

Healthy Habits: Level Up Your Life

Guided Self-Study

The material in this guidebook is synergistic, broadening and building on what came before. It's also a lot of information. Please read through this entire manual, but select only those exercises that "speak to you."

The format of this guidebook is set up for you to practice and integrate what you learn and to work at your own pace. Additional copies of all the worksheets are located at the end for your convenience.

To get the most out of your journey, it's highly recommended that you will keep a journal. There will be many prompts and questions for you to reflect on throughout this guidebook. Feel free to use them or go with the flow of whatever comes up for you. Your journal is your free zone.

Allow your journal to evolve and change as needed. Your handwriting, style of writing, even your "voice" will change. This is one of the ways journaling is a profound tool for self-knowledge.

There are no grammatical rules. You don't have to limit yourself to words exclusively. Let it flow. Doodle. Draw pictures. In the end, you'll get as much out as you bring in to it.

To begin, sit quietly for a few minutes reflecting on the most compelling or important feeling/event of the day. Or use one of the prompts offered. Whatever you choose, let that be your first sentence. At the very least, you'll have recorded what is most significant to you. It could be a bit of a dream, memory of chance encounter.

Set a timer for 10 minutes or however much time you have. Three minutes of free-flow writing can surprise you. Grab your journal. Start the timer. Keep your pen moving as you write the thoughts, feelings, and images that arise in the moment. Accept all that you write - the pretty, the ugly, the absurd and the boring. Discover what wants to be felt, known, expressed, and released.

After the timer goes off. Put your pen down and close your journal.

In the beginning, you're just learning how to stop editing yourself. This is hard to do, so give it time. Image management is a part of identity formation, but it can quickly turn into a security blanket hiding our real Self.

While there are no "rules," a few basic guidelines are worth noting:



- 1) *Write spontaneously.* Let the words flow on their own. Self-expression is the only goal. Write without caring or editing in regards to what others might think. Also, allow yourself to write when you want to and not because you should.
- 2) *Write honestly.* Be open to what is instead of how you wish it was. No one needs to read this but you, so don't be shy. Get curious about yourself and formulate a few guiding questions like, "How did I respond?" or "How do I feel in this moment?"
- 3) *Write deeply.* Lack of intimacy and engagement is what creates boredom. The solution is to go all in and get in touch with the feelings. When all else fails, get curious about what's behind it and go from there.

Allow the flow without question. Just go with it. The discovery comes later. Write from your gut, don't hold back and accept what comes. Like yoga and meditation, free-flow writing is a goalless practice that cultivates mindfulness, self-acceptance and spaciousness. You write briskly to a prompt, ignore spelling and grammar, and notice what arises.

One last thought...

I love a beautifully bound journal as much as the next person, but it ups the ante to get my thoughts "just right." I don't feel as free to scribble, rip, tear, doodle – whatever I need to do to keep the thoughts flowing. I recommend getting a very simple, spiral bound journal. Nothing fancy, yet something that you will turn to. If you want to splurge, do so on a few really good pens.

Note of integrity: This guidebook is the product of many voices, mine included. Respectfully, it is the intellectual property of Kerry Ogden. Please honor the time, thought and commitment put forth by not sharing it freely with others without written permission.



Healthy Habits

Congratulations. You are about to embark on a journey of transformation. This guidebook is your jumpstart to taking actionable steps toward bringing better habits and wellness into your life. There is a lot of information here. Read through everything and then pick a few new healthy habits to practice. Master those first, before venturing forward. Baby steps are the key to lasting change.

To reach optimal health you not only need to build better habits, you need to repeat them over time. Forget those claims of change in 21 days. Real, lasting change takes longer. We've all been fired up about change only to see it peter out after a few days or weeks.

Humans are designed to learn from experience. When we do, we make better choices. The key to experimentation is to take what we've learned and improve upon it next time around. Practice and repeat. Instead of berating yourself for the inevitable slips. Ask yourself, "What did I learn?"

Many of us want to be the best version of ourselves possible. We want to eat better, feel better and be better. The question is whether or not we are willing to take the journey. So first and foremost, I want to congratulate you for caring enough about your well-being to take on this adventure. Health and vitality are not a given. They must be earned. I love that you value yourself enough to put in the effort.

So often we set ourselves up for failure by wanting to make giant leaps and bounds. The endurance needed for such change is not sustainable. Real and lasting change occurs in bits. The beauty of baby steps is that you hardly notice change is happening. It feels more like a gently nudge in the direction you want to go and before you know it you're there.

In this guidebook you will be presented with ten healthy habits. Why ten? Because it's doable and I want you to succeed. These ten healthy habits were chosen because they are shared worldwide by the healthiest populations. Though the list is far from exhaustive, it does cover health across the spectrum of mind, body and soul.

Before you get introduced to the Big Ten, I'd like you to get acquainted with someone who is going to be an ally, guide and source of inspiration on this amazing journey you have begun.



Comfort Zones

We often fall into habits for good reason. Our lives are busy and it's the easiest thing to do. Whether it be what we eat, how we move or relate, these comfort zones can also be a trap where we are safe and in control but a bit uninspired and confined to a routine that is no longer in service to us. So it's good to shake things up, just a little, to bring a fresh and interesting experience and higher quality of living into our lives.

This doesn't have to be big, earth-shattering shake-up. Focus on one small change for an entire month. Really hone in on it. Or pick one area of your life to take stock on and allow yourself to meander in and out until fresh ideas come on what you'd like to do or how you'd like to improve it.

The point is to interrupt the habit or routine that is no longer working like it used to. You've got a manual at your disposal, a willing coach and your own gumption to get you through. So step into the unknown, shake things up a bit, take a risk with something new. I'm rooting for you all the way!

Inner Healer

There is a you inside of you who knows everything she needs to know about health and living a life with purpose and meaning. She may not be leading your life, but she is there, watching. You were born with this inner knower/healer and you will die with her. That wisdom can never be taken away, though it can get buried pretty deep.

Disease, discontent and stuckness do not appear from nowhere. They are the cumulative result of an imbalance in the system that was years in the making. The good news is, most degenerative diseases and physical distress are not only preventable but reversible. We are meant to age gracefully with our wits and ability intact to the end.

The most common degenerative diseases today – heart disease, arthritis, cancer, dementia, diabetes, and obesity – start with chronically high levels of the stress hormone cortisol. When cortisol is combined with a diet high in sugar and refined foods and low in daily movement and pleasure, chronic inflammation is the end result.

Given the right conditions, the body will heal itself. That is the way of nature. This entire program is geared toward getting back in alignment with nature, getting back in touch with our inner knowing.



Far too many women are being over treated for early stage cancers with bilateral mastectomies, radiation, and drugs. While the threat is real and not to be minimized, most women have been conditioned to react too quickly due to the ingrained believe that diagnosis means death. Education and awareness is critical, but it can distort our perceptions of the risk and generate a lot of unnecessary fear, which in turn, floods the body with more cortisol.

Your body is designed to intervene with the disease process at every point and to prevent, slow down and reverse this process to restore you to your natural state of health. Your immune system is designed to kick into gear and fight any pathogens or germs that enter. As you make better decisions you build immunity against future invaders.

Every woman must be respected for the difficult health decisions she must make. And, my hope, is that more women learn to trust their inner healer. Modern medicine and medical tests have their place. Use them to discover your imbalances and then help your body self correct by alleviating emotional stressors and avoiding environmental toxins to the best of your ability. Doing so will support the inner healer in creating the health and vitality that is the birthright of every woman.

Deep Listening

Our bodies and our spirits do not lie to us. Learn to trust your intuition, what you feel but can't always explain. It may come in the form of a symbolic dream, or you might have a heaviness or emotional resistance that isn't coming from fear but some deep, inner knowing. When these signals come, give yourself full permission to pause and ask, "What's going on here? What is my body and soul trying to say to me?"

Use modern medicine wisely. Not all medical advice fits every person. Many of us have willingly handed over control of our health. We're giving into fear when we blindly hand over personal authority and responsibility of our health. When you align with nature and honor spirit, seeing yourself as the child of Nature you are, you have a completely different perspective on health.

Our bodies are designed to repair but in order for nature to work her magic, we must reduce stress, get adequate rest, move, and fuel ourselves with whole foods. You're likely reading this because one (or more) of these behaviors is not dialed in. You'll get there. Be



patient and persevere and know that the key to success is to habituation and I'm going to help you do just that.

Mind-Set

What we think - our mental habits - play a huge a role in our health. For example, people's perception of aging has a greater impact, positively and negatively, on longevity than low cholesterol, blood pressure, body mass index, even smoking! Our thoughts profoundly impact our biology. What we think matters. Your thoughts and beliefs are the single most important indicator of your state of health and where your real power lies.

And society plays a part. In Peru the term for hot flashes means "shame," whereas in Japan, hot flashes and menopause are considered signs of a sacred spring when a woman goes deeper into wisdom. And, lo and behold, the inflammation Peruvian women experience with hot flashes is higher than it is for Japanese women.

Additionally, the power of visualization is one of the best kept secrets in the medical profession. You'll later about how to harness this powerhouse for optimal health and well-being.

Personal Vision Worksheet

You'll be writing and reflecting for this exercise, so grab your journal or the use "Notes" in the back of this book. Secure a window of time for deep reflection where you will not be interrupted.

Take some time to imagine your best possible life. What would it look like? To help you start, scale your level of satisfaction across the following domains using a 1-5 scale.

[1=the least, 5=the most]

Career _____
Money _____
Health & Well-being _____
Family _____
Personal Growth _____
Romance _____



Fun & Recreation _____
Environment _____

Imagine yourself as you would like to be. Get as detailed as possible. Consider what you will be wearing, feeling, saying and behaving. Think about the food you'll be eating the type of movement you'll be doing. Think about as many details of your new life vision as possible.

Now grab your journal. In no particular order, list qualities you would love for your "best life possible" to have. Don't be concerned with the potential barriers that might be in the way. Just brainstorm and create a list.

Next, reflect on and answer these questions:

- In your vision, what are you doing more of?
- In your vision, what are you doing less of?
- Who is in your life?
- What is your life like?

Now for the biggie question. Take a deep breath and without judgment answer the following question:

What needs to change for me to achieve my vision?

Be specific. Break it down into components. Let it flow.

Automate Your Life

Just about everything we do, think and feel is habit. Even our personality is mostly a collection of habits. By unlocking the code of habit, we discover the heart of self-mastery. Seeing our problems in life as habits instantly grants us the power to change them.

Change is falsely believed to be about character, which is a blaming mentality. We've all earnestly set about change only to have the old habit creep back in. The inability to create lasting change is not a fault of character or a lack of willpower.

Trying to rely on willpower to create lasting change is a losing strategy. Decision fatigue is real and when the anterior cingulate cortex gets overtaxed from making hundreds of decisions all day, there's no bandwidth left to make a good decisions which opens the door for old habits to come waltzing in.



The goal to lasting change is automation. Once something becomes automatic it frees up tremendous cognitive resources for other things. Investing in just a few diligent months will pay a lifetime of dividends. During this time imagine yourself as wearing a pair of Crocs. You're not going to be running any marathons in them. What you will be doing is tackling tough terrain with patience and perseverance. That's the attitude you want to have when taking on change.

Habit Evolution

The force that will mold, sculpt and shape your body and mind is daily habit. The habits you choose are either in alignment with health or not. As Aristotle said, "We are what we repeatedly do." When you mindfully make wise choices your body wisdom deepens. Over time these repeated actions create your habit evolution.

As we age we should be refining our habits so that our actions are aligned with thriving health and ease of living. Instead, we have been lead to believe that degenerative disease is a given.

Many of us want to be the best version of ourselves possible. We want to eat better, feel better and be better. The question of our own unique journey is whether or not we are willing to take it. The journey will change us, but at a costs. Health and vitality must be earned.

The journeyer sets out one step at a time. There is no other way. So often we set ourselves up for failure by wanting to make giant leaps and bounds. The endurance needed for such change is not sustainable. Real and lasting change occurs baby step by baby step. What are the easiest, smallest, most underwhelming improvements you can commit to today that will get you to a better tomorrow?

How to Build Better Habits

"For the first thirty years of your life you make your habits. For the last thirty years of your life, your habits make you."
- Ancient Hindu saying

Do you ever eat when you're not hungry or continue watching TV even though nothing good is on? Routines often cause downward spirals because we follow through even if we no longer derive pleasure from them.



Habits form for a reason: to make life easy. Once you learn to ride a bike that information is there for good. This is one of the reasons that old (bad) habits are hard to change. In fact, you don't ever eliminate them – they just get weaker as you create newer, stronger ones.

Ultimately it comes down to the most clichéd but scientifically true maxim: practice, practice, practice. To create new, better habits you have to repeat them over and over again until your brain rewires itself.

And 30 days isn't going to cut it. More like ten weeks, or longer. Be prepared for this. But once you train your mind and lay down a new pattern, it will start working for you instead of against you - no matter how old you are or how ingrained the old habit is. That's pretty amazing.

After you have honed in on one or two behaviors you'd like to dial in, keep the following in mind:

Be Specific About Change

Making a resolution to change is more effective than just wanting to change. Being specific in what you want to change helps make it more achievable. For example, "I resolve to work out more" is not as effective as "I resolve to go to the gym before work on Tuesdays and Thursdays."

As we age we should be refining our habits so that our actions are aligned with thriving health and ease of living. We have to train our brain like a dog. If you leave a plate of cookies out, you can't get mad at Rover for eating them. That's what dogs do. You have to train Rover not to eat them.

Creating new habits is not simply a matter of willpower. It's about patience, practice and perseverance. Be as kind with yourself as you would a cute little puppy that can't help herself. When you fail to live up to an expectation you've set, be compassionate and remind yourself losing your way is part of the journey.

Think About How Your Life Would Improve

The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote, "He who has a why to live for, can bear most any how." Having a long-term goal gives you a why. To accomplish something really important to you, like thriving health, it's necessary to suppress a lot of short-term impulses. It may surprise you that the brain finds a way to reward for *not* giving into the old impulse as long as it is in service to a larger value. This is why we want to anchor our



goals to a meaningful purpose, such as “having more energy to play with my kids while they are still young”.

Know Your Triggers

Thoughts and feelings are not always controllable, but your environment usually is. We often get stuck in habits because cues in our environment are associated with the behavior. Ideally, we need to identify our trigger and avoid it all costs. Stay away from the cookie aisle if you don't want to come home with a box of cookies. This strategy works like a charm toward creating new habits. Prep your environment in favor of new habits. If you want to take a walk first thing in the morning, put out your sneakers and socks.

Practice Gratitude

Write a detailed letter from your future self, thanking you for the hard work and dedication that has made her life better. Be detailed about the improvements that have been made such as better rest, weight maintenance, increased self-confidence, clear thinking, connection to the earth, deeper relationships, greater life satisfaction, disease-free living, no more aches and pains, etc. Have future you describe a typical day in her life, how effortless and easeful life is, how she feels, and how her rituals are just a part of life - like brushing her teeth.

Partner Up

People who have a supportive community are 7x more likely to achieve their goal than those who don't. Seven times!!! Being an active part of supportive community is a critical piece to habit change. Be someone's wing person. Give the person your time and deep listening. Agree to give each other an equal amount of time for support. Ask each the following check-in questions:

- What is going on for you this week?
- What are you goals for next week?
- What worked well or didn't work for you last week?
- How can I support you in the week ahead?"

And, most importantly, use humor and compassion liberally.



Dear Me Worksheet

This exercise can be used for long-term goals, like weight loss, or short-term needs like dealing with unfairness. In other words, you can write this from two weeks from now or two years from now.

As you're working your way through the log jams of life, it helps to make frequent visits to this future time-place where your problems are solved. Let the picture of your future self be an image you return to again and again as needed.

Some people have an easier time writing this exercise in a letter form. Get your notebook and start by writing a future date (anywhere from two weeks to two years from now). Then imagine yourself in that future, acting as a guide to your present self, showing you the way to a life free of self-sabotaging behavior.

Dear Present Self,

I'm writing from the future to tell you that thanks to your efforts, you are in a wonderful place in your life. Old patterns are healed and resolved. Here is how positive you feel:

_____, _____, _____, and _____.

Here are the goals you achieved: _____, _____, _____, and _____.

Here are the obstacles you overcame between now and (future time): _____, _____, _____, and _____.

Here are the new actions you took to overcome them: _____, _____, _____, and _____.

Here is how wonderful you feel about our accomplishments and how grateful you feel:

_____, _____, _____, and _____.

Looking forward to meeting you! Thank you so much for your hard work, love and dedication. It was all worth it!

Warmly,

Your Future Self



Ten Ways to Create Change

- 1) *Design with the end in mind.* Get clear on exactly what you want. What you want needs to be specific and measurable behavior. If what you want is less stress, how to get there may require streamlining your to-do list, not working after dinner, going to bed at 10pm and setting the alarm for morning meditation.
- 2) *Give yourself a reality check.* Is this goal doable? Are you sure this is what you want? Is there anything that needs to be tweaked or adjusted to make it a reality? Think about your values and what's important to you.
- 3) *Create a timeline.* Give yourself an end date, a when to the what. Mark this on your calendar. This is your due date. Be reasonable, yet firm. A specific goal needs to have a clearly defined benchmark of success so you know you have achieved. "In ten weeks I will be in bed by 10pm, up by 6am and doing 20 minutes." The program is set up to meet smaller goals on a journey toward a long-term goal.
- 4) *Know why.* Get crystal clear on why you are pursuing this goal. If your what is: "I want to lose 12 pounds in 10 weeks." Then your why is "So I'll have more energy, so that my clothes fit better and it'll be easier to workout in the morning." Once you have your why, remind yourself daily.
- 5) *Baby step your actions.* What are the easiest, smallest, most underwhelming improvements you can commit to today that will get you to a better tomorrow? Write that down and commit to it. If you're wanting is to get to bed earlier, commit to 15 minutes each night for a week. At the end of the week revisit your goal and plan the next baby step. The idea is to hardly notice that change is happening.
- 6) *Give yourself a prompt.* Link the behavior to a location, time, or action. "Right after I _____, I will _____." For example: "Right after dinner, I will brush and floss." Notice how simple and specific the new habit is. The secret to behavioral change is to keep it simple and underwhelming.
- 7) *"Yes, And."* This comes from improv comedy. To build narrative, members of a troop say "yes" to whatever situation arises. This keeps the flow going and allow for endless possibility. You will hear a voice in your head say, "I can't do that." See if you



can squeeze a little “yes, and” in there. “Yes, getting more sleep sounds great. And I can probably go to bed five minutes earlier this week.”

- 8) *Prep your environment.* Design your surroundings to support your goal. If you want to drink tea instead of coffee, set out your teapot and put away the coffeemaker. Want more space in your closet, separate your winter and summer clothing. Want to eat better, stock healthy choices in the fridge and clean out the pantry of processed junk.
- 9) *Create a tribe.* You increase the odds of change by 70% with peer support. Choose your peeps wisely. Connect with people who are the same wavelength. They will cheer for you, empathize and hold your feet to the fire because they know what the journey means.
- 10) *Discover your keystone.* The keystone is the stone in the top of an archway. It bears the weight of the load above and holds the arch together. In the journey ahead, you want to zone in on the habit that allows you to be a better version of you. For many, eating an earlier, lighter dinner is their master habit. Commit to your keystone habit and all the others will fall into place.



“In this moment...”

Health Ritual #1: Sup Your Dinner

A great day starts the night before with an earlier, lighter dinner. Our bodies are not designed to have the largest meal be at the end the day. It lets us know with flatulence, constipation, restless sleep, weight gain, lethargy and mood disorders – to name a few.

Not too long ago, the biggest meal of the day was at lunch giving the body ample time to digest. Farmers would have a pot of soup on the stove all day and in the early evening “sup” the soup for supper.



Over the millennium, our bodies have developed to eat the largest meal midday with a small, easily digestible meal in the early evening. This freed up the body to have energy to finish a few tasks or get some playtime in before sundown.

With a lighter dinner the body isn't working overtime to digest a heavy meal. It's free to do what it's meant to do during the night: repair and restore. When we eat a heavy meal, we're literally borrowing energy from the next day.

When we eat a heavy meal, late in the evening we set ourselves up for failure. That's why this is the first habit we want to dial in. Try to dine by 6pm and finish no later than 7pm. Ideally, leave at least 14 hours between dinner and your next meal.

Make lunch your biggest meal of the day. Nail this one and the next two habits will fall right in line. Here's a quick assessment to see if you need to take this habit to heart. You are eating light and early enough if:

- You feel great with your weight.
- You wake up feeling light and energized.
- After supper you desire to move, take a walk, do household tasks, or play outside.
- You have a strong immune system and rarely get sick.
- You feel a natural fatigue versus exhaustion, at the end of the day.
- When you go to bed, your belly feels empty and light, but you're not hungry.

If you answered no to these questions, eat a satisfying lunch with protein and fat. If you want dessert, have it now and skip it later. For dinner, think soup, salad, green and non-starchy root vegetables. Less grains, legumes and fat. Choose higher water content food over denser, solid foods.

Benefits to Earlier, Lighter Dinner

Better Sleep

Late-night meals and snacking can interfere with your sleep. These behaviors can cause indigestion which can rob you of deep sleep and REM sleep. If you have started to have sleeping troubles, try to make dinnertime earlier in the evening and avoid heavy foods within two hours of bed.



Digestive Health

If you often struggle with heartburn, acidity and gas, it could be because of not having a prescribed time for dinner. When you sleep soon after dinner, your body doesn't get enough time to digest food. The digestive system gets slow as a result, causing you to experience gut troubles as a consequence.

Weight Management

When you eat dinner late at night, you are likely to gain weight. The later you eat your last meal of the day, the more of it gets stored as fat and thus, you run a risk of putting on weight. Moreover, you also have the time to take a walk and burn the excess calories that you consumed.

Heart Health

Eating dinner on time and hitting the sack early has a link with heart health. Here is another reason to eat dinner early – lower the risk of heart attack and stroke. Waiting to eat dinner increases the tendency to eat more and when those calories aren't burnt off, they are turned into triglycerides which increase one's risk of heart attack and stroke.

Headstart the Next Day

When you eat late and stay up late till night, you are likely to miss breakfast the next day. When you don't eat meals on time and wait all day for dinner, your body responds by storing insulin and ups the risk for body fat storage. On the other hand, early dinner gives you a headstart the next time and provides plenty of time for breakfast.

Better Energy

When you are eating dinner on time and not missing out on the next day's breakfast, your energy levels will remain high and intact. When you postpone the meals, it can zap your energy. Besides, it leaves you reeling with low blood sugar and fatigue.

You Make Time for Exercise

When you have an early dinner and go to bed soon, it gives you a chance to wake up early and exercise. And we all are aware of the value of exercise and its contribution to a healthy body.

End to Stomach Ailments

The most important health benefits of having an early dinner is that it puts an end to all stomach ailments. It improves the bowel movement as you are giving your body sufficient time to digest before going to bed.



Meal Planning

Set yourself up for success by having a weekly meal plan. It doesn't have to be formal, though it should be specific enough so that you don't have to think about it. Have fresh salad greens and dressing in the fridge, steam a batch of sweet potatoes at the beginning of the week, make a pot of soup.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Miso soup and green salad with fresh veggies and ginger miso dressing
- Greek salad
- Carrot coconut curry soup
- Gazpacho with avocado
- Asian cabbage salad
- Roasted sweet potato and peas
- Romaine and roasted beets with vinaigrette

Another tip for an earlier, lighter dinner is to use a bowl or 10-inch plate. Often times we eat visually, telling ourselves we're full only when the bowl or plate is empty.

If your family is unable to join your new eating schedule, you can still sit together for a family meal. Simply have your earlier and enjoy a cup of tea or light fruit while they have their meal. Family meals are about more than just food. It's a time to gather together to nourish each other with love and connection.

If you are able to get the family to adjust, kudos! Either way, when the last meal of the evening has ended, clean up and close the kitchen. For fun, you can even put up a sign that says "Kitchen Closed" as reminder to stop eating after dinner.

Don't Rely On Willpower

I'm going to throw down some simplified science to explain why you don't want to rely on willpower to make the changes you want in life. The anterior cingulate cortex has a unique position in the brain, with connections to both the "emotional" limbic system and the "cognitive" prefrontal cortex. When it gets overtaxed from making hundreds of decisions all day, which it does from the time your feet hit the floor, there's no bandwidth left to make a good decisions which opens the door to insatiable hunger signals coming from the stem brain.



The stem brain sends mixed signals when we eat too much of the wrong foods (think hyper-palatable and highly processed foods) which causes our insulin levels to rise. This increase in insulin blocks the hormone leptin. When our reptilian brain doesn't get the signal from leptin that we are full, due to nutrient poor food, it makes us think we're starving. So, we eat more. That's why it's impossible to feel sated by a bag of chips...even if you eat the whole bag! It's missing the nutrients that trigger leptin to tell us, "We're good!"

On top of this, we've been conditioned by external cues that tell the brain joy is just a drive-thru away. Additionally, these pseudo foods have been altered to hit what scientist call our "bliss point." When activated enough times, we develop *overpowering cravings*. Get this. The same receptors that light up for heroine, light up for pizza. The brain gets a rush of dopamine just thinking about getting a hit – whether it be from food or drugs.

In fact, sugar and refined grains (aka flour) act on the brain exactly like drugs. Turns out sugar is even more addicting than cocaine. Eight times more! As crazy as it sounds, we have to start looking at refined, hyper-palatable food for what they are: addictive drugs.

I realize this sounds extreme and, in all likelihood, the idea of giving up sugar and flour is enough to make you fall on the floor into a fetal position. That's okay. It's just your dopamine wanting a hit. Want to know what's even crazier than kicking the white stuff? The way our society eats and the consequences we've decided we're willing to tolerate as a result.

The majority of chronic disease in America is related to lifestyle and nutrition. 35% of all cancers can be attributed to a poor diet and that number has been cited as high as 70%. 90% of heart disease has been found to be preventable by reducing risk factors – the number one factor being diet. Lastly, a whopping 80% of healthcare costs goes toward patients with at least one chronic disease that is preventable with a better lifestyle.

Outrageously hyper-palatable foods are feeding obesity through tolerance, craving and withdrawal cycles. Food addiction is real. All drugs hijack the food reward system. Drugs hit the same receptor, just more intensely.

When we eat stimulating foods that release dopamine, the brain "down regulates" by thinning out dopamine receptors to adapt to the overload. Once it kicks in for the person who is addicted to the stimuli, down regulation feels like the absence of pleasure. Forget getting high. The person needs a fix just to feel *normal*.



Have you ever felt irritable or cranky when you were dieting, especially when there was a “no-no” food in sight? That’s what I’m talking about. Your brain is sending you distress signals and you need the donut just to stop the noise inside your head.

Over just the last few decades, sugar consumption has sky-rocketed thanks to massive farm subsidy from the government. We are hitting the reward system of our brain with ever-higher, more potent levels of stimulation that it simply wasn’t designed to handle.

As Dr. Michael Gregor says, “An ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure, because there is no cure for dead.” You will experience withdrawal but it will go away. For some the shift will occur in as little as a month, for others up to a year. The average length of time is 66 days, so forget about those claims to change in 21 days. The actual range is incredibly diverse. Some people achieve automaticity in as few as 18 days while others take 254 days.

The goal is reaching automation. Once something becomes automatic it frees up tremendous cognitive resources for other things. Investing in a few diligent months will pay a lifetime of dividends. During this time imagine yourself as wearing bunny slippers. In others, travel gently and be kind. That’s the attitude when taking on change. Stay hydrated. Don’t overly exert yourself. Sleep and stay motivated.

Increased exercise depletes willpower. So during a particularly challenging habit-forming phase, scale back on any activity that is overly taxing on your system. Move your body with gentle walking and a few light stretches.

As for food, we get a brand new set of taste buds every two weeks! Woo-hoo! Hang in there. It won’t be long before real food will taste amazing and you’ll be experience true hunger opposed to cravings. You got this!

Health Ritual #2: Early to Bed

“Early to bed, and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.” — Ben Franklin

If you are like most people, chances are you’re living against the rhythms of nature. In western culture, burning the candle at both ends is the closest thing we have to a rite of passage. Unfortunately, our bodies haven’t bought into technology as readily as our minds have.



Our bodies are about as old school as it gets, having developed over the millennia in harmony with the seasons. In order to live an extraordinary life we need to unplug (periodically) and tune into the natural rhythm of nature.

Most of us moderns are living out of synch. We're staying up late, eating nutrient-poor foods, and not moving our bodies as they were biologically built to do. A wonderful built-in quality of the body is that it never lies. It will tell you in obvious and subtle ways if you are living out of alignment.

We lose connection with sacred communication every time we ignore the message. Until one day – ding dong – the body delivers it to you in a neon sign flashing: inflammation, diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease – to name a few. Another indicator that we are off is quality of sleep.

As a society we have no idea how tired we really are. Our fatigue is culturally-sanctioned as the entry into adulthood. We tend to glorify it, even when we make claims against it. To compensate for the deprivation, we're keeping ourselves awake with a steady stream of caffeine and sugar. While you may be outwardly functioning at a normal level, internally the cycle of fatigue and stimulants is wreaking havoc on your nervous system, immunity and circadian rhythm.

Your sleep cycle is synchronized by light/dark rhythms outside your body. Prolonged exposure to artificial lighting and screens tells the brain it's still light out. Time to party! Except, it's *not*. Do your best to avoid bright lights after the sun sets. Dim screens or close them down altogether. Switch off lights you're not using and make sure your bedroom is pitch black when you sleep.

Conversely, bright lights during the day help synchronize your circadian rhythms, which improves your sleep. Take a few minutes to go walking out in the sunshine each day. If you live where light is scarce during the winter months, try to work in a brightly lit environment during the day.

When you develop abnormal circadian rhythms you put yourself at risk for all those diseases mentioned above as well as depression, bipolar disorders and seasonal affective disorders. The U.S. Center for Disease Control has gone so far as to name insufficient sleep as a public health epidemic.



Sleep is a big deal. It compromises immunity and elevates cortisol, our master stress hormone. Cortisol sends a message that the body needs energy to ready itself for action. This energy comes in one form only: calories.

If you've successfully dialed in eating earlier and lighter, bite sizing your bedtime will be a breeze. If you're still working on habit #1, baby step habit #2 by taking a rest on the couch for a few minutes after the kitchen is cleaned and closed. This gets you out of the kitchen while telling your body it's time to exit doing mode.

Use this time to reflect on what your body wants to do next. Maybe your body wants a walk, or a bath, or to curl up with a book. Watch the pull of old habits versus what the body really wants. Ideally you want to start winding down and hitting the sack by 10pm.

Getting to bed early gets you back in synch with the natural rhythm of life. The following sleep secrets are your ally to a restful, consistent night of restorative, nourishing sleep.

Quick Assessment

On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1-*Everyday*, 2-*Often*, 3-*Sometimes*, 4-*Rarely*, and 5-*Never*, how often do you experience the following:

- _____ Yawning at frequent intervals, rubbing eyes
- _____ Wanting more than 3 stimulants per day, such as coffee and caffeinated soda
- _____ Thinking (or wishing) about catching a quick snooze
- _____ Feeling impatient, irritable, or overwhelmed
- _____ Feeling lethargic, not wanting to move, trying to save energy
- _____ Feeling low on self-discipline

Add up your scores above: _____ out of 30 points. The higher your score, the closer you are to functioning at your best. How are you faring?

Sleep Secrets

Sleep is the most underrated health habit. A study at Duke University has found that poor sleep is associated with higher stress levels and a greater risk of heart disease and diabetes. They also found that these risks are greater in women than in men.



There is a discrepancy between what our body clocks and what our social clocks demand. As a result, many of us have lost touch with our natural circadian rhythm.

Sleep deprivation negatively impacts our mood, our ability to focus and access higher level cognition – which leads to a variety of seemingly unrelated problems like weight gain, inflammation and depression. Whereas our creativity, ingenuity, confidence and decision-making are all enhanced by regularly getting enough sleep.

Perhaps it's hard to imagine going to bed and getting up at the same time every day. With the weekdays so full, the last thing you want is to be tied to a schedule on the weekends. But if you reinforce a rhythm – like a 10:30 bedtime and 6:30 wake-up – your body will help you out. It will learn to start producing melatonin at around 10:00pm, to make you sleepy. And at around 6:00am, it'll start pumping serotonin and cortisol to wake you up. It won't take long before you fall into a natural rhythm that requires almost no effort to maintain.

To get a good sleep hygiene going, try the follow simple "secrets":

- Keep the bedroom on the cool side, between 60°-68°.
- No screens an hour prior to bedtime, this includes TV, laptops, e-readers and phone.
- Have the room be completely dark. Utilize black out curtains and remove digital displays – yes, even that little bit of light can disrupt sleep.
- Don't drink or eat two hours before bedtime.

The key to any change is ritual. The same goes for sleep. Start your sleep ritual an hour before bedtime. This sends the signal to your body that it's time to wind down. This might mean sacrificing something you currently hold sacred or love dearly, such as plopping down on the couch to watch your favorite show after the dishes are done and the kids are in bed. Or maybe you love to curl in bed with your phone leafing through Instagram. Those are fun pleasures and if you have no trouble falling asleep and sleep as soundly as a baby, you're golden.

But, if you struggle to get a full, sound 7-8 hours of sleep a night at least give the above suggestions a try. Take a bath, do some gentle stretching, meditate, write in your journal, talk to your partner in bed with the lights off. My partner and I do this every night and it's a loving way to reconnect after a long day of doing.



Respect Your Internal Clock

Most of us get too much light at night, when we need darkness to trigger melatonin production and too little natural light during the day, trapped beneath fluorescent lights. To help your body get back in alignment with your circadian rhythm, link up with the sun. Try rising with the sun and stepping outside first thing, even just for a minute or two, to let your body feel the daylight. This is when having a garden or a dog comes in handy. Not only will the quick morning stroll trigger health signals to your brain, you're relationship to your land will deepen.

Find a time in the day (the earlier, the better) when you can be exposed to natural light for at least a half hour. At night, dim the lights at home. As a reminder when you go to bed, remember to make your room pitch black (cover digital clocks, remove phones). Chances are, you'll fall asleep more easily and sleep more soundly.

Welcome Sandman Worksheet

This exercise will build mindful awareness around your natural sleep cycle. Paying attention to what our biological clock wants to do naturally can help us set a good routine.

Without changing your evening routine, notice at what time you start to feel drowsy at night. For a few days, keep a record of the time at which you start yawning or feeling your eyelids trying to close.

Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Day 4: _____

Is there a roundabout hour at which you get tired? Write it down. _____

If so, that is the time at which you can fall asleep most efficiently. It may not be the ideal and that's okay. Start where you are and work from there.

Do you typically go to bed when you start feeling sleepy, or do you tend to stay up longer either trying to get more done or just hanging out for distraction? Over the course of a few days, notice what you do when you start to feel tired.



At what time do naturally wake up when you have the luxury to do so? Jot down the time at which you first come into morning awareness when you don't have to use an alarm, such as over a few weekends or on vacation.

Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Day 4: _____

Is there a more or less regular time at which you wake up? Write it here. _____

If so, that would be the time you wake most gracefully.

How many hours of sleep would you guess you get on average each night? _____

Now measure it for a few days.

Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Day 4: _____

What's your actual average? _____

Most people tend to overestimate how much sleep we get by about 45 minutes. How are you doing versus your estimate? Did you nail it? We're you off by a mile?

For a few days, record how much light exposure you got during the day and a few hours before bedtime. It's easy to take this for granted because we are so accustomed to having it in multiple forms. Any light makes a difference here, so consider everything from overhead lights to reading lamps and digital clocks. Then rate the ease of falling asleep. Using the following scales to get a sense of exposure:

Light Exposure Scale: High – Lots of light exposure
Med – Some light, but not fully bright
Low – Only very dim light involved

Ease of Falling Asleep: Easy – I fell asleep in less than 20 minutes
Med – I had to put some effort into falling asleep, it took 20-45 mins
Hard – I tossed and turned for over 45 minutes

Note light exposure:

During the day _____ 2 hours before bed _____ 1 hour before bed _____



Note ease of falling asleep: _____

What connection is there between your exposure to light during the day and your ease of falling asleep?

Health Ritual #3: Early to Rise

There is something magical about the dawn. There is space, peace and potential in the morning. By waking early you're able to harness that calm magic. The earliest hours of the day offer a unique opportunity to align your life through your mind. It's a time to set your intention for the day and start your day right.

Rising early is the partner to getting to an earlier bedtime. It the continuation of the natural rhythm of life. This time of day is a sacred moment of solace. The more we align with the rules of nature, the healthier and more vital we become.

Thirty minutes before sleep and thirty minutes after waking, the mind is most susceptible to imprinting. That's because the neuropathways are winding down or have yet to wind up for the day ahead. This is a special time to anchor your intention.

The key to establishing this habit is to align your mind, body and spirit with a specific practice or action. What you do matters less than the consistency of securing the time for practice. You can journal, meditate, pray, stretch, reflect or just breathe. Don't be attached to what you do each day, as that will change according to what you need. Commit to the daily practice. That's where the power is.

Before you decide what will be a part of your morning routine, the primary morning duty is to eliminate accumulated wastes from your body. You want to empty the contents of both the descending and transverse colon before taking in food for the next day.

Inner Flush

The single most important thing you can do each morning is poop. And the best way to stimulate a good bowel movement is with a simple glass of water. I like to "spike" mine with



a squirt of fresh lemon juice. Drinking a quart of room temperature water first thing in the morning will get the goods moving.

Your duty to your body is to help flush the great channel before you bring any new experiences into your day or digestibles into your belly. You want to empty the contents of both the descending and transverse colon. If a quart of water doesn't do it, chase it down with another pint.

Releasing waste fills your body with space, creating a vessel full of potential, for the day ahead. Emptying your bowels also sets up you nicely for the second important thing you can do each day, Healthy Habit #2, waking with the sun. The earliest hours of the day offer a unique opportunity to align your life through your mind.

If you have serious trouble getting the bowels moving in the morning, you can encourage elimination by taking the medicinal herb triphala the night before. Two recommended brands are Organic India and Banyan Botanicals. Take it only until your bowels get the hang of it. Magnesium supplements like CALM are also very helpful.

Also, consider investing in a "squatty pot." Or, if you are flexible enough, lift your heels to rest on the toilet seat. In this position, waste elimination is easier, faster and complete. Sitting, on the other hand, obstructs the passage of waste through the colon. Squatting creates a beneficial pressure in the abdominal cavity, which compresses the colon, creating a natural urge to eliminate which helps release waste and toxins out of the body.

Pooping Perks

When I was the chef and trainer at the Tree of Life it was *de rigueur* to talk about bowel movements and for good reason. An imbalanced digestion is the gateway to most mind-body imbalances. Whereas a robust digestion is a sign of great health.

The American grub many of us we were raised on is digestion nightmare. Because it's the norm, the side effects of it have become widely accepted as part of growing old. We're not taught that chronic constipation, indigestion, diarrhea, gas, bloating, etc. are *irregularities*.

The benefits to healthy digestion and regular elimination are plentiful. The following is a short list of the many perks:

- Your colon absorbs nutrients better.
- Your metabolism is stronger and it's easier to balance your bodyweight.



- Your cells hydrate faster, which helps in productions of blood and muscle cells.
- Your skin will glow due to increased morning hydration and by having less waste in circulation.
- Your lymphatic circulation improves, which improves your immune function.

Poop Whisperer

If you're gung-ho about poop but your body still isn't, become a poop whisperer. First thing, dial in eating an earlier, lighter dinner and drink your morning water. Think about what you eat, as well. The cleaner your diet the better.

Make water your default beverage. Caffeine and alcohol will dehydrate your bowels, not to mention your skin. Water keeps the digestive system and kidneys functioning smoothly and keeps your skin hydrated. If you're not in the habit of listening to your thirst cues, follow the old rule of eight glasses a day.

Space your meals with only water or green tea in between. Eat a more liquid diet, such as green smoothies, soups and stews. Chew your food completely, at least 20 times, to break it down. Avoid crackers, breads and starchy foods. Try adding a few dried plums to your meal.

Antibiotics are depleting our bodies of essential bacteria. Incorporate more fermented foods into your diet like kimchi, kombucha or sauerkraut to balance out bacterial gut flora. You may even consider taking a daily probiotic. These are found in the refrigerated section of your grocer. Choose one with at least 20 billion viable bacteria.

Also, get some kind of movement in every day whether it be gentle stretching, working in the garden or a 30 minute walk. Move your body every day to get things moving. Preferably outdoors in the morning sunshine.

Sunlight

Most people in non-equatorial latitudes experience lower energy, depressed mood, increased sleepiness, and greater appetite, in the winter months as compared to the summer. Some individuals chronically experience Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a form of clinical depression, during the winter.



SAD affects more than 10 million Americans. But you don't have to be diagnosed with seasonal depression to feel moody in the wintertime. A subclinical version (SSAD) brings subtler symptoms: a desire to sleep in, a craving for carbs, and a lack of "omph."

At the heart of both conditions lie some inescapable facts. Like other mammals, humans evolved in response to the natural world and those age-old connections show up in our biology and behavior. When we start messing with our internal clocks, the system goes a little haywire.

Circadian rhythms, our internal clocks, are based on external cycles – the 24 hours it takes for the earth to rotate on its axis. These rhythms affect our eating and sleeping patterns, as well as our hormone production and body-temperature regulation. In other words, biologically speaking, the sun still rules our world.

In the winter the gap between our daily rhythms and those of nature widens, making even balanced people feel sluggish, empty and low. Longer nights encourage our brains to produce the "darkness hormone" melatonin at the expense of the "feel-good hormone" serotonin. But the primary triggers for the winter blues are the change in the timing of the sunrise and the fact that many of us wake up in the dark.

Even if you do not suffer from SAD, adequate light exposure – especially early morning light exposure – is important to your well-being in the winter months. The further from the equator you live, the more important such light exposure is for your mental health.

In addition to its direct benefits, sunlight allows us to make Vitamin D. This helps support our physical health in many ways and has been shown to have a beneficial effect on depression comparable to that of anti-depressant medications.

Thankfully, we can balance out the nature-culture disconnect and reset our rhythms, thereby lifting our moods. SAD and SSAD tend to respond readily to the very thing we're missing: light! As winter approaches here in the Pacific Northwest, we can have gruelingly long bouts of grey. Continue to rise at the same time and consider utilizing a light box and taking a Vitamin D supplement to get you through the winter.



"I feel most at peace..."



Health Ritual #4: Move Your Body

Upon rising, your energy is stagnant and dull. To set health in motion, you want to shake that off and get the blood circulating as soon as possible. Doing so builds momentum for the day ahead. By including movement into your morning ritual, you release stagnate energy, increase oxygenation and flood your system with feel-good endorphins.

From an evolutionary stand point, the sedentary lifestyle is in stark contrast to how human beings have lived for most of history. We are not adapted to be sedentary. Our bodies need to move to help us digest food, sleep better, maintain strong bones and vital functions.

Allow your breath to initiate the action. Deep, coordinated breathing causes your blood, organs and limbs to get in synch. Following the breath takes you into a flow state that shallow breathing can't access. Our cells are starved for this kind of breath-centered movement.

After your morning release, before breakfast, move and breathe deeply for at least five minutes. Do whatever feels good – walk, dance, stretch, jump or salute the sun. Do it every day. Work up to 20 minutes. Connect the movement with your breath.

Self Talk Worksheet

The vast majority of adults know all about the benefits of exercise, yet few exercise enough to reap the benefits. We've all got an internal lawyer that is ready to rationalize what we do and don't do. A common strategy of our internal lawyer is to make a case that we don't have the time or resources to follow through.

Sometimes this inner lawyer cuts to the chase and goes for the juggler with harsh labels. Identifying and removing self-constructed obstacles can make room for positive associations with exercise that will inspire you to get moving.

If you don't enjoy working out, you probably have a fair share of negative associations. Over the next few days, make a note of all those bad vibes here or in your journal.



For this next part, you'll be listing all your favorite excuses. Have fun with it. No one is judging you. Just observe and jot them down here or in your journal.

Maybe you good vibes around exercise! What are some of the aspects you like?

Now for the Big Switch. For every negative association, reframe it into a positive one. See the following for examples:

Negative Association: *I feel like I'm going to have a heart attack when my heart rate increases.*

Positive Reframe: *Increasing my heart rate clears my arteries and prevents me from heart disease.*

Negative Association: *I'm no longer the athlete I used to be.*

Positive Reframe: *I'm glad I can still be athletic.*

Negative Association: _____

Positive Reframe: _____

Negative Association: _____

Positive Reframe: _____

Negative Association: _____

Positive Reframe: _____

Now repeat the above, but this time looking at excuses that keep you away from movement. See the examples provided to help get you started.

Negative Association: *I only have 15 minutes.*

Positive Reframe: *That's just enough for a walk around the neighborhood!*



Negative Association: *I'm too tired.*

Positive Reframe: *Exercise will give me a boost of energy.*

Negative Association: _____

Positive Reframe: _____

Negative Association: _____

Positive Reframe: _____

Negative Association: _____

Positive Reframe: _____

Next time you find yourself making excuses to skip moving your body, come back to this page for a friendly reminder.

Morning Dopa

Waking up to coffee and emails is a recipe for stagnation and inflammation. A better alternative is to gorge yourself with oxygen and feel good hormones like dopamine. Dopamine in your brain's version of methamphetamines. It controls decision making, focus and pleasure. Its goal is to seek what turns you on and then get more of it.

Lucky for us, the dopamine system is flipped on through exercise. By including conscious movement into your morning ritual, you release stagnate energy, increase oxygenation *and* flood your noggin with endorphins. The more intense the exercise the better, but if you don't have it in you to get a runner's high, a walker's buzz will do just fine.

Start with 5 minutes a movement a day and gradually work up to 20 minutes. Link it to another daily task with the statement: "Right after I _____, I will _____." Keep it simple and doable. The reason being is that the brain also rewards us with dopamine when we're working toward a long-term goal. Not only do we get a boost when we reach the target, dopamine is release with each step along the way.

Focus on baby steps. "Right after I drink my water and poop, I'll do two sun salutations and fifty jumping jacks." The key is to train your body to move with the breath and get the blood flowing. Over time, your body will start to tell you what it needs. Be curious and open to trying new things.



Ease Into Movement

If it's been a long time since you've actively moved and stretched your body or you are still healing from a stressful injury, ease into movement. Baby your injuries and know that avoiding movement will only make them worse. Be gentle, yet firm with that inner voice that wants to vegetate on the couch. Instead, take a hot Epsom salt bath, get a massage or take a light stroll.

If you don't yet exercise at all, be extra gentle as you begin. It's more important to build the habit. Five minutes of daily walking is infinitely better than running for a week and quitting. Ease yourself into a daily practice. Make it fun. As you build strength and endurance, your body will let you know it wants more a challenge.

Five Minute Movement

This one is seemingly easy, yet hard for many to do. For this reason, set your phone, watch or timer to remind you. Write it on a Post-it note. Whatever will help you remember to move.

After 55 minutes of sitting, get up and walk around. Use the bathroom upstairs. Get a drink downstairs. Just move. Even getting up and sitting down for five minutes will do it. Not only will this get your heart moving, it will build your pelvic floor muscles.

Stretch your arms over your head. Give your torso a gentle stretch. Do a few jumping jacks or push-ups. If you can, pop outside for a big, cleansing breath. This break also gives your mind a restart, so don't be surprised if this habit gives a boost to productivity.

Fountain of Youth

Our bodies were meant to move, like children, in fits and spurts. Our bodies were not built to run long distance for no reason. We're built to chase down prey and then stop. To run from danger and then stop. That is what feels best and works best to keep the human body in shape – short bursts of intense exertion interspersed with periods of leisurely movement.

You don't need a specially designed workout or a personal trainer. This system is organically built into how children play as well as the average yoga class. You hold a pose that works every muscle you've got, followed by child's pose.



One way or another, do something physical every day. If you're a runner, get in some stretching. If you're a yoga loyalist, get some sprints in on your next walk. The idea is to be strong and stretchy. Be sure to get in some core work, as well. This can be as simple as a few plank poses. Having a strong, central support is what holds our whole musculoskeletal system together.

Why Yoga is the Bomb

Yoga is about a lot of things, but largely it's about learning how to stay in an uncomfortable place. Once practiced, the concept goes wherever you need it because you take it with you wherever you go.

Standing in tree pose, for example, you feel a little wobbly and think, "*Hum...if I shift my weight to the left, I think I'll keep my balance better. If I lift my chest, I might be able to breathe more fully and loosen the tightness in my belly.*" And then later at work, when you're feeling tense you remember to ground your stance, open your chest and take a slow easy breath. In this way, yoga becomes a way of life.

But it doesn't happen overnight. As with everything else, the changes we want to make come with repeated practice. We fall off the mat and get right back on again, because we know it takes time to rewire new habits and new ways of thinking. Whether it be yoga, relationships or parenting – we never master it. We just stay on the path and deepen our discovery.

Yoga speaks in a startlingly fresh way to the concerns we Western seekers bring to our psychological and spiritual journeys. Americans suffer inordinately with what therapists call problems of the self – an inability to self-soothe, an inability to sustain a satisfying and cohesive sense of self-overtime, an inability to maintain an ongoing sense of belonging and a deep sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Think of yoga as the ultimate holistic medicine. Yoga understands the critical role of the body and mind in the development and transformation of character.





Recognize these cuties? They're from a popular cartoon strip from the 1960's. I'm going to borrow some of their love to shed a little light on yoga.

Yoga is...

...about linking breath and movement.

...about noticing where your mind goes when you ask your body to do something unfamiliar or scary.

...about being humble.

...about opening your heart.

...about discovering balance and being nice to yourself when you fall.

...about fixing things from the inside.

...the pursuit of outward clarity, to help move us toward outward clarity.

...about stretching, strengthening, stimulating, and tuckering out every muscle in the body so you can comfortably sit and meditate, without any aches to distract you.

Open Your Heart

If you only learn one yoga pose, let it be *supta baddha konasana* or "Reclined Goddess Pose." No, that's not why I chose it - though the name is pretty great. This asana is a heart-opening, lung-stretching, deeply restorative posture you can do with or without props. It'll give you a sense of the true magic yoga can offer without straining yourself unnecessarily.

Whether you spend your days at a computer, building with your hands, or on the floor playing with your kids, you're likely to be closed and tight in the front of your body. Most of us are. Reclined Goddess Pose opens the shoulders, chest, groin, inner thighs, and hips. It



can relieve stress, depression, and anxiety while stimulating circulation and the digestive and abdominal organs.

It also relieves symptoms of menopause and menstruation. If you have sensitive hips or knees, you can place blocks or blankets underneath your knees to support them. If you have groin or knee injuries, use blocks under your knees to support them.

1. Begin seated with your knees bent and your feet on the ground.
2. Place a bolster or folded blanket lengthwise behind your sit bones and gently lie back so that your midback and head are supported by the bolster.
3. Once comfortable, take your feet together and push knees apart, and allow your arms to relax on either side of you. Breathe here for at least five deep breaths.

Love Your Sole

Your feet are the command center of the body. Be nice to them. They are deserving of loving attention. One way I love my feet is with a thick, squishy mat. I have one in the bathroom and two in the kitchen, one near the sink and the other by the stove. Wherever you find yourself standing for an extended length of time is a good place to put extra support for your feet.

Another handy trick is to keep a tennis ball in your desk drawer. As you're sitting at your desk, roll it under the bottom of one foot and then the other, for five minutes. It ungrrips all the tiny muscles that hold up your frame all day and has gentle trickle-up benefits for your entire system.

Also, minimize the number of hours you spend in tortuous shoes. Heels are sexy as hell, but hard on the footies. High heels don't just hurt your feet, they affect your knees, hips, spine and neck – which means your brain and mood are affected, too!

If you do wear heels, and let's face it, sometimes we just need to rock a pair, always take two minutes to stretch yourself back into shape. Stand on a step with the just ball of your feet and let your heel lower down for a calf stretch. Hold for a few seconds then switch feet. Repeat 10 times. Finish with a gentle foot massage and a loving thank you.



Health Ritual #5: Eat More Plants

Let's face it, most of us know eating more plants is the way to go. When you eat plants, you take in their deep, nourishing energy. Whereas when you adulterate the plant, you miss out. Plants provide every nutrient we need, except for B12 and that's only because the soil has been damaged through years of chemical agriculture.

Our bodies know exactly how to disperse the vital nutrients at a cellular level and rewards our wise choices with good digestion, clear skin and abundant energy. Another perk to eating more plants is that it plugs us into the rhythm of nature, especially when we eat locally and seasonally.

And let me just put this out there from the start, all protein comes from plants. That is where animals get their protein. Plants. Protein comes from plants. ☺

We are what we eat and while you're not going to turn into turnip by eating one, the scientific evidence is clear: humans thrive on a whole foods, plant based diet that is low in fat and nutrient dense. We can almost completely control our health destiny and avoid the diseases that befall those who adhere to the standard American diet and lifestyle by simply eating more plants.

Plant-based eating is not a diet. It's a lifestyle. It's not vegan, raw or paleo. It focuses on what you eat, not what you exclude. It's based on lots of vegetables (raw, fermented, roasted, cooked, boiled and grilled), fruits, beans, legumes, seeds and nuts (in smaller amounts).

Whether you eat locally raised eggs, grass-fed animals or bone broths is not worth taking sides over. Honor your body by eating as much whole foods it wants. Prioritize plants. The more good stuff you get in you, the less room there'll be for the other stuff.

The more complex or hard to digest your diet is, the less energy you have for everything else. Get good at streamlining your diet to optimize energy. Daily food should be simple, quick and easy to make.

What you crave is almost always determined by the pattern you are perpetuating. Taste is relative to what you recently relished. If you've been eating cookies every day, you will crave cookies. Like increases like. Part of the trick to creating better eating habits is to diversify your portfolio.

While your body will reward you in the long run, if you aren't accustomed to eating plant strong, you may experience some initial digestive distress as your body adjusts. Probiotics



and a well-balanced digestive enzyme can dramatically help as your body through the transition.

Size Matters

Most of us Westerners are card-carrying members of the Clean Plate Club. And for good reason, waste is a disgrace. The problem with this seemingly moral membership is that the size of our portions have dramatically increased.

Between 1977 and 1996, food portion sizes increased both inside and outside the home for all categories except pizza. Analyzing data from three national surveys involving more than 60,000 Americans, researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill found that serving sizes have grown over the past 20 years

The data revealed that over the past 20 years:

- Hamburgers have expanded by 23%
- A plate of Mexican food is 27% bigger
- Soft drinks have increased in size by 52%
- Snacks, whether they be potato chips, pretzels or crackers, are 60% larger

Adults who come to the United States are often wow-ed by the staggering sizes of the portions here. Not surprising, the prevalence of adult obesity in the United States increased from 14.5% in 1971 to 30.9% in 1999. The most recent statistics (2016) has the prevalence rate of obesity at 39.8%, affecting about 93 million Americans.

Because we often eat with our eyes, it's natural to eat more when given bigger portions. Do yourself a favor and order smaller sizes when you're out or ask for a container and pack half of it to go. You can also take a cue from Asian culture and try eating with chopsticks – which force you to eat slower.

Another tip on how to eat comes from the residents of Okinawa, which has some of the longest-living people in the world. There, they practice *hare hachibu*, which means they eat until they're 80% full. This jives with science, since it takes a while for your brain to realize your stomach is full. To help facilitate this, chew each bite at least 20 times. This not only breaks food down for better digestion, it sends a signal to your stomach that you're getting full.



Another trick is to only drink water or herbal teas between meals. Drinking caloric beverages is like a snack, taxing digestion which requires energy. This is a form of grazing, which keeps the digestion system continually on, taking energy away from other systems. That rumble in your belly stokes the fire of metabolism, encouraging your body to burn more fat. When you graze throughout the day, the digestion fire is extinguished.

A lifetime of less-than-best food choices leaves a trail in the body, especially on the tongue and gastrointestinal system. Your tongue is your body's tracker. It detects freshness, flavor and nutrients. Over time, due to poor digestion, you may develop a thick coating on your tongue. If so, you lose the clarity of your taste buds.

Thankfully, the body is a great intelligence. It knows when to clean house. Provide it with some detox and your inclination for healthy tastes will return. Lastly, as mentioned, we eat with our eyes first. Get in the habit of presentation. Set the table. Use cloth napkins, attractive dinnerware and smaller plates.

The following guidelines is a "cheat sheet" that will help you build better habits to strengthen your sense of taste and digestion. Find one or two that are linked to your issue (poor digestion, elimination, insomnia, stress, etc.) and work from there. *Bon appetite!*

- Thoroughly chew your food.
- Spike your water with citrus.
- Eat locally and seasonally as much as possible.
- Eat melons on their own.
- Eat fruit first.
- Only eat when hungry.
- Avoid snacking.
- Prioritize fresh over leftovers.
- Do not eat while distracted.
- Give thanks for your food.
- Eat no more than what would fill your two hands
- Relax after eating for a few minutes.

Get Acquainted with Hunger

Do you remember hunger? To my chagrin, it had been years since I had. I used to nibble and nosh throughout the day, adhering to the "slow-burn" philosophy of digestion. But the



truth is, I was eating to fulfill a variety of emotional needs like boredom, anxiety, and aversion.

Snacking is a leftover habit from childhood. Kids need to refuel all day because their little bellies can only hold so much while their bodies require a ton of calories. Unless you're an Olympian athlete, two to three meals a day are more than enough.

I'll be honest this one took a while to dial in, but when I did I saw a dramatic shift in my digestion and elimination. That's the beauty of finding your keystone habit. You experience real change - fast. I began to look forward to the hollow feeling of hunger and felt genuine appreciation for my food. I was no longer eating on auto.

When I snacked, I knew I wasn't hungry. I often felt disempowered, unable to stop eating. This wreaked havoc on my sense of self. Reigning in my snacking gave me back my power. I am now at the helm of when I eat, how I eat and what I eat.

It's estimated that 80% of food cravings are thirst in disguise. When in doubt of real hunger, have a glass of water. Jazz it up with a squirt of lemon or a piece of pineapple. This is also a good place to apply the "yes, and" rule: "Yes, I want to eat and I'll have a glass of water first. If I'm still hungry in 20 minutes, I'll know it's the real deal."

Part of the goal in taking responsibility for your health is getting to know yourself better. Not just the aches and pains, but also what makes you hum and soar. Whether you're a carnivore or vegan, fitness fanatic or yoga loyalist, wellness is governed by a balance of mind, body and soul and the healthy habits that make them thrive.

Food Rules

As with all the suggestions in this guidebook, pick and choose one or two of the following and see what works best for you.

- Eat real, whole food – the kind of stuff that goes bad if left too long on the shelf. Clear the kitchen of crap. Buy fewer packaged foods. Avoid anything containing high fructose sugar or artificial sweeteners.
- Eat fat, good ones like avocados and raw nuts.
- Eat the colors of the rainbow, daily, as often as possible.



- Buy organic and local. Portland is a veritable Shangri-La for produce. Take advantage of the bounty by supporting your local farmer. Visit co-ops and the Farmer's Market. Even better, grow your own food.
- Sugar is poison. We are wired to like sweetness but in small doses and in its whole form. Think blueberries, strawberries and figs.
- On that note, watch your fruit intake – especially dried fruit. It's better than the "white stuff," but it'll still spike your glucose.
- Raw nuts are packed with nutrients. Roasted nuts, not so much. If you like them toasty, slow roast raw nuts at 165° for 10-15 minutes.
- Break up with bread. The wheat of today is not our friend. It's addictive and an appetitive stimulant. For many, giving up processed flours (bread, pasta, cereal, etc.) will seem unfathomable. After sugar, gluten is the biggest energy drain. Your immune system fights it as if it's a foreign invader, which is exhausting. To free up precious energy, say bye-bye to bread.
- Think of dairy as a condiment. Better still, avoid it altogether. Adults aren't meant to drink cow milk any more than they are meant to drink human breast milk. It wreaks havoc on our digestion and is loaded with pesticides, steroids, antibiotics and bacteria.
- Stop counting calories. Go for nutrient density. Pay attention to the source of your calories rather than the number. A hundred calories of kale is much better than a 100 calories of a cookie.
- Don't stuff yourself. We often think we're full only when the plate is empty. Stop eating when you're about 80% full. Eat slowly, preferably sitting down a table without distraction with pleasant company of those you love.
- Drink green tea. In the beverage smackdown, it kicks butt over coffee. Rich in botanical antioxidants, it strengthens your immune system, protects against sun damage and arms you against cancer – all while providing a gentle boost of energy.
- Love your gut with fermented foods. Sauerkraut is *the* easiest probiotic to make: shred some cabbage, massage in some salt, press into a jar and let sit. Boom. Done. Kimchi, kombucha, pickled vegetables and tempeh also encourage the growth of healthy bacteria.
- Limit oil. We've been sold a false "truth." Oil is not a health food. Not coconut oil, not olive oil, not avocado oil. It's one of the most refined foods on the planet that is pure fat with no nutritional value. Get your fat from food. Your taste buds will need time to adjust, but once they do you'll appreciate the real taste of food.



- Chocolate is okay...in moderation. Choose dark, 70% or higher, and take a pass if it contains milk.
- Chew your food well. Digestion begins in the mouth. If you gulp down your food, the stomach and intestines have to work that much harder to break down nutrients. These big bits end up in your blood stream where the immune system attacks them as foreign invaders.

Food Matters

There are many ways to nourish ourselves and food is one of the most pleasurable. What we eat and how we eat has a tremendous influence on the quality of our lifestyle. Most diseases are lifestyle related.

When you eat wholesome foods prepared with love with those you love, sitting down *sans* electronics, you're less likely to look to food later to fill what's missing because you are full of belonging. Enjoying life makes it easier to enjoy food that nourishes your body. Food no longer takes on the dual role of friend and therapist.

When it comes to food, you must learn to eat like a goddess who loves the bounty of nature before her and knows she is deserving of the best and freshest available. Lose deprivation language – what you are “allowed” and “restricted” from eating. Focus on the rich color, taste and texture and the tremendous variety of fruits and vegetables.

Lose the word diet. Eating is a lifestyle. And if the scale is currently not your ally, put it away for a while. As you develop a healthier attitude toward food and your body, you'll know whether or not the scale is helping or hindering.

Women need to think and talk differently about health and nutrition. You can eat all the steamed broccoli and quinoa in the world, but if you're doing so to beat your appetite into submission you'll just raise your stress hormones to the levels as toxic as the most highly processed foods.

Mindset matters. Guilt or shame about what you're eating compounds anxiety. If this sounds familiar, invite awareness to your belly before you eat. Is it relaxed? Happy? Or it tense, worried and wishing the pants weren't so tight? Just bringing awareness can shift the energy. Nobody eats perfectly all the time. Be kind to yourself and go your best.



Thankfully the body is forgiving and wise. As you age, it will send very clear signals. Digestive upset, high blood pressure, constipation, achy joints are just a few of the early signs. If you don't heed them, the body will continue to let you know until it gets your attention. Don't wait until medical intervention is needed. Nourish yourself now.

Guilt in the Kitchen

Our kitchens can be one of the most guilt-inducing places in our homes. We feel guilty about what we're eating (too many carbs, too much sugar, not enough veggies). Or we feel guilty about buying all those leafy vegetables and then tossing them in the trash when they've gone bad, which leads to guilt about not having a compost bin, which leads to more guilt about not single-handedly saving our planet.

There's guilt for not producing enough delicious, healthy meals for our families. Guilt for not buying organic, free-range and local. Guilt for snacking late at night, for not doing the dishes or mopping the floor or cleaning out the freezer. *Gah!*

Before I venture further, I want to point out that guilt is not always such a bad thing. Our guilty feelings are simply telling us that our ideas and expectations are not aligned with what's actually happening. This can be helpful information. It can be an indicator to pause, take stock, and adjust accordingly. In this way, guilt has a helpful, if limited, place in our kitchens and in our lives.



Make no mistake, food can be addicting. Refined sugar, alcohol and other high glycemic foods all increase beta-endorphins which give a quick, temporary boost of feel good. But over the long term, they increase inflammation which contributes to disease.

Food manufacturer know this and have it down to a science. Literally. They know the exact chemistry needed to get us hooked to their Frankenfood. If you do eat processed foods, read the label and do so in moderation. The only long-term, sustainable cure for food addiction is to create an environment in which you self-generate natural "feel good" chemicals in your body through healthy lifestyle choices as you work on the underlying emotions driving you toward your trigger foods.



But guilt rarely travels alone. It's often accompanied by a sense of shame, inadequacy, and frustration. So while it's okay to feel the initial pinprick of guilt's lesson, it's not okay to indulge in it or, just as bad, to ignore it. Unchecked, guilt goes underground and can sabotage the simple pleasure of being alive.

When you feel guilty rearing its head, try to check it before the beast jumps up and wraps its arms around you. Ask yourself what the expectations are and what is keeping you from meeting them. Are they reasonable and doable? Don't indulge the notion that it is some shortcoming on your part.

Guilt is quite tenacious and sometimes even habitual as a response, so it's not always possible to simply shrug it off. And the last thing you need on your plate is feeling about feeling guilty! We may never eradicate guilt from our lives completely but we can keep it in its place. We can limit its negative effects on our lives, while at the same time using its keen ability to discern "What is workable given the reality of my life?" and take it from there.

Food Synergy

Increasing evidence suggests that certain components in the foods we consume interact with each other to give our bodies extra disease protection and a higher level of health.

Phytochemicals found in whole plant foods have consistently been found to be protective at reducing the risk of chronic diseases. The "magic" is in their synergistic effects. The positive impact of whole plant foods is dramatically increased when combined with other whole plant foods. The whole really is greater than the sum of its parts.

Each plant in nature possess different bioactive compounds with varied antioxidant capacities. Combining foods from different categories increases their synergistic value. This is more than $1 + 1 = 2$. It's more like $1 + 1 = 5$. A few super synergy food include: whole grains, vegetables (especially dark green), raw nuts, tea (especially green), tomatoes, citrus fruits, and ground flaxseed.

This partially explains why isolating antioxidants into a pill form doesn't provide the same health benefits as eating whole plant foods. The problem is that the desire for quick fixes through pills is overwhelming, making the public susceptible to influence. Wall Street and Big Pharma know this and prey on the persuasion.



A Few “Fun” Food Facts to Get You Motivated:

- Marketing and lobbyists have sold our health to the highest bidder. Our food is laced with sugar, oil and salt in such a way that we develop unusual cravings.
- Plant oils are the triumph of marketing over science. It’s the most processed food on the planet and not a health food, despite claims to the contrary.
- Calcium is a mineral. Want a first class, highly absorbable form? Get it from the source. Eat plants. You absolutely do not and should not get it from milk.
- All protein comes from plants. That is where all animals get their protein. Plants. Plant sourced protein is the cleanest, most energy efficient, environmentally friendly source of protein on the planet.
- Kwashiorkor is the term for protein deficiency. You never heard of it because you don’t have it. Don’t worry about getting enough protein when eating plants.
- Chicken has the same amount of cholesterol as red meat. Fish is loaded with toxins and has more cholesterol than either one.

Detox

I’d like to take a moment to talk about detoxification. Detox is great. It fosters good health and reminds us how good it feels to return to our natural state of well-being. But most people see it as a kind of penance for being “bad.” You do not have to subject yourself to days of detox that bring on migraines and flu-like symptoms because you over did it during the holidays. You can simply choose to return to clean eating and let your body remove the accumulated toxins as nature intended.

You will still feel some mild discomfort – a bit of bloating for a few days, a dip in energy but a boost is just around the corner. Let go of the concept of detoxification as punishment and focus on the pleasures of nourishing yourself with fresh, whole foods and tending to your needs. During the first few days, redirect your energy toward decluttering an overcrowded space like a messy drawer or closet and smile knowing the same is happening within your beautiful body.

Eat Smart, Live Strong Worksheet

Sometimes we eat the wrong foods because we don’t know. Companies invest millions of dollars in advertisement and misleading propaganda to keep us confused. Learning a basic outline of how much of what you should be consuming is a good place to start.



To get started, let's take a look at some basic food components:

- **Sugar:** We're eating too much and it goes by a myriad of names, including high fructose corn syrup, molasses, honey and crystal dextrose. Aim for less than 12 grams per day.
- **Sodium:** We are assaulting our food with salt and it's ruining our taste buds. Sodium is found in table salt, soy sauce, cured, canned, pickled and packaged foods. Aim for less than 2300 mg per day.
- **Saturated fats:** The main source of sources of cholesterol is fatty meats and dairy products. Yet another perk to eating more plants, is a natural reduction in saturated fats. Aim for less than 300 mg of cholesterol and 20 grams of saturated fat each day.
- **Trans fats:** Avoid these like the plague. Fast food, baked goods and margarine are your three leading sources of it. Trans fats are hydrogenated and cause more weight gain than any other fats. If you see anywhere on your list of ingredients, get rid of it.
- **Fruits and vegetables:** These lovelies are the king and queen of the food pyramid. Treat yourself like royalty and fill yourself up with as many as you like. Aim for at least 2 cups of fruit and 3 cups of vegetables each day.

To better give you an idea of what you're consuming, remember we often don't realize how much we do, jot down your intake over a four day period.

Nutrient	Advised Intake	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Sugar	< 12 grams				
Sodium	< 2300 mg				
Cholesterol	< 300 mg				
Saturated Fats	< 20 grams				
Trans Fats	None is best				
Fruits	> 2 cups				
Vegetables	> 3 cups				
Dark Greens	> ½ cup				



Health Ritual #6: Love Your Skin

The body needs and craves touch. Without it we fail to thrive and the need for touch extends past our emotional needs. Our hands are amazingly sensitive instruments. When we mindfully apply them to our body, we create a powerful line of communication and healing. That's why dry brushing and oil rubbing are top of the list on this Healthy Habit.

Dry brushing not only exfoliates your skin, it stimulates detoxification. Your skin is the largest most important eliminative organ in the body and is responsible for one quarter of the body's detoxification each day.

The following is a list of the many benefits of dry brushing:

Stimulate Your Lymphatic System

In your body, your lymphatic system is the system responsible for eliminating cellular waste products. Hundreds of miles of lymphatic tubules allow waste to be collected from your tissues and transported to your blood for elimination, a process referred to as lymphatic drainage.

When your lymphatic system is not working properly, waste and toxins can build up and make you sick. Lymphatic congestion is a major factor leading to inflammation and disease. By stimulating your lymphatic system you help release toxins, making dry skin brushing a powerful detoxification aid.

Exfoliation

Dry skin brushing removes dead dry skin, improving appearance, clearing your clogged pores, and allowing your skin to "breathe."

Increase Circulation

When you dry brush your skin, it increases circulation, which encourages the elimination of metabolic waste. It's a win-win and particularly useful during winter months.

Reduce Cellulite

Dry skin brushing may help to soften hard fat deposits below the skin while distributing fat deposits more evenly. This may help to diminish the appearance of cellulite.

Stress Relief

The act of dry brushing has been described as meditative (especially if you do it in a quiet space) and may reduce muscle tension, calm your mind, and relieve stress. Many compare it to a light whole-body massage.



Improve Digestion and Kidney Function

Dry skin brushing may go even deeper, helping to support your digestion and organ function. Many naturopathic doctors use dry brushing to help with bloating because massaging the lymph nodes helps the body shed excess water.

Invigorate

Many people become "addicted" to dry skin brushing (in a good way) because it simply feels so good. Along with glowing and tighter skin, regular dry skin brushers report feeling invigorated after a quick session.

Our skin receives one third of all the blood circulated in the body. It's also the last to receive nutrients in the body, yet the first to show signs of imbalance or deficiency. So it's wise to "listen" to your skin by tending to it daily.

How to Dry Brush

Choose a dry skin brush with firm natural bristles and brush once or twice a day for optimal results. You should use gentle pressure while brushing (toward your heart); your skin should be pink (but not red) after a session.

It's easy, inexpensive and invigorating. Here's how you do it:

- Always dry brush your dry and naked body before you shower or bathe. You want to wash off the impurities from the skin.
- You can do the brushing head-to-toe or toe-to-head. It doesn't matter. Just move toward the heart in long, sweeping strokes. Stroking away from your heart puts extra pressure on the valves. We don't want that.
- You can also dry brush areas of cellulite five to 10 minutes twice a day to achieve cellulite dissolving but the technique needs to be done consistently for a minimum of five months. Be patient and consistent.
- Wash your brush once a week with warm soapy water.
- After showering, it's time for step two.

Nourish Your Body with Oil

The practice of self-massage is lavishly healing. Oil opens awareness to deeper bodily tissues, in particular muscles, bones, blood and nerves. You don't have to invest lavish,



expensive oils. Just head over to the grocery store. Sunflower, coconut, grapeseed and avocado oils will all do nicely. Just be sure to buy organic

Over time, when you tune into the needs of your body you can tailor to what it needs by adding a few drops of essential oils to one of the carrier oils listed above. Essential oil have a much smaller molecular weight than carrier oils and therefore pass through the skin. Feeling stressed? Add a few drops of lavender essential oil. Feeling spacey? Add some grounding cedarwood or sandalwood.

You might be wondering, "Can I use lotion instead?" Lotion is basically oil and water and a whole bunch of chemicals to bind it together. No matter how "natural" your favorite brand touts itself to be, it's anything but. That's not a slam, just a fact of science.

The process is self-massage is simple. Put some oil in a small 4 ounce bottle. Optionally, you can add a few drops of essential oil. Give it a shake if you do. After dry brushing and showering, slightly dry your body.

Pour or scoop a small amount of oil into your hand. You don't need much. Knowing just how much will take some practice. You don't want it to ruin your clothes and you don't want to be skidding over your skin.

How you go about it is up to you. I tend to do one limb at a time, working the oil all over then backtracking to give joints and larger muscle groups some extra love. I keep massaging until it almost completely absorbed into my skin.

Once a week or so, find the time to give yourself a longer massage. Start with a long bath, if possible. Maybe play some soothing music. Place an old towel on the floor. When you get out of the bath, dry off lightly and have seat on the towel. Luxuriate in this quiet time with you and your body. Give thanks to each part as you slowly and deeply work the oil in the skin.

What Goes On, Goes In

Let's talk about products. For example, you might think you're already using a healthy toothpaste, but hidden in some brands that label themselves as "natural" are dyes, artificial colors, and chemicals like propylene glycol, triclosan, SLS, or SLES. Check labels or switch to purer brands. Anything you buy at a Co-Op will be a safe bet.



The same is true for lotions, cosmetics and deodorants. What goes on, goes into your body and into your blood stream and precious life organs. We're all concerned about our smell and natural deodorants don't work as well as commercial brands. That's a fact. But here's another fact, the cleaner you eat and the more you care for yourself by releasing toxins and lowering stress, the better you will smell!

Until that day, experiment with a few brands and give your body time to adjust to a chemical-free formula. You may need to get in the habit of reapplying it a few times throughout the day, but it's all worth it. Mainstream brands of deodorant put antifreeze in their product to keep it from drying out. Yup. You read that right. And it's been known to cause brain, liver, and kidney abnormalities. If it stresses you out not to have it around, keep in in the cabinet for "emergency" situations.

Some effective natural brands to try are: Crystal Essence, Soapwalla and Tom's of Maine. My personal favorite is brand I found online that uses essential oils called Real Purity.

Get Dirty

This might sound odd after praising the virtues of dry brushing and slathering up with oil, but the fact remains we humans used to be a lot dirtier and were healthier for it. Now we're a bunch of germ-o-phobes. The problem is that our body needs microbes from outdoors to keep your immune system strong.

Most of us live way too much of our lives indoors, often breathing stale air or worse. Don't let space be a deterrent. You can dig in a small patio garden containers, take off your shoes and walk barefoot in the grass. Or go to a playground and swish around in the sandbox. Do cartwheels on your neighbor's lawn. Get dirty and fun!

While we're on the subject of getting dirty, don't use antibacterial hand soap to clean up. The synthetic antibacterial ingredient triclosan in most hand cleansers disrupts hormones and messes with your immune system. Break the habit of squirting sanitizer on your hands multiple times a day, too. You're zapping an opportunity for your immune system to combat foreign invaders which builds strength against future invaders.



Breast Health

Did you know that National Breast Cancer Awareness Month was started by a company that manufactures and sells mammography machines? While awareness is important, there is clearly a conflict of interests. Instead of focusing on “how to avoid breast cancer and early detection,” why not proactively focus on “how to have healthy breast and enjoy the hell out of them?”

Saggy, drooping, plump and juicy, spotted, freckled, scarred and implanted. Let’s celebrate them all! Imagine what a game-changer it would be? The best part about this idea is that we don’t have to wait for a company to give us the green light. Instead of searching for malignancy, we can use the month of October as a reminder to send loving energy to our breasts every day and every month of the year!

Breasts represent nourishment and deep love. Even if you weren’t breast fed or never used your breasts to feed a baby, your breasts carry the energy of love and nourishment. We need to reject the culturally dictated myth that our breasts determine our beauty.

It isn’t the size or shape of our breasts that give us power or attractiveness. It’s our relationship to our breasts that makes us beautiful, breath-taking alpha goddesses. Every culture has had its favorite adornments to enhance beauty from time immemorial, whether it’s tribal tattoos, rings around the neck to elongate it, or breasts implants. What matters is that you get to decide what makes you feel beautiful and desirable.

As women move into a new phase of life in which mothering is no longer required in the same way as when children were young – or a relationship, career, or creative project was just beginning – we have to find a new way to give our love and nurturance to the world.

At the same time, we have to honor that we are in a different stage and that our loving needs to be reciprocal. We now have enough experience behind us to know the importance of self-care and the critical role it plays in our ability to give to others.

I’d love it if every woman interpreted Breast Awareness Month on her own terms: as a reminder to check for lumps, tenderness and irregularities. Absolutely. But also to massage them, lovingly filling them with the energy field of your loving heart. The following breast massage is a basic exercise on how to do just that.



Breast Massage

It's ironic that breasts aren't usually invited to the self-care party, when we all know they're the undisputed life of it! Not only is regular massage an exquisite part of holistic health, it's a wonderful way to get reacquainted with deep self-nurturing. Also, if you're in touch with your breasts, you'll be the first one to notice if something is different.

Massage, in general, is a wonderful, stress-relieving, and detoxifying practice for the whole body. During a breast massage, you're not exactly rubbing out muscle kinks - though the physical benefits are still profound.

For one thing, the body's lymphatic system is highly concentrated in the underarm and chest regions. Stimulating these areas helps keep this key detox mechanism running smoothly.

And, there's really no wrong way to do it. Though there are a few things to keep in mind in order to get the most out of your massage.

- Strip down above the waist and apply oil to your breasts and armpits. Companies are starting to produce products specifically for breast massage, such as Poppy & Somebody, Urban Moonshine Earthsong. But even coconut, olive, or sunflower oil will do in a pinch.
- Start by cupping one hand just above your opposite breast so that your fingertips go into your armpit and your thumb is on the front of your chest. You're basically cupping your pectoral muscle with your whole hand. Gently squeeze this area in a rhythmic pumping motion. Make sure to start here, so you're clearing the lymph from your armpit first.
- Gradually move your hand down onto the top part of your breast. Using this same pumping motion, work around the outside, under, and then inner part of your breast, around the nipple, and back toward the armpit. Your direction of pressure is to push fluid from your breasts toward your armpits.

Ideally, you want to spend about five to ten minutes per breast, three to four times a week.



Health Ritual #7 Be Social

Social connections are vital to our happiness. Over the course of human history, it has been essential to our survival. In a sense, evolution has been placing bets at each step of our development that the best way to make us more successful is to make us more social. The current trend is gambling fate. We are (unintentionally) turning away from each other as our face-to-face communication competes with technology.

Our nervous system hungers for resonance yet we are increasingly touching base through emails, texts and tweets that don't require speaking, let alone seeing one another. Any social interaction – whether with family, co-workers, or the person ahead of you in line at the post office – is a chance to create a higher-quality connection. Seize it.

Our ability to receive the life-enhancing effects of connection depend on having a steady diet of resonance. 'Resonance' refers to the energy that occurs between people and you have to be present to feel it. Each moment of resonance knits you in a little tighter to the social fabric of your community, network of relationships, and family – increasing your overall feeling of belonging, security and love.

Consider the happiest times of your life. Were you alone during those times? It's unlikely. When people share their happiest moments, they were spent connecting with others. Our social connections are vital to our happiness. People who have one or more close friendships not only report greater life satisfaction, they are statistically healthier. Being socially connected is essential to our survival and our health.

 *writing prompt*

"Love and nourishment..."



Red Brocade

by Naomi Shihab Nye

The Arabs used to say,
When a stranger appears at your door,
feed him for three days
before asking who he is,
where he's headed.

That way, he'll have strength
enough to answer.

Or, by then you'll be
such good friends
you don't care.

Let's go back to that.

Rice? Pine nuts?

Here, take the red brocade pillow.

My child will serve water
to your horse.

No, I was not busy when you came!

I was not preparing to be busy.

That's the armor everyone put on
to pretend they had a purpose
in the world.

I refuse to be claimed.

Your plate is waiting.

We will snip fresh mint
into your tea.



Mind Your Mood

Dr. Barbara Fredrickson, an evolutionary psychologist at Chapel Hill, has dedicated her career to the study of emotions. Her research includes a wide range of emotions she calls "the big 10". These are emotions like interest, awe, joy, love and gratitude. The emotions that touch our hearts.

Her research led to a theory called Broaden and Build. The idea behind this theory is that when we experience positive emotions our minds open up to new possibility. According to her theory, positive emotions play an essential role in our survival. It's easy to see why. They enhance one another, creating an upward spiral and with each emotion, we climb another rung to richer relationships, greater resilience and better health.

Say you watching a beautiful sunset and become filled with awe at the beauty of nature. As you stand there taking it in, awe, wonder and gratitude commingle. You start to get a feeling that it's good to be alive. That's the broaden and build theory in action.

In 2013, she narrowed her focus to one positive emotion, love, which she describes as a "moment of warmth and connection that you share with another living being." We've been conditioned to believe that love is reserved for friends and family only and she busts that myth wide open.

Her work in love really struck a chord with me, for two reasons. 1) It's forever renewable and 2) it can happen between strangers or "another living being." You just need the right formula: two people sharing a positive emotion that is a felt experience, coupled with a mutual feeling good will. Mix it together and you've got a micro-moment of love!

Let's go back to the sunset. You're watching it, feeling grateful and you look over and notice someone else is having a similar experience. The person sees you and gives a smile of recognition and you feel a warm wave wash over you. That's the moment and it's over in a flash.

Let's talk about how we broaden and build on that flash of mutual resonance. We now know the body can experience past events in real time. That's what PTSD is all about. Thankfully, this works both ways. We can also recall positive events to bring joy in the present moment.

So now you're at home, posting images of the sunset, reflecting on how lovely it was. You remember the shared smile with that nice stranger and the recollection sends another wave of warmth through your body. *That's* the renewable quality of love.



I've become something of a micro-moment junkie, ever on the prowl for moments of connection. I highly recommend becoming a collector of as many micro-moments as you possible can. The effect is cumulative. The more the better.

There are many ways to broaden and build positive emotions in your life. The top four are:

- Connect with others
- Make eye contact
- Get out in nature
- Practice gratitude

How to Increase Positivity

If becoming a “micro-moment junkie” is something that appeals to you, the following is an elaboration of how to do it. This comes directly from Dr. Fredrickson’s twenty plus years of research. The best part, is that many of these are a fluid and natural part of holistic health.

Connect with Others

Connect with others, every day, no matter what. Even if you’re not naturally a very outgoing person, act like you are. Scientific experiments document that if you simply pretend to be extraverted when you’re with others – that is, if you act bold, talkative, energetic, active, assertive, and adventurous – no matter what your natural inclinations are, you’ll attract more positivity from those social exchanges.

Be Open

Give yourself permission and time to experience the richness of the present moment. Being open means cultivating both curiosity about and acceptance for whatever you’re currently experiencing. No matter what you encounter, no matter what happens, experiment with both awareness and acceptance. Attend to what is happening without trying or wishing for change.

Create Connections

Any social interaction – whether with family, co-workers, or the person ahead of you in line at the post office – is a chance to create a higher-quality connection. Do it all day long with everyone you encounter. Notice how different you feel. Notice how energized and buoyant you become. Notice, too, how the other person reacts. Do your eyes meet more often?



When your conversation comes to a close, do either of you carry on with a smile on your face or a spring in your step? Think of the gift you're giving, both to yourself and others.

Cultivate Kindness

Give yourself the goal of performing five new acts of kindness on a single day. Be both creative and thoughtful. Assess what those around you might need most. Try it for a few months and see the difference it makes.

Focus and Flow

The goal is simple: to let go and get your mind off your troubles. The most effective distractions demand your full attention. You get lost in the activity, fully absorbed by it, so that when you emerge you've cleansed yourself of the blues and are ready to approach your problems with a clear mind.

Connect to Nature

Another very simple way to increase positivity is to go outside. More precisely, go outside in good springtime weather. Simply put, being outdoors allows you to see farther, and seeing farther may be all it takes to expand your thinking and give you more to feel good about.

Apply Your Strengths

Over at the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania, Martin Seligman, Ph.D. created a treasure trove of statistical measures. One such is a survey to measure character strengths. [www.AuthenticHappiness.com] After completing the survey, you'll receive a report that ranks twenty-four strengths by the degree to which they characterize you.

Once you've learned your strengths, you're in position to redesign aspects of your life that aren't in alignment with your greatest qualities. By asking powerful questions, you can change your life. What changes do you need to make to truly use your strengths each day?

Savor Experience

To experiment with savoring, you'll need two things: 1) a source of genuine love, joy, pride, or any other flavor of positivity in your life and 2) a willingness to think differently about it. It doesn't matter if your source of heartfelt positivity happened in the past, is happening now, or has not yet to come to be. Practice with all three and see which suits you best. The key is to think about the event in a way that stokes your positivity flames *right now*. Truly cherish the event. Allow yourself time to roll your mental images around in your mind.



Ritualize Gratitude

Spoiler alert. Healthy Habit #9 is the practice being grateful. In its most simple form all it requires is that you notice the gifts that surround you. If you're drawn to recording your thoughts, you might keep a gratitude journal in which you record things you are grateful for each day. On that same idea, you can put a note pad by next to a jar and jot down when something good happens. Take a moment to offer sincere thanks before a meal, if only to the sun and earth.

Meditate

And rounding out the list, Healthy Habits #10 is about meditation. As not to bury the lead, I'll simply say the goal to attending to your breath is to practice being present, right here right now. Wherever your mental adventures land you, it's okay. The mind will wander endlessly. Expect it and be kind to yourself.

Visualize Your Future Worksheet

This journaling exercise is fantastic way to gain perspective and you focus on what matters.

Imagine yourself ten years from now. Everything has gone as well as it possibly could.

You've worked hard and succeeded at accomplishing the life goals you set for yourself.

Visualize where and how you are, a decade from now, having reached your best potential.

Commit to this journaling assignment for several writing sessions, perhaps every day for a week. Fill in all the details you can imagine. Describe your surroundings and your feelings.

After about a week, review what you've written. Draw out from your dreams a life mission – short enough to memorize and serve as your touchstone. What purpose do you want to drive you – each day and every day? Why turns you on? What makes you jump out of bed? In other words, what's the meaning of your existence?

Let yourself soak in these tough questions, and journal some more. Take time to let your deepest hopes and dreams rise to the surface. Give those visions words. When you think you've got it, put it to the eulogy test. If you were to carry out this mission, would your time on earth be well spent?

Now create a ten-year plan to help you meet your mission. Distill it to bullet points, so that your dreams can guide you through your decisions now.



Health Ritual #8 Embrace Minimalism

“Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.”

- Anne Lamott

Minimalism is ultimately about clearing the clutter to focus on what matters most. It's also about extracting pleasure from the simple moments in life. It requires being mindful of your materially possessions and with a discerning eye if they enrich your life.

We are so consumed by goals, driven by plans. Never satisfied with our achievements as someone else has that bigger car, better holiday or expensive phone.

Minimalism places value on living a meaningful life above all else. The lifestyle values experiences over things. And it is a lifestyle. Not a fad or a trend. It is about enjoying the happiness you have, and living in the now, rather than continually pursuing the next best thing.

Minimalism encourages us to slow down, making time for rest and relaxation. When we fail to recognize the value in rest, we over stimulate our nervous system. But when we recognize the value in rest, we can start to identify the busyness and carve out time to create a more fulfilling life.

This is a subject dear to my heart. If you'd like to read more about minimalism please go to: <https://nosidebar.com/author/kerry-ogden/>

Decluttering

Picture your dream home. I bet it's not filled with clutter. Clutter is the junk food of the home. Get rid of it. Clearing it out unguns the gears and gets energy moving again. Your soul and brain feel better and function more smoothly in a place that's been purged of extraneous objects

Nobody moves into a new home and thinks to themselves, “I can't wait to fill this entire house with clutter.” But somewhere along the way, it just sorta happens and stuff begins to accumulate...in our closets and our drawers, our basements and our attics, in our garages, storage sheds, and storage units. Clutter just happens.

Removing clutter makes room for a life focused on the things that matter most. It opens up physical space in our home and mental space in our mind. Living clutter-free offers



potential for more focus, more freedom, passion and intentionality. It helps reduce stress and financial obligations.

Even better, removing the physical clutter from our home lays a foundation that makes significant life changes possible. It encourages us to question assumptions and invites thoughtful consideration of all aspects of our lives. While minimalism involves reducing the accumulation of stuff, it includes discarding *anything* that is no longer serving you.

As for “things,” possessions carry emotional energy and can be a constant, unconscious reminder of what you’re not letting go of. In fact, when you’re feeling stuck or depressed, it can be empowering if not downright uplifting, to clear out a closet or rearrange a drawer. Clearing clutter invites flow and where there is flow, there is life.

Your home should be a haven from the outside world, a place where you replenish yourself. Enlist some *feng shui* by creating little sanctuaries throughout your home. Feng shui is based on the idea that by using elements of nature and arranging the objects in ways that allow chi to flow freely, we become nourished and rejuvenated.

Invite Mother Earth’s energy and presence with sounds, touch, sight, or whatever connects you to her healing essence. More often than not, our physical surroundings are a reflection of our bodies and our minds. If these spaces are stuffed with old, unused materials chances are you are too!

De-Cluttering Your Life Worksheet

In order to have a great life, we have to have the energy to support it. Energy drainers are things that you are tolerating, ignoring, or putting up that are no longer serving you - anything that is costing you valuable emotional, mental and financial resources. The more obstacles, frustrations and nuisances you live with, the less energy there is to apply to life.

This worksheet will help get you started on de-cluttering your life. “Stuff” comes in many forms, from an overflowing garage to unfinished emotional business. It’s whatever is in your immediate environment.

Make a list of what you are putting up with that nags at you. Write down at least one or two things. As you think of more items, add them to the list. You may or may not choose to do anything about them right now. That’s fine. Becoming aware of and naming them will bring them to the forefront of your mind, where you eventually start eliminating/resolving them.



Energy Drainers at Work	Energy Drainers at Home
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

Strengthening Your Life Worksheet

After naming what is draining, you've already set in motion the practice of de-cluttering your life. It's time to go the extra step and give thought to areas of your life that enliven you.

Energy *gainers* are those things or activities that give you a booster shot of joy, fun, passion, or peace and contentment. It's whatever turns you on and lights you up. These are often the items that get pushed aside by energy drainers.

Energy Gainers at Work	Energy Gainers at Home
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.



Decompress Decluttering

If you find yourself overwhelmed by the amount of stuff you've collected, start small. Pick a single drawer in the kitchen or tackle one area in your closet.

Set a timer for 15 minutes.

Now go through the items and ask yourself, "Do I love? Does it spark joy? Is it useful?" All the items that do not, go into a pile. Those that do, go into the keeper pile.

When the timer goes off, stop, place the "to go" pile in a box or bag. Ideally you will immediately haul the no pile to your nearest donation center. Your mind will start to play "What if..." and other rainy day games with your stuff if you keep it around. The sooner you get rid of it, the better.

Repeat this same process again tomorrow and the next day until you are pleased with the results.

20 Ways to Choose Less Every Day

Simplifying your life is a big change that comes through many small decisions. If you're wondering how to choose less in small, everyday ways, here is a list of ideas:

1. Clear the counter clutter.
2. Stick to the grocery list, avoiding impulse treats.
3. Speak less, listen more.
4. Use natural cleansers. Less chemicals = less harm.
5. Say no to one activity.
6. Give in on a decision.
7. Be unavailable for a day.
8. Donate one item of clothing.
9. Waste less.
10. Share an entrée at a restaurant.
11. Fast from social media.
12. Accessorize less.



13. Fast from digital streaming.
14. Worry less.
15. Criticize less.
16. Make a shorter to-do list.
17. Take less than you need.
18. Go without.
19. Save energy.
20. Slow down. Sit in silence.

Tips for Decluttering Your Wardrobe

- 1) *Eliminate accessories.* Instead of trying to figure out what scarves, handbags, jewelry, or other things you accessorize with, eliminate all or all but one. This may not be a permanent step, but removing the decision making process for a few months will help you experience the benefits of dressing with less without the struggle to choose.
- 2) *Wear your favorite colors.* If you love wearing blue but have a few red items to mix things up, or because red was the color of the month in your favorite fashion magazine, let yourself off the hook. You don't have to dress in seasonal colors or colors you think you are supposed to wear. Remove the shades or patterns you don't feel good in for a while.
- 3) *Keep it all in one place.* Get all your stuff in one place and then divide it into seasons. If you can, divide the season in half instead of quarters. Put one season in storage bins and the other season all in one closet. There is no reason to be sifting through what you don't wear to find what you want to wear.
- 4) *Identify 5 favorite outfits.* Statistics show we wear 20% of our clothes 80% of the time, but we still ask "what am I going to wear?" every morning. Instead, photograph yourself in your 5 favorite outfits and before you even look in your closet, choose from your favorite looks.



- 5) *Get rid of the tags.* If there are items in your closet with tags still on them, remove them. Give them away, consign them or sell them. The tags may not seem harmful but seeing those bad purchase decisions every day is a stressful reminder of impulse shopping and overspending.
- 6) *Only keep one size.* Multiple sizes may feel like a safety net, but they may also be a painful reminder of how you feel in your own skin. There's no proof that smaller sizes encourage you to lose weight and the stress of trying could even contribute to weight gain. Keep one size in your closet and take a walk with the extra time you save in the morning by not having to decide what to wear.
- 7) *Let go of the guilt.* Closets are full of emotion with guilt often at the top of the list: guilt for spending too much, for not wearing what you have, and for clothes fitting poorly. Unfortunately, the guilt is completely unproductive. Take a look through your closet and pull out anything that makes you feel guilty. Box it up and revisit it in 3 months. If you don't love it by then or if it still makes you feel bad, give it away.
- 8) *Call a 3-month time out.* To begin experiencing immediate benefits, give minimalist fashion challenge Project 333 a try. Dress with 33 items or less for 3 months including clothing, shoes, jewelry and shoes. The rules may sound intimidating but keep in mind, it's only temporary if you want it to be. Don't give anything away at first. Just get it out of sight for a while and see how you feel dressing with less. Remove the chaos and emotional attachment by separating yourself from your stuff. You have nothing to lose except stress, spending, and closet chaos.

Clean-up Your Cookware

A healthy place to begin decluttering is your kitchen. Starting with your pots and pans, get rid of any cookware that is no longer useful or redundant. Swap out plastic storage containers for glass and plastic water bottles for stainless steel, especially when out in the hot summer sun. Warmed plastic seeps into the water.

Your best bet for cookware is cast iron, ceramic or stainless steel. Copper and aluminum can leach into your food and nonstick surfaces like Teflon contain chemicals that have been proven harmful. And I am sorry to break this to you, but microwaves are vitality zappers.



There will always be loss when heating foods. That's the nature of cooking. The problem with microwaves is that they knock the nutritional sense out of food with electromagnetic waves that vibrate molecules up to 2.5 billion times per second.

Once the structural integrity of food is altered, it no longer performs the desired function in your body. Now I'm all about sexy, "high-vibrational" food. I just prefer it unadulterated. Do yourself a favor: lose the microwave and the Franken food that gets put into it and pull out the pots and pans. Your mind and body will thank you.

Embrace the Neti Pot

On the subject of decluttering this one is going to seem far-fetched, but it's really not. It's just not something you likely do in front of others. Like going poop and flossing your teeth, flushing your nose with warm salty water can become second nature. Once you start and get hooked to the feeling, you'll wonder how lived without it.

Here's all you do: You put a tiny spoonful of non-iodized salt into special pot. Neti pot salt not only comes with its own little spoon, but you can get it with essential oils like lavender and eucalyptus. Yeah, it's neti-ing is a thing.

Fill the pot with water that is warm to the touch and pour into one nostril. Tilting your head, you're able to direct the water out the opposite nostril as you pour. Blow out any residual water to clear and then do other the side.

Afterward blow your nose a few more times to clear. Within minutes you'll breathe more easily and more "cleanly." You'll also find that colds don't last as long and seasonal allergies are less impactful.

Periodically, Do Nothing

Remember when you used to do one thing at a time with clarity and purpose? It appears that single-minded tasks died somewhere around 1993. It's time for a resurrection.

Sometimes the organ that needs the most care and restoration is the brain. If you're a driven person or feel you can't possibly have an unproductive day, it's quite possible that's exactly what need. No to-do list. No phone. No computer.



If a whole day seems nuts, make it a half day or a couple of hours and do something that seems like a complete waste of time. Take a walk with nowhere in mind, sit at a park and let your mind wander, go to a café and people watch.



"My source of pleasure is..."

Don't Wait

Likewise, don't wait for pleasure or save it for a rainy day. A lot of people have a habit of saving certain things, special things, delicious things for just the right time, place or circumstance. On the surface, this makes good sense. But if practiced too rigidly, it can become another form of deprivation or even hoarding in disguise.

If this behavior dips becomes entrenched, the odds of ever using those special items will become exceedingly low. Scarcity thinking has of way keeping us away from pleasure. Is it really true that wonderful things are rare and limited and should be doled out with caution? Is it really true that some days are more special than others? While there are exceptions, the more broad answer is "no."

The sense of scarcity is a habit, a basic foundational behavior and way of thinking that invariably permeates all aspects of life. It may be the ringleader, but it's there quietly influencing key players.

Instead of saving the good stuff for later, what about throwing a party every day? What about splashing on that special perfume until the vial is empty, snuggle into that cashmere sweater and never leave the house? And how about those delicious delicacies in the kitchen? Go ahead and pull down the really good coffee, use your nicest plates and allow yourself the pleasure of really fine dark chocolate.

Of course, there needs to be balance. For some it will mean inviting more recklessness. For others, more restraint. Make it a point to find your balance and to celebrate every day in small ways.



Health Ritual #9: Practice Gratitude

"I don't have to chase extraordinary moments to find happiness, it's right in front of me if I'm paying attention and practicing gratitude." - Brené Brown

Gratitude defies a simple definition. It can be experienced as an emotion or a state of being. It can inspire us to act with compassion or align us to something greater than ourselves. Yet throughout all these definitions, there is an underlying theme. Connection.

Gratitude arises from our connections to each other, to nature, and to life itself. It's having the present-moment, open-hearted awareness that the gift being experienced, be it laughter, flowers or a sunset, could have very well been missed or not occurred at all.

It is the ability to find gratitude that helps us move through life's challenges time and time again. Gratitude helps us find our strength, open our hearts and experience the fullness of our lives. It liberates us from the prison of small mind/ego.

The good news is you don't have to lose everything you hold dear to find it. Gratitude is a practice, which means it can be learned. A whopping 40% of our satisfaction with life is determined by our choices and behavior. In other words, that which we nourish will flourish.

Look back to a difficult time in your life. Reflect on what experiences you're now grateful for that occurred during this challenging time. Think of ways you are stronger, wiser or more skillful from this experience.

Life will always throw us a wrench. Sometimes we catch it and feel great. Other times it bonks us on the head when we least expect it. Dazed and a bit confused, we can sometimes make less than helpful decisions. There is no shame in it. That's life. Learn from it and then let it go.

Sharing Gratitude Exercise #9

Gratitude is mindfulness in action. It requires heightened awareness of our environment. And nowhere is the impact more deeply felt than in our personal relationships. One of the most common mistakes couples make is the "assumption error." This occurs when we assume our partner knows what we are thinking or feeling, or, worse, believe they should.

A simple exercise to get your gratitude on is to write down a few things you appreciate about your partner each day. Don't limit yourself to the big stuff. The majority of our daily



actions go seemingly unnoticed. Having someone recognize the “little things” can be deeply gratifying.

Then create an uninterrupted moment to read this list to your partner. Take it slow and let it sink in. Research shows that couples who regularly express appreciation for one another are happier, healthier and have a greater sense of fulfillment in their relationships.

Don't have a significant other? No problem. The heart of this exercise is putting gratitude into practice. You can do this with a friend, family member, a co-worker and, yes, even yourself.

Gratitude is a Mindset

Gratitude and optimism go hand in hand and for good reason. Like gratitude, optimism improves the immune system, prevents chronic disease, and increases resilience – one of the golden measurements of well-being. Having a positive mindset helps us cope better with difficult life events and increases overall life satisfaction.

Rather than yearning for what we don't have, we do more good for our health and happiness by expressing gratitude for all we do have. Saying “thank you” to others, counting your daily blessings, writing a gratitude letter, and recognizing a colleague's contributions can have critical impacts on happiness.

Those who actively express gratitude report having closer, stronger relationships. That's because acts of gratitude require us to admire good characteristics of other people. Being appreciated and seen tells us we are loved.

Whether thanking a higher power, friends, family, colleagues, or strangers, gratitude has lasting positive impacts. Studies found that those who practice gratitude experience greater joy, pleasure, happiness, and optimism.

Another version of gratitude is to extend kindness to ourselves for perceived flaws. In *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Brené Brown wisely suggests giving up who we think we're supposed to be to embrace who we really are.



Cultivate Gratitude

Did you know a slim 10% of happiness is determined by life circumstances such as wealth, health, and relationship status? Another 50% is genetically based, similar to our body type and temperament. That leaves a whopping 40% to our control.

Contrary to popular belief, it's not all up to chance. We have a significant amount of volition in how happy we are and a statistically-validated way to tilt the odds in our favor.

What's the secret to tip the odds? Cultivating gratitude.

Gratitude and other positive feelings are like an antihistamine to our emotional immune system. They don't eliminate negativity, but rather help us from remaining stuck in it. In other words, gratitude builds resilience.

Take a moment and reflect on how much you assume happiness is circumstantial. Compassionately feel how restrictive these thoughts are. Gently release these beliefs and allow yourself to open to the knowledge that you can cultivate more joy in your life.

The practice of gratitude is just that, the cultivation of habit. Over time, this new perspective will be less effortful and will simply become your view of the world. While a lucky few are truly "born happy," it's comforting to know that we can play the odds.

The thing with gratitude, is that it's kind of like exercise and eating right. It's not a matter of knowing what to do. It's about overcoming the obstacles that get in the way of it. The irony is that it appears our ability to adapt may be the biggest one.

Adaption is fundamental to our survival, but when it comes to gratitude it's a double-edge sword. It builds resilience which helps us recover from set-backs but the ability to get used to things means we take them for granted. Go without plumbing for a day and you'll be reminded how true that is.

One way to work around our innate adaptability is to focus on experience and connection. This echoes Barbara Fredrickson's work. When we make gratitude part of a felt, shared experience, it is much more likely to take hold.

Like any habit, gratitude is ultimately a practice that grows stronger with use. To help habituate gratitude you want to do things like:

- Write thank-you letters. Express your appreciation to someone in your life. Bonus points if you read it to them in person. Try to do this once-a-month. You can write



one to yourself, too.

- If you really don't have time to write, think about someone who has been kind to you. Visualize telling the person with as much detail as possible. See their face and their expression. The brain will register it as real.
- Make it a habit to share something you're thankful for each day. Dinner is a perfect time for this. In my family we start by going around the table and naming our "rose and thorn" for the day. It's a great way to check in with each other while being seen and heard.
- Another powerful way to invoke gratitude is to imagine yourself far into the future, 20 to 30 years from now. From that place, reflect back on your life. What did you love the most? What made you the most happy? What are you the most grateful for? Do more of that. Looking back, we often find, it's the little things that matter most.
- At the end of the day, write, reflect or share "three good things" that have happened. A good place to do this exercise with at the family dinner. In my home we do "a rose and a thorn" where each family member goes around and gets to share their wins and losses for the day in safe, supportive environment.

Be of Service

Helping others, working for a cause you connect with, participating in something that sparks your passion, is not just an important part of being human – it's an important part of being *healthy*. When you engage in something that matters to you, your spirit and energy surge in similar ways to when you're in love. You feel, physically better and rejuvenated.

Thinking you don't have the time? You'd be surprised how small of a gesture it can be. You can hand out protein bars to the homeless on your way to work. Hold the door for the person behind you.

When you add something you care about, you change the way the pie chart of your life is divided. You add meaning. That new thing that matters finds a place in your world, enlargening it, so that the things that stress you out get smaller.



Investigate possibilities for giving and being of service. Ask friends. Poke around online. Look at your community. Commit to the act and the service will find you. Forget pay-it-forward mentality or karma. A big part of being of service is simply cultivating kindness with no expectation of reciprocity or personal gain.

Let someone cut ahead of you in line, listen to someone who needs an ear, give a compliment you sincerely mean. I'm not talking about overextending yourself. These a small, meaningful moments of mindful generosity...of spirit. It's a nice way to live.

Health Ritual #10: Sit in Silence

"Between stimulus and response, there is space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." - Viktor Frankl

We live in a technical age though our bodies are still quite primitive. The amount of stimulation we receive daily is overwhelming to our nervous system, whether we are aware of it or not. Moments of silence are like a salve to our mind, body and soul. The mind gains clarity, the body feels stillness and the soul taps into a larger perspective.

Every byte of information you consume, consciously or unconsciously, must be digested. Sitting purposefully in silence provides the time and space needed to process your thoughts, ideas and experiences.

Health is ultimately about homeostasis. The body will do the hard work of creating a stable internal environment. Our job is to provide the best external environment. This requires some biofeedback sensitivity.

The body is always communicating to us and for the most part, we listen well. When it's cold, we provide warmth. When it's lonely, we seek company. And when the mind is feeling full, we sit in silence.

Part of the problem is that our brains are designed to seek novelty and love dopamine – two things the internet and social media provide in abundance. The high dosage has skewed our pleasure circuits and we've developed a low tolerance for doing nothing. So, we have to help our brains remember what it needs: stillness and quietude.



Stress shuts down executive functioning and ramps up impulsivity. Whether you see your life as stressed or not, just living in western society is a stressor. It's the proverbial water we swim in.

When you sit in silence, the blood flow moves from the primitive, stem brain to the rational, prefrontal cortex – washing the mind with calm clarity. Overtime, this enables you to make better decisions...like knowing when to power down for meditation. ☺

In quiet solitude we discover who we really are and what are lives are about. Be it sitting silently with yourself a few minutes a day or turning inward for winter's reflection, time alone is the ultimate antidote to the hectic pace of modern life.

Staying Present

To truly experience the present moment means we have to refrain from our usual strategies that protect us from the discomfort of what we don't want to feel. Until we refrain from these coping strategies, we will remain stuck in the narrow world of our beliefs and behaviors.

Mindfulness practice is about learning how to accept all of our feelings, thoughts and experiences by allowing them just to be. This is what it means to reside in our experience. As the breath flows in and out, we let life be as it is.

Every moment we are able to surrender to the reality of what is happening in the present moment, devoid of chatter, is to experience ourselves within a larger context. Doing so helps us cultivate one of the essential roots of happiness.

Being present in this way allows us to take in the innumerable joys of existence we often experience without truly noticing. It's easy to let life slip by unaware of what we are missing. For this reason alone, mindfulness dramatically improves the quality of life.

Of course if this were easy, we'd all be walking around in a kind of happiness stupor. I won't lie. It's challenging to stay committed to a mindfulness practice. But like a muscle, it is something we can build and the more we practice staying present during "neutral" moments of life, the easier it will become to remain present during the most intense.

The real question is whether we're willing to give up the familiar ways we've tried to find happiness that bring superficial joy or, worse, dissatisfaction. Only when we've reached the understanding of what needs to be done can we willingly follow the most fundamental



instructions of mindfulness practice: become present, as often as possible, and reside there as long as you can.

Maximizing Our Potential

Few of us have been taught how to sit with our thoughts and feelings. As a result we are vulnerable to getting hooked and triggered. Lack of awareness keeps us in a state of autopilot, often without our knowing. While your body and mind may go along for the ride, your spirit knows avoidance is not a solution and will wait patiently for you to return.

Most people are familiar with Henry David Thoreau's quote that "Most men live lives of quiet desperation and will go to the grave with a song still in them." It's a powerful, bold statement about living out our fullest potential.

People who practice mindfulness find more joy, peace and clarity in their lives. They learn the meaning of genuine happiness which comes from accepting life as it is. Learning how to do this can help free you from the chaos and stress that seems endemic to modern life.

Thankfully there is no "one size fits all" when it comes to mindfulness. You may find you enjoy some practices more than others. It's important to try a variety of practices. To get started, a simple baseline practice is to follow your breath.

Expect that your mind will wander relentlessly. It's just doing what it's supposed to do. No blame. No judgment. Simply note the thinking and bring your awareness back to the breath. And take comfort in knowing that the act of returning your mind to the task is exercising your mindfulness muscle.

Mindfulness Practice

"Leave your front door and your back door open. Allow your thoughts to come and go. Just don't serve them tea." - Suzuki Roshi, Zen monk and teacher

There are many different types of mindfulness practices that activate the prefrontal cortex in different ways, similar to exercise. No matter the course, all forms of intentional focus strengthen attentional circuits and reduce the fight-or-flight response.



Carving out time for a practice is key to integrating it into your life. For people just starting out, aim for ten minutes a day. This can be divided into two five-minute sessions. Give yourself time to build up stamina. You might start with two minutes a day. It's your practice. No matter the skill level, remain committed to practicing a prescribed period day each day.

In the context of mindfulness, to "watch" means to "notice" without putting labels on the experience. As you practice, you will begin to recognize habituated, automatic responses. This is normal. When you catch yourself labeling or naming your experience, simply return back to observing.

As always, the simplest way to start is sit down with a timer and follow your breath.

Instructions for Mindfulness Practice Worksheet

There are many helpful mindfulness and meditation apps [see below]. The following is a basic transcript to get you started:

"You may begin in a comfortable sitting position. With your eyes open or closed, take a moment to simply listen to the sounds around you. Notice sounds that are constant and others that happen infrequently. Notice sounds that seem far away, and others that are closer. You might notice that some sounds evoke a reaction or an image or feeling. Is there any sound of breathing?

Just for a moment become aware of your breathing. Notice the flow of breath into and out of your body. There's no need to direct the breathing or to change it in any way. Simply notice it. Feel the sensation of breath in the nostrils... in the back of the throat. Feel the movement of the chest and ribcage as the breath moves in and out. Notice where you feel the body moving as it breathes.

Notice, too, the very quality of your noticing. Is it critical or analytical? Distracted or bored? Does it seem intense? Uncertain? Does your witness have an attitude? Just notice any of this and then come back to simply following the flow of the breath as it moves into and out of your body.

Does the rhythm of your breathing seem to change as you observe it? What other parts of your body do you become aware of as you pay attention to your breathing? Are you aware of any sounds? Thoughts? Images? What else is included in your present experience?"



Summary for Mindfulness Practice:

1. Begin in a comfortable position. You want to be comfortable enough to feel relaxed without falling asleep.
2. Eyes open or closed begin to notice aspects of your present moment experience. For example, listen to the sounds around you.
3. Become aware of your own breathing but without trying to change it.
4. Continue to let your attention include other physical sensations. What are you aware of happening in your body?
5. Include other aspects of your experience in your awareness: thoughts, images, feelings, impulses. There is nothing to do besides this noticing.

Mindfulness Apps:

- Headspace
- Mark William's Mindfulness Recordings
- Calm
- Do Nothing for 2 Minutes
- MeditateApp for Android
- Mental Workout
- Finding the Space to Lead
- Eckhart Tolle's Music to Quiet the Mind

Slowing Down

The Slow Food movement began as an alternative to fast-food. It was a call for local ingredients, thoughtfully prepared and eaten with pleasure. Based on this wisdom, I'm advocating we start a Slow Life movement where the quality of life is determined by the depth of our connections.

Our society is habituated to busyness. We're overstimulated yet easily bored. Attention spans are short. Tempers even shorter. It's difficult to see our many tasks through the end, creating a nagging feeling of incompleteness.

Meaningful connection is the first thing to go when living in a state of time deprivation. There was a time when we were surrounded by friends and family, often under the same



roof, but our fast pace life has weakened these relations. The Slow Life is about creating a culture of connection.

This week, notice how much you rush yourself. With gentle awareness, look at how others are affected. Feel the pull to be busy or stay preoccupied. Rather than hustling, take a breath, look around and see what you can change to slow life down.

Eat quietly while taking in the sounds around you. Make eye contact when talking and really listen. Read a good book. Cuddle. Once you're open to it, you'll find many opportunities to slow down and savor your life.

Naming

There's an old yoga joke that asks, "If you had to hide the most valuable thing, where would it be?" The answer: "In the present moment." It's true! We all get enamored with distraction. But what if, instead, we learned to sit in open awareness?

One way to do this is by naming our experience. Language gives us breathing space and objectivity – two invaluable resources when we're hijacked. So rather than honking at the car in front, you're able to pause and say to yourself, "I'm running late and this traffic is making me anxious."

Mindfulness interrupts our habituated ways of being, which gives us freedom of choice. A lot of the "techniques" are just naming tools using nonjudgmental awareness. The practice is simply noticing old patterns and consciously choosing a better way.

This takes practice, lots of it. You're going against habituated behavior. Be kind to yourself. Gradually, your ability to notice what is happening in the moment will increase as cortisol levels drop. This is good medicine for body, mind and soul.

The body resides in the present moment - 24 hours day, seven days a week - without judgment, expectation or assumption. When the mind tries to prevail, notice it and return to your breath. Use your body. It's your friend and ally. Follow the flow of breath, watch and notice, in breath, out breath, in breath, out breath.



Loving Kindness

The path of mindfulness begins with our self. Each of us is here to study and get to know who we are as we journey through life. But it can be painful to see our less desirable parts. They trigger fears of unworthiness. So when we do make contact, there is a tendency to run away.

Being open to who we are, exactly as we are in this moment, requires a stance of gentleness toward ourselves. This is what it means to befriend the self. We treat ourselves with the same sweetness we would a friend.

Instead of rejecting our insecurities, sour-temper and petty jealousies, we turn up our curiosity and soften our heart. The magic is being open without judgment. In doing so, we begin to naturally see others in an equally compassionate light.

So, the ground of loving-kindness and mindfulness begins with our selves but ends with others. When we set the intention to live from this kind of honesty and gentleness, there are no obstacles to how far our love can go.

Align Head and Heart

In Asian languages, the word for 'mind' and 'heart' are the same. This speaks to the interconnectivity of mindfulness – it's a whole body practice. Repeated studies show it affects our bodies, minds, spiritual and emotional well-being.

Next to movement, meditation is the closest thing we've got to a miracle drug. It increases immunity, lowers inflammation, improves cognitive functioning, decreases stress, and a gives a boost to creativity.

The only "drawback" to this wonder drug is that it needs to be taken regularly. To get the many benefits of meditation, it needs to be a part of our everyday lives. Happiness and well-being are not magical traits that some are blessed with and others are not. Good health is earned.

Thankfully life provides many opportunities to practice quieting the mind: waiting in line, at a traffic light, or for your kids to get their shoes on. Instead of letting these moments be a source of irritation, use them as a reminder to pause and notice the moment.



Nature Cure

There is a growing concern that we are losing touch with nature, that human beings, especially children, are spending less time outdoors resulting in a wide range of behavioral problems – even here in the Pacific Northwest! Too many kids are growing up looking down.

One way to combat this is to be present in your surroundings. You may not be able to hike the Gorge, but you can up and out. Make eye contact with trees, birds and other people. Smartphones and other devices are tweaking how we connect.

See the sky, look at the barista who makes your drink, watch people as you eat lunch instead of burying your face in your phone. Doing so takes you out of the moment. Lift your head and be a part of the environment.

Another terrific way to connect is to wander barefoot. Kick off your shoes and walk on the grass, earth or sand whenever you have the chance. Not only will this boost your immune system by exposing you to unfamiliar microbes, but it will give you a little charge – literally. There are electrons in the earth, which have calming and healing benefits for the whole body.

Forest Therapy

Shinrin-yoku is a term that means "taking in the forest atmosphere" or "forest bathing." The idea is simple: if a person simply visits a natural area and walks in a relaxed way there are calming, rejuvenating and restorative benefits to be achieved. Go to a forest. Walk slowly. Breathe. Open all your senses.

It was developed in Japan during the 1980s and has become a cornerstone of preventive health care and healing in Japanese medicine. We have always known this intuitively. But in the past several decades there have been many scientific studies backing up the healing effects of communing with nature.

For example, many trees give off organic compounds that support our "NK" (natural killer) cells that are part of our immune system's way of fighting cancer.

The scientifically-proven benefits of Shinrin-yoku include:

- Reduced blood pressure



- Reduced stress
- Improved mood
- Increased ability to focus, even in children with ADHD
- Accelerated recovery from surgery or illness
- Increased energy level
- Improved sleep

Forest bathing combines leisurely walks on gentle paths under the forest canopy to help you open your senses, hone your intuition, and experience the nature as you never have before. It's a form of meditation in action.

Forest Bathing Exercise

Many people like to forest bathe barefoot. Walking in the forest without shoes will help restore the broken connection between you and the natural world. Refer to "Earthing" instructions if you want to combine the two.

But if you don't want to take off your shoes, make sure to make contact with nature some other way. Plunge your hands into a pile of leaves, pick up a pebble from the bottom of the stream, enjoy the sensations of the breeze against your skin, or lean against a tree and, yes, you can hug it!

The following are five simple steps to get the most from your forest bath:

Step 1 – Leave behind your phone, camera or other distractions, so that you can be fully present in the experience.

Step 2 – Leave behind your goal and expectations. Wander aimlessly, allowing your body to take you wherever it wants.

Step 3 – Pause from time to time, to look more closely at a leaf or notice the sensation of the path beneath your feet.

Step 4 – Find a comfy spot to take a seat, listen to the sounds around you. See how the behavior of the birds and other animals changes when they become used to your presence.



Step 5 – If you go with others, make an agreement to resist talking until the end of the walk, when you can gather to share your experiences.

Earthing

While barefoot outside, sit or stand and focus all your attention on the soles of your feet, paying attention to what you can feel.

Stand with your feet parallel and shoulder-width apart. Keep your chin tucked in and your spine straight. Let your arms hang loose.

Standing straight, let all your tension and weight sink into your feet. Imagine roots spreading out from the bottom of your feet into the earth beneath you.

Wired to Connect

We are wired to connect. It's part of our survival mechanism. A testament to that is our relationship to technology. The average smart phone user checks his or her device every six minutes. But the connection that comes from technology is often unfulfilling. Even more unsettling, there is evidence that it can actually rewire our brains to make us less adept at real human connection.

Finding ways to disconnect can be a difficult task when our work and livelihood depend on us being "on." Many people live in "continuous partial attention," which is the state of always being partly tuned into everything while never being completely tuned into anything.

Drowning in email was less of an issue before smart phones. We used to leave the office at work, now we take it with us wherever we go. Multitasking is not only the norm, it's a badge of honor. Except it's not. Our nervous systems are still quite primitive. Being constantly on disrupts our body's balance, which elevates stress.

The first wave of the Internet was all about information and the amount we can access is still mind blowing. But what we want is not only always what we need. Paradoxically, one of the best tools for helping us deal with technology is...technology.

To fully experience the world around us, we have to free ourselves from the distractions that beg for our attention. Because the hold is strong, we can use all the help we can get. The following apps can help us loosen the grip:



- Anti-social
- Nanny
- Controlled Multi-Tab Browsing
- Siesta Text (Android) and BRB (iPhone)
- Self Control (Mac)
- RescueTime
- Freedom
- Time Out
- Concentrate (Mac)
- Digital Detox App
- Isolator (Mac)
- Higby

Life Lessons

1. "You can't connect the dots going forward; you can only connect them looking backwards."

Steve Jobs was right on the money with this one. A perceived opportunity that didn't work out often leads to a much bigger opportunity around the corner.

2. Never walk away mad from a loved one.

Life is precious. One moment someone is here and the next moment they might be gone, so treat every last word with loved ones accordingly.

3. Don't let little things get to you.

Does it really matter who is right about who did what chore in the house? You might win the fight, but you lose the battle. Don't sweat the small stuff because little things don't matter.

4. No one is perfect.

This especially holds true for people we put on pedestals. No matter how great or enlightened they are, they're still human. Everyone make mistakes and nobody is perfect.

5. We're good at going fast and need to practice going slow.

It's why practices like yoga, mindfulness, and mediation are so important—they help us practice "slow" and connect us to our true selves.



6. Sometimes you have to put things in the "I don't know" folder.

Awful stuff happens to everyone. Sometimes there's an immediate silver lining. Sometimes there isn't and at these times, you have to accept that some things just don't make sense right now. And maybe they will later.

7. You are a combination of the five people you spend the most time with.

It may sound like a cliché, but it's true. If you really want to change your life, you have to change the people you hang around with. Spend time with people who support you and believe in you.

8. Yoga works.

But it *really* works when you see it for what it truly is - a guide to living.

9. Balance and moderation are key.

Sometimes we all need a cupcake. It's probably not a great idea every day, but the occasional treat isn't going to kill you. Life should be fun. Being obsessively healthy can be stressful and extremely unhealthy.

10. Your gut is always right.

Always, always, always listen to your gut. Whenever I've gone against my intuition, it's been a disaster. Listen to your gut, it's always right.

11. If you're not happy with yourself, you'll never be happy in a relationship.

Every successful relationship starts with you. You can't rely on someone else to make you happy. Finding a great spouse or partner is just the icing on the cake, but you're responsible for the cake.

12. Energy (both negative and positive) is palpable.

We've all felt it at one time or another, there's that person who we always feel good around, or that person who is just simply draining. Energy is very real.

13. No one knows your body better than you.

So get to know your body.

14. Friends come and go.

Just because you were close with someone 10 years ago doesn't mean you're going to be close to them today and that's okay. People change and so do relationships. Sometimes people come into your lives at very specific times to help you get from point A to B, and then they somehow fade away. That's the magic of life and relationships: they're always evolving.



15. Gratitude is the key to happiness.

The common theme behind every religion is gratitude. It's powerful and it works. Always be grateful for what you have; no matter how bad things seem, there's always someone who has it worse.

16. Don't compare yourself or try to be someone else.

There's always someone out there who has more money, a more (perceived) perfect relationship, or a flatter stomach. Comparing yourself or trying to be someone else is a game you'll never win. As Oscar Wilde said, "Be yourself; everyone else is taken."

17. Money doesn't buy happiness.

Focus on happiness and the money will come, not the other way around.

18. Being fit doesn't mean you're healthy.

Your thoughts, your mind, your environment—they all play a huge role in your overall health and well-being.

19. There's something to be said about being in nature.

It feels good.

20. Don't take yourself too seriously.

You have to be able to laugh at yourself. Being wound too tight isn't good for you or the people around you.

21. There's only one proper way to accept a compliment.

"Thank you."

22. Everyone has stress and it manifests in different ways.

Stress follows you everywhere, manifests in different ways and tends to hit you where you are most vulnerable. Stress will always be in your life so you have to figure out how to deal with it. As Jon Kabat-Zinn says, "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn to surf."

23. Goals and deadlines are important, but sometimes you just have to say, "I don't know when, I don't know how, but I know it's gonna happen."

This can be tricky as sometimes we only see what we want to see, so I refer back to number 10 on this list about listening to your gut :)

24. Sometimes you have to put things in the "I don't know" folder.

Awful stuff happens to everyone. Sometimes there's an immediate silver lining. Sometimes there isn't and at these times, you have to accept that some things just don't make sense right now. And maybe they will later.



23. Vacations are good!

They help you relax and recharge. Don't stock up your days. Use them.



Personal Vision Worksheet

You'll be writing and reflecting for this exercise, so have your journal ready. Secure a window of time for deep reflection where you will not be interrupted.

Take some time to imagine your best possible life. What would it look like? To help you start, scale your level of satisfaction across the following domains using a 1-5 scale.

[1=the least, 5=the most]

Career _____
Money _____
Health & Well-being _____
Family _____
Personal Growth _____
Romance _____
Fun & Recreation _____
Environment _____

Imagine yourself as you would like to be. Get as detailed as possible. Consider what you will be wearing, feeling, saying and behaving. Think about the food you'll be eating the type of movement you'll be doing. Think about as many details of your new life vision as possible.

Now grab your journal. In no particular order, list qualities you would love for your "best life possible" to have. Don't be concerned with the potential barriers that might be in the way. Just brainstorm and create a list.

Next, reflect on and answer these questions:

- In your vision, what are you doing more of?
- In your vision, what are you doing less of?
- Who is in your life?
- What is your life like?

Now for the biggie question. Take a deep breath and without judgment answer the following question:

What needs to change for me to achieve my vision?

Be specific. Break it down into components. Let it flow.



Dear Me Exercise

This exercise can be used for long-term goals, like weight loss, or short-term needs like dealing with unfairness. In other words, you can write this from two weeks from now or two years from now.

As you're working your way through the log jams of life, it helps to make frequent visits to this future time-place where your problems are solved. Let the picture of your future self be an image you return to again and again as needed.

Some people have an easier time writing this exercise in a letter form. Get your notebook and start by writing a future date (anywhere from two weeks to two years from now). Then imagine yourself in that future, acting as a guide to your present self, showing you the way to a life free of self-sabotaging behavior.

Dear Present Self,

I'm writing from the future to tell you that thanks to your efforts, you are in a wonderful place in your life. Old patterns are healed and resolved. Here is how positive you feel:

_____, _____, _____, and _____.

Here are the goals you achieved: _____, _____, _____, and _____.

Here are the obstacles you overcame between now and (future time): _____, _____, _____, and _____.

Here are the new actions you took to overcome them: _____, _____, _____, and _____.

Here is how wonderful you feel about our accomplishments and how grateful you feel:

_____, _____, _____, and _____.

Looking forward to meeting you! Thank you so much for your hard work, love and dedication. It was all worth it!

Warmly,

Your Future Self



Say Hello to the Sandman Worksheet

This exercise will build mindful awareness around your natural sleep cycle. Paying attention to what our biological clock wants to do naturally can help us set a good routine.

Without changing your evening routine, notice at what time you start to feel drowsy at night. For a few days, keep a record of the time at which you start yawning or feeling your eyelids trying to close.

Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Day 4: _____

Is there a roundabout hour at which you get tired? Write it down. _____

If so, that is the time at which you can fall asleep most efficiently. It may not be the ideal and that's okay. Start where you are and work from there.

Do you typically go to bed when you start feeling sleepy, or do you tend to stay up longer either trying to get more done or just hanging out for distraction? Over the course of a few days, notice what you do when you start to feel tired.

At what time do naturally wake up when you have the luxury to do so? Jot down the time at which you first come into morning awareness when you don't have to use an alarm, such as over a few weekends or on vacation.

Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Day 4: _____

Is there a more or less regular time at which you wake up? Write it here. _____

If so, that would be the time you wake most gracefully.

How many hours of sleep would you guess you get on average each night? _____

Now measure it for a few days.



Day 1: _____ Day 2: _____ Day 3: _____ Day 4: _____

What's your actual average? _____

Most people tend to overestimate how much sleep we get by about 45 minutes. How are you doing versus your estimate? Did you nail it? We're you off by a mile?

For a few days, record how much light exposure you got during the day and a few hours before bedtime. It's easy to take this for granted because we are so accustomed to having it in multiple forms. Any light makes a difference here, so consider everything from overhead lights to reading lamps and digital clocks. Then rate the ease of falling asleep. Using the following scales to get a sense of exposure:

Light Exposure Scale: High – Lots of light exposure
Med – Some light, but not fully bright
Low – Only very dim light involved

Ease of Falling Asleep: Easy – I fell asleep in less than 20 minutes
Med – I had to put some effort into falling asleep, it took 20-45 mins
Hard – I tossed and turned for over 45 minutes

Note light exposure:

During the day _____ 2 hours before bed _____ 1 hour before bed _____

Note ease of falling asleep: _____

What connection is there between your exposure to light during the day and your ease of falling asleep?



Self Talk Worksheet

The vast majority of adults know all about the benefits of exercise, yet few exercise enough to reap the benefits. We've all got an internal lawyer that is ready to rationalize what we do and don't do. A common strategy of our internal lawyer is to make a case that we don't have the time or resources to follow through.

Sometimes this inner lawyer cuts to the chase and goes for the juggler with harsh labels. Identifying and removing self-constructed obstacles can make room for positive associations with exercise that will inspire you to get moving.

If you don't enjoy working out, you probably have a fair share of negative associations. Over the next few days, make a note of all those bad vibes here or in your journal.

For this next part, you'll be listing all your favorite excuses. Have fun with it. No one is judging you. Just observe and jot them down here or in your journal.

Maybe you good vibes around exercise! What are some of the aspects you like?



Now for the Big Switch. For every negative association, reframe it into a positive one. See the following for examples:

Negative Association: *I feel like I'm going to have a heart attack when my heart rate increases.*

Positive Reframe: *Increasing my heart rate clears my arteries and prevents me from heart disease.*

Negative Association: *I'm no longer the athlete I used to be.*

Positive Reframe: *I'm glad I can still be athletic.*

Negative Association: _____

Positive Reframe: _____

Negative Association: _____

Positive Reframe: _____

Negative Association: _____

Positive Reframe: _____

Now repeat the above, but this time looking at excuses that keep you away from movement. See the examples provided to help get you started.

Negative Association: *I only have 15 minutes.*

Positive Reframe: *That's just enough for a walk around the neighborhood!*

Negative Association: *I'm too tired.*

Positive Reframe: *Exercise will give me a boost of energy.*

Negative Association: _____

Positive Reframe: _____

Negative Association: _____

Positive Reframe: _____

Negative Association: _____

Positive Reframe: _____

Next time you find yourself making excuses to skip moving your body, come back to this page for a friendly reminder.



Eat Smart, Live Strong Worksheet

Sometimes we eat the wrong foods because we don't know. Companies invest millions of dollars in advertisement and misleading propaganda to keep us confused. Learning a basic outline of how much of what you should be consuming is a good place to start.

To get started, let's take a look at some basic food components:

- **Sugar:** We're eating too much and it goes by a myriad of names, including high fructose corn syrup, molasses, honey and crystal dextrose. Aim for less than 12 grams per day.
- **Sodium:** We are assaulting our food with salt and it's ruining our taste buds. Sodium is found in table salt, soy sauce, cured, canned, pickled and packaged foods. Aim for less than 2300 mg per day.
- **Saturated fats:** The main source of sources of cholesterol is fatty meats and dairy products. Yet another perk to eating more plants, is a natural reduction in saturated fats. Aim for less than 300 mg of cholesterol and 20 grams of saturated fat each day.
- **Trans fats:** Avoid these like the plague. Fast food, baked goods and margarine are your three leading sources of it. Trans fats are hydrogenated and cause more weight gain than any other fats. If you see anywhere on your list of ingredients, get rid of it.
- **Fruits and vegetables:** These lovelies are the king and queen of the food pyramid. Treat yourself like royalty and fill yourself up with as many as you like. Aim for at least 2 cups of fruit and 3 cups of vegetables each day.

Use the chart below to jot down your intake over a four day period, without judgement. Unless you're cooking most of your food from scratch, most of the food on the shelves is loaded with hidden salt, fat and sugar.

The purpose of this exercise is simply to increase awareness. After you have logged down your intake, go through your kitchen cabinets and see which foods are no longer serving you and keep this in mind on your next trip to the grocery store.

The least processed, closest to whole form the better.



Nutrient	Advised Intake	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Sugar	< 12 grams				
Sodium	< 2300 mg				
Cholesterol	< 300 mg				
Saturated Fats	< 20 grams				
Trans Fats	None is best				
Fruits	> 2 cups				
Vegetables	> 3 cups				
Dark Greens	> ½ cup				



Visualize Your Future Worksheet

This journaling exercise is a fantastic way to gain perspective and you focus on what matters.

Imagine yourself ten years from now. Everything has gone as well as it possibly could.

You've worked hard and succeeded at accomplishing the life goals you set for yourself.

Visualize where and how you are, a decade from now, having reached your best potential.

Commit to this journaling assignment for several writing sessions, perhaps every day for a week. Fill in all the details you can imagine. Describe your surroundings and your feelings.

After about a week, review what you've written. Draw out from your dreams a life mission – short enough to memorize and serve as your touchstone. What purpose do you want to drive you – each day and every day? Why turns you on? What makes you jump out of bed? In other words, what's the meaning of your existence?

Let yourself soak in these tough questions, and journal some more. Take time to let your deepest hopes and dreams rise to the surface. Give those visions words. When you think you've got it, put it to the eulogy test. If you were to carry out this mission, would your time on earth be well spent?

Now create a ten-year plan to help you meet your mission. Distill it to bullet points, so that your dreams can guide you through your decisions now.



De-Cluttering Your Life Worksheet

In order to have a great life, we have to have the energy to support it. Energy drainers are things that you are tolerating, ignoring, or putting up that are no longer serving you - anything that is costing you valuable emotional, mental and financial resources. The more obstacles, frustrations and nuisances you live with, the less energy there is to apply to life.

This worksheet will help get you started on de-cluttering your life. "Stuff" comes in many forms, from an overflowing garage to unfinished emotional business. It's whatever is in your immediate environment.

Make a list of what you are putting up with that nags at you. Write down at least one or two things. As you think of more items, add them to the list. You may or may not choose to do anything about them right now. That's fine. Becoming aware of and naming them will bring them to the forefront of your mind, where you eventually start eliminating, fixing, or resolving them.

Energy Drainers at Work	Energy Drainers at Home
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.



Strengthening Your Life Worksheet

After naming what is draining, you've already set in motion the practice of de-cluttering your life. It's time to go the extra step and give thought to areas of your life that enliven you.

Energy *gainers* are those things or activities that give you a booster shot of joy, fun, passion, or peace and contentment. It's whatever turns you on and lights you up. These are often the items that get pushed aside by energy drainers.

Energy Gainers at Work	Energy Gainers at Home
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.



Sharing Gratitude Exercise

Gratitude is mindfulness in action. It requires heightened awareness of our environment. And nowhere is the impact more deeply felt than in our personal relationships. One of the most common mistakes couples make is the "assumption error." This occurs when we assume our partner knows what we are thinking or feeling, or, worse, believe they should.

A simple exercise to get your gratitude on is to write down a few things you appreciate about your partner each day. Don't limit yourself to the big stuff. The majority of our daily actions go seemingly unnoticed. Having someone recognize the "little things" can be deeply gratifying.

Then create an uninterrupted moment to read this list to your partner. Take it slow and let it sink in. Research shows that couples who regularly express appreciation for one another are happier, healthier and have a greater sense of fulfillment in their relationships.

Don't have a significant other? No problem. The heart of this exercise is putting gratitude into practice. You can do this with a friend, family member, a co-worker and, yes, even yourself.



Instructions for Mindfulness Practice

There are many helpful mindfulness and meditation apps. The following is a basic transcript to get you started:

"You may begin in a comfortable sitting position. With your eyes open or closed, take a moment to simply listen to the sounds around you. Notice sounds that are constant and others that happen infrequently. Notice sounds that seem far away, and others that are closer. You might notice that some sounds evoke a reaction or an image or feeling. Is there any sound of breathing?

Just for a moment become aware of your breathing. Notice the flow of breath into and out of your body. There's no need to direct the breathing or to change it in any way. Simply notice it. Feel the sensation of breath in the nostrils... in the back of the throat. Feel the movement of the chest and ribcage as the breath moves in and out. Notice where you feel the body moving as it breathes.

Notice, too, the very quality of your noticing. Is it critical or analytical? Distracted or bored? Does it seem intense? Uncertain? Does your witness have an attitude? Just notice any of this and then come back to simply following the flow of the breath as it moves into and out of your body.

Does the rhythm of your breathing seem to change as you observe it? What other parts of your body do you become aware of as you pay attention to your breathing? Are you aware of any sounds? Thoughts? Images? What else is included in your present experience?"

Summary for Mindfulness Practice:

1. Begin in a comfortable position. You want to be comfortable enough to feel relaxed without falling asleep.
2. Eyes open or closed begin to notice aspects of your present moment experience. For example, listen to the sounds around you.
3. Become aware of your own breathing but without trying to change it.
4. Continue to let your attention include other physical sensations. What are you aware of happening in your body?
5. Include other aspects of your experience in your awareness: thoughts, images, feelings, impulses. There is nothing to do besides this noticing.



Forest Bathing Exercise

Many people like to forest bathe barefoot. Walking in the forest without shoes will help restore the broken connection between you and the natural world. Refer to “Earthing” instructions if you want to combine the two.

But if you don’t want to take off your shoes, make sure to make contact with nature some other way. Plunge your hands into a pile of leaves, pick up a pebble from the bottom of the stream, enjoy the sensations of the breeze against your skin, or lean against a tree and, yes, you can hug it!

The following are five simple steps to get the most from your forest bath:

Step 1 – Leave behind your phone, camera or other distractions, so that you can be fully present in the experience.

Step 2 – Leave behind your goal and expectations. Wander aimlessly, allowing your body to take you wherever it wants.

Step 3 – Pause from time to time, to look more closely at a leaf or notice the sensation of the path beneath your feet.

Step 4 – Find a comfy spot to take a seat, listen to the sounds around you. See how the behavior of the birds and other animals changes when they become used to your presence.

Step 5 – If you go with others, make an agreement to resist talking until the end of the walk, when you can gather to share your experiences.

Earthing

While barefoot outside, sit or stand and focus all your attention on the soles of your feet, paying attention to what you can feel.

Stand with your feet parallel and shoulder-width apart. Keep your chin tucked in and your spine straight. Let your arms hang loose.

Standing straight, let all your tension and weight sink into your feet. Imagine roots spreading out from the bottom of your feet into the earth beneath you.



Bibliography

How Not to Die - Michael Gregor

The Art of Decluttering – Marie Kondo

The Social Network Diet - Miriam Nelson

Whole – T. Colin Campbell

The China Study – T. Colin Campbell

Writing Down the Bones – Natalie Goldberg

Placebo Effect – Joe Dispenza

The Power of Your Subconscious – Joseph Murphy

The Hidden Life of Trees - Peter Wohlleben

Documentaries

Forks Over Knives

What the Health?

Fed Up

Food, Inc.

Food Choices

Hungry for Change

In Defense of Food

Fat, Sick, and Nearly Dead

Cowspiracy

Eating You Alive

The Game Changers

