's fascinating.

Amy de Nobriga: Yes. Sometimes, once people really hear what they're saying... Actually, funny enough, I was talking with a client - I'm working with at the walking therapist and she asked me, "What should I do?" Then she started talking about it, and I pointed out, "I know you're asking me, but it seems to me that you solved your problem. Did you hear yourself? You solved your own question. You solved your own problem." And they're like, "Oh, ya. That's that is what I did." I said that really came from you; it didn't come from me.

If we allow people to talk and we just listen, and if someone is talking and talking and it feels overwhelming, being the person who can help organize their thoughts and help them see it from a different perspective/or way to connect ideas can really allow them to make the change they're wanting to make.

Magazica: And just in between, very quickly - I'll tangent a bit. In your profile on Psychology Today, I have seen your experience in CBT and DBT. So CBT I understand - Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, which focuses on thoughts and how they influence emotions and behaviours.

What is DBT?

Amy de Nobriga: Oh, Dialectical Behavioural Therapy focuses more on emotional regulation, acceptance, as well as skills development and such as radical acceptance.

Magazica: What's the difference between the two, for our common readers?

Amy de Nobriga: CBT focuses on identifying and changing unhelpful thought and behaviours to improve emotions and functioning. DBT build on CBT but emphasizes emotional regulation, distress tolerance, and mindfulness.

Magazica: That's a big thing.

Amy de Nobriga: Yeah. So, there's more of that. CBT is more the idea that everything is connected - your thoughts, your feelings, your body. It's all connected. If you change your thought about something - even if, say, you have a thought like, "You know what, I'm so unhealthy, I'm so overweight," -

Magazica: Self-talk.

Amy de Nobriga: Yes, all our negative self-talk. But if you change your actions maybe you start going to the gym, or you start walking, or you start doing something - that's going to connect and start to change your thoughts and your way of thinking.

Magazica: So, you're thinking in dialectic.

Amy de Nobriga: Yes. So that's how I get it. But they're similar in some ways.

Magazica: So that is for the common readers. You fight for better policies as an advocate of better mental health for all. You fight for better policies and support systems. Can you share a moment where your advocacy led to a meaningful change - even in a very tiny medium, whatever it may be?

Amy de Nobriga: I've had the opportunity to work at Osgoode Hall Law School in the community legal clinic. Doing community development at the clinic - helping law students sit in committees in the community, and also social work students in their clinical practice and community practice as well. I've had the opportunity to do deputations at City Hall, talking about Toronto Community Housing needs.

But also, going back to the hospital, we're looking at a policy change for the five-day, five-night program. For people who don't know, it's when you go to the hospital - many hospitals in Ontario have this program - and it's based on research that if someone is at risk for

postpartum depression or anxiety, sleep is really helpful in preventing the development of postpartum mood disorders. Sleep is really important.

The idea is that the mom is getting the sleep she needs to care for her baby. Usually, if you have a delivery, you're there for 24 hours; if you have a C-section, 48 hours. This program gives you extra time to focus on sleep. The baby is with you during the day and usually goes to the NICU or your support system at night so the mom can sleep.

Right now, we're developing and pushing for a policy change because sometimes when the baby goes to the NICU for medical needs the mom is sent home. The idea is, "She can go home and get the sleep she needs." But we're pushing back, because that may be not the case for some people - maybe their home is calming and good for recovery - but not for everyone.

There's this idea that if the baby is in the NICU, the mom will be fine and no longer needs the program. But even if the baby is in the NICU, the focus should be on the mom. Some people go home to three or four other children. They're not going to get that supported time to sleep and take care of themselves. Or there might be things going on at home - maybe their partner is kind and caring, but maybe they're experiencing domestic violence. We don't know.

The push for this policy is to focus not just on the care of the baby, but on the mental health of the mom. It's not only the sleep she gets at

the hospital - she gets the support of the nursing team, someone to talk to, the support of a psychiatrist if she needs it, the support of a social worker, the support of a lactation consultant for a longer period of time if she's struggling with breastfeeding or choosing formula feeding. There's so much support.

My push for that policy is really about separating the care for mom and baby. We have to think that everyone - going back to that psychosocial assessment - has a different experience. It needs to be individualized. We need to think from a bigger perspective than just the idea that the baby goes to the NICU or is taken care of by someone else and that solves the problem. We need to look at the big picture.

Magazica: Yeah. And regarding the babies - that's... whenever you were explaining this, it sounds so logical. I never thought of it this way. Obviously, you are the expert in that field, but I never thought of it this way as a layman as well - that mom and baby's care should be separated proactively so that moms and babies get individually better care. Fantastic.

One of your research areas or focus areas of study is the effect of art programs on children's self-esteem. So, how does - I'm going a bit off on a tangent from our previously talking points. - How does the freedom of creativity help build stronger self-esteem, according to you? What is your take on that?

Amy de Nobriga: Yes. I remember doing that back in university days.

Magazica: Our content team is really, really fascinated by the fact.

Amy de Nobriga: Oh, really. When I did that, actually with my friend Diana, who is now a clinical psychologist, we did that study together. We worked with the Big Brother, Big Sister program. We did visual art, dancing, acting - different kinds of art programs. We were looking at whether there was a difference. Is it better to put your child in music lessons compared to theatre? What is the link to self-esteem?

But when we looked at the study, it really didn't matter what specific type of art they were doing. It was the idea that arts programs give people a way to express themselves.

To be able to - whether that's through art, through movement or dance - it gives a way for self-expression. And when you see people dance, it's like, "Wow, that's amazing." So it's really kind of intrinsic... if it comes from you, that you created something - "Wow, I was able to master this skill. I was able to do this." - It builds your self-esteem. Even if you had no training before in dancing or acting, you can say, "Wow, now I have gained this skill, and I'm able to do this." That's how we looked at building your self-esteem.

It really is about giving yourself this sense of agency, making you feel good and not judged, and being able to express yourself physically or creatively - just being able to get that stuff out. And especially, again, I know we have to focus on ourselves and intrinsically feel happy about

ourselves, but it is so lovely when we get positive feedback from people around us. “Wow, look at this art piece you did. Look at how you’re doing that.” That also really builds the confidence of children - and people of all ages.

Magazica: Yeah, agency is a big part of being creative - that “I have control over the process,” or “I can do it.” That’s a big thing. So many people are entering into this field of social work and helping others who are facing tough times, students and professionals both. From your two decades of experience, what’s the most important lesson you’d pass on to those who are just starting in this field?

Amy de Nobriga: I really like to think it’s about being humble, being curious. You don’t have to come from a place where you have all the answers. Sometimes it’s about asking the right questions. And really, as we were talking about before, the idea that if you listen to people long enough, they solve their own problems.”

I think being curious, being supportive, and understanding other people’s perspectives that might differ from yours is essential. You might have an idea of how the specific problem they’re facing might be solved, but that doesn’t mean that’s the way it will be. Working together with the person in front of you to figure out the best solution you can both develop together - that’s the thing.

And honestly, when you work together, there’s less onus on you to be perfect or the best social worker ever. It’s also about detaching and knowing that people have their own

agency. That’s healthy, especially for burnout and your own mental wellness. It’s not about you. It takes your ego out of it. It’s about helping that person. And when you go home, you know you did everything you could with the resources you had to support that person.

It’s not your job to “fix” people. You might provide a different perspective or link them to resources they didn’t know about to help them see things in a different way - which is great. And when people say, “Thank you, you were so helpful to me during that time,” that’s wonderful. But again, don’t personalize it. This was about them. They did the work. You just provided, from your learning and experience, a different way that helped them along their journey.

Magazica: Awesome, awesome. Be humble, be curious, ask the right questions, and most importantly, put the ego outside of the equation so you can facilitate them in the right direction. Fantastic - absolutely spot on. I think people who are just entering the field to become future professionals will benefit hugely, because you’ve summed up so many things in a very short way.

Your work is deeply emotionally demanding. Sometimes you have to listen to people who are in trauma. It is very emotionally demanding. How do you protect - how do you nurture - your own mental well-being while supporting others? What’s the mechanism?

Amy de Nobriga: I think it’s really for you to know yourself very, very well - to be self-reflective and to really know what you need to do to take care of yourself and not taking on

people's burdens as your own. It's not about being far away or detached so you don't feel anything - we're providing empathy - but knowing that what this person is facing is not your problem. We're all human, and we can only provide as much as we can.

Some things touch us - we're all human - especially if we've dealt with really trying situations, especially death or awful, horrific things that have happened to people. For me, it's reaching out to the relationships I have with people - connecting with friends, talking things out, walking (as I'm a walking therapist), exercising, doing yoga. Moving my body feels good. Eating the right foods that nourish me - and sometimes some sweets as well.

And also going out and doing things I enjoy, like dancing. That helps me stay grounded. But really, from my experience as a social worker, it puts my life into perspective. We've all been through traumatic events in our lives - myself included - but in essence, it gets me into a state of gratefulness. Really grateful.

Sometimes the little things - we can let them go more easily, because we can see there are so many other things that could be worse. Not invalidating your experience, but keeping it in perspective. It helps you productively reframe your thoughts and feelings.

Magazica: Your last point touched me - that whenever you listen to people going through trauma and difficulties and trying situations, you feel empathetic to them, but side by side, it also makes you very grateful. That "at least I'm not living that experience. I'm being empathetic.

I'm helping the person, trying to guide the person by being humble and putting all the efforts that I have learned." But that also reframes my reality as well. And this becomes something that makes you more and more grateful. I hope that is also a powerful thing.

Amy de Nobriga: Yeah, for sure. I think it makes you grateful - especially if you've worked with someone who has gone through a similar trauma to you, and they're in the thick of things. And again, it is about that person. Just because you went through something similar, maybe you would have a different experience of it, and it still would be different. But to know that, yeah, people are not alone. But it also gives you a sense of, "I was there before, but now, because of the past experiences I've had, I'm in a different place now."

That person you were before - you were there - but through growth and the things you've done to help yourself, with your knowledge and the way you've worked on yourself, you come out the other side. So even if you've gone through a similar experience, it can give you clarity for yourself.

Magazica: More learning, more clarity. True. If you could leave our listeners, viewers and readers with one powerful insight - something that could inspire them - what would that be?

Amy de Nobriga: I really think that for anything you're going through, change is always possible. I think no matter what, there is light at the end of the tunnel. You might not like what you're going through at that time, and it's not that you deserve it, but there is hope.



There is a way that you can get through things.

I would just say that - there is hope. There's always hope.

Magazica: There's always hope. There's always, always hope. And finally, though I said we would leave our audience with a powerful message, we want to end with your dream. What do you see on the horizon? What do you see in the coming times that you are doing?

Amy de Nobriga: Well, as I've started my private practice, The Walking Therapist - delivering counselling services as you walk, like with your dog, pushing a little one in the stroller, or through work or school, like at university,

walking around the campus with you - it's really about mobile therapy. Even coming to your home. I still do phone or video chat too, but essentially, it's about making therapy tailored to the person in front of me.

I really believe that The Walking Therapist literally is meeting people where they're at - like their house - and that's my philosophy as a social worker and therapist: walking alongside them. It's literally and figuratively what I believe in as a practitioner.

I'm excited about that. I'd like to grow into a group practice, and I'm hoping to provide some free workshops for people as well. I'm excited to continue growing into a group practice and hope to offer free workshops. That's what I'm really excited about.

Magazica: Walk the talk, walk the therapy.



Amy de Nobriga: Yes, exactly.

Magazica: Fantastic. With that, all the best of luck and good wishes for your effort. You are trying to do things passionately, and you have learned a lot in the last two decades. I hope people will really resonate with that. Thank you so very much for giving us your time.

Amy de Nobriga: Thank you so much for having me. It's great.

Magazica: Thank you very much, and I hope this is not the last talk. We will have another conversation with some very specific and focused issues in the future.

Amy de Nobriga: I'd like to. Thank you so much.

Magazica: Thank you.

“You don't have to come from a place where you have all the answers.

Sometimes it's about asking the right questions.”



The Power of Morning Light: Resetting Your Circadian Rhythm for Spring

Conceptualized by:
Suman Dhar
Editor-in-Chief

Imagine this: It is a Tuesday morning in early April, and you have at last changed your parka for a jacket. But as you gaze at your morning coffee, you feel like your brain is still stuck in a January blizzard. Waking up is a complete and total gong show, and you can't help but wonder why your body hasn't quite gotten the memo that spring is here.

The truth is, "you're not a morning person." Your body simply hasn't quite adjusted its internal clock to match the sun. The good news is your brain has a reset button. All you have to do is learn how to press it by getting some morning sun.



The Tiny Conductor in Your Brain

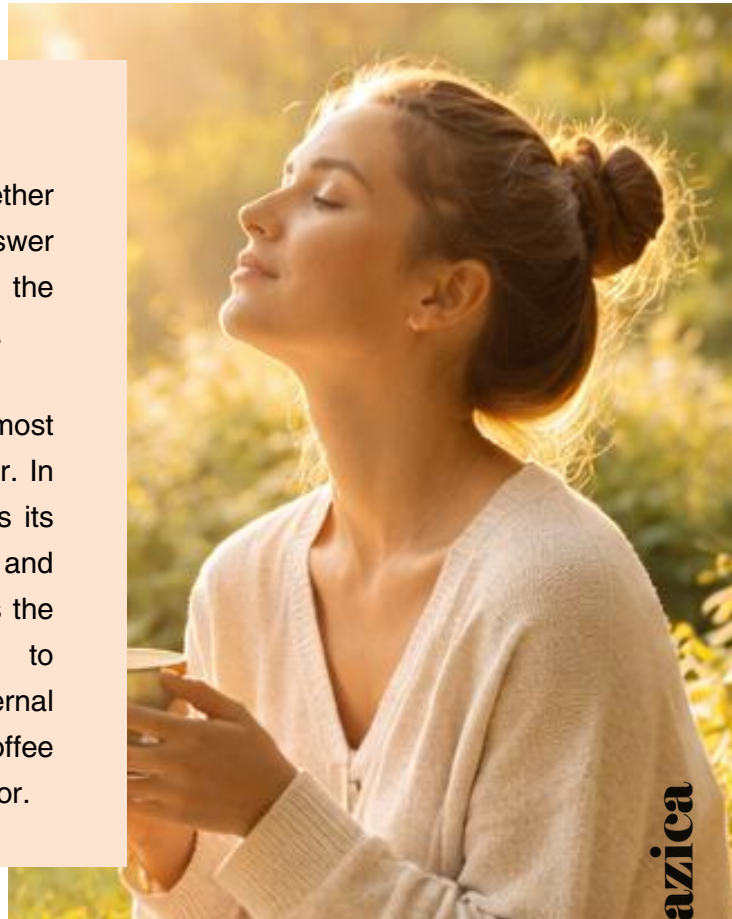
In each of us, there is a high-tech internal time-keeping system that ticks away with a regularity of about 24 hours. Not just a gut feeling, this is a physical command center deep in the brain, known as the suprachiasmatic nucleus, or SCN.

Imagine the SCN to be the conductor of an orchestra. The conductor must make sure that the different sections of the orchestra play the same music. This is true with our hormones, temperature, and metabolism. When light enters our eyes, it sends a signal directly to the SCN via the "retinohypothalamic tract," telling the conductor to pick up the tempo or slow down.

The Nightclub Bouncer of the Body

You might be wondering why the timing is important, whether or not your internal clock is off by an hour or two. The answer is that your immune system is much like the bouncer at the local nightclub, and they have very specific timing to follow.

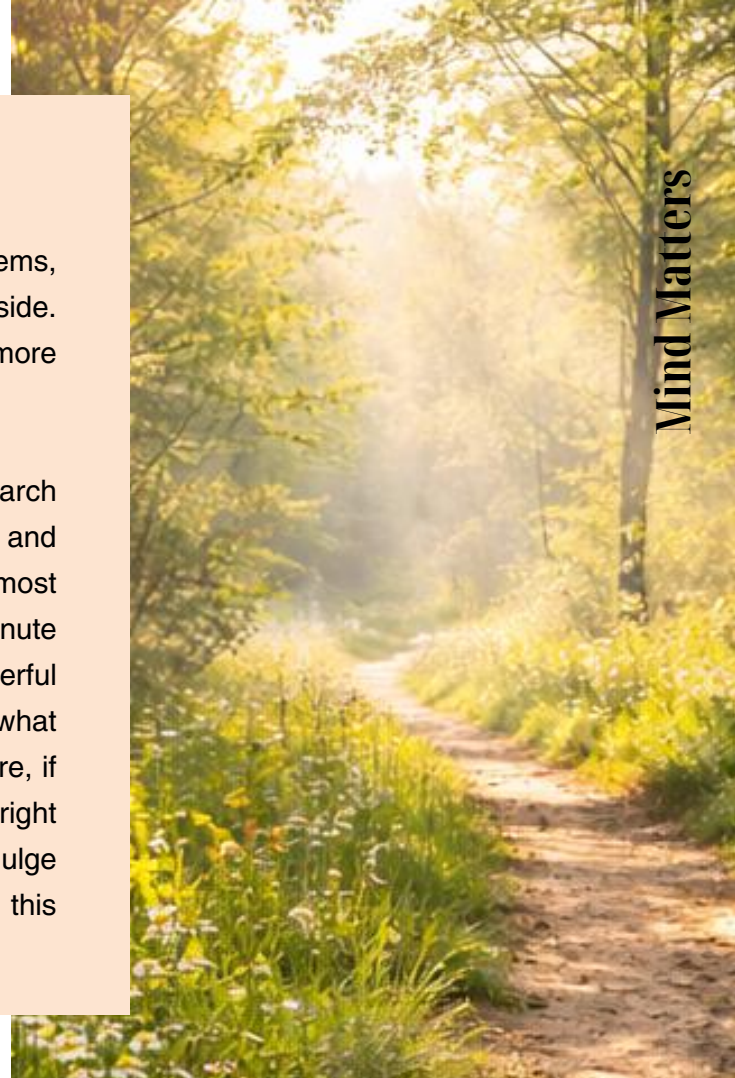
Your daytime hours are the time when this "bouncer" is most vigilant and on high alert, keeping watch at the front door. In fact, studies have shown that the body actually heightens its inflammatory responses, such as leukocyte trafficking and proinflammatory cytokines, during the day because this is the time when you are most likely to be exposed to "troublemakers" such as bacteria and viruses. If your internal clock is off, the bouncer might be in the back taking a coffee break when the "troublemaker" comes through the front door.



The 30-Minute Efficiency Hack

Most of us believe that in order to solve our sleeping problems, we have to spend our whole morning strolling outside. However, science has revealed that our minds are much more efficient than we think.

In a study carried out by the Biological Rhythms Research Laboratory, researchers compared different light patterns and determined what type of light "reset" our clocks most effectively. The researchers realized that a single 30-minute dose of bright light, especially after waking, was a powerful one. This short period of time was able to yield 75% of what we could obtain from two hours of light exposure. Therefore, if we can find a few minutes, say half an hour, to sit near a bright window or step outside onto our balcony, we can indulge ourselves with a majority of what we can obtain from this experience without missing our first meeting of the day.



Why "Blue" is the Magic Colour

However, not all light is equal when it comes to your brain. Your SCN has a bit of a fussy streak and is most responsive to short-wavelength "blue" light.

You have special cells in your eyes called ipRGCs, and they use a photopigment called melanopsin to detect blue light. Although your regular photoreceptor cells, called your cones, play a part in getting the light signal started for the first few minutes, they don't do the "heavy lifting" when it comes to keeping the signal going over time. This blue light signal sends a message to your brain to stop producing melatonin, your "vampire hormone" that makes you sleepy, and start producing cortisol to get you moving!

Phase-Advancing Your Life

When you get light in the morning, you are doing what scientists call a "phase advance." This effectively winds your internal clock forward, making it easier to fall asleep earlier that night and wake up refreshed the next day.

For Canadians trying to cope with the "spring forward" time change, light in the morning is the best tool we have to combat "circadian misalignment," or that tired, out-of-sorts feeling that comes with seasonal changes. By aligning your internal clock with the solar day, you aren't just fixing your sleep; you are supporting your heart, your metabolism, and your mood.

Key Takeaways

- **The 30-Minute Rule:** One 30-minute session of bright morning light has 75% of the benefit of much longer periods of exposure.
- **The Bouncer Schedule:** Your immune system has a natural circadian rhythm, making it more "bouncer-like" during the day, protecting you when you are most active.
- **Blue Light is Key:** Your master clock in your brain is most sensitive to blue light, which is abundant in natural morning sunlight, allowing melatonin suppression and increasing daytime alertness.
- **Morning for Advancement:** Exposure to light after waking results in a "phase advance" that shifts your entire sleep-wake cycle earlier, allowing better alignment with the spring sun.

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Canadian Indigenous Seed Saving: Preserving Culture and Food Security

For thousands of years, Indigenous peoples have been the original seed keepers of this land. Today, communities across Canada are reclaiming that role—one seed at a time.



*"These have stories.
Listen to
them."*

Conceptualized by:
Anthony Testa
Editor

The Original Seed Keepers

Long before seed catalogues arrived in the mail, Indigenous seed keepers collected saved and shared seeds from the plants that sustained them. For generations, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples across Turtle Island carried a tradition that sustained them and their culture.[5].

My first-year gardening, I bought a packet of tomato seeds from a big box store. They grew fine. But last summer, a friend who is Mohawk from Six Nations handed me a small envelope. Inside were corn seeds—her family's corn, grown on the same land for generations. She said,

"These have stories.
Listen to them."

I planted them— I understood.

That is what seed saving is about. Not just growing food. Holding memory.

These weren't just seeds. They were medicine. Food. Memory.

Robin Wall Kimmerer, the celebrated Indigenous author and botanist, once wrote: "In some Native languages, the term for plants translates to 'those who take care of us' [5]. That relationship—plants taking care of us, and us taking care of plants—is at the heart of Indigenous seed saving.

A seed is not a commodity. It is a relative. A gift. A promise.

"Seeds carry stories, language and the taste of home."

What Is Seed Sovereignty?

Seed sovereignty is the right to save, use, and share seeds. For Indigenous communities, it goes deeper: it is about cultural survival.

As researchers from the University of Manitoba explain, food sovereignty for Indigenous peoples is a necessary struggle for cultural survival.

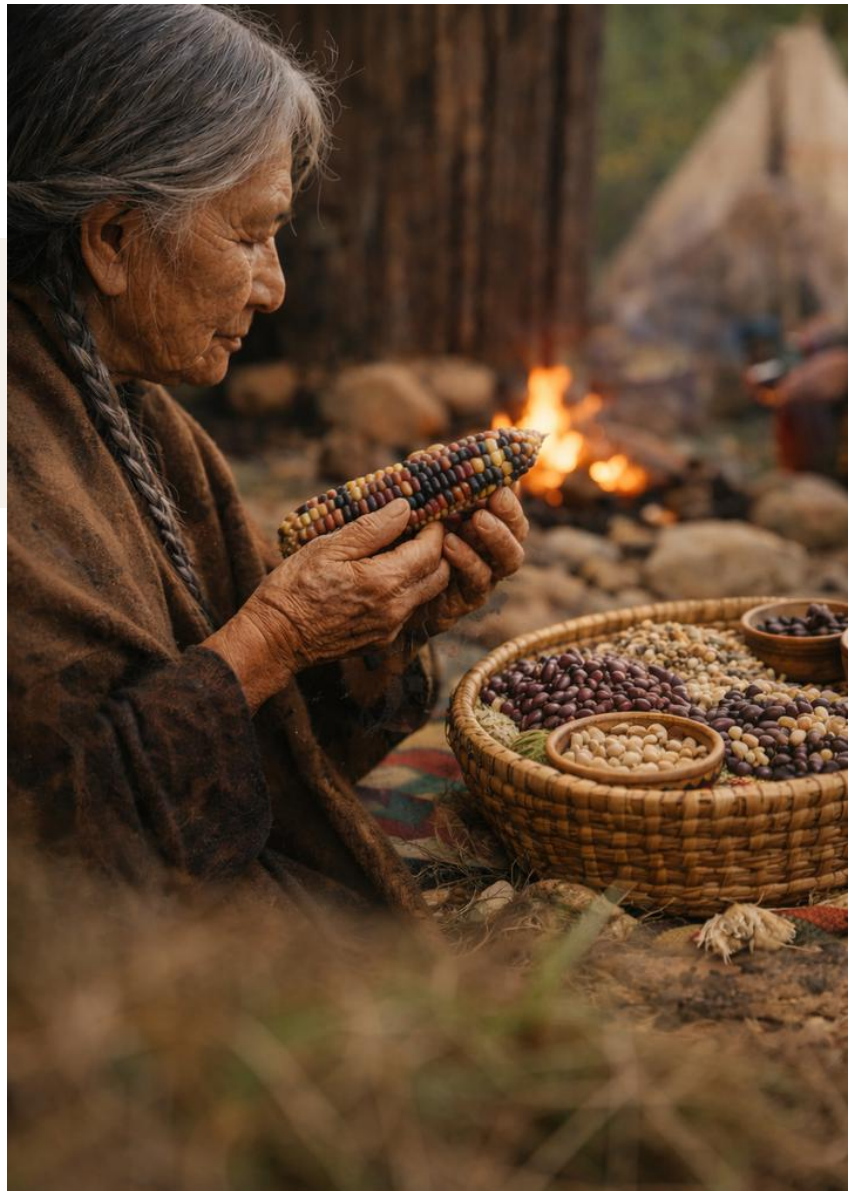
Many communities live in conditions shaped by colonial policies that disrupt traditional food systems [4].

But communities are fighting back—with seeds.

Seeds of Change: Stories from Across Canada

Mohawk Seedkeeper Gardens (Six Nations, Ontario)

In Ohsweken, Ontario, Terrylynn Brant runs Mohawk Seedkeeper Gardens. For more than seven years, she has created a space where community members reconnect with the land through traditional Haudenosaunee practices: gardening, heritage seed saving, and native plant foraging [2].



Her newly launched Indigenous Food Trees Project is working to revitalize Haudenosaunee land management by re-establishing native food trees and removing invasive species that threaten traditional foraging grounds [2].

Dr. Silvia Sarapura-Escobar describes it as a trust-building process rooted in "respectful partnerships and sustainable, culturally grounded approaches" [3].



The Braiding Food Systems Project (Northern Ontario)

In Northern Ontario, the Braiding Food Systems Project is bringing together First Nations communities with researchers from the University of Guelph. The goal?

To co-develop and re-localize seed systems [3].

Partner communities include Red Rock Indian Band, Netmizaaggamig Nishnaabeg, and Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek. Together, they are supporting community gardens, introducing climate-adapted Indigenous seed varieties, and braiding Indigenous knowledge with Western science [3].

Yukon Seed and Restoration (Yukon Territory)

In the Yukon, the First Nations Na-Cho Nyäk Dun Development Corporation co-owns Yukon Seed and Restoration (YSR), the territory's first native seed bank. The company collects hyper-local seeds—called ecotypes—that have adapted to Yukon's unique conditions: the cold, the short growing season and specific soil [1].

These seeds restore lands disturbed by mining and wildfire. Guided by Indigenous teachings, YSR follows Northern Tutchone protocols that promote leaving enough behind for plants to self-seed and fulfill their roles in feeding wildlife [1].



Community Connections

Indigenous Seed Collection Program (National)

In 2022, the National Tree Seed Centre launched the Indigenous Seed Collection Program (ISCP), an Indigenous-led initiative that supports seed collection capacity within Indigenous communities across Canada [5].

The program offers hands-on training in seed collection, processing, storage, and germination. It also provides long-term seed banking through agreements that respect community ownership and cultural considerations [5].

The program is grounded in "Two-Eyed Seeing," coined by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall—learning to see with the strengths of Indigenous knowledge and Western science, together [5].

Seeds for Food Security

For many Indigenous communities, access to healthy, traditional food remains a challenge. Colonial policies disrupted food systems. Today, many remote communities face high food prices and limited access to fresh produce.

Seed saving is part of the solution. By growing their own food from seeds and shared within the community, Indigenous families reclaim control over what they eat.

How You Can Support Indigenous Seed Sovereignty

1. Learn about the land.

Understanding whose territory you are on is a first step toward respecting the seed-keeping traditions that have existed there for millennia.



2. Support Indigenous-led organizations.

Consider donating to or volunteering with initiatives like the Indigenous Seed Collection Program or Mohawk Seedkeeper Gardens.

3. Grow native plants.

If you garden, incorporate native plants. They support biodiversity, climate resilience, and Indigenous cultural needs.

4. Listen.

Follow Indigenous seed keepers. Attend community events when invited. Amplify Indigenous voices.

The promise of a Seed.

Across Canada, Indigenous communities are reclaiming their role as seed keepers—not to return to the past, but to build a future rooted in sovereignty, resilience, and relationship with the land.

That is not just seed saving.

That is resurgence.





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About this article: This article was written to raise awareness of Indigenous seed sovereignty initiatives across Canada. For more information or to get involved, please reach out to the organizations listed in the sources.

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Parkinson's Awareness: Separating Fact from Fiction

Conceptualized by: **Anthony Testa**
Editor

"Sitting at breakfast, I noticed my husband's hands were shaking. It was the first sign that Parkinson's had entered our lives—and while everything changed, we learned that change doesn't mean the end of a full life."



This April, more than 550 Canadians will hear three words that change everything: "You have Parkinson's." Here is what everyone should know.

April is Parkinson Awareness Month. Around the world, people wear tulips—the symbol of hope for the Parkinson's community—to spark conversations about a disease that touches more Canadians than most realize [1].

Every single day in Canada, 18 people are diagnosed with Parkinson's disease.

That means in April alone, more than 550 individuals in this country will learn they have this condition. By the end of the year, that number will reach over 6,500 [1].

Yet despite how common it is, misunderstanding about Parkinson's remains widespread.

Let's separate the facts from the fiction.

What Is Parkinson's Disease?

Parkinson's is a progressive neurological disorder.

That means it affects the brain and worsens over time. There is currently no cure, and no treatment that can slow or halt its progression [1].

But here is what that does not mean: it does not mean life ends with a diagnosis. With proper medical care, a strong support system, and the right information, many people with Parkinson's live a full, active, and meaningful life [1].

Parkinson Canada describes the disease as complex and highly individual. No two people experience it the same way. In fact, there are as many different kinds of Parkinson's as people who are living with it [2].

Myth 1: Parkinson's Only Affects Movement

This is the most common misconception. Because tremors are visible, many people assume Parkinson's is "just a movement disorder."

The truth: Parkinson's affects far more than movement.

While motor symptoms like tremor, slowness (called bradykinesia), stiffness, and balance problems are certainly part of the disease, many people find their quality of life is actually more affected by what doctors call "non-motor symptoms" [1].

These include:

- Constipation and bladder issues
- Loss of sense of smell
- Depression and anxiety
- Sleep problems (especially acting out dreams)
- Cognitive changes
- Difficulty swallowing

Not everyone experiences all of these, and symptoms vary greatly from person to person. But awareness of these less-visible symptoms is crucial for early detection and proper care [1].

Myth 2: A Parkinson's Diagnosis Is a "Death Sentence"

This myth persists, but it is simply not true.

The truth: Parkinson's itself is not fatal. Most people with Parkinson's can maintain a good quality of life for many years with proper management [2].

One neurologist describes it this way: Parkinson's is not a death sentence, but it is a "life sentence"—meaning it requires ongoing work. There is more effort involved in maintaining wellness: exercise, nutrition, sleep, and taking medications on time all become essential parts of daily life [2].

With that effort, many people continue doing what matters to them for years or even decades after diagnosis.

The Gut-Brain Connection Returns

Our companion article Gut-Brain Connection reminds us of how spring produce feeds your mood. That same gut-brain connection is playing a major role in Parkinson's research—right here in Canada.

In fact, Parkinson's has been consistently linked to changes in the gut microbiome, sometimes appearing years before motor symptoms begin. Canadian researchers are at the forefront of this work [3].

A major 2024 study from the University of British Columbia and the University of Calgary found that people with Parkinson's show distinct changes in their gut bacteria compared to healthy controls. The study identified seven different bacterial species that were present at different levels in people with Parkinson's [3].

Dr. Silke Appel-Cresswell at UBC's Pacific Parkinson's Research Centre and Dr. Laura Sycuro at UBC's Calgary International Microbiome Centre are leading this research, investigating whether these gut changes might help predict or even influence how the disease progresses [3].

Exercise Is Powerful

If there is one message to take away from current Parkinson's research, it is this: exercise is medicine.

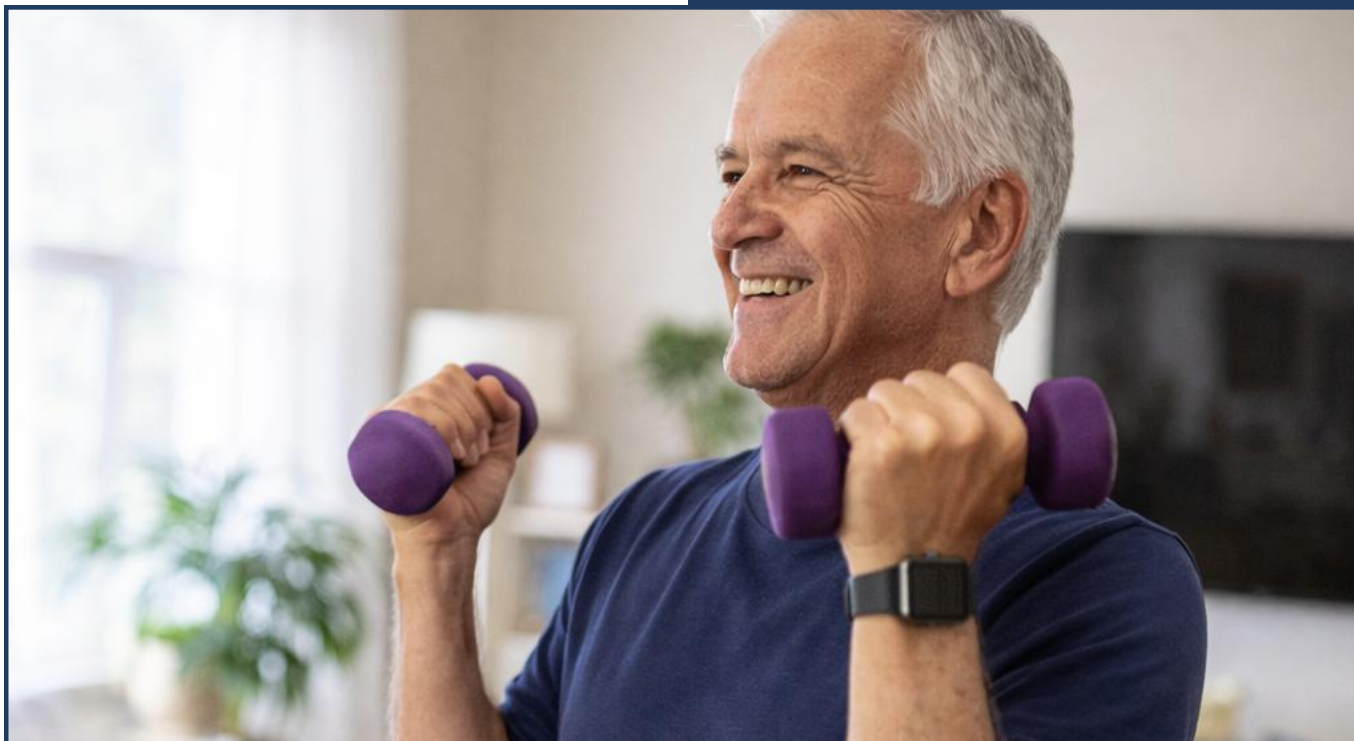
According to neurologists who specialize in Parkinson's, exercise does more than just keep muscles strong. It actually helps the brain use dopamine more efficiently, creates new connections between brain cells, and may help reduce the spread of Parkinson's in the brain [2].

The best approach includes multiple types of movement:

- Cardiovascular exercise
- Strength training
- Stretching and balance work
- Skill-based activities like boxing, dance, or ping-pong

Exercise helps with energy levels, walking, balance, and even voice strength.

And the benefits are not just immediate—regular exercise can help people function better for longer [2].



Resources for Canadians

If you or someone you love is navigating Parkinson's, you are not alone. Parkinson Canada offers a wide range of free resources, including:

- Every Victory Counts® Canadian Edition: A comprehensive guide created with input from over 50 Parkinson's experts, allied health professionals, and Canadians living with the disease. It covers everything from medication and treatment to exercise, nutrition, and emotional health [2][4].
- Educational fact sheets: Topics include apathy, bowel management, depression, sleep issues, swallowing problems, and more—all available at no cost [4].
- Support line: 1-888-664-1974, Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. ET [5].
- CARE Fund programs: Across Canada, community programs offer free exercise rehab, music therapy, and even improv classes designed specifically for people with Parkinson's [5].

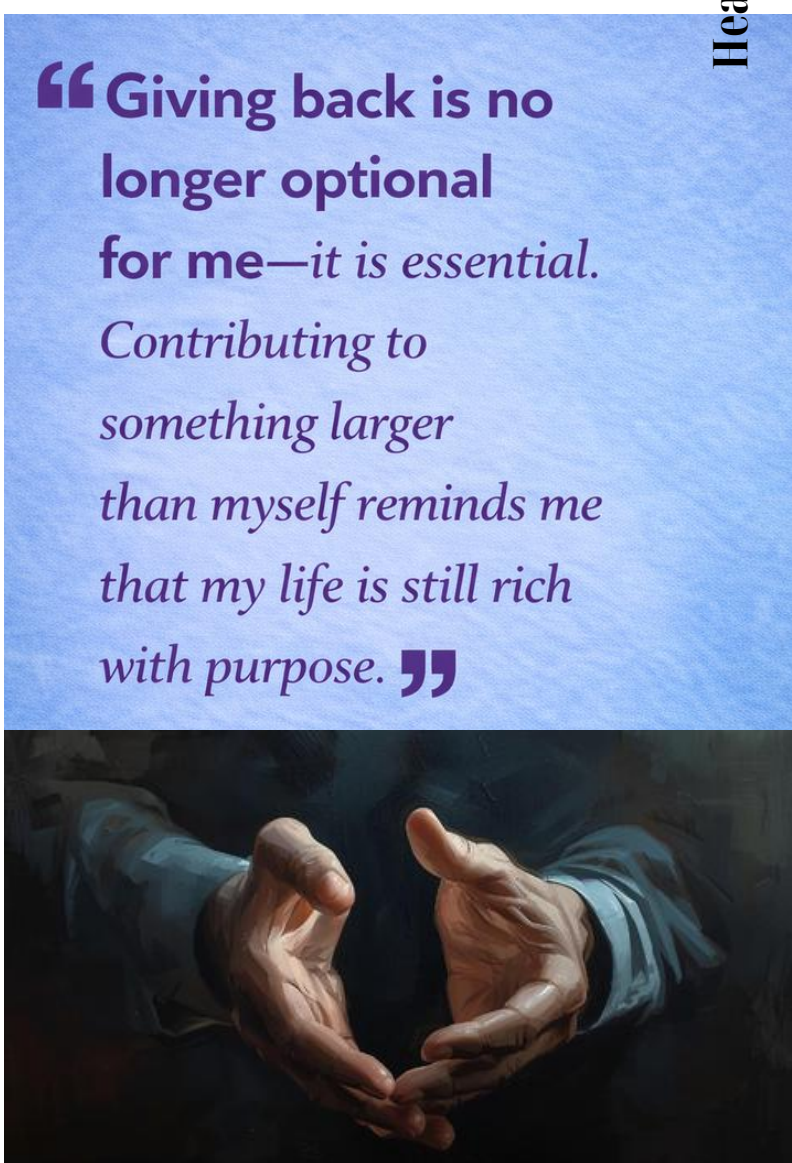
How You Can Help

Parkinson Awareness Month is about more than learning facts. It is about seeing the person behind the diagnosis.

Carlota Lee, who lives with progressive supranuclear palsy (a Parkinson's-plus condition), puts it beautifully:

"Giving back is no longer optional for me—it is

essential. Contributing to something larger than myself reminds me that my life is still rich with purpose" [5].



This April, you can:

- Wear a tulip to start a conversation
- Share accurate information with friends and family
- Support Parkinson Canada or local programs
- Simply listen to someone's story, their struggles, their victories

Hope for the future.

Parkinson's is complex. It is different for every person. There is no cure—yet. But there is hope, there is community, and there is meaningful action people can take.

As Professor Bas Bloem writes in the forward to Every Victory Counts:

"Parkinson's is having its day. We need to find better ways of preventing Parkinson's from happening in the first place, and we need to find improved solutions to optimally support all of you who have already developed symptoms. This means that we all must raise our voices to secure more funding and raise further awareness" [4].

This April, let's raise our voices—with facts, compassion, and hope.

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Important: This article is for informational and awareness purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. If you or a loved one are experiencing symptoms that may be related to Parkinson's disease, please consult a neurologist or movement disorder specialist. Always speak with your healthcare provider before making changes to medication, diet, or exercise routines.



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The Gut-Brain Connection: How Early Spring Produce Feeds Your Mood

Conceptualized by:
Anthony Testa
Editor

Do you feel weird this time of year? Canadian asparagus, peas, and rhubarb can fix that.

You know that feeling when April rolls around?

The snow has finally melted. The sun stays out past dinner. And yet... You are irritable. Your stomach feels bloated. Your brain is foggy. You snap at your partner over nothing.

If this sounds familiar, here is the good news: you are not broken. You are not imagining it. The solution might be waiting at your local farmers' market.

Welcome to the gut-brain connection—and why early spring produce from Canadian soil might be exactly what your mood needs right now.

Your Gut Is Talking— to Your Brain, constantly.

Scientists once believed the gut was just a digestive tube. A processing plant. Food goes in. Waste comes out. Simple.

Your gut microbiome is much more complicated than a transport highway.

Your gut—home to trillions of bacteria—does a lot more than break down food. Your microbiome organisms talk to your brain, constantly.

According to researchers at the University of Calgary, the gut and brain communicate through a network of nerves, hormones, and

immune signals. That pathway is called the vagus nerve. Think of it as a two-way phone line running straight from your digestive system to your skull [1].

Here is the surprising part: about 90 percent of your body's serotonin—the chemical that makes you feel calm and happy—is made in your gut. Not your brain.

When your gut bacteria are unhappy, your brain feels it. When your gut bacteria are well-fed and thriving, your mood follows.

Why Spring Messes with Your Gut (and Your Head)

Winter changes us. We eat heavier foods. We move less. We see less sunlight. All of this affects our gut bacteria.

A study from the University of British Columbia found that seasonal changes actually shift the composition of your microbiome. Less dietary fibre in winter means less food for the "good" bacteria. By April, your gut is running on empty [2].

Then spring arrives suddenly. Your body tries to wake up. Your gut tries to adjust. And for a few weeks, you feel off.

Researchers call this a "high perception state." Your gut and nervous system are both becoming more sensitive at the same time. That's why small stressors—a late train, a grumpy email—feel enormous.

But here is where spring produce comes to the rescue.

Early Spring Produce: Nature's Mood Food

The first vegetables to poke through Canadian soil are not just pretty. They are specifically designed to feed the bacteria that calm your brain.



Asparagus

Asparagus is one of the earliest crops in Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec. It is also one of the most powerful prebiotics on the planet.

A prebiotic is food for your good gut bacteria. Asparagus is packed with inulin, a type of fibre that your body cannot digest. Instead, it travels to your large intestine, where your good bacteria feast on it. When they eat, they produce compounds that travel up the vagus nerve and tell your brain to reduce stress.

The Ontario asparagus season starts in May. Look for spears that are firm and bright green. The thinner the spear, the more tender.

Peas

Fresh spring peas are not the mushy ones from a can. Real peas—the kind you pop out of the pod—are loaded with fibre and plant compounds that act like fertilizer for your microbiome.

According to research from the University of Guelph, increasing vegetable intake, including peas, supports the growth of bacteria linked to lower stress and better mood regulation [3].

Peas thrive in the Maritimes and Alberta. If you cannot find fresh peas, frozen peas are frozen within hours of picking. They retain almost all of their gut-health benefits.



Rhubarb

Rhubarb is a strange one. It looks like pink celery. It is sour. And it is one of the most powerful gut-healing foods you can eat.

Rhubarb contains high levels of plant compounds that specifically feed bacteria associated with lower anxiety. Early spring vegetables like rhubarb help restore the diversity your gut lost over winter.

Rhubarb grows like a weed across Canada. If you have a friend with a rhubarb patch, they will likely give you as much as you want. Just remember: the leaves are toxic. Eat only the stalks.



"Your mood this spring is not random. It is not a character flaw. It is biology."

How to Eat for Your Mood This Spring

You do not need a complicated meal plan. You just need three small shifts.

1. Aim for Two Produce Wins Before 10 a.m.

Most Canadians eat vegetables at dinner. By then, your gut has gone most of the day without fibre. Try adding a handful of peas to your eggs or a few spears of roasted asparagus to your breakfast. Your gut bacteria will thank you.

2. Eat the Rainbow.

Start with Green and Pink

All vegetables are good. But early spring greens (asparagus, peas, leeks) and pinks (rhubarb) are especially powerful because they match what your gut needs right now.

3. Walk After Eating

Light walking after meals increases microbial diversity—a key marker of gut health. Gentle movement helps keep your digestive system active and your gut bacteria thriving. Your gut loves movement. And so does your brain.



Healthy Bites

A Simple Spring Recipe to Get You Started

Roasted Asparagus & Pea Salad with Rhubarb Dressing

- 1 bunch Ontario asparagus, ends trimmed
- 1 cup fresh or frozen peas
- 2 stalks rhubarb, chopped
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- Salt and pepper

Toss asparagus and peas with olive oil. Roast at 400°F for 12 minutes. Meanwhile, simmer rhubarb with a splash of water until soft. Mash with a fork and stir in vinegar. Drizzle over roasted vegetables. Eat warm or cold.

This dish takes 15 minutes and feeds every single part of the gut-brain connection.

Magazica

Your spring reset.

Your mood this spring is not random. It is not a character flaw. It's biology.

I have experienced this in my own kitchen; the first bunch of Ontario asparagus hits the pan, and something shifts. Not just in my meal—in my energy.

Your gut bacteria went through winter with less of the food they need. Now that Canadian soil is waking up, the first vegetables are designed to feed the specific bacteria that talk to your brain.

When you eat asparagus, peas, and rhubarb this season, you are not just enjoying the first taste of spring. You are feeding the trillions of tiny organisms that help you feel calm, clear-headed, and resilient.

Your gut and your brain—the conversation starts with what's on your plate.

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About this article: For personalized nutrition advice, speak with your healthcare provider.

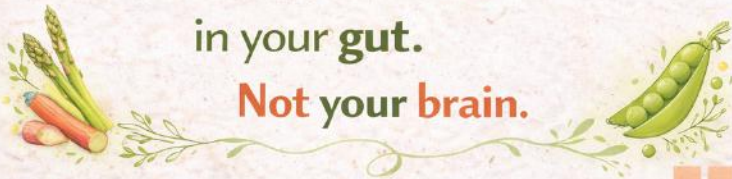
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“About **90 percent** of your body's serotonin—the chemical that makes you **feel calm and happy**—is made in your **gut**.

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Asthma Awareness: Navigating the Shift into High Pollen Season

Conceptualized by:
Suman Dhar
Editor-in-Chief

If you have ever walked outside on a lovely spring day in Canada, changed out of your parka into a light jacket, and immediately felt as if your lungs were going on strike, well, you are certainly not alone. It is a complete gong show when the weather finally breaks into something even slightly nice, but at the same time, it feels as if your respiratory system is stuck in a dusty attic. The transition into high pollen season is more than just an itchy nose; it is a very complex process that involves your heart, brain, and very confused security system inside your chest.

The Over-Eager Home Security System

To understand why a few marauding grains of

pollen make you feel like you've run a marathon in a sandstorm, we need to consider what happens when intruders enter the body. Consider the immune system a highly sensitive home security system. In a world that would ideally be in balance, the system would only sound the alarm at the presence of a true threat, like a nasty virus or dangerous bacteria.

However, in children and adults with Type 2-high asthma, the most common type of asthma, the system is set on a hair trigger. So when you breathe in a piece of completely harmless grass or tree pollen, the "alarmins" in the lungs - the system's motion sensors - sound the alarm. Rather than ignoring the intruder, the system goes into a chain reaction of chemical

signals, causing the airways to constrict, mucus to flood the "entryways," and inflammation to occur. In 9 out of 10 children hospitalized with asthma who are sensitized to at least one allergen, the security system is in a state of panic mode the entire spring season.

The Heart-Pollen Handshake

For years, we have believed that pollen activity remained in the "lobby" of the body, in the nose and lungs. However, recent studies have shown that the drama may have an impact on the heart. Scientists have found that there is a biological link between high pollen counts and acute coronary syndromes, which are events such as heart attacks.

While this is a little crazy, studies have shown that the inflammation in the lungs does not stay

isolated. A study on patients undergoing heart procedures found that high levels of grass pollen two days before the procedure were linked to an increase in hospital deaths. This is because when the alarm goes off in the lungs, it goes off everywhere else in the body, putting additional pressure on the heart.

Thunderstorms and Pollen Bombs

If you have ever experienced your breathing constricting at precisely the same moment when a springtime storm is brewing, you have not been mistaken. In fact, this is called "thunderstorm asthma" and is essentially a "pollen bomb." In a thunderstorm, air currents carry whole pollen grains all the way up into the atmosphere. The humidity and moisture cause them to break apart into thousands of small, microscopic pieces.



When the downdrafts of the thunderstorm occur, all of this microscopic pollen is blown back down to ground level in large quantities. These small pollen pieces pass directly through the body's natural filters in the nose and go all the way down into the lungs. In thunderstorm asthma cases, emergency room visits for asthma have increased by 2.7 times, and hospitalizations have increased by 16 times. If you see dark clouds rolling in during peak grass pollen season, it would be a good idea to stay indoors and fill your boots with some activities to do inside.

The "Pollen Hangover"

But pollen doesn't only make you wheeze and cough; it can also make you feel surprisingly sleepy. In fact, in a study done on people

sensitive to ragweed pollen, an interesting correlation was found between pollen counts and daytime sleepiness. However, as an aside, you're not usually the most sleepy the very second you walk through the weeds.

In fact, the study found that daytime sleepiness actually occurs two days after the first exposure, giving the phenomenon the somewhat humorous name "pollen hangover." The idea is that the inflammatory reaction actually takes 48 hours to fully percolate through the system and affect the person, illustrating the fact that high pollen counts are indeed a whole-body reaction.

Why the Season Hits Harder Now

If it seems like "pollen season" is beginning earlier and extending longer than it did when

WHY THE SEASON HITS HARDER NOW



you were a kid, you are correct. Climate change is a big part of this, with increased temperatures and CO2 levels expected to boost pollen counts and even the "allergenicity" of this pollen.

And to top it all off, urban air pollution can even interact with this pollen, making it more likely to bind to your airways and increase its allergic impact. It's a complicated web of influences, from the quality of housing we have to global weather patterns, that will determine how difficult a time we have this spring. By knowing more about what's going on in our bodies and how we respond to environmental changes, we can prepare for this transition.

Key Takeaways

- **The System Failure:** Childhood asthma is "Type 2-high," meaning that the immune system is programmed to recognize harmless pollen as a dangerous invader.
- **The Cardiac Link:** Grass pollen counts have been linked to increased mortality rates among heart attack victims.
- **The Storm Effect:** Thunderstorms can break pollen apart into small pieces, allowing it to penetrate deeper into the lungs and cause emergency room visits.
- **The Two-Day Lag:** Sleepiness can peak two days after a high pollen day, giving you a "pollen hangover."

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Digital Detox Weekends: Reclaiming Your Attention Span

Conceptualized by:
Suman Dhar
Editor-in-Chief

So, if perusing your weekly screen time report is like binge-watching, well, you are certainly in good company. We have all had that moment of "tech-induced vertigo" when we suddenly grasp the fact that we have spent more time perusing other people's vacations than actually living our own. The problem, however, is that this "hum" is not just a personality quirk, but actually a biological toll on the brain and the body. The silver lining, however, is that science is now indicating that taking a "time-out" from technology is the answer to rebooting the hardware in your head.

Your Brain is an Overheated Laptop: The Science of Digital Overload

Think of your brain as a high-powered laptop. When you've got fifty tabs open, from email to social media to news notifications, and that one random Wikipedia page about poutine, the fan is screaming, and the whole thing comes to a grinding halt.

This is what researchers call "cognitive overload." Research has demonstrated that when we are constantly immersed in the digital world, not only are our attention spans fatigued, but they are, in fact, depleted.

In one study, a staggering 80% of university students reported that they used their smartphones for more than four hours a day every single day. This, of course, puts one into a state of "Chronic Overstimulation." But if people choose to take a step back from this "digital noise," then "Attention Restoration" happens. This is not just a "feel-good" theory; this is actually letting your brain's cognitive resources recharge, just like letting that overheated laptop cool down in a quiet room.

Evicting Stress Rent-Free: Why Digital Detox Lowers Your Cortisol

Stress is often thought of as a mental battle, and while that is certainly true, the body also

keeps a remarkably detailed scorecard. When we're glued to our phones, our "smoke alarm," or the HPA axis, is often stuck in a state of high alert. Scientists recently put this to the test among medical students, or "the ultimate keepers," to use a Canadian expression for those who are ultra-competitive.

The results, after just two weeks without any digital distractions, were astounding. The students experienced an 18 percent reduction in morning cortisol levels, or the body's main stress hormone. The really impressive numbers, though, were for the "nightclub bouncer" of the body, or the immune system. Inflammation markers such as CRP and Interleukin-6 (IL-6) fell by 40 percent. In other words, by unplugging, these students didn't just become less stressed; they literally began healing from the inside out.



Breaking Up with Your Wi-Fi: Managing Nomophobia and Netlessphobia

If the thought of going outside without your phone makes your heart skip a beat, then you may be suffering from "nomophobia," or no-mobile-phone phobia. Or perhaps you are suffering from "netlessphobia," that particular kind of fear that strikes when the WiFi bars are gone. These are no longer just modern

phenomena; these are actual anxiety responses to disconnection.

The research indicates that a digital detox is actually a form of exposure therapy. "By engaging in this self-regulation strategy, the brain can develop a kind of 'psychological tolerance.' While the initial three days may be a bit of a struggle, like kicking a sugar habit, the 'digital craving' soon passes." Students who did this self-regulation strategy felt significantly more peaceful and less distracted, proving that one doesn't need to be "connected" to be whole.



Fill Your Boots with Real Life: The Power of Alternative Activities

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings in the latest crop of "detox" studies is that once the phone is tucked away in the drawer, half the battle is won. The other half is getting on with some "alternative activities." These are the magic things that will get the brain back on track. This is supported by the "Attention Restoration Theory," which argues that natural environments are particularly good at restoring our brains to normal after the "focused concentration" demanded by our devices.

Medical students in the study found that when they added things like mindfulness and social time with peers to their screen time detox, they had the greatest improvement in heart rate variability. This is an important marker of a strong nervous system. It turns out that the "mental reset" is much easier to accomplish when one is actually doing something.

Why It Matters: Reclaiming Your "True North" and GPA

Beyond the immediate stress-relieving benefits, the idea of digital detox is about "eudaimonic well-being," or, in plain English, living life with purpose and self-enhancement. Without the distraction of every "ping" and "buzz," you have the mental energy to focus on what really matters.

Perhaps the greatest benefit of digital detox is reserved for students. Those who practice digital detox have been shown to have significantly higher GPAs. By removing the small but regular interruptions to study time brought on by smartphones, they are more effective learners. Are you a student or a professional? Either way, having an attention span is having the ability to perform at peak levels. So why not give it a try this weekend? Give yourself a little "technology sabbath." Your brain - and your "bouncer" - will thank you.

Key Takeaways

- The 40% Rule: Reducing non-essential screen time can lower inflammatory markers like CRP by nearly 40%, giving your body a much-needed break from chronic stress.

- The 'Detachment' Hack: You don't need to move to the woods; research shows that even short durations of detachment can significantly enhance cognitive functioning and problem-solving.
- Pairing is Caring: A digital detox is most effective when you replace screens with "alternative activities" like walking, journaling, or face-to-face social connection.
- The 48-Hour Reset: While digital separation can feel uncomfortable at first, studies show that "digital separation anxiety" typically subsides as the brain builds psychological tolerance over time.

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Puddle-Jumping Workouts: Embracing the Rain for Outdoor Cardio

Conceptualized by: **Anthony Testa** | Editor

Remember when you couldn't resist jumping into a puddle right after it rained?



Let's be honest: if we waited for the perfect weather to exercise in Canada, we'd be sedentary from October to April. A nation of weather warriors, from the misty coasts of British Columbia to the sudden downpours in Halifax, our forecast often includes rain.

But what if we stopped viewing rain as a barrier and started seeing it as a feature? It's time to lace up your sneakers, find the biggest puddle in the park, and embrace the "puddle-jumping workout."

50

Not only does it build mental grit, but it might also be the most fun you'll have getting fit this season!

The Canadian Rain Mindset

To be active in this country, you must adapt. As noted by BCIT Commons, the rain doesn't stop hikers or runners in Vancouver. In fact, the article highlights that "rainy or misty weather and forest smell can make running, hiking, or

walking even more beautiful." It turns your workout into a sensory experience rather than a chore.

This mindset is about reframing the forecast. Instead of waiting for perfect conditions, Canadians are learning to treat the weather as the changing backdrop to a consistent fitness story.

Why You Should Splash Out

Running in the rain offers unique benefits that you just can't replicate on a treadmill.

1. Built-in Resistance Training

Pushing through waterlogged paths or running into a headwind requires more effort. According to Canadian Running Magazine, changing your running conditions provides a different stimulus that helps improve overall fitness and stamina. It's nature's version of a weighted vest.

2. Mental Toughness

There is a distinct sense of accomplishment that comes from finishing a workout when everyone else is hiding under an umbrella. As Canadian Running Magazine emphasizes, embracing rainy runs builds "mental resilience and grit." It prepares you for race day when the weather inevitably turns against you.

3. Fewer Crowds

The fair-weather exercisers stay home. This means you get the trails, the seawall, or the track almost entirely to yourself.

The Art of the Puddle-Jump

Making a rainy workout "fun" requires a slight

shift in tactics. Forget about hitting a personal best; focus on play.

1. Gear Up for the Splash Zone

The Golden Rule: There is no bad weather, only bad gear. You need a proper moisture-wicking base layer—no cotton, as Canadian Running Magazine notes, because it "hoards sweat and magnifies the chill." A waterproof, breathable shell and a brimmed hat are non-negotiable for keeping the rain out of your eyes.

2. The Route Selection

This is your time to be a kid again. Skip the boring loops. Head to a trail known for its mud or a park with big, splashy puddles. As noted in Vancouver's fitness culture, the forest trails on the North Shore—like Lynn Valley—become even more magical in the rain, with the mist and fresh scents adding to the experience.

3. Turn It Into a Game

Instead of a structured tempo run, do a "puddle-jump" interval session. Sprint between puddles, do high-knees through the big ones, and treat slippery grass patches as agility drills. It forces you to focus on stability and balance, which improves your proprioception more than a dry pavement run ever could.



The Science of the Splash

If you are worried about the physical effects of training in the damp, take a cue from Canadian sport science. Dr. Heather Sprenger, a physiologist at Ontario Tech University and former national team athlete in both ice hockey and road cycling, has spent her career researching how the body handles environmental stress. Her work explores nutritional and environmental physiology to enhance training adaptation and performance. While her research often focuses on elite athletes, the principle applies to us puddle-jumpers: the body adapts. Training in varying conditions builds a robust physiology.

Post-Workout Protocol

The fun doesn't end when you get home—the recovery is part of the ritual. As any seasoned Canadian outdoor enthusiast will tell you, the key is to have a towel ready at the door to avoid muddy footprints trailing through the house.

- **The Hot Shower:** The ultimate reward. Nothing feels better than warming up after a cold, wet effort.
- **Gear Care:** Rinse off your shoes and jacket immediately. Stuff wet shoes with newspaper to help them dry faster and maintain their shape.
- **Refuel:** Your metabolism revs up to keep you warm during a rainy run. Reward that engine with a warm drink and a hearty snack.

So, next time you hear the pitter-patter of rain on the roof, don't cancel your plans. Layer up, head out, and find the biggest puddle you can

jump in. It's good for your heart, your head, and your inner child.

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The Spring Wellness Expo



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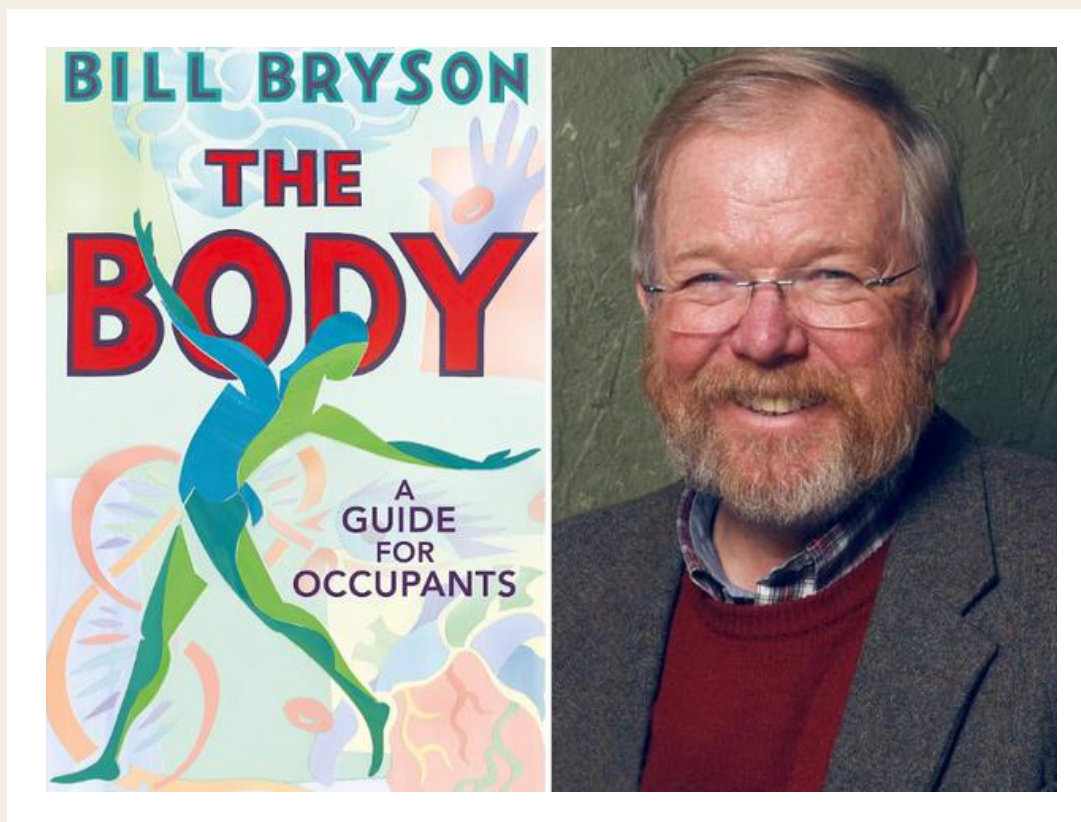
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Your Body Explained Like Never Before: A Fascinating Tour from Head to Toe



Reviewed By
Suman Dhar
Editor-in-Chief

From cells to systems - discover the miracle you live in every day

If you were to take your body to a hardware store in an attempt to price out the various elements within, you would likely leave the store feeling rather cheap. In his most recent book, **The Body: A Guide for Occupants**, released in 2019, Bryson sets the record

straight in his inimitable style, referencing the Royal Society of Chemistry, which has determined, "To make a human being of the size of the actor Benedict Cumberbatch, you would need to spend about \$151,578.46 on the open market."

This is the quintessential Bryson approach: taking the mundane reality of our physical existence and presenting it in shocking, often pricey, statistics and historical curiosities. As a nation of Canadians living in an era of high-speed living, Bryson provides a rather sobering, yet celebratory, reality check in reminding us that we are, in fact, "warm wobbles of flesh" that we take completely for granted.

The book is more like a witty and gruesome tour of a highly complex museum than a dense medical textbook. Bryson's main thesis is that the body is a miracle of self-organization. We are a group of inert materials – the same stuff we find in a pile of dirt – and we somehow decide to be "us." From the density of the DNA in every cell (which would stretch ten billion miles to Pluto and beyond if woven into a single strand) to the fourteen thousand blinks we make every day, the scope of what goes on inside us is "positively enormous."

Perhaps one of the most interesting things about Bryson is that he is able to humanize the history of science. Instead of just describing the immune system, he introduces us to the "noble and selfless" scientists who risked their very lives to study it. He tells us about the "harrowing experience" of novelist Fanny Burney, who had to undergo a mastectomy in 1810 without any anesthesia. This is just one of how Bryson keeps the reader interested, even in chapters that are essentially just a refresher on Grade XII biology.

However, the book is not without criticism. As a critic of wellness, one must say that Bryson becomes much sharper - and perhaps more necessary - when writing about how we deal with the form we inhabit. The author argues that we are currently living in a slow-motion "suicide by lifestyle." He argues that for most of our history, we were killed by infectious diseases. Now, however, we are killed by our own decisions. He argues that 70% of the diseases that kill us today, such as type 2 diabetes and some heart diseases, are "mismatch diseases," or diseases that occur

when our hunter-gatherer bodies are trying to survive in a world of sedentary lifestyles and overeating.

Bryson's treatment of nutrition is especially interesting to the contemporary wellness seeker. He unmaskes the "massive racket" of the antioxidant supplement industry, pointing out that there is no scientific evidence to support the idea that these supplements will counteract the effects of aging. He also unmaskes the insidious effects of sugar, pointing out that Heinz ketchup is nearly one-quarter sugar, more sugar per volume than Coca-Cola. His advice on how to deal with this is refreshingly simple: stick to the outside aisles of the supermarket.

Another issue the author addresses is the "more is better" philosophy that is commonly found in medicine. The author argues that America is spending more on healthcare than any other nation in the world. However, America is ranked mediocre at number thirty-one when it comes to life expectancy. The author also addresses the issue of "incidentalomas," which are discoveries made during routine checkups. These discoveries lead to overtreatment, which is harmful to patients. The author argues that some medical procedures, such as the testing for prostate cancer, are "hardly more effective than the flip of a coin," leading to surgeries that alter the lives of patients for something that might never have harmed them.

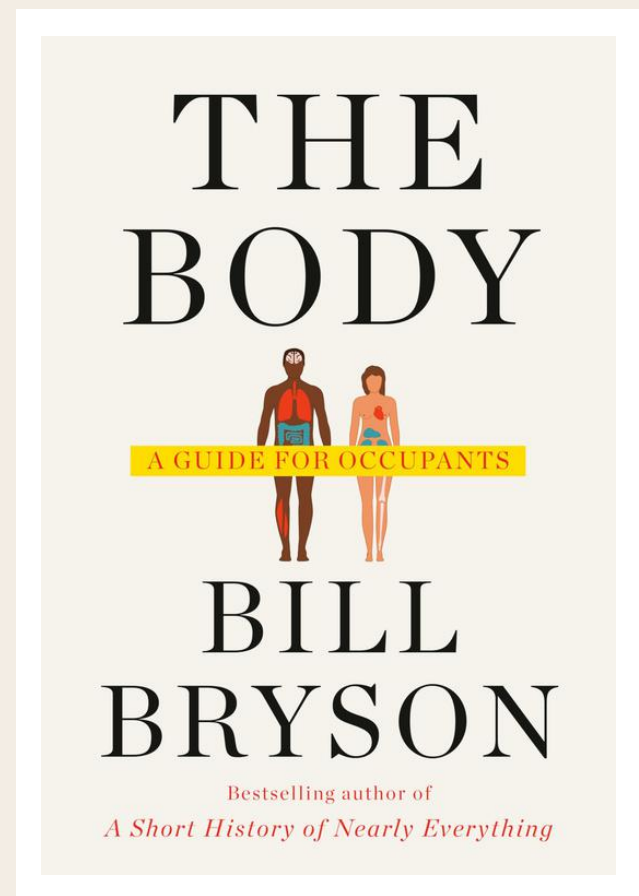
Bryson is at his best when he is debunking myths, and he sets the record straight: "We don't lose most of our heat from our heads, we

don't use only 10 percent of our brains, and the eight glasses of water a day thing has no basis in science whatsoever." This is all done in a witty manner, so the book doesn't feel like a lecture. The writing moves along at a breakneck pace, and this is perhaps the only flaw with the book. The author is in such a hurry to get to everything from the "Microbial You" to the "Nether Regions" that some subjects, such as the pain of chronic pain or migraines, are dealt with in just a handful of paragraphs. Of course, this is probably done to avoid bogging down the average reader with too much cellular detail.

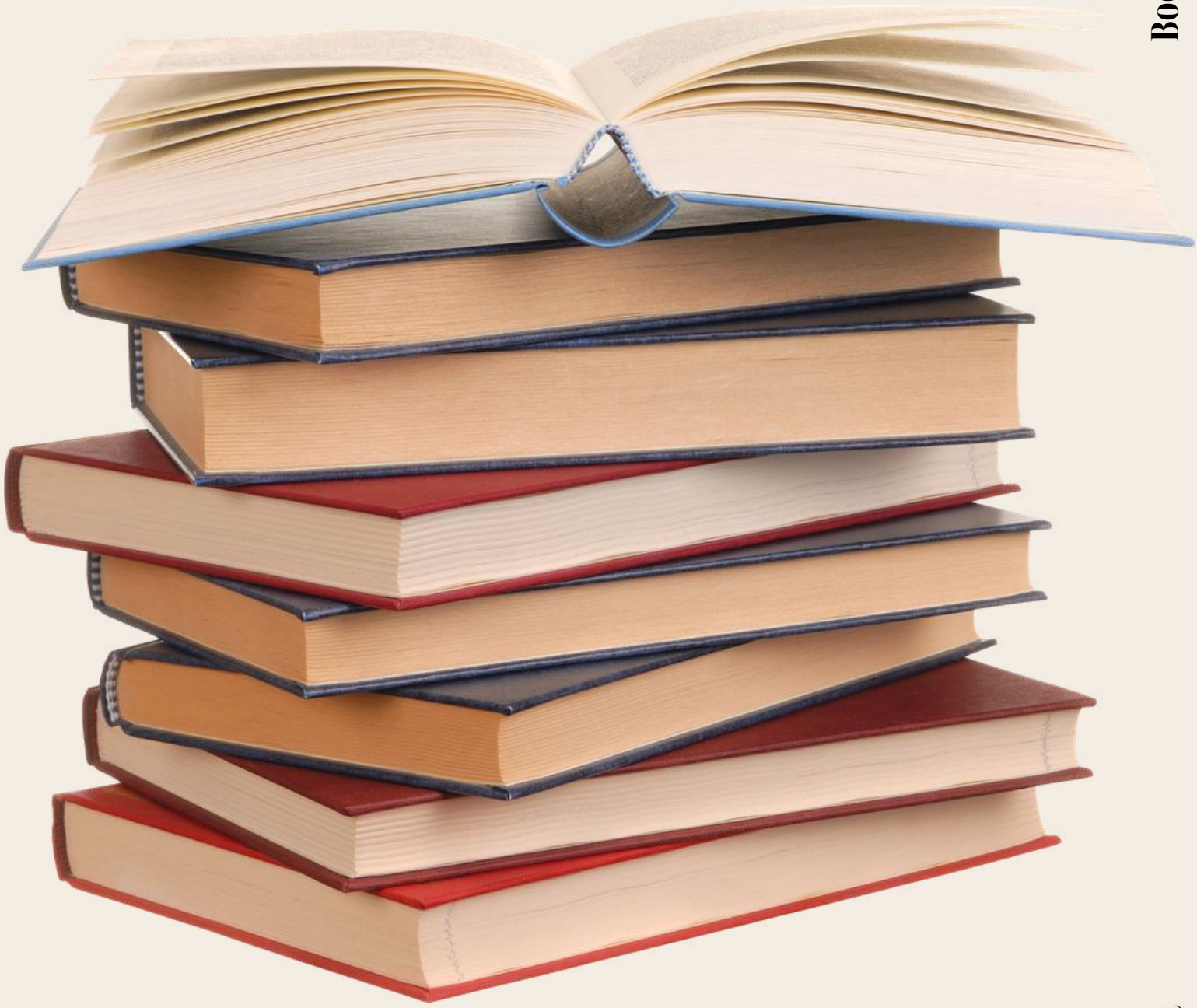
The prose moves at a breakneck pace, and this may be the only problem with the book. The author is so intent on getting through everything from "The Microbial You" to "The Nether Regions" that he glosses over such things as the suffering that is chronic pain or the intricacies of migraines, but perhaps this is a ploy to prevent the layperson from getting lost in the details of cell structure.

In the last chapters, Bryson's writing becomes less full of wonder and fuller of urgency. "For every year of increased life expectancy we have gained since 1990, only ten months of that are 'healthy'." We have become very good at adding to the duration of our deterioration, but less successful at adding to our wellness. Bryson's final advice on the secret to life, after reading thousands and thousands of pages and talking to experts, is surprisingly unglamorous: "Eat a little less, move a little more."

The Body: A Guide for Occupants is a magnificent example of science communication, capable of evoking in the reader a sense of being "cosmic and miraculous," while also keeping them aware that they are a "warm wobble of flesh" inhabited by trillions of microbes who do not even realize they exist. It is a book that all occupants of a human body should try to read, to understand the manual for the vessel they find themselves in, and perhaps even treat it a bit kindlier.



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Book of The Month

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