



Wellbeing Insights

Living a Better, More Vibrant Life



Breaking Down Barriers of Otherness with Active Listening

When was the last time you felt heard? That is, the person you were speaking with was completely engaged in your conversation and deeply interested in understanding you. It's a wonderful gift to feel heard. Perhaps that is due in part to how rare it is. We all know the value of this feeling, yet many of us fail to cultivate the skills needed to give our presence to others. The skill of listening is not outwardly valued as highly as the skill of speaking eloquently in our society. Yet, it is a powerful tool to help close the divide between people in an atmosphere where tensions are high around societal and political issues, and we are combatting feelings of isolation, loneliness and other emotions that come with long-term social distancing.

Throughout the pandemic, many people have turned to social media as an outlet for connectedness. While it's a way to post thoughts, ideas and experiences, it's more of a platform to share than to listen. This can create a virtual tinderbox for perpetuating "otherness." We have a tendency to scroll through our feed and divide people into "us" and "them," which can cause rifts to deepen, based on assuming instead of understanding. Imagine if we approached others with curiosity and respect. It's possible to narrow the space between us and them with a bit of active listening, putting the humanity that we share above the opinions that we may not.

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If you're tired of feeling at war with others or simply frustrated over how they could believe/promote something, here are some tips to help you listen, connect and coexist more peacefully:

Set an intention to understand. Set a rule for yourself that you will not interrupt, defend or attempt to persuade. Aim to understand and not to debate or “win” the conversation. If you're passionate about a certain issue, it's natural to want to convince others or defend your ideals. You may also feel that listening to the other side is a weakness or backing down. Consider that one of the most courageous things you can do is be quiet, listen and absorb. You won't agree with everything that's said, and that's ok. Remember, your goal isn't to come to an agreement, it's simply to acknowledge the other person and provide them with an opportunity to feel heard.

Keep a student mindset. Focus on being interested and curious versus being perceived as interesting or an expert. Go into the conversation with the attitude that you can learn something from everyone. Be selfish in pulling every piece of insight you can out of the other person in order to find what you have to learn from them. Again, that doesn't mean you have to buy into their viewpoints, simply that you can gain new insight from their experience in the world. Refer to the Mindful Minute segment for an exercise in basic active listening.

Set assumptions aside. When you're speaking with someone you consider an “other,” it means you already have some assumptions or bias. Avoid the urge to ascribe viewpoints or put words in the other person's mouth. This means no defensive or targeting questions; simply stay curious. If strong emotions are unavoidable as the result of opposing viewpoints, consider acknowledging that you are both passionate or have been shaped by different life experiences, or respectfully suggest taking a break from the conversation to reflect, research and gain some perspective.

Extend empathy. Perhaps the strongest tool for understanding someone is to put yourself in their shoes and try to imagine the world as they've experienced it. That is, give a piece of your heart, not a piece of your mind. Keep in mind that their message may extend beyond their actual words. Try to visually identify their emotions and sentiments through their body language and tone of voice.

W.A.I.T. before speaking. When you feel tempted to interject, ask yourself “Why Am I Talking?” If the answer is to present an argument or belittle the other person's viewpoint, reconsider. Instead, ask more clarifying questions. If the answer is to provide a “one-upper” story of your own, reconsider. Get curious and ask them more questions about their experience versus redirecting the conversation back to you.

Mindful Minute

Active listening requires that you truly hear the other person and notice when you are getting lost in your own thoughts. Similar to a basic mindfulness practice, it's all about staying present in the moment. If you find yourself drifting in thought, keep coming back to genuine listening. Once you are in the moment, you can work on going deeper in conversation. Listening involves paying attention to both what the other person is saying and what that person is trying to communicate beyond words. **The HEAR practice can help you cultivate deeper listening skills.**

Halt — Halt whatever you are doing and offer your full attention.

Enjoy — Enjoy a breath as you choose to receive whatever is being communicated to you – wanted or unwanted.

Ask — Ask yourself if you understand what's being communicated and, if you don't, ask for clarification. Instead of making assumptions, bring openness and curiosity to the interaction.

Reflect — Reflect back to them what you heard. This tells them that you were really listening.

Adapted from mindful.org



If they **respect you**, respect them. If they **disrespect you**, **still respect them.**

Do not allow the actions of others to decrease your good manners, because **you represent yourself**, not others.

– MOHAMED ZEYARA



On the Menu

Spaghetti Squash

While there are many varieties of squash, no squash has gained quite the popularity that spaghetti squash has over the past few years. This calabash or vegetable squash is unique due to the thin, translucent strands it produces once cooked. These strands or “noodles” give spaghetti squash its descriptive name. The mild, delicate flavor resembles that of yellow summer squash. However, spaghetti squash is considered a winter variety and is usually harvested starting in early fall. Spaghetti squash keeps for months in cool storage, making it available throughout the winter and spring. Look for squash that is pale yellow and devoid of any bruising or green blemishes, which is a sign that it’s not ripe yet.

In addition to the noodle-like consistency, some note a mild pasta-like flavor. Since spaghetti squash offers a lower carb option for pasta dishes, it’s a healthy option for those monitoring their carb intake. But the benefits don’t stop there. Spaghetti squash has a variety of vitamins and minerals with a long list of health benefits. These nutrients include:

- **Vitamin B6** – Plays a key role in keeping the brain and nervous system functioning properly.
- **Antioxidants Beta-Carotene & Vitamin C** – Two antioxidants that can curb free radical formation and reduce your risk of chronic diseases.
- **Potassium** – Helps regulate fluid balance, muscle contractions and nerve signals. A high-potassium diet may help reduce blood pressure and water retention, protect against stroke and prevent osteoporosis and kidney stones.
- **Manganese** – A trace mineral that’s vital for bone health.
- **Fiber** – Promotes regularity and aids in supporting digestive issues like diverticulitis, intestinal ulcers, hemorrhoids and GERD.

Keep It Fresh!

Store squash in a cool, dry place (preferably 55 to 60° F) for up to 3 months. Refrigeration ripens the squash, but it can be stored in the refrigerator for 1 to 2 weeks. Cut squash should be tightly wrapped in plastic wrap, refrigerated and used within a few days.

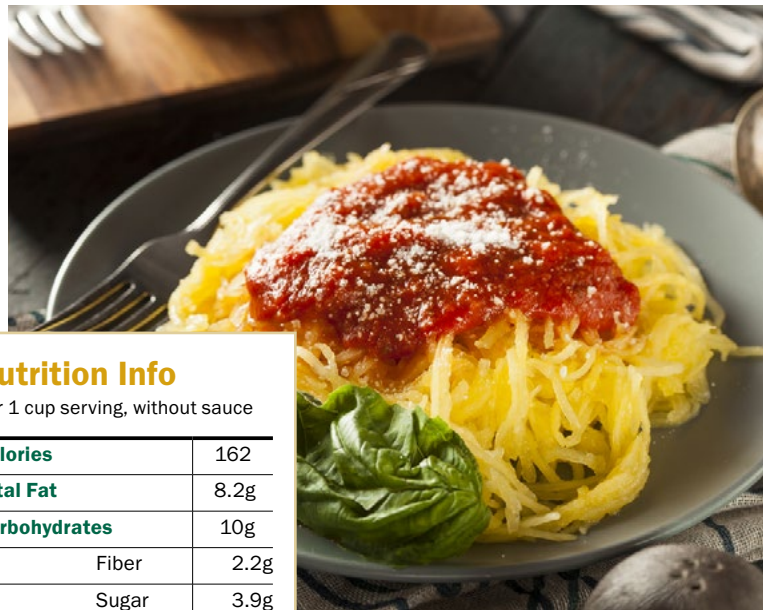
Simple Spaghetti Squash Noodles

Ingredients:

- 1 spaghetti squash
- 2 tsp. extra virgin olive oil
- Sprinkle of salt and pepper
- Optional: Pasta sauce or butter for tossing with the finished noodles

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400° and line a large, rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Slice the squash in half from top to bottom. Use a spoon to scoop out the spaghetti squash seeds and discard. Drizzle the insides of each squash half with 1 teaspoon olive oil and rub it over the inside, adding more if necessary. Sprinkle salt and pepper lightly over the interiors of the squash and place them cut-side down on the prepared baking sheet. Bake for 40 to 50 minutes, until the cut sides are turning golden and the interiors are easily pierced through with a fork. Once the squash is done, fluff the interiors with a fork to make the insides spaghetti-like. Add your favorite seasoning or healthy pasta sauce, if desired.



Nutrition Info

Per 1 cup serving, without sauce

Calories	162
Total Fat	8.2g
Carbohydrates	10g
Fiber	2.2g
Sugar	3.9g
Protein	1g

Adapted from CookieandKate.com

Taking Control of Your Debt

In 1972, psychologist and Stanford University professor Walter Mischel conducted a study that gave children the option to eat one marshmallow immediately or wait and have two marshmallows later. This groundbreaking experiment came to be known as the “Stanford marshmallow experiment” and a classic study of delayed gratification. Follow-up studies revealed that those children who waited for the bigger reward tended to have greater success later in life.

When it comes to making financial moves, the same concept holds true – delayed gratification pays off in the long run. Saving until you have enough money to make a purchase is smarter than making payments over time with interest. Some financial experts recommend avoiding debt entirely, but if you do take on any debts, the reason why makes all the difference.

In some instances, you’re incurring debt to improve your life in a lasting, meaningful way, such as buying a home, obtaining an education or starting a business. This ‘good debt’ may include home mortgages and student or business loans taken with the intention to ultimately put you in a better financial situation.

Almost every other kind of debt falls into the category of ‘bad debt’ or that which doesn’t make a lasting, positive change. This may include auto loans, credit cards, store credit or other types of revolving credit. These kinds of debt generally have higher interest rates and fees so that you end up paying more than the actual worth of your purchase.

When it comes to debt, there are three common mistakes:

1. Focusing on the present instead of the future

Financing purchases cannot only add additional dollars to the item’s price through interest but also can potentially create instances where paying for the item is more financially difficult down the road.

2. Failing to understand all of the terms

Misunderstanding the fine print on your agreements can add up. Pay attention to interest rates and look out for items that may require additional spends, such as annual fees.

3. Incurring debt without a set payoff strategy

To get yourself on the road to repayment, you need to know how

much debt you actually have and what steps you’ll take to pay it off. There are many ways to pay off debt, including paying the debt associated with the highest interest rate first or paying smaller amounts of debt in full to check things off your list. Regardless of which method you choose, make sure you always pay at least the minimum payment on each account each month.

Be intelligent in how you manage debt. If there’s a way to significantly lower your interest rate, such as transferring balances to lower rate cards or negotiating with creditors for better terms, then do so. Make sure you aren’t just switching cards or refinancing loans to save 0.1% in interest. Applying for credit too often will cause your credit score to decrease, and this can have major negative ramifications. When it comes to borrowing money or financing large purchases, higher credit scores can give you access to better options, such as lower interest rates, better terms and more availability to borrow.

These options can help create more manageable debt repayment situations for you in the future. Taking control of your debt and increasing your credit score are key to establishing financial freedom.

4 Ways to Reduce Food Waste at Home



Harvest is here! If the rush of fresh produce has you scrambling for ways to use it before it spoils, you're not alone. With the rise of popular subscription services claiming to "save ugly food," there's been added buzz around reducing food waste. We throw away 63 million tons of food per year, even though 40 million Americans are considered food insecure, so the concern is warranted. However, purchasing aesthetically imperfect produce may not be the grandiose solution it appears.

Most produce is put to perfectly good use; it's not the prettiest plum that goes into that jar of baby food or the reddest, roundest tomato that gets turned into ketchup. So while this trend has upsides for some farmers and the customers who can afford the services, it's not sparing us from the majority of food waste. In fact, 43% of food waste happens at home, making it the single biggest source of food waste. If you're looking for practical ways to decrease food waste at home, here are some tips:

1. Avoid over-purchasing and preparing. Meal planning goes a long way to prevent waste. Try to include multiple meals that use a particular veggie if you're worried about using it in time. Stick to the list when you're shopping and know how much you need. Additionally, if your family is finicky about leftovers, don't be shy about altering recipes to reign in the size of the batch. For a great meal planning template, [click here](#).

2. Store produce correctly. Two thirds of in-home food waste is due to spoilage. Properly storing your produce can drastically extend its shelf (or fridge) life. Did you know that the best way to keep asparagus fresh is to store it like cut flowers, upright in a jar with a bit of water? Or that mushrooms keep much longer in a paper bag than in the plastic carton they are typically sold in? For a list of proper produce storage, [click here](#).

3. Learn to preserve. Techniques such as pickling, fermenting, canning and

drying are just as effective at reducing waste today as they were thousands of years ago. If you have berries, bananas or other fruit that is ripening faster than you will use it, freeze it. Cucumbers, radishes or onions about to spoil? Try boiling vinegar, water and seasoning and pouring it over the slices. This quick pickling technique will buy you up to four weeks of freshness. For more information on preservation techniques, [click here](#).

4. Get friendly with your freezer. Fresh herbs and spices reaching their end? Chop them up and freeze them in an ice cube tray with olive oil. Veggies and fruits typically do best with an individual quick freeze. For this method, clean, dry and cut (if necessary) before spreading into a single layer on a baking sheet and tossing in the fridge. Once frozen, the produce can be transferred to a freezer bag. For more information on freezing, [click here](#).

The Buzz About Blue Light-Blocking Glasses



If you've been looking for relief from eye strain or poor sleep quality, chances are you've run across the latest trend in wellness – blue light-blocking glasses. They're designed to lessen the amount of blue light (short-wavelength light) that the wearer is exposed to and are marketed as a means of alleviating eyestrain and associated conditions (e.g., headaches, dry eye, etc.) and improving sleep quality.

While we're exposed to blue light in many forms, that omitted by electronics is the subject of scrutiny. Researchers agree that blue light from LED devices, such as laptops and smart phones, may block the body's natural production of the sleep-aiding hormone melatonin. While the simple solution is to limit screen time (or at minimum, adjust screen brightness settings) a few hours before bed, people are searching for alternative solutions that do not involve changing habits of device use. Blue light-blocking lenses may appear to be a logical option for solving this shortage of melatonin creation; however, quality research to support the theory is still somewhat lacking, and the market is fairly unregulated, making it difficult to know and control the quality of the glasses available.

A 2017 meta-analysis conducted by the College of Optometrists found “a lack of high-quality evidence to support using blue light blocking spectacle lenses for the general population to improve visual performance or sleep quality, alleviate eye fatigue or conserve macular health.”

Furthermore, The American Academy of Ophthalmology has gone on record saying they do not recommend any kind of special eyewear for computer users, stating “The symptoms of digital eye strain are linked to how we use our digital devices, not the blue light coming out of them.”

Despite the lack of evidence in favor of blue light-blocking lenses, countless users testify that they suffer less eyestrain and other symptoms after wearing them. The bottom line – speak with your doctor about the best options if you're struggling with eyestrain, poor sleep, headaches or other symptoms. You can also try these tips:

- Adopt the 20-20-20 rule, recommended by many vision-related organizations. Every 20 minutes, look at an object at least 20 feet away for 20 seconds.
- Adjust your seat or the position of your computer so your eyes are about 25 inches from the screen. Position the screen so you're gazing slightly downward.
- Use a matte screen filter to reduce glare.
- Use artificial tears when your eyes feel dry. Blinking, which keeps our eyes lubricated, can drop by up to 50% when focusing intensely on a computer screen.
- Pay attention to the lighting in the room. You might try increasing your screen contrast. Ensure you're not staring at a bright screen in a dark room.

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