

→ Mark your confusion.

→ Purposefully annotate the article (1-2 mature, thoughtful responses per page to what the author is saying)

→ Write a 250+ word response to the article.

(If you are a teacher or student who would like to modify this Google Doc, go to File > Make a Copy. I cannot and do not respond to Share requests -- my apologies!)

5 things health experts said were good for you in 2016

by *The Week* Staff on December 31, 2016 (excerpt)

1. Exercise could help your brain stay young and lower your chances of cancer. In a study involving about 900 adults, those who did little or no regular physical activity experienced cognitive decline equivalent to 10 more years of aging compared with their more active peers. Early take-up was important: Exercise didn't appear to help people who were already showing signs of cognitive decline. Another study found that people who do the equivalent of about two and a half hours of walking a week have a lower risk for 13 different forms of cancer. "If people understand that physical activity can influence their risk for cancer," says lead author Steven Moore, "then that might provide yet one more motivating factor to become active."

2. Dirt helps children stave off allergies. Kids are often scolded for biting their nails or sucking their thumbs, but researchers in New Zealand found that adults who grew up with these bad habits were much less likely to develop allergies to things like pets, grass, and dust mites. Their findings suggest that the immune system may benefit from early exposure to microbes. "Being too clean isn't that good for you," says researcher Stephanie Lynch. "Parents shouldn't be afraid to let their kids get dirty or let them have dirt under their nails."

3. Books may make you live longer. Researchers at Yale University found that adults ages 50 and over who read a book for at least 30 minutes a day lived for an average of almost two years longer than those who don't. Becoming engrossed in a love story, mystery, or thriller may trigger cognitive processes — such as empathy, social perception, and emotional intelligence — that can help promote longevity. Reading newspapers and magazines didn't have the same effect. "The benefits of reading books," the study's authors conclude, "include a longer life in which to read them."

4. Cutting calories may improve your entire quality of life, not just your waistline. In a small study, a group of healthy, non-obese adults reduced their daily calorie intake by 12 percent for two years. Not only did they lose an average of 17 pounds, they also enjoyed improved sleep, better moods, and an enhanced sex drive. Once people "get over the hump" and start dropping pounds, says co-author Corby Martin, "their hunger levels subside a bit and they start to feel the benefits of the weight loss."

5. Friends and family can be as important to your health as diet and exercise. A University of North Carolina study found that social isolation increases risk of high blood pressure more than diabetes, and that lonely people are 30 percent more likely to suffer a heart attack or stroke than those who are socially active. Friends can "buffer some of the effects of stress, and/or help with coping," says lead author Kathleen Mullan Harris. Separate research suggested that older people tend to live longer when they count a family member other than their spouse among their closest confidants.

5 things health experts said were bad for you in 2016

by *The Week* Staff on December 31, 2016 (excerpt)

1. Alcohol is even worse for us than we thought. A report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that booze is the second most deadly drug in the U.S., behind only tobacco. Between 2002 and 2014, alcohol-related deaths surged 37 percent; drinking now accounts for more fatalities than overdoses from prescription painkillers and heroin combined. Other research found that alcohol is a direct cause of at least seven forms of cancer, and that the more people drink, the worse their odds. "Nine in 10 people aren't aware of the link between alcohol and cancer," says Jana Witt from Cancer Research UK. "This review is a stark reminder that there's strong evidence linking the two."

2. Opioids may do more harm than good. Powerful prescription drugs like OxyContin and Vicodin are widely used to treat severe and chronic pain. But a University of Colorado, Boulder study found that injured rodents that had been given morphine were more sensitive to pain in the long run than those that hadn't. Researchers believe the drug may amplify pain signals from the spinal cord, prolonging and even intensifying discomfort. "This is a very ugly side to opioids that had not been recognized before," says Linda Watkins, the study's co-leader. "The implications for people taking opioids like morphine, oxycodone, and methadone are great."

3. Distracted walking is a growing hazard, as more and more people injure themselves while using their smartphone on the move. Pedestrian deaths jumped 10 percent in the first half of 2015, the largest year-on-year increase in four decades. Public-health experts attribute that rise to distracted walkers, who now account for 10 percent of all pedestrian injuries requiring emergency room treatment. The phenomenon is most common among millennials, but women 55 and older suffer the most serious injuries. The human brain simply didn't evolve to multitask, explains orthopedic surgeon Claudette Lajam. "You can't really pay attention to more than one thing at a time."

4. Deep space could be too dangerous for manned exploration. A NASA-funded study found that astronauts who flew to the moon were four times more likely to die from heart disease than those who only traveled as far as low Earth orbit, where the International Space Station is located. Researchers believe this is due to their exposure to deep-space radiation, which has also been linked to chronic cognitive impairment and dementia — or "space brain." These obstacles will have to be overcome before astronauts can attempt a mission to Mars. "We've probably underestimated the impact of deep-space radiation," says Michael Delp, lead author of the NASA study.

5. Marijuana may take a long-term toll on the mind. Researchers found that weed reduces blood flow to virtually every part of the brain. The effect is most notable in the hippocampus, the neural region responsible for learning and memory, which is particularly vulnerable to Alzheimer's disease. "The media has given the general impression that marijuana is a safe recreational drug," says co-author Daniel Amen. "This research directly challenges that notion." Separate studies this year found that longtime marijuana users are also more likely to have memory problems, and are at a greater risk for gum disease.

Possible response options:

- What changes would you like to make in your life this year?
- Choose one passage and respond to it.