

Good Gas

Written by Katherine Tandy Brown

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You've probably heard the expression, "You don't put bad gas in a car." You may have even had the "bad gas" or even the "water in the tank" experience. Suddenly, the ol' vehicle has issues with acceleration and hesitation. Maybe even a splutter or two.

A fuel additive may help if there's a bit of condensation in the tank but if the gas is bad, an immediate siphoning out and replacement with the good stuff or a dry-out before adding it, will become necessary, depending on your situation. And if you wait too long, a mechanic will have to hit up your wallet big time.

The same holds true for your body, but *your* gas, or fuel, doesn't come from a filling station pump. Good gas for humans takes many forms. We're talkin' healthy and/or organic foods, preferably locally grown; lots of water, regular exercise, sufficient nightly sleep, time in nature, de-stressing relaxation that can include meditation, positive self-talk, expression of gratitude, perhaps in a journal; supportive friends and/or family, and plenty of fun and laughter.

Sounds simple enough, but it's not necessarily easy. Amid today's go-straight-out-to-try-to-get-it-all-done pace in our society, we often ignore our own needs to focus on those of our family, our friends, our job or our community before our own. Then, should there be a few minutes left over in the day, *maybe* we can add some of that good gas to our own bodies. However, crashing on the couch, perhaps in front of TV, with a pick-me-up sipper of wine, beer, bourbon or whatever your pleasure may be, and a salty or sweet snack, may be all we feel like doing.

Granted, those other priorities may be necessary to tend to, but if you continue to ignore your own health, your body eventually may throw you a curve in the form of a wake-up call – if you're lucky – or something worse. I know that from experience. Fortunately, mine was the former.

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In 1984 I was a fulltime proofreader for an equine pedigree company. Though I adored my coworkers, some of whom are still friends, that was *the* most boring job, with hours that often lasted into the night. I hung in for four long years, until finally one morning I awoke with double vision and unable to walk. I could practically hear my body yelling, “

Enough
already!”

After two weeks in the hospital, I was diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder, Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS), and getting totally back up to speed took a good nine months to a year, plenty of time to re-think my lifestyle and settle upon healthier options. A Food and Healing class at an upstate New York health retreat, Omega Institute, provided the spark to light the fuse of change for me. Over the following years, I learned about better-for-me cuisine, switched from pounding the pavement as a runner to kinder-to-my-muscles swimming, incorporated yoga and chi gong into my routine as relaxers, took long walks in a nearby arboretum, nabbed a cool job in a bookstore, adopted a big ol’ tabby kitty, and embraced a growth-filled spiritual path.

Along the way, a slew of wise gems about living life well have landed in my lap. Here’s a sampling.

- Use the acronym “HALT” to de-stress and zero in on how you really feel. The letters stand for hungry, angry, lonely, and tired. It’s one of those 12-Step Program ideas that can help anyone.

When an anxiety-producing situation presents itself, first halt, take a deep breath or two and slowly count to 10 to send blood to your brain so you can assess the issue more clearly. Then ask yourself why you’re reacting to the trigger the situation has pulled.

- “Am I hungry?” Maybe you missed breakfast or worked through lunch. Eat something, preferably protein or an energy-producing snack.
- “Am I angry?” If so, is it what’s in front of you that’s anger-producing, or is it a different situation entirely that has caused ire to rise? Did you have words with your spouse that remain unresolved? Plan a time to talk and find resolution.
- “Am I lonely?” If so, reach out to someone, not necessarily to say you’re lonely but to ask about *their* life. Concern for others can ease your own worries.
- “Am I tired?” Has your sleep been less than sound lately? Carve out an hour pre-bed to wind down and chill before sliding under the covers. Read a book, listen to quiet music, give your dog some pats, cuddle with the kitty, have a cuppa chamomile tea.

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HALT helps because often we may be troubled about an entirely different issue when the present situation simply crossed our path at an unfortunate time. Get clear on what's really upsetting you and defuse that sucker as much, and as soon, as possible.

- Listen to your body. When my energy returned after my bout with GBS, I started a national support group for folks who'd had the same variant of it as I. During the next five years, I spoke by phone with, and collected data from, more than 90 people. Almost to a person, we were Type A, i.e. competitive, self-critical, extremely driven, highly work-involved over-reactors. New research shows that Type A's are prone to high blood pressure and coronary issues. Should you resemble that description – or one of many others that can lead to chronic health issues – it may be time to start switching to good gas. The better you take care of your body, the better you'll feel and the sooner you'll be able to determine what it's trying to tell you and what it needs.

- Heed the wise words of Helen Neary, author of *Loving and Leaving the Good Life*, adds "Do the best you can, whatever arises . . . Find a job you enjoy . . . Don't worry; live one day at a time . . . Help someone else somehow . . . Take time to wonder about life and the world . . . Observe the one life in all things . . . Be kind to the creatures."

Yourself included!