

Potato Chips, Prana, and Perambulation: My Favorite Things to Weather the COVID-19 Storm

My five favorite things that have helped me weather the COVID-19 storm have been yoga, hiking, leggings, potato chips, and writing.

Yoga has been a real lifesaver for me: not just the physical postures but also the breathing and meditation exercises and the spiritual aspect of the discipline. These practices exercise my body, quiet my mind, make me feel that I am doing something positive to keep my health in the midst of the virus, and ground me in positivity and hope. I know I have to stop whatever I'm doing and practice yoga when I feel that I'm caught in an endless loop of worrying and negativity or when the slightest thing (for example, my neighbor using his leafblower) makes me want to scream. My favorite activities are breath exercises; prana (Sanskrit for breath or life force) keeps my lungs in good shape and my mind clear. Without yoga, I would be a mess, emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

Hiking is something I've always done a lot of, but with the pandemic and being home during the day, I've been able to do a lot more of this activity. It's wonderful to be able to go hiking in the middle of a weekday instead of having to wait until the weekend. Each time of the day has its own charm, so I've even gone hiking several times in the same day. I used to work in an office building and would spend a lot of steps walking around the building, going to visit people in their offices, taking a stroll around the nearby campus during the lunch hour, and walking to and from the bus stop. When I was sent home, I worked out of one room and only walked up and down the hallway to the kitchen. This setup quickly made me irritable and unhealthy, and hiking has been my way to exercise and to stay out of the kitchen!

I used to dress up for work, and enjoyed doing so, but didn't see a reason to get dressed up when working from home. I ended up staying in my pajamas or throwing on a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. Neither type of outfit worked well for me – I felt sloppy and uncomfortable. I went out on one of my infrequent store trips and bought 10 pairs of leggings with colorful designs on them. Now each day I pick a legging and a top that matches it and feel like more of a fashion plate, and thus more serious when doing my work and having Zoom meetings, all while being supremely comfortable.

Potato chips are unfortunately one of my favorite foods and so I rarely have them in the house. I would sometimes get them from the vending machine at work or from a nearby restaurant I went to for lunch. At first, I continued avoiding them at home but as day after day of teleworking went by, I started to really crave them. I realized that going to get a bag of chips allowed me a break from work (I tend to get hyperfocused and find it hard to break my attention) as well as reminding me to drink water (the salty attribute of potato chips always reminds me to drink). Something else I realized about eating potato chips was that it lowered my stress level, which has gone way up from working at home; I think it's because having something to chew on releases tension in the jaw. For whatever reason(s), since I've set aside a small amount of chips each day to eat, my stress has gone down. Luckily, it only takes a small amount of the chips for this to happen!

The last, and probably the most important, thing that has helped me weather the COVID-19 storm has been writing. I love to write: stories, letters to friends, emails, journal entries. It was hard before the pandemic to find the time to write but since the pandemic, I've found it crucial to my mental health to set aside several times a day to write. Turns out I had the time all along; I just needed to make it a priority. Getting out all the words that swirl around in my head and keeping in touch with others through writing has been extremely valuable to me.