

Editor's notes:

September 2012, Volume 27-1

Want to live a good long time? Eating right and getting lots of exercise are essential, but so is the right attitude. At least that's what one study suggests.

Researchers at the Institute for Aging Research at Albert Einstein College of Medicine questioned 243 people age 100 or older. They found that centenarians tend to share certain personality traits (in addition to other factors, like genetics). In general, these long-lived people are . . .

- Outgoing
- Positive-minded about other people
- Full of laughter
- Open with their emotions
- Conscientious and disciplined
- Unlikely to obsess about anxieties or guilt

The scientists point out that these characteristics don't necessarily represent a cause and effect relationship. They did notice, however, that in many cases the personality traits they observed weren't necessarily lifelong tendencies, but behaviors their subjects learned as they grew older. Focusing on the good and not worrying about the negatives may have a positive impact on overall life expectancy.

* * * * *

This month is named after the Latin word "septem," meaning "seven." September was the seventh month until 700 B.C. when Roman king Numa Pompilius switched from a 304-day lunar calendar.

Here are a few dates of note this month:

Days of Marathon Anniversary, September 2-9, 490 B.C. - This week celebrates an ancient messenger's run that inspired present day marathons. The word comes from the Greek town, Marathon, from which the messenger, Phidippides, ran 26 miles nonstop to Sparta to seek help in repelling the Persian army attacking Athens. The Athenians defeated the Persian army, and Phidippides ran back to Marathon and died as he spoke the words, "Rejoice, we are victorious."

Labour Day, September 3 -- The first Monday in September in Canada and in the United States celebrates the accomplishments of working people and labour organizations.

Grandparents Day, September 9 -- This is an opportunity to honour grandparents, to let them show love for their children's children and to help children become aware of the strength, wisdom and guidance older people can offer. It is held annually the first Sunday after Labour Day.

Rosh Hashanah, September 17 -- Also known as the Jewish New Year or the Feast of the Trumpets, it is held in great reverence in the Jewish faith as the Day of Judgment.

It marks the beginning of a ten-day period, "The Days of Awe," during which, according to tradition, all the people of the earth pass before the Lord and are marked in either the "book of Life" or in the "Book of Death." The Days of Awe culminate with Yom Kippur, a day of fasting, repentance and seeking forgiveness.

Autumn begins, September 22 -- The word "Fall" was first used by the early settlers in North America. They borrowed the term from some native people who spoke of the time of the "Fall of the Leaf." The season's other name, Autumn, comes from the Latin word "autumnus" meaning to turn or change and increase or harvest.

Harvest Moon, September 29 -- This is the full moon that is nearest the autumnal equinox, which falls on September 22 this year. This moon is unique in that it rises for several days near sunset and is often a brilliant orange colour when on the horizon.

Don't Get Too Close --

A long-range view of personal space

Personal space is . . . well, personal. We don't like strangers getting too close, and we're only comfortable allowing very close friends and family members to get really close. Although personal space varies somewhat in different cultures, most humans consider a bubble of about 18 inches to be "intimate space," limited to family, good friends, and pets.

Beyond that, a personal zone extends from about 1.5 to 4 feet, where acquaintances and casual friends can enter. After that, a social space of 4 to 12 feet is where we feel comfortable with new people or strangers, and anything outside that zone is up for grabs.

All this space is apparently controlled by the amygdala, the region of the brain that recognizes and regulates emotions like fear. In an article on the Live Science website, Ralph Adolphs, professor of psychology and neuroscience at California Institute of Technology, explains that this belief stems from examination of a patient with lesions on her amygdala who felt no discomfort no matter how close anyone got to her.

So when someone gets in your face, maybe you can blame your instinct to clobber him on your amygdala.

Do these factors add up to billions?

Are you destined to become a billionaire? Forbes magazine conducted an informal, unscientific analysis of its list of self-made billionaires and noted a few common denominators: Math Skills -- A lot of the world's wealthiest people show a high aptitude for math. Many of their parents had math-related careers such as engineering or accounting.

Birth date -- More billionaires were born in the fall than in any other season. September was the most common month of birth for the 380 self-made American billionaires who appeared on the Forbes list in the recent years. What does this mean? Nobody knows. Maybe it's the magic of mistletoe.

College -- Higher education isn't necessarily a requirement for vast wealth. Of the 292 billionaires analyzed, 20 percent either didn't complete college or never bothered with it in the first place.

Failure -- Forbes notes that several of the billionaires on its list failed to score on their first attempt. Some of their first attempts at business were disastrous -- but they learned from their failures and now view them as a necessary step to their eventual success.

Key to creativity: Venture into the great outdoors

No pill can make you more creative, but new evidence suggests that you can boost your imagination by just getting outside and spending some time in nature. Researchers from the University of Kansas gave a standard creativity test—called the Remote Associates Test—to four groups of back-packers as they were about to set off on a series of lengthy hikes. They also administered the test to a second group of hikers who were already four days into their nature excursion. This second group scored almost 50 percent higher in creativity than their counterparts.

Ruth Ann Atchley, department chair and associate professor of cognitive/clinical psychology at the University of Kansas, describes the findings this way: "Nature is a place where our mind can rest, relax, and let down those threat responses. Therefore, we have resources left over—to be creative, to be imaginative, to problem-solve—that allow us to be better, happier people who engage in a more productive way with others."

So if you need to spark a creative idea or two, maybe you need to head for the great outdoors, away from the distractions of civilization, and let your mind roam free.

The Plains of Martin?

The Plains of Abraham are the rolling fields upon which the armies of English General Wolfe and the French Montcalm met and did battle on September 13, 1759. The plains extend for some miles before the ramparts of Quebec City.

The phrase "the plains of Abraham" sound as if it should come from the pages of the Old Testament. However, they bear the name of the original owner of the land in the 17th century, a ship's pilot named Abraham Martin. The Plains of Martin must not have seemed imposing or impressive enough. The official designation of the land is bilingual: National Battlefields Park/Le Champ de Bataille.

What Drives You?

What kind of motivation do you respond to best? The answer can guide you toward the success you're seeking. Here's a simple test that experts in neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) frequently use:

Imagine that you've just won the lottery and you'll never have to work again. Which of the following descriptions would apply most closely to you?

A. You feel safe and secure. You have everything you need to be comfortable and free of worries. You don't have to do anything you don't want to. You can make most of your problems go away easily.

B. You can do whatever you want. You can buy your favorite car, live any place, and go anywhere you've ever dreamed of. Any goal you've ever thought about is now within reach.

If "A" feels most accurate, you have what NLP gurus call an "away-from" personality. You're motivated to avoid negative outcomes, which can help you manage obstacles and plan for problems, although you may not be drawn toward grand, challenging goals.

If "B" describes you better, you have a "toward" personality. You're driven by achievement, but you don't necessarily deal effectively with details or organize your campaign well.

Both personality types have pros and cons, and most people have a little bit of both. But knowing which fits best can help you decide what will work best when you're setting goals and striving for success.

Fall Flowers

Many of Canada's flowers die in the fall, but some late bloomers seem to like the short days and cool weather. The first of these is the goldenrod, often followed by wild asters and chrysanthemums. One small purple aster bears the name of St. Michael; it is called the Michaelmas daisy (Michaelmas or St. Michael's Day is September 29). Look for it along the edges of fields and roads.

