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HOW TO FLOURISH AND THRIVE



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Coming Back to Life



How to Go from Languishing to Flourishing

From the outside looking in, Brit Miller is living the life she's long worked for, and one many entrepreneurs dream about. She's a successful brand designer for mission-based businesses and a happily married mom of two children.

"I'm working with people who are doing amazing things with their communities. Everything is really great. So, why am I not over the moon about it?" Miller wonders. "It translates into my personal life as well. I'm an artist. I'll think, *I should grab my sketchbook and do some stuff*, but I'm just like, *Nah, I'll just sit here a little while and not do anything*. That's how I know I'm in a funk. I'm just devoid of any creativity or drive to create in my surroundings."

As many as one in five Americans are experiencing what mental health practitioners term "languishing," which is yet another lingering by-product of living through the stress and uncertainty of a long-term pandemic and cultural disruption.

What is languishing?

According to researcher Corey L. M. Keyes, author of *Flourishing: Positive Psychology and the Life Well-Lived*, languishing is a "state in which an individual is devoid of positive emotion toward life, and is not functioning well either psychologically or socially."

If you have lost your energy and motivation, feel stuck, or have a blah feeling, it's time to revitalize your sapped spirit.

By Christa Melnyk Hines

Unlike with depression, someone who is languishing isn't sad, but they aren't happy either. Rather, they may be feeling detached, listless, unmotivated, or stuck.

"The way most people describe it to me is it's a feeling of 'just blah, everything seems the same. I don't have any creative juices flowing,'" says Christine B. L. Adams, MD, an adult, child, and adolescent psychiatrist, and coauthor of the award-winning book *Living on Automatic: How Emotional Conditioning Shapes Our Lives and Relationships*.

The Lingering Pandemic Effect

According to a 2021 Ipsos poll, people "who are languishing are more likely to say COVID has impacted their life than those who are flourishing."

In an effort to keep each other safe and out of hospitals, most of us altered our lives dramatically. We stayed close to home, creating bubbles around our families, and generally stuck to the same routine day in and day out. We avoided our usual social outlets. Vacations were canceled, many churches and schools closed or went online. Our favorite restaurants (if they were open) were serving out of carryout boxes, and concert halls shuttered.

Even as life began to go back to normal, life under the shadow of COVID-19 remained unpredictable, confusing, and out of control for many people.

"Uncertainty takes the control of the situation away from you. You can't plan into the future very well," Adams says. "It's very unnerving to be on a roller coaster when you either don't know when the roller coaster is going to end, or you don't know when the guy's going to stop the machine so you can get off."

Juggling the multiple demands of home, family, and work, while news headlines and worry reels do loop-the-loops through your head, can siphon your psychological well-being if you aren't scheduling regular pit stops to rest and recharge.

"It's almost like overstimulation," Miller says. "You kind of just shut down and start blocking things out because you're thinking about too many

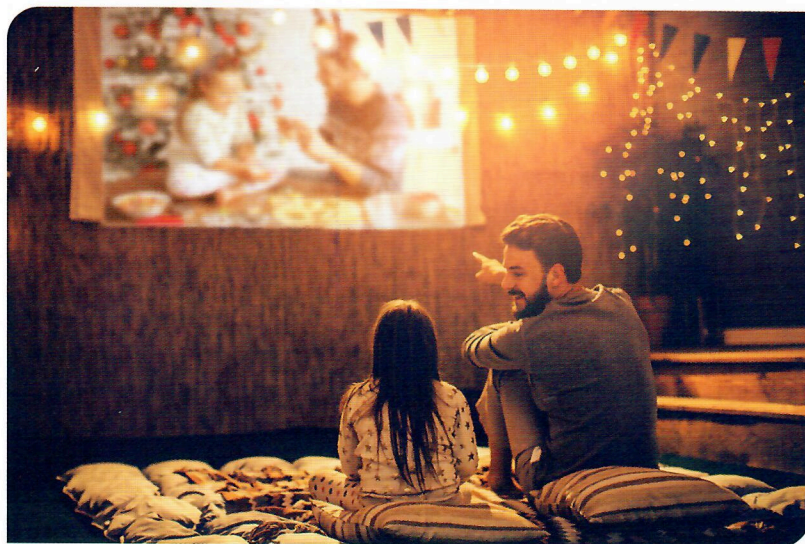
things, committed to too many things, and taking in too many things."

How to Go from Languishing to Flourishing

"We are living in a very fearful world right now. And because there's not really been a break, other than brief glimpses of hope, it feels as if there's no end in sight," says Rennie McKinney, director of Behavioral Health, AdventHealth, Shawnee Mission, Kansas.

Fortunately, there are ways to revitalize your sapped spirit. The first step is to get intentional about doing something different to help yourself break through the morass.

One way to refuel your psychological tank is to do something you've never done before.



Engage in novel experiences.

One way to refuel your psychological tank is to do something you've never done before. For example, take a drive through the country or explore different parts of your city. Hike a new trail. Pack a picnic lunch and visit a new park. Go fishing or kayaking. Plant a moon garden (a garden filled with fragrant white or silver plants that reflect light and can be enjoyed even at night).

One experience that Miller found helpful was taking herself on a solo retreat. "I rented an Airbnb near home, and for three days I didn't do any work. I listened to my favorite music. I took a bath."



With renewed creative energy, she came home and ended up rebranding her business.

"I feel like doing something drastic, taking a step out of my comfort zone and taking that first step to put something in motion instead of just hanging out and wanting it to be different is usually enough to shake things loose," Miller says.

Learn a new skill.

Tapping your curiosity is another way to move yourself out of a funk. Take a self-development class, try a different fitness routine, or learn a new language (Duolingo is a free online option). Visit an ethnic grocery store and try making a recipe with ingredients you've never tasted before.

Check out YouTube for multiple free tutorials, from water coloring to cooking and knitting.



Are You Languishing? 9 Signs to Watch For

Sometimes a "blah" feeling toward life comes over you gradually, slowly creeping into your daily life. Here are a few ways to know when you're slipping from flourishing to languishing:

- 1 You have difficulty concentrating or focusing.**
- 2 You feel detached from normal activities and people.**
- 3 You are procrastinating more than normal.**
- 4 You have a lack of energy or motivation.**
- 5 You feel empty or devoid of feeling (apathy).**
- 6 You are not interested in your usual activities or hobbies.**
- 7 You feel stuck.**
- 8 You frequently experience fatigue or are sleeping more than usual.**
- 9 Your moods aren't especially high or low. (You aren't happy, but you also aren't sad.)**

Adults aren't the only ones who suffer from languishing. Children and teens can experience it too, so don't overlook signs of languishing in young people.

Plan a family activity.

"Have a costume night or a themed cuisine dinner, like Mexican food night," Adams suggests. "Let your kids loose in the kitchen, and let them plan and prepare dinner."

Other activities might be a candlelit dinner, eating outside on your back patio, or having a role-reversal day where kids do things parents normally do, like laundry, loading and unloading the dishwasher, taking out the trash, or feeding and exercising pets.

Go quiet.

When your phone battery runs low, you plug it in and leave it alone so it can recharge. Do the same for yourself. Inform your family that you will be unavailable for an hour (or an afternoon) to make space for quiet reflection, prayer, and rest.

"Sit on your deck, lie in your hammock, go to the park and look at the trees. Do absolutely nothing. Read a book, draw, take photographs, and sleep. Do whatever you need to do to get down-time," Adams says.

Plan mini celebrations.

Make time for low-key celebrations that add everyday magic to your life. Celebrate your child's half-birthday. Drive by a friend's house and drop off a fun surprise at their door.

Dust off your fine china and have a Sunday tea party, complete with scones or another treat. Host a simple s'mores party on your driveway for friends and neighbors to celebrate a new season.

Practice gratitude inside and out.

Experiment with how a regular, intentional gratitude practice can shift your frame of mind. In a journal, write down one thing you feel thankful for each day.

"It's the really small things that can make us feel grateful," McKinney says. "There's so much back-and-forth and anger out there. I think we just need to get a little happy back, and that takes effort. Seeking out the stuff that I'm thankful for every day helps, and it doesn't take any time. It's a two-second thought in my head that can change my perspective."

Show others you are grateful for them by mailing a card to a friend, or baking cookies for a neighbor.

Encourage your kids to come up with creative ideas too. For instance, children in my neighborhood tucked painted rocks along the walking trails, and they chalked sidewalks with positive messages to give walkers a smile.

Pause and pay attention.

Even if you're in a hurry, take moments to pause and reflect. McKinney recalled one stressful workday when she went to visit a friend at a neighboring hospital campus.

"This other hospital had the most beautiful flowers. I drove around the block so I could soak it in. It's so easy to get caught up in all the stress that's happening right now in the world. By being more intentional about pausing, it reset my mind and my focus for the day," McKinney says.

Opportunities for random acts of kindness usually occur when we slow down and focus on

Who is at High Risk for Languishing?

While anyone can experience languishing, there are some occupations and environments that put people at greater risk, including:



People who work arduous, repetitive jobs for weeks at a time, like oil rig workers



People stuck in the same environment/routine day in and day out, such as prisoners



People who work 70+ hours a week, including CEOs, entrepreneurs, and workaholics



Overextended, on-call surgeons, ER physicians, and medical school students

SOURCE: CHRISTINE B. L. ADAMS, MD


the present moment. When you're running into the grocery store and see someone on an electric scooter struggling to reach something, offer to help. Hold the door open for people. Not only will others appreciate your sensitivity and awareness, you'll be rewarded with an internal burst of happiness.

Revisit old favorites.

Rewatch a favorite movie, reacquaint yourself with a long-lost hobby, replay your favorite music, or bike that trail you've always loved. Get carryout or reserve a table at a restaurant you've missed. Schedule a visit to your favorite museum.

And don't forget about the positive energy that comes with reconnecting with a good friend by meeting for a walk, scheduling a meal together, or chatting over Zoom or on the phone.

When to Get Help

If you continue to struggle, seek professional guidance. Even two or three sessions of talking through your concerns with a trained therapist can help provide a path forward. 

Christa Melnyk Hines is a widely published freelance journalist and author.