

[Etiology]

ME = MC<sup>2</sup>

From the abstract of "Self-Experimentation as a Source of New Ideas: Ten Examples about Sleep, Mood, Health, and Weight," by Seth Roberts, published last year in the peer-reviewed journal *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*.

**L**ittle is known about how to generate plausible new scientific ideas. So it is noteworthy that twelve years of self-experimentation led to the discovery of several surprising cause-effect relationships—an unusually high rate of new ideas.

The cause-effect relationships were: (1) Seeing faces in the morning on television decreased mood in the evening (>10 hours later) and improved mood the next day (>24 hours later), yet had no detectable effect before that (0–10 hours later). The effect was strongest if the faces were life-size and at a conversational distance. Travel across time zones reduced the effect for a few weeks. (2) Standing 8 hours per day reduced early awakening and made sleep more restorative, even though more standing was associated with less sleep. (3) Morning light (1 hour/day) reduced early awakening and made sleep more restorative. (4) Breakfast increased early awakening. (5) Standing and morning light together eliminated colds (upper-respiratory-tract infections) for more than 5 years. (6) Drinking lots of water, eating low-glycemic-index foods, and eating sushi each caused a modest weight loss.

Self-experimentation lasting months or years seems to be a good way to generate plausible new ideas.