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Our Team

Staff Writers and Contributors

Compeer of Greater Buffalo
Hana Dawood
Victoria H
Alejandro Henry-Jackson
Brian Jacobs
Ayesha Khan
Henrich Kundel
Faizuddin Mohammed
Usman Mehmood
Laura Ott, LCSW, PMH-C
Christina Thomas
Alex Tilton

Editor-in-Chief Faizan Haq
Executive Editor Katy Defazio
Account Manager Yahya Alaryani
Design Editor Rachael Bannen
Website Editor Rozina Batool
Graphic Design SunSpin Media
Print Publication SunSpin Media
Copy Editors Victoria H, Beth Hatcher
Content Coordinator Nazish Saleem

Editorial Board

Victoria H
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CEO, JMH Advisement, LLC
Ralph Hernandez
Farina Mirza
Riffat Sadiq, MD
CEO, WNY Medical, PC
Joe Serghany, MD
CEO, Western New York MRI

Our Mission

Your Bliss explores the human spirit, the wealth of relationships, mental and physical health, and spiritual well-being. We celebrate moments of achievements, triumphs and patience for diverse audiences. Our goal is to bring you information that you can use to explore and celebrate health, wealth, happiness, and spirit.

With the ever-expanding nature of technology, knowledge and healthcare, there is a growing supply of data to take from. With Your Bliss, we find the information for you and put it all in one place. Every month, we bring you new articles on a wide range of topics so you can live a fulfilling and whole life.

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Autumn's Greatest Gift

By: Christina Thomas

There's something magical about autumn. The crisp air, changing leaves, and the thrill of finding the perfect pumpkin are reasons enough to love the season, but for many years, I didn't even know it existed.

I grew up in a desert country of sand dunes, palm trees, and blistering heat. I had no idea parts of the world had more than one season, let alone one as beautiful as fall. At seven, I experienced my first autumn and I was instantly captivated. Leaves that had been green for most of the year suddenly burst into scarlet, orange, and gold, like something straight out of a fairy tale.

But as much as I appreciate a good makeover, I've discovered that fall's best gift isn't its beauty. It's the way it invites us to slow down, lean into rest, and make time for the things that matter most.

Although many people associate summer with relaxation, I've always found it stressful. Between weddings, cookouts, and saving up for a family vacation, it feels like a mad dash to fill my days with outdoor activities and manufactured fun. Before I know it, my calendar is full, my kids are bouncing off the walls, and I'm flopping on the couch, sweaty and exhausted.

Fall, on the other hand, feels like a deep breath. The new school year brings structure and quiet evenings at home become the norm. Even fall's clothing invites me into rest. Swimsuits and shorts are traded in for cozy sweaters, wool scarves, and fleece leggings that I practically live in.

Nature slows down too. Trees shed their leaves and animals store up food and settle in for hibernation. As nature slows its rhythm, it gives me permission to do the same.

But slowing down doesn't mean doing nothing. A slower pace leads me to reflect, adjust my priorities, and be intentional about what matters. I start by decluttering my home and getting rid of what I no longer love or need. I also schedule medical appointments for myself. As boring as it sounds, eye exams, dental checkups, and bloodwork are important forms of self-care, and a reminder that my physical well-being is worth my time and energy.

Fall also gives me more time with loved ones. Friends who were busy or travelling in the summer months settle back into their own routines. As the cold drives everyone indoors, it becomes easier to plan a last-minute coffee date or just walk around the mall without a fixed itinerary. Family time gets easier too. We spend weekends picking apples, baking cookies, and drinking cocoa in front of the TV. On dark chilly mornings, we huddle by the fireplace and take a moment to connect before the busyness of the day begins.

Moments like these remind me that slowing down can be just as meaningful as filling up my schedule. From the outside, its beauty feels shallow — just a burst of colorful leaves before the cold and dark set in. But fall's real gift has never been about the leaves. It's an invitation into rest and renewal. We let go of things we've outgrown and make room for something new. We trade in our hurried schedules and daily pressures for a slower rhythm. And perhaps most importantly, we learn to find joy and purpose in the simple things: a pumpkin spice latte, a long walk, and the love of friends and family who make even the coldest days feel warm.

A Doctor's Guide to Diabetes and Prevention

By: Dr. Riffat Sadiq, CEO, WNY Medical PC, Channel Creator



November is known as National Diabetes Awareness Month. This is a great time for raising awareness about what diabetes is, its preventive care and encouraging individuals to make good decisions about their health. Diabetes is a chronic condition that occurs when the sugar level is too high in your blood which is the primary source of energy. If diabetes is left untreated it can lead to serious complications in the body. However, appropriate treatment, early diagnosis, and healthy habits can improve quality of life.

There are two types of diabetes known as Type 1 and Type 2. An autoimmune condition is considered as Type 1 diabetes in which insulin-producing pancreas cells are destroyed by the immune system. Frequently developed symptoms are excessive urination, frequent thirst, unexplained weight loss, fatigue, blurred vision and increased hunger. Insulin therapy is required regularly because insulin is considered as an essential element for converting glucose into cellular energy. People with Type 1 diabetes require proper monitoring of blood sugar regularly, appropriate physical activities and have balanced meals to manage their conditions. It can occur at any age.

The condition in which the body does not maintain the normal blood sugar level or become resistant to insulin is known as Type 2 diabetes. It is intensely interconnected with inactivity, weight, age and genetics. It can affect anybody, but with healthy lifestyle choices, type 2 diabetes can be prevented. Diabetes general symptoms involve slow-healing wounds, blurred vision, frequent urination, excessive thirst, fatigue and weight loss. Regular checkups are very important for individuals that have these risk factors. Its management consists of having a proper balanced diet, limiting processed foods and sugary drinks, getting proper sleep and exercising daily.

Prevention starts with your daily routine preferences. A healthy diet plan consists of fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and foods that are fiber-rich helps in maintaining blood glucose levels. Elimination of highly processed goods, sugary drinks and intake of refined carbohydrates is also favorable. The body's insulin is also maintained when adults aim for having regular physical activities in their daily life routine. Getting sufficient sleep, managing stress levels, and maintaining a healthy weight also furnish your metabolic health. The identification of prediabetes or diabetes early can be done through blood glucose testing that includes HbA1c testing, fasting glucose when recommended. When an individual has some sort of risk factor, they should get help from healthcare professionals.

Blood sugar can be Hypoglycaemia (low sugar level) or Hyperglycaemia (high sugar level). High blood sugar symptoms are blurred vision, frequent urination, thirst is increased, and weakness in the body. If individual blood sugar gets high, first check their glucose level if possible, encourage water intake and follow up on the individual's prescription. Seek medical help if the condition gets serious or complicated. It is important to recognize low blood sugar instantly. Shaking, hunger, dizziness, confusion and sweating may be the symptoms of having low blood sugar level. If the individual is conscious, provide them with their glucose tablet or some fruit juice. After 15 minutes recheck their glucose level and if needed ask for medical help. If an individual gets unconscious, it's better to call emergency services right away. Do not leave the individual alone.

Diabetes management is all about understanding your body, identifying the signs, staying in touch with healthcare doctors, and making healthy choices. Individuals with diabetes need support rather than judgements. Let's spread awareness this November so it can be helpful in leading to action. Always remember early intervention can be fruitful for the individuals in ways that they will thank themselves later.

"Awareness is the first step in healing" - Dean Ornish



Dr. Riffat Sadiq: Restoring Self

Want more tips on improving your wellness and restoring yourself? Watch and subscribe to Dr Sadiq's videos on YouTube, DrRSMD.



Outsmart Healthcare Cyber Threats: Stay Connected

By: Faizuddin Mohammed, MYB Professional

How busy families and older adults can keep their medical and financial information safe in just a few minutes without giving up the convenience of modern care.

You wake up and make yourself some coffee. After a few minutes alone at the kitchen table before everyone else in the house starts waking up, you pull out your phone and open your doctor's app to find out what your lab results are and to see if your prescription needs a refill. In less than five minutes, you have answers to both questions and your mom's medicine is ready at the pharmacy, with no waiting around on hold.

Having your doctor's office right in your pocket is great. However, it is hard to avoid reading about the recent cyberattacks on hospitals, pharmacies, and insurance companies across the nation.

It's understandable that many parents who are balancing families and older adults who are taking care of themselves want to know if their personal information is protected. Many middle-aged parents and older adults ask themselves: How can I keep my medical and financial information safe while continuing to use my health app?

The good news is that being safe is much easier than the news would lead us to believe.

Key Takeaway

"We don't have to become experts in computers, and we certainly don't have to revert back to paper folders and phone tag. Once we understand how these scams occur, we can protect ourselves and our families in just a few minutes."

Why Healthcare Is a Popular Target for Hackers (And How Your Doctor's App Can Help Protect You)

Hospitals and clinics collect a lot of personal data about each patient. This includes birthdays, insurance numbers, and medical histories. Since doctors and nurses require rapid access to this information in order to provide quality care to patients, hackers frequently attempt to disrupt large-scale hospital computer systems.

Although scammers target individuals regularly, they rarely attempt to break into a medical app on your phone. Breaking into a medical app requires too much effort. Instead, scammers typically try to deceive you into providing them with your information. They do this by sending you fake text messages, phony emails, or automated telephone calls. They hope you will respond to their message while you are rushing.

Using your doctor's official mobile app is one of the best ways to protect yourself. Standard text messages and regular emails were never created to secure confidential medical information. Your clinic's official app uses advanced encryption technology so that only you and your care team can view your information. Sending a message or viewing blood pressure readings within your doctor's app is significantly more secure than responding to an email or speaking to an anonymous person over the phone.

Four Simple Habits to Protect Your Information

You already lock your front door at night and look both ways before crossing the street. Protecting your health information also requires developing similar simple daily habits *see table on next page.*

Stay Connected Without the Worry

Taking care of your health and caring for the people you love is challenging enough. You shouldn't have to worry about computer hackers every time you check a lab result or communicate with your nurse. By utilizing your doctor's official app and ignoring unexpected links in texts and emails, you eliminate the majority of the methods scammers employ to obtain your information. You maintain the speed and convenience afforded by today's healthcare system while having peace of mind knowing that your family's information remains safe and secure.

Habit	Actionable Steps for Daily Digital Protection
1. Check messages inside your doctor's app, not through links in texts	Scammers send lots of texts saying you owe money for a medical bill or that you need to act quickly regarding an urgent test result. If you receive a surprising text or email asking you to click a link or enter your Medicare or insurance number, don't do it. Instead, open your doctor's app directly on your phone to determine whether there is truly a message for you. Alternatively, give the clinic a call at the number you already know.
2. Choose a simple phrase for your password	No one enjoys creating complex combinations of letters and symbols for their passwords. Rather than doing this, choose a phrase that brings joy to your heart (such as *WarmCoffeeOnSunday2026!*) and use it exclusively for your medical account. A complete phrase is easily remembered by you, difficult for a scammer to guess, and separates your health account from other accounts requiring passwords.
3. Enable two-factor authentication	Most medical apps allow you to enable an additional verification step during log-in. Examples include fingerprint scanning, facial recognition, or receiving a temporary code via text message. Enabling this feature ensures that even if someone knows your password, they cannot access your account without possessing your phone.
4. Review your monthly insurance statements	Each month spend two minutes reviewing your Medicare summary or insurance statement either mailed to you or available online. Ensure that the physician visits and prescriptions listed correspond to what you and your family actually received. Identifying an unusual charge early is the simplest method to identify either a billing error or an identity theft issue immediately.





Staying Healthy During Cold and Flu Season

By: Victoria H

As the weather gets cooler and families spend more time indoors, cold and flu season begins to make its annual appearance. Between school, work, and extracurricular activities, it can feel impossible to avoid the germs that follow us around. While no one can prevent every illness, there are some habits families can practice to help stay healthy while reducing the spread of germs!

The simplest and most effective way to protect your family is by handwashing. Children touch countless surfaces throughout the day. From classroom desks to playground equipment, germs accumulate quickly. Encourage everyone in the family to wash their hands regularly with soap and water, especially before meals and after returning home. Turning handwashing into a routine can help make it feel like a second nature! You can even sing a favorite song while children wash to help ensure they spend enough time scrubbing their hands.

Sleep is another important tool for staying healthy. With life being so busy, it's tempting to stay up a little later to finish chores, homework, or household tasks. However, adequate rest helps the body recover, recharge, and maintain overall wellness. Establishing consistent bedtimes for both children and adults can make a big difference. Creating a relaxed evening routine with slow activities, dim lighting, and limited screen time can help prepare everyone to get the rest they need.

Nutrition also plays an important role in supporting a healthy lifestyle. While there is no magical food that can prevent illness, nourishing your body with a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and protein can help support overall well-being. Busy schedules can make healthy eating difficult, so consider preparing snacks ahead of time or keeping easy options available to grab and go! Fresh fruit, yogurt, vegetables with dip, cheese sticks, and nuts are simple choices that can help keep everyone fueled throughout the day. Make sure to drink lots of water as well.

Don't forget to stay active! Cooler temperatures can sometimes mean less time outdoors, but movement remains important for both physical and mental health. Family walks, indoor dance parties, active games, or even stretching together while watching TV can help keep everyone moving. Physical activity can boost mood, reduce stress, and provide an opportunity for family connection.

As hard as it may be, it's important to listen to your body. Sometimes we feel pressure to push through the day, but giving ourselves permission to recover when needed can help prevent additional stress and exhaustion. We lead by example and children watch what we do, not what we say. By resting, you are teaching children to recognize when they need rest. This is an important life skill that will benefit them well beyond cold and flu season.

Finally, remember that wellness includes emotional health too. It's easy to feel overwhelmed with everything going on around us. Please make time for connection by sharing meals, talking about the day, or reading together. Every moment counts! These little opportunities to connect can provide mental comfort and stability during hectic times.

Cold and flu season can bring challenges, but consistent habits can go a long way in helping your family stay healthy. By focusing on handwashing, sleep, nutritious foods, physical activity, rest, and family connection, you can create routines that support wellness throughout the season. Remember, you don't have to do everything perfectly. Give yourself grace, take things one day at a time, and focus on what works best for your family. Most importantly, take care of yourself too. You're doing great!

Check On Your Friends: A Practice that Matters

By: Compeer of Greater Buffalo

As the holiday season approaches, many of us move toward traditions, gatherings, and time with people we love. But for others, this season can feel quiet, heavy, or isolating. Shorter days, colder weather, financial stress, grief, family tension, and loneliness can make the winter months especially difficult for mental health.

At Compeer, we have adopted the "Check On Your Friends" philosophy reflecting what our work has always shown us: connection is prevention, and friendship can be a powerful form of support. Compeer's work is rooted in one-to-one, friendship-based relationships that help reduce isolation and remind people they are seen, valued, and not alone. Check On Your Friends gives our work a simple, everyday expression.

Checking on someone does not require formal training or perfect words. It can be a text, a phone call, a cup of coffee, a walk, or a thoughtful question like, "How are you really doing?" We believe small check-ins can make mental health support feel approachable, not clinical. The goal is not to fix someone's life. It is to create a moment of care and remind them they do not have to carry things alone.

It is also important to notice changes. A friend, family member, or coworker may need additional support if they are withdrawing from others, missing commitments, seeming unusually tired or irritable, losing interest in things they usually enjoy, talking more negatively about themselves, having changes in sleep or appetite, or using alcohol or substances more often. You may also notice they seem overwhelmed by everyday responsibilities or simply less like themselves over time.

When you reach out, keep it simple and specific: "I've noticed you've seemed quieter lately, and I wanted to check in." Listen more than you speak. Avoid minimizing what they share. If they are struggling, encourage them to talk with someone they trust or connect with professional support. If someone may be in immediate danger or crisis, call or text 988 for the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Compeer invites you to take one meaningful step: send the text, make the call, share the coffee, and check on your friends. A small moment of connection can remind someone they matter.

Want to learn more about supporting someone you care about, visit *CompeerBuffalo.org* for more information.



What I Would Tell My Younger Self: For CEOs Starting Out

By: Faizan Haq, Editor-in-Chief and Publisher, Your Bliss Magazine
President & CEO, Manage Your Business LLC



The first question I would ask my younger self is not how to become a CEO, but why. Why lead? Why build? Why assume responsibility for the livelihoods, hopes, and ambitions of others? Too many people begin the journey focused on titles, growth charts, and recognition. Yet leadership, like a mountain viewed from a distance, appears very different once the climb begins. The higher you rise, the more you realize that success is not measured by what you acquire, but by what you are entrusted to carry.

If I could speak to my younger self, I would say this: spend less time trying to prove yourself and more time trying to know yourself. Markets change. Technology changes. Industries rise and fall. But your character is the one asset that follows you through every season. Decisions made in moments of pressure reveal who you truly are, not what is written in your business plan. Invest early in honesty, humility, and discipline. They compound more reliably than money.

I would also tell myself that people are not resources. They are the business. In the early years, it is tempting to view success as a matter of strategy alone. Experience teaches otherwise. Teams do not follow vision statements; they follow trust. Employees remember how they were treated during difficult times long after they forget quarterly targets. The greatest leaders are not those who command loyalty, but those who earn it.

I would remind myself not to fear failure so much. Some of the lessons that shape a leader arrive disguised as setbacks. A lost client may teach resilience. A poor hiring decision may teach discernment. A difficult season may reveal strengths that comfort never could. The goal is not to avoid mistakes but to grow wiser because of them.

Most importantly, I would say that business is not separate from life. The same person who sits in the boardroom returns home at night. Success that damages your family, health, or principles is merely a different form of failure. The challenge is not balancing competing parts of your life. The challenge is becoming one whole person whose values remain consistent everywhere.

In the end, companies are built by many hands, but leadership is built from within. Before seeking to grow your business, grow yourself. The business will often follow where the character of its leader has already gone.



Review of *Below*, a Netflix Original series

By: Alex Tilton



Spoilers ahead. *Below* is a limited series about a sea monster that takes place in a tiny Canadian fishing village. Our opening scene is 40 years prior to the main story. Some Canucks are in a little motorized rowboat towing a small house across a large lake. We're told in the opening text that the Canadian government sometimes forces people who live in remote areas to relocate because it's too expensive to take care of them so far away. Something goes wrong with the tow, and the young Calvin Penny sees an enormous eye swim past him just below the surface of the water. Calvin's dad steps off the boat to investigate what's wrong with the house they're trying to tow, and something pulls the house under the water. Calvin watches his father disappear into the lake.

I liked this opening. This is a reasonable way of introducing your monster. The threat is clearly real, but indistinct. Flash forward to 40 years later and a 50-year-old Calving Penny played by Josh Hartnett is meeting his adult daughter's boyfriend during a 'come home' festival. There's no issue here, Calvin likes the boyfriend. But Calvin wants his adult kids to move back to the tiny village to help him with his failing ice harvesting business so he can earn money to start a distillery. His adult kids want him to vote in favor of the buyout so he can start over elsewhere.

But strange things are happening. People keep disappearing. Calvin's oldest son, whom he has forbidden from going out on the fishing boat, decides to go anyway with one of his dad's rivals. As they're harvesting ice from a glacier that broke loose due to global warming, an enormous tentacle comes out of the water and kills the boat's owner. All doubt is removed; it's an enormous giant squid. The rest of the show will be everyone else slowly finding out. One of the first to do so is the lead researcher at an environmental science research station, Dr. Fonda Howander. Dr. Howander realizes almost immediately that the ice which has been brought in for sale to the local vodka distillery is contaminated with biological material from a previously unknown cephalopod species. We learn later that this science research station is funded by the Crocker family, the evil corporate interest that not-so-secretly pushes for the town's relocation. Meanwhile a mysterious iceberg has drifted into the bay the town depends on for all their commerce.

So that's the skeleton of the story. The meat is the family dynamic. The Penny family are all trying to move forward with their lives in different ways. Daughter Ruby and her boyfriend want to get married and move to the city. Rebellious Charlie wants to be taken seriously as a boatman and Jay is in debt to gangsters and needs the buy-out money to pay off his debt. All these threads are handled very well and none of them overstay their welcome. The monster story is never overshadowed by their personal drama. The squid becomes a very un-subtle stand in for the environmental deterioration that's killing the fisherman's way of life and helping the corrupt Crocker family leverage them out of their homes. Many twists and turns follow. One that I particularly liked (and won't describe here) serves to show that even the best of intentions can become corrupt. Howander eventually determines that this iceberg is the creature's nest where she's stored her egg sack, thus the violence against the humans in the area. This was a cool reveal and it tied things together neatly. But I felt more tense and alert to the story before this happened. Back when it was just a rampaging sea monster, it felt more dangerous.

My only complaint is the ending. Sticking the landing is hard and *Below* does the best it can but the last second maneuverings by the good guys to avert a crisis have some problems. Their plan is implausible and really has no business succeeding. The villainous Crocker family patriarch at one point tries to bully a Canadian military officer into using a helicopter air strike to kill the squid (known as 'Mother' to some locals who have been acquainted with her for [apparently] decades). But while the Crocker family has established their authority on the island by lending helicopters to help 'evacuate' the townsfolk they want to get rid of…at no point does the Crocker family patriarch have any leverage over this military officer. He's simply an angry civilian shouting at a man with actual authority…I'm also not clear on why Crocker wants the squid killed. If it's alive then that's a real danger that requires the evacuation. But if they kill it…then can't the townsfolk just come back? The eventual resolution is that Calvin Penny and his adult kids mount a mini-coup against the occupying Canadian military intervention force and tow the iceberg out to deep water where, and I'm not making this up, the squid dies naturally because that's what squids do when their eggs are about to hatch…which they do, and subsequently die because the water is too warm for them to survive. So this heroic effort was all for nothing? The squid was about to die anyway and now she just does that somewhere humans aren't bothering her and thus the body count stops climbing? In summary, the ending needs some work.

All in all, I loved *Below*. Nobody felt like they were acting. The action was (mostly) measured and very believable. The twists and turns weren't telegraphed so you do in fact find them surprising. The ending, as I said, is a little clunky but it was so sincere I couldn't find it in my heart to get angry about it.

So that's a strong recommendation from me. Enjoy *Below* at your earliest convenience.

How Gratitude Improves Mental Health

By: Laura Ott, LCSW, PMH-C



Every fall, I feel inundated with reminders to be thankful, to be grateful, and to be of service. I tend to get a turkey art project home from school with feathers listing things my kiddo is thankful for. But being told to count our blessings is sometimes easier said than done. Seasonal depression can set in while school, work, family, and financial stress pile up alongside holidays that require more of our presence and/or presents.

Here's what gets missed: gratitude isn't ignoring the hard things or viewing life through rose-colored glasses. We can acknowledge life is hard and still practice gratitude.

What Gratitude Actually Does

Gratitude is simply the practice of noticing what is meaningful, supportive, or good in our lives. Sometimes that's something big: getting a big bonus, receiving a large gift, making a team, or winning a prize. Other times, it's your partner bringing you home a drink after work, hitting every green light on a quiet drive home, or your kids falling asleep early enough for you to cozy up and watch reruns of your favorite show.

Gratitude isn't a substitute for therapy, but there's research behind it. In a 2023 review published in *Einstein*, Geyze Diniz and colleagues examined 64 clinical trials involving activities such as gratitude journals and expressing appreciation to others. They found fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression among people practicing gratitude, although the evidence for those changes was considered low certainty. Another 2023 analysis by Abdurrahman Kirca and colleagues, published in the *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology*, looked at 25 randomized trials involving 6,745 participants. They found small improvements in happiness and life satisfaction from expressing gratitude, such as writing thank-you letters, compared with neutral activities.

Anxiety and fear aren't all bad. Think of them as protective signals that help us spot problems, recognize danger, and make judgment calls. Unfortunately, anxiety can also leave us replaying an awkward moment from gym class in 9th grade at 2 a.m. while overlooking ten ordinary moments from that very day that went just fine or even went well.

Gratitude gives us a chance to notice those moments, too. Not instead of the hard stuff. Alongside it.

Gratitude and Difficult Emotions Can Coexist

As a therapist, I think this distinction matters. Two things can coexist, even if they seem to conflict. Someone can be thankful their family lives down the street and still want better boundaries, like having them call before coming over. You can appreciate your coworker's friendship and still wish they'd end the chat sooner so you can focus. You can recognize the people who supported you through a painful experience and still wish that experience had never happened.

Sometimes the most compassionate thing we can do is acknowledge two truths at once: "This is hard," and "There is something here that is helping me get through it."

Try Gratitude Without Turning It Into Homework

Start small. At the end of the day, ask what made today a little easier. Not amazing. Easier. Maybe someone checked in, you said no to something you didn't have energy for, or someone paid for your drive-thru coffee.

If writing isn't your thing, skip the journal. Over dinner, share one good thing and one hard thing about your day. Personally, I call it Pit and Peak, but clients use Sunshine and Storm, Highs and Lows, and Ups and Downs. It's a great way for kids and adults to practice the 'two things can be true at the same time' hack. Nothing comes to mind on a particularly difficult day? That's okay, too. You can simply be grateful the day is ending. Gratitude works best as an invitation, not another standard you're failing to meet.

The goal isn't to be happy all the time. That's unrealistic. It's to make more room for what supports you, even when life is complicated.

So while I hope I continue to get those turkeys home from school and daycare, I also hope my family can practice this daily instead of solely for November projects.

Giving Forward: Creating Stronger Communities

By: Hana Dawood



When we think about giving back to our communities, we often think about donating money, volunteering at large organizations or participating in charity events. And while those are all great ways to make a difference, giving back doesn't always have to involve some grand gesture. Sometimes, the smallest acts of kindness can have the biggest impact.

Whether it's checking in on a neighbor, helping someone carry their groceries or simply taking a few minutes out of your day to listen to someone, these small gestures can go a long way. And the best part? You don't need a lot of time or money to make someone's day a little better.

Think about a time when someone did something unexpectedly kind for you. Maybe a stranger complimented you on a day you weren't feeling your best or a friend reached out to see how you were doing. Chances are, that small interaction stuck with you longer than you expected. Now imagine if we all made a conscious effort to do something kind for someone else every day. Those little moments could eventually add up to something much bigger.

This is what's known as the ripple effect. One person's kindness can inspire another person to do the same, creating a chain reaction that reaches people we may never even meet. And that's really what giving forward is all about. It's not necessarily about returning a favor, but rather taking the kindness you've received and passing it along to someone else.

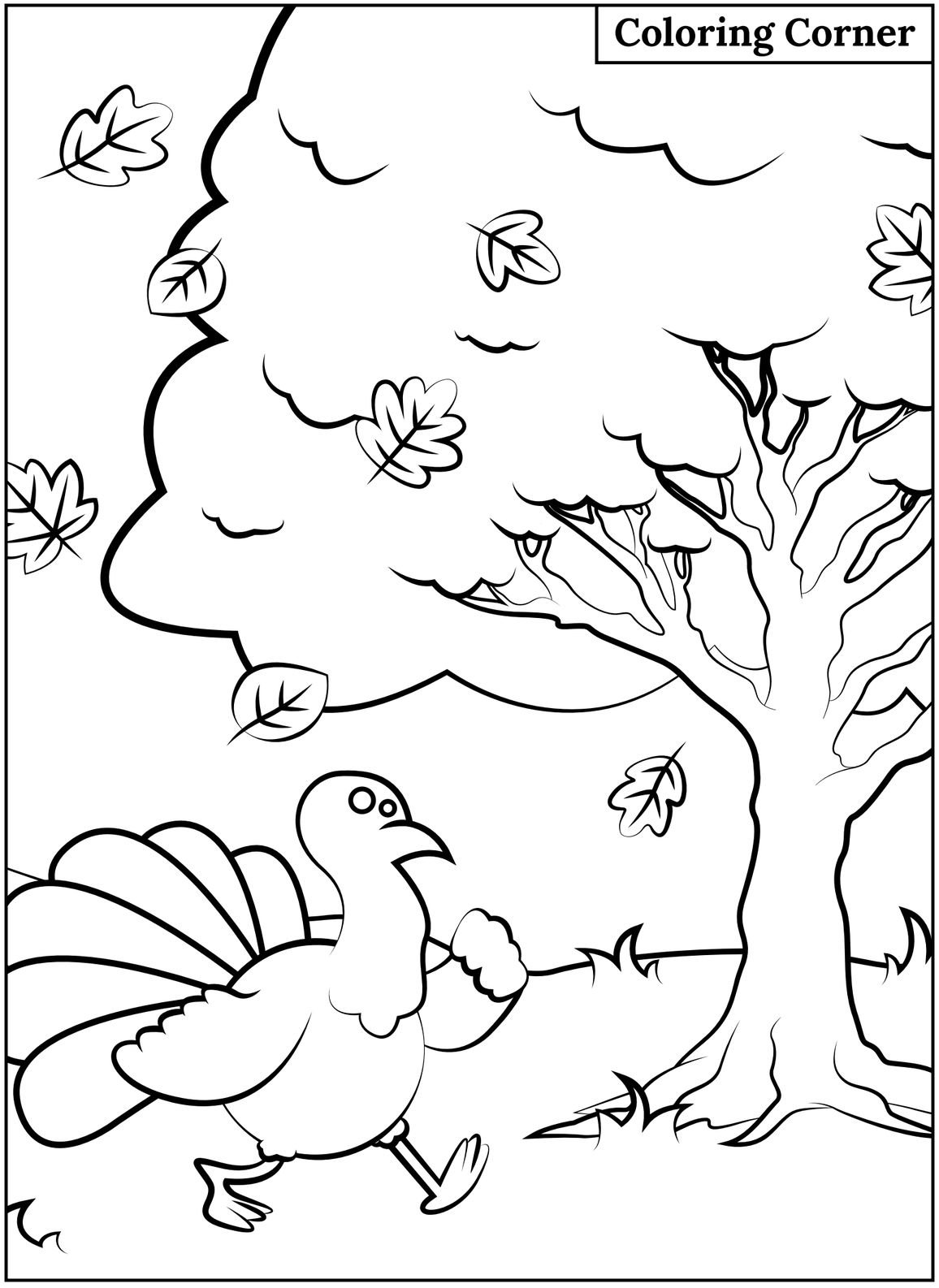
One common misconception about giving back is that you need money to make a meaningful contribution. But the truth is, your time and effort can be just as valuable. Volunteering at a local food pantry, helping a younger student with their homework or offering to run an errand for an elderly neighbor are all ways you can make a difference without spending a dime. And if you're someone who already has a pretty busy schedule, giving back doesn't have to take up hours of your day either. Even something as simple as checking in on a friend who's been having a rough week can make them feel supported and less alone. The goal isn't to see how much you can give, but rather to recognize where you can make a difference.

A strong community isn't just defined by the number of resources or organizations it has. It's also defined by the people who make up that community and how willing they are to show up for one another. When people feel supported, included and cared for, they're more likely to develop a sense of belonging. And when that sense of belonging grows, so does the willingness to look out for others. Think about it. A community where neighbors know one another, people feel comfortable asking for help and individuals are willing to lend a hand is a community that's better equipped to face challenges together. And these are the types of communities we should want to build for future generations.

At the end of the day, you don't need to change the entire world to make a difference in it. Start with the people around you. Reach out to an old friend, volunteer when you can, support a local business or simply be a little more patient with someone who's having a difficult day. You might not always see the impact of your actions and that's okay. Sometimes the smallest gestures are the ones people remember the most.



Coloring Corner



Butternut Squash Mac & Cheese

Recipe Source: *eatingwell.com*

Ingredients

- 3 cups peeled and cubed butternut squash
- 1 medium yellow onion, quartered
- 4 cloves garlic, peeled
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- ¾ cup whole milk
- 12 ounces whole-wheat elbow pasta (about 3 cups)
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 8 large fresh sage leaves
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1¼ cups unsalted vegetable broth
- 1 cup shredded sharp Cheddar cheese
- 3 ounces garlic-and-herb spreadable cheese (such as Boursin; about ½ cup)
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon ground pepper



Directions

Step 1:
Preheat oven to 425°F. Bring a large pot of water to a boil over high heat.

Step 2:
Meanwhile, combine 3 cups squash, onion, garlic and 1 tablespoon oil on a large rimmed baking sheet; toss until well coated. Roast until the squash is tender and browned, 25 to 30 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a blender; add ¾ cup milk. Secure the lid on the blender and remove the center piece to allow steam to escape. Place a clean towel over the opening. Process until smooth, about 2 minutes.

Step 3:
Add 12 ounces pasta to the boiling water; cook until al dente, about 8 minutes. Drain and set aside. Reserve the pot.

Step 4:
Cook 3 tablespoons butter in the pot over medium heat until foamy, about 1 minute. Add 8 sage leaves in an even layer; fry until slightly transparent and dark green, about 1 minute. Carefully remove and transfer to a paper-towel lined plate. Reserve the butter in the pot.

Step 5:
Add 3 tablespoons flour to the reserved butter in the pot; cook over medium heat, whisking constantly, until the mixture smells nutty, about 1 minute. Gradually whisk in 1¼ cups broth; cook, whisking, until smooth and thickened, about 2 minutes. Reduce heat to low; whisk in the squash puree, 1 cup Cheddar, ½ cup spreadable cheese, 2 teaspoons mustard and ½ teaspoon each salt and pepper; cook, whisking constantly, until warmed through and smooth, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the cooked pasta; cook, stirring often, until warmed through, about 1 minute. Transfer to a large bowl. Garnish with the fried sage leaves.

Active Time:
45 mins

Total Time:
55 mins

Additional Time:
10 mins

Servings:
6



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