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SPECIAL ISSUE

20 Ways
to be
Healthier
in **2020**



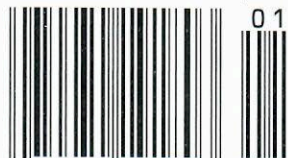
**It's time for
a fresh start**

- Take a mini adventure.
- Try habit stacking.
- Improve your memory.

... and 17 more ideas!

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**Keep a
childlike
sense of
wonder.**

Think back to the cheerful days of childhood, back when you spent your days running and playing, back when you weren't worried about work or the mortgage payment. Those days of wonder and delight hold a key to health and happiness.

By Christa Melnyk Hines

For more than 30 years, Bowen White, M.D., a Kansas City-based family physician, author, and speaker, has been on a mission to spread more playfulness and joy, both in his private practice and around the world.

“If you want to be healthy and you want to have great relationships, start by having a better relationship with yourself. Lighten up a little bit. Don’t take yourself so seriously. Figure out what you enjoy doing, and do more of that,” says White, who is a founding board member of the National Institute for Play and the author of *Why Normal Isn’t Healthy: How to Find Heart, Meaning, Passion and Humor on the Road Most Traveled*.

One way White shares his playful sense of humor is as a humanitarian clown. Dressed in a funny “Dr. Jerko” costume, he visits patients at hospitals, orphanages, and refugee camps around the world.

“I was goofy before I started clowning, and goofier since I started clowning,” White says, who was introduced to clowning by his good friend Patch Adams, the doctor made famous by Robin Williams in the hit movie *Patch Adams*.

“It has allowed me to be even more open to the possibilities of the moment and to see opportunities for playfulness in ways that I hadn’t before I started clowning.”

Your joyful spirit will brighten your life—and the lives of others.

When we take a more lighthearted approach to our interactions, we naturally infect our social circles with optimism, strengthen relationships, and boost each other’s health.

“You can reverse heart disease without medicine or surgery if you decrease fat intake to 10 percent of calories and get three other things (assuming you’re a nonsmoker): exercise, stress management, and the healthy support of a group,” White says.

Laugh more. Flirt with your partner. Parent more playfully, such as making silly faces with your preschooler.

Play is the opposite of depression.

Play offers an intrinsically rewarding, free-spirited way to move more. Visit any playground and watch kids laughing, running, swinging, and sliding. They aren’t thinking about the calories they’re burning.

Instead of dragging yourself through another dull workout, choose activities that you enjoy—and invite your friends. According to a study published in *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*, you’re more likely to stick to exercise when you participate with a group, and you’ll experience enhanced emotional well-being too.

“The opposite of play isn’t work. It’s depression,” says psychiatrist Stuart Brown, M.D., in his TED talk “Serious Play.” Brown is the founder of the National Institute for Play and the author of *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*.

Play, Brown says, is like oxygen. It’s not only critical to our happiness, optimism, and social relationships, but also to our creativity and innovation.

Recall the wonder of childhood, of discovering and trying new things out of curiosity, taking risks, and making mistakes. Often, the trial and error of play leads to creative ways to solve problems.

A childlike spirit makes you feel more alive.

Playfulness is an attitude free for anyone to adopt, and it keeps you young.

“We are meant to grow young. We are meant to stay . . . in touch with the wonderful behavioral characteristics of the child,” White says. “If you pay attention to the fact that you’d like to have a more playful life, you end up having the energy to be more playful, more alert, awake, alive, and enthusiastic.”



Christa Melnyk Hines is a journalist and the author of *Confidently Connected: A Mom’s Guide to a Satisfying Social Life* and *Happy, Healthy & Hyperconnected: Raise a Thoughtful Communicator in a Digital World*.