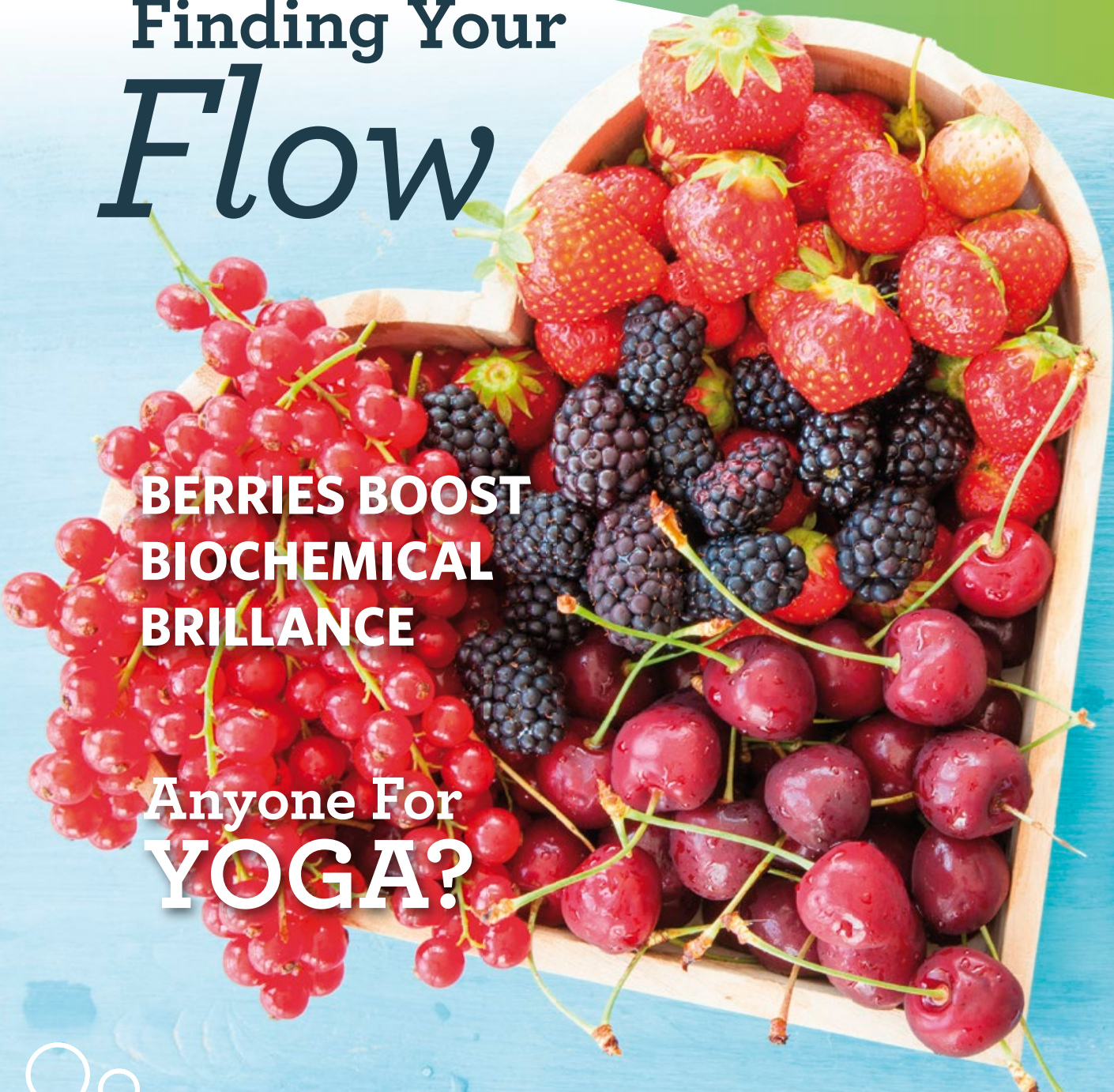


GOOD HEALTH TIMES

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Finding Your *Flow*



**BERRIES BOOST
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Finding Your Flow

The power of flow for a happier and more successful life

As a medical doctor, I often meet people who are overwhelmed with negative stress and anxiety in everyday life, drifting along without purpose. On the other hand I also frequently meet people who are living life engaged and full of vitality. The main difference - to sum it up in one word - FLOW.

Because while real life has setbacks and challenges for each and everyone of us, there's no doubt that one of the keys to a life of fulfilment and meaning is to have a sense of passion and purpose, to be able to spend time doing those things you love to do. In other words learning to find your flow!

The concept of an individual's 'flow' has been comprehensively explored by the brilliant Russian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. His research originally investigated the habits of artists, whose intense focus and steely concentration when engaged in their process, had inspired his curiosity. He described witnessing their joy in creating for its own sake, and how they found personal fulfilment in the moment, without being preoccupied with the final product or indeed how it would be received.

The psychologist then expanded his research to interview thousands of people from many different backgrounds, discovering that creating flow experiences in your life can be a gateway to happiness; a profound tool in the creation of a productive and rewarding life. He found that flow is a universal psychological experience characterised by being engaged, happy, and energised. It involves a high level of productivity coupled with an appreciation for the fruits of one's efforts. You must feel as though you are always pushing yourself but maintain the confidence that you have the ability to succeed. It is this combination that can so engage and absorb you that simply performing your activities can inspire a state of effortless concentration coupled with a feeling of enjoyment. It is this state that so many people describe as 'being in the zone', the effortless performance of the activity itself being its own reward.

"It is important to recognise these moments so that we can better channel them into other areas of our lives."

For more on releasing the happiness within and the small choices that make big changes, visit www.doctormarkrowe.com





We are wired to experience pleasure when we perform at, or close to, the best of our abilities – peak experience through peak performance. Through giving ourselves the opportunity to perform at our best, we can engender profound changes in our overall wellbeing. Through entering these states of flow, we become more confident and self-assured, we view ourselves with greater admiration, and we are inclined to view life's obstacles as far less challenging.

While twenty percent of people regularly enter flow states, unfortunately, fifteen percent never do. This is a great shame as experiencing a state of flow is the clearest view we can get of our own potential. When we find flow in our lives, we don't only become more productive, but within this productivity we also become more playful, creative, and authentic. Just as the spirit of gratitude is learning to want what you have, the essence of flow is being in the moment; where action and awareness are merged.

THE EXPERIENCE OF FLOW

Imagine having the boundaries of your focus and abilities pushed, but not broken. Your engagement level is maxed out but you are not fazed by insecurities. You have mind-mapped your tasks and you proceed through them without doubt or hesitation. It is an experience often experienced by those who play sports. Tennis, a game I play for example, is a sport in which a state of flow is regularly experienced. There is a clear set of rules that require appropriate responses. The ball must be returned to your opponent's court, giving immediate feedback on the success of your actions. However, when each point ends, no-one dwells on the result of the previous point, they merely re-engage with their focus and return to their flow. It is not just athletes who experience flow however, many of us do from time to time in situations such as driving the car, cooking, studying, gardening, creative pursuits, or satisfying work. Perhaps we even feel it when we are engaged in a conversation with friends. It is important to recognise these moments so that we can better channel them into other areas of our lives.

For myself, it is in speaking and delivering workshops to individuals and groups about new understandings of health and wellbeing wisdom that I often find myself in the zone! I have met many artists over the years who look younger than their years and I believe from engaging with them that their work allows them to be in a flow state for prolonged periods of time. As the saying goes, do what you love and love what you do!

Tip of the Month

Exercise enables more possibilities; for enhanced energy, emotional vitality and enriched sense of wellbeing.



After a flow experience, the concept of the self is generally strengthened because you know that you have overcome challenges with confidence and grace.

In general terms flow begets flow. We can create more of these experiences in our lives by being aware when we are in them and being open to replicating the experience in other areas of our lives. We can try to focus on our tasks as we perform them without allowing ourselves to be distracted by external thoughts, in this way we can often find we can create a state of flow within this performance, regardless of the nature of the task.

Journaling can be a useful tool to encourage flow in our lives, by noting when we have flow experiences and the circumstances that inspire them, we can learn to know ourselves, and our flow, that little bit better.

As we learn to live in the moment more, we can find flow in the small tasks. This in turn allows us to gain more agency over our attention and our intention. These experiences will help us develop greater clarity as to what our lives are about, and redouble our efforts on focussing on what is important to us. Never allow life to cease challenging you, we can always find a way to do things better, to enrich our lives, or those around us. By doing this we can ensure that we are always sufficiently engaged to have flow in our lives. Flow through all aspects of your life, from taking care of your loved ones, to going to the beach, to reading a book; all activities can be done with a high level of engagement, and they can all benefit from this approach.

THE BENEFITS OF FLOW

When we are enjoying the experience of flow, our fear of failure is often replaced with an underlying feeling of enjoyment. Such is the depth of engagement that we often forget about our insecurities throughout the process. It doesn't stop here however, because as we emerge from our state of flow our sense of self is fortified making us more robust than we were before. It is this ability of flow to centre us in the present, detaching us for the stresses of the past or future that truly gives it its potential as a silver bullet for expanding our happiness and optimising our experience of life itself.

If we imagine our life as a river, we can say that one bank represents boredom or a tendency to inactivity, producing apathy, and the other side representing an overflow of responsibilities, producing anxiety. We often live our lives clinging to one bank or the other, unhappy but feeling fearful of releasing into the unknown. When we have the courage to let go of the bank and 'go with the flow', we can find ourselves with a wonderful sense of liberation and the internal question - 'what was I afraid of?' This metaphor is illustrative because it shows us that our best approach to having flow in our daily life is by finding the optimal balance between our perceived abilities and the perceived challenge of the tasks at hand - where there is neither boredom (too much ability for the challenge) nor anxiety (too much challenge for our ability).

By doing this we can generate flow experiences which strengthen our psychological fitness and improve the quality of our relationships. They help your personal growth and self-development, make you more receptive to new experiences, more committed to learning new things.

“Never allow life to cease challenging you, we can always find a way to do things better, to enrich our lives, or those around us.”

Start simple! Have faith in yourself that you know what you are doing. Choose one activity today and fully engage yourself in it. Whether it is making lunch for your kids, or performing a task at work, or arranging to meet with friends; be present, be engaged, and go with the flow! Gradually expand this approach throughout your life and see what a difference it can make!



Anyone For Yoga?

Yoga teaches that your true nature as a human being and your human potential is not only unknown but unknowable and transcends your sense of self. An ancient art which originated in India, Yoga is the practical application of Vedic science, a comprehensive systemic Indian philosophy, going back over 5000 years. The word yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root yuj, which means 'to unite', which indicates that the purpose of yoga is to unite yourself with your highest nature. Yoga promotes unity of mind, body and spirit and can be practiced by anyone regardless of age, experience, body type, or physical ability. The very essence of yoga is balance, not just physical balance (range of movement) but balance between body and mind and between mind and spirit.

Yoga requires focused breathing. It teaches that the breath signifies vital energy; that controlling your breathing can also help you control your body and still your mind. Yoga takes concentrated effort and the discipline, drive and determination to practice a series of movements and postures designed to increase the strength, flexibility and fitness of the whole body.

Yoga can be a wonderful way to grow physically, emotionally and psychologically.

Yoga builds emotional vitality and balance in your body and has powerful techniques to create a sense of inner peace, harmony, and clarity of mind. It can help many chronic health conditions including pain, anxiety and depression. It can reduce stress, enhance your mood and expand the creativity and joy in your life. In addition, psychological fitness is strengthened by providing mental clarity and focus. Yoga is a great way to meditate and gain peace of mind, to feel stronger and younger.





FROZEN DESSERT

Serves: 4
Prep time : 2 mins

Ingredients

- 250g Frozen Mixed Berries
- 250g Greek Yogurt
- 1tbsp honey

Method

Blend berries, yogurt and honey in a food processor for 20 seconds, until it comes together to a smooth ice-cream texture. Scoop into bowls, and serve. Voila! A healthy tasty dessert.



BERRIES BOOST BIOCHEMICAL BRILLANCE

You may already know that eating berries is good for your health but increasing research shows just what nutritional powerhouses they really are. A study published this year in the journal of Circulation makes for interesting reading. It found that women who ate a serving (about a cupful) of blackberries and strawberries three times a week reduced their risk of heart attack by about a third, compared to women who ate berries once a month or less. This effect held true even compared to women who ate lots of other fruit and vegetables. And the benefit was independent of other risk factors including age, blood pressure, body mass index, cholesterol, alcohol intake or smoking status.

This research finding is likely to benefit men as well though the study in question was only carried out in women.

So what makes berries so good for your heart health?

While the precise reason for this reduction in heart attack risk is unclear, what we do know is that berries are rich in several elements beneficial for your health (including your heart.) These include :

- **Flavonoids** which help protect against inflammation, heart disease and cancer.(other flavonoid-rich foods include pears, apples and tea)
- **Reservatrol** which fights inflammation and helps prevent blocked arteries and also boosts brain health (also found in dark chocolate and red wine)
- **Antioxidants** which protect cells from oxidative damage helping to prevent aging and chronic diseases - berries are loaded with them! Important antioxidants in berries include anthocyanins, quercetin and vitamin C. Anthocyanins are responsible for the dark colour so important to prevent inflammation in the body. Along with quercetin, it may help prevent age related memory loss.
- Packed full of **vitamins, folate, fiber** and free of saturated fat, no wonder berries are so good for your heart.

And berries can also be great for helping with weight loss because they are filled with fluid and their fiber content fills you up.

The best berries are blackberries, blueberries, boysenberries, acai berries, raspberries, strawberries and cranberries. Remember if you can't find fresh berries, then frozen (unsweetened) berries during the off season are a great healthy substitute.

SMART SUNSCREEN ADVICE

Research has found that if you get five sunburns in your lifetime, you will double your risk of getting melanoma. This can be particularly important in children, as sunburns early in life can increase the risk of skin cancer as an adult. In a study recently published in the journal JAMA Dermatology, when researchers looked at the top 1% of sunscreens being sold on Amazon.com as of December 2015 (65 out of 6,500), they found that 40% didn't meet the sunscreen guidelines of the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD).

The American Academy of Dermatology recommends that sunscreens:

- ① Be broad spectrum (meaning they protect you from both UVA and UVB rays).
- ② Have an SPF (sun protection factor) of at least 30, which blocks about 97% of the sun's rays (note: there is no evidence that anything above an SPF 50 protects better than SPF 50).
- ③ Be water resistant, so that they are more likely to stay on if you go swimming or get sweaty.
- ④ The whole point of sunscreen is to, screen you from the sun — and prevent not just sunburn and premature signs of aging, but also skin cancer. So when choosing a sunscreen, it's important not just to choose the right sunscreen, but also to use it the right way.
- ⑤ Apply sunscreen before you go outside. It can take about 15 minutes for it to be absorbed into the skin — if you wait until you get outside, you will be unprotected for that time.
- ⑥ Use enough. You need about an ounce of sunscreen (roughly the amount in a shot glass) to cover your skin.
- ⑦ Reapply at least every 2 hours.
- ⑧ Cover all the bare skin. This is where a lot of people mess up. Remember your back, the back of your arms, legs, ears and neck, the tops of your feet. For hard to reach places, you may need help or a spray (never spray near the eyes or mouth — inhaling it is not a good idea). Here's a tip for parents of small children: put the sunscreen on when they are naked, before you put on their suit. For people with thinning hair (or babies who don't have much hair yet), use a broad-brimmed hat.