

Hobbies Help Us Heal and Thrive

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What does a doctor who makes time for regular karaoke sessions with his children, a retired printing technician who inadvertently answered a decade-old geometry problem, and an 11-year-old who found bones from an ichthyosaur, the largest known ocean reptile from the time of dinosaurs have in common? They are all people who have realized the benefits of being a hobbyist and have even made some important discoveries.

Benefits for Your Body: Doing an enjoyable hobby releases endorphins, those chemicals in our brain that help us feel good, as well as lowering our cortisol or stress hormones. These can support our body in lowering blood pressure, reducing inflammation, improving sleep, boosting our immune system, improving our cardiac health, and increasing our energy. Dr. Vuu, the doctor who loves singing and karaoke, says, "Karaoke is one of the things that just lights me up and brings me joy. In my work as a doctor and researcher, I've become convinced that having hobbies is an essential part of living and aging well."

Benefits for Your Brain: Hobbies can provide protection against dementia as well as improve our neuroplasticity--the ability of the brains neural networks to change, adapt, and make new connections. Dr. Hafeez, a neuropsychologist at New York's Columbia University says, "One of the coolest things I've found is that regularly doing things that you find enjoyable causes biochemical changes in the

brain, and we measure these in the lab. With the brain, it's a 'use it or lose it' type of situation...so you always want to be exercising it to keep it strong, and hobbies are a really fun way to do that."

Benefits for Your Spirit: Hobbies make us happier, increase our sense of well-being, and help us find greater purpose and meaning in life. This is especially true when we find or join a community through our hobby; it is an opportunity to find new friends or catch up with old ones. Almost ten years ago, my husband and I moved across the US, and I knew almost no one. I joined a community band and rekindled the joy of playing my flute and rediscovering the synergy of being part of something bigger than myself. More about that in a previous blogpost: www.coachmyrna.org/blog/family-synergy-being-in-tune

How about starting off the new year with renewing something that you have been passionate about in the past? Or maybe it is an opportunity to try something new--yoga, painting, joining an orchestra or community choir. Maybe you want something that your family can do together--hiking, camping, or volunteering to help with the park clean-up. Have a family meeting and talk about it together. What hobby would you like to start or continue in 2025?

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