

Comfort Crisis – Easter, Michael

This book provides insights about how the current first-world environments to which most people live in has created a level of dissatisfaction that can only be combatted through discomfort, challenges, and intentional growth.

Thanks to modern medicine the average is, yes, living longer than ever. And the data shows that the majority of us are living a greater proportion of our years in ill health. (17) Comforts and conveniences are great. But they haven't always moved the ball downfield in our most important metric: happy, healthful years. (19)

New situations kill the mental clutter. In newness we're forced into presence and focus. We can't anticipate what to expect and how to respond, breaking the trance that can even slow down our sense of time. People remember duration as being shorter on a routine activity than on a nonroutine activity. Stepping outside our comfort zone to learn useful skills that require both mind and body, alerts our brain's wiring on a deep level, which can increase productivity and resilience. Dementia significantly drops in people who dedicate more of their lives to learning. (63)

Escaping from an environment of comfort to one of discomfort is often a multistage process. (65)

At the signing of the Declaration of Independence, only 5 percent of us were urbanites. Today, 84 percent of Americans live in cities and more are moving in. Only 12 percent of Americans actually want to live in a city. (66) Money doesn't seem to cover the rural/urban happiness gap. People who live in cities are 21 percent more likely to suffer from anxiety and 39 percent more likely to suffer from depression than people who live in rural areas. (67)

Dunbar's number: A group of roughly 150 people or fewer seems to be an ideal community. Savanna Theory of Happiness: The higher the population density wherever a person is, the less happy they'll likely be. (69)

Fear is apparently a mindset often felt prior to experience. (73)

It's an interesting paradox. Despite the fact that people today are rarely alone, we are increasingly lonely. Being lonely increases your risk of dying in the next 7 years by 26 percent. Overall, it can shorten your life by 15 years. (76)

Building the 'capacity to be alone' may be just as important for you as forging good relationships. "The capacity to be alone is essentially the ability to be alone with yourself and not feel uncomfortable or like you have to distract yourself," said Matthew Bowker, PhD of Medaille College. Be uncomfortable but untethered. (77)

Our general discomfort with solitude may be due to how society frames it. Consider how we discipline children: timeout. Or how we punish prisoners: solitary confinement. This tradition, Bowker thinks, may have cued us to believe normalcy is found through others and solitude is punishment. (78)

In solitude you can find the unfiltered version of you. "Building the capacity to be alone probably makes your interactions with others richer. Because you're bringing to the relationship a person who's actually got stuff going on in the inside and isn't just a connector circuit that only thrives off others." Research backs solitude's healthy properties. It's been shown to improve productivity, creativity,

empathy, and happiness, and decrease self-consciousness. “Social connection is obviously critical,” said Bowker. “But it can be dangerous if your social connections ever go away and you don’t have yourself to fall back on. If you develop that capacity to be alone, then instead of feeling lonely, you could see solitude as an opportunity to have a meaningful and enjoyable time to get to know yourself a little better. (79)

Moments make everything else more colorful and more manageable. (86)

The average American each day touches his phone 2617 times and spends 2 hours and 30 minutes staring at a small screen. A large group of ‘heavy users’ spends greater than 4 hours on their phones. The average person spends 11 hours and 6 minutes a day using digital media. They still spend double the time watching TV than they do on their smartphone. (93)

The collective lack of boredom is not only burning us out and leading to some ill mental health effects, but also muting what boredom is trying to tell us about our mind, emotions, ideas, wants, and needs. Boredom is neither good or bad – how you respond to it is what can make it good or bad. Boredom is a motivational state. (95)

Our brains essentially have two modes: focused and unfocused. (95)

More than half of adults said they were under ‘high stress in 2017. Anxiety grew by 39 percent in a recent one-year period. Attention spans fell by 33 percent from 2000 to 2015. Depression diagnosis are up 33 percent since 2013. (100)

Fogg’s Behavior Model: Three elements must converge at the same moment for behavior to occur: Motivation, Ability, and a Prompt. (101)

Simple definition of addiction being ‘continued use despite adverse consequences.’ We have less tolerance for distress. Finding a different outlet for boredom lets us tap into creativity. (103)

Torrance’s study found that creativity was a threefold better predictor of much of the students’ accomplishments compared to their IQ scores. (105)

More than half of Americans don’t go outside for any type of recreation at all. American kids play outside 50 percent less than their parents did. Camping in the woods is down about 30 percent since 2006. (111)

Biophilia Hypothesis: We have an ingrained call to be in nature that’s in competition with our evolutionary desire to control our environment. (112)

20 minutes outside, three times a week, is the dose of nature that most efficiently dropped people’s levels of the stress hormone cortisol.

Soft fascination is a lot like meditation. It’s mindfulness without the meditation. (116) Any time in nature is beneficial, but spending more time in wilder spaces does seem to give you more benefits. We should spend a total of about five hours in it a month. (119)

Humans have increased the world’s loudness fourfold. Silence-induced discomfort is new, learned behavior. (127) Our brains are wired to think loud = danger. Today’s jarring background noises spur the same fight-or-flight response. Antianxiety medication use rises a relative 28 percent for every 10

decibels increase a neighborhood experiences, and people who live near loud roads are 25 percent more likely to be depressed. (128) Silence is more calming than listening to Mozart, and silence led to the bigger drops in measures of relaxation compared to a handful of other relaxation techniques. (132)

For every two pounds a person loses, their brain unconsciously ramps up their hunger and causes them to eat about 100 more calories. (140) Overweight people's miscalculations are, on average, 300 percent greater than thin people's. (145) 40 percent of people eat significantly more food when they're stressed. Two reasons for eating: real hunger and reward hunger. (147) Real hunger is an honest dialogue between the brain and stomach. Reward hunger played an integral part in human evolution by compelling us to eat past fullness. (148) Real hunger now drives just 20 percent of eating. When people do eat for reasons other than real hunger, they're far more likely to binge past fulfillment. (150) The slow drip of cortisol from chronic stress not only kickstarts reward eating in many people but also erodes self-restraint. (153) Overweight people are more likely to eat when faced with stress compared to lean people. The all-or-nothing approach seems to make the off-limits foods more attractive and rewarding. People are less likely to comply with health-promoting programs the more stress they face. Fad diets mess with a person's ability to gauge their hunger. (154) Food differs by as much as 700 percent in their ability to fight hunger. (157)

Rarely feeling real hunger is a strong sign that a person is suffering from the ill effects of comfort creep. The average person now eats across a 15-hour window. We're snacking 75 percent more than we were before 1978. Snacks are 60 percent larger and more likely to be ultra processed.

A hungry human body undergoes a sort of cellular natural selection. We fully metabolize our last meal after 12 to 16 hours. A symphony of hormones that act as signals to burn stored tissues for energy – rids dead and damaged cells. (166) Hunger may help humans be more focused and productive in tasks of modern life. People who stop eating a few hours before bed sleep better. Programming 'hunger days' delivers benefits. (169)

The harder you work for something, the happier you'll be about it. (170)

25 percent of all Medicare spending is for the 5 percent of patients in their final year of life. Most of that money goes to treatments that are of little lifesaving benefit. (185) Well-being is really a byproduct of the interaction between a person's external and internal conditions. Once you get past the 25 percent or so poorest countries on earth, where the only question is survival and subsistence, there is no relationship between gross national product, per capita income, any of those things, and levels of happiness. (189) Titles, wealth, and possessions ultimately improve our well-being only insofar as they fulfill our basic needs. The average American works 47 hours a week. We increasingly see busyness as a way to earn status. (195)

A false sense of permanence can cause a person to put off the things they truly want to do. People who thought about their own death were more likely to show concern for people around them. (202)

Exercise-induced fatigue is predominantly a protective emotion. It's a psychological state that has little to do with a person's physical limits. (219) People who are able to detach from their emotions during exercise almost always perform better. (220)

Roughly three-quarters of jobs are now sedentary, and we're sitting more every year. Over the last decade, the average American added another hour of daily sitting. Adults now sit for six and half hours, while kids sit more than eight. (225)

Back pain from "too much" seems to be due to performing one physical activity at the expense of all others. Too little activity is quite a similar problem, except it's caused by a weird, bizarre lack of movement. (256) Pain was and still is an evolutionary advantage. It's our brain's way of telling us we're doing something potentially dangerous. A warning of harm and threat. A use of discomfort to suggest a change that will improve our health and safety. (258)

There are more bacteria in the gut than stars in the galaxy. And scientists estimate that fewer than 100 of these species could hurt your health. (265) A lack of exposure has even been linked to worse-off mental health, because some bacteria could produce substances that alter nerve cells. (267) Avoid taking antibiotics unless absolutely necessary. They can be lifesaving but in killing infection they also raze our gut microbiome. A daily shower with antibacterial soap upsets the balance of microorganisms on the skin and encourages the emergence of hardier, less friendly organisms that are more resistant to antibiotics, which may reduce the ability of the immune system to do its job. (268)

In winter, scientists recommend people lower their thermostats by three to four degrees each week. Then stop once 64 degrees has been achieved. People who slept in rooms in the mid-60s saw a 10 percent increase in their metabolic activity. They also saw improvements in health markers like blood sugar levels. Extreme cold can help prevent severe brain damage and death after dangerous medical events. (271)

Altitude training leads to changes in mitochondria. Prolonged, repeated bouts at altitude lead to the most profound changes. (274)

Discomfort is likely a key ingredient in the Icelandic formula. Natural selection suggests the people who couldn't hack it likely perished. Those with a high discomfort tolerance probably thrived. The result is that Icelanders may have buried within their genetic code a hard-to-kill gene, one that explains their longevity. (279)

Misogi: ritual purification in Japanese culture. A critical benefit of misogi is "creating impressions in your scrapbook." It is the process of pushing oneself to the near brink but in an intentional way that requires preplanning/effort to potentially achieve. The reward is in the endeavor itself as much as achieving the end-goal. (280)