HEALTHY. HAPPY. FOR REAL.

December 2021





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SPORTS HYDRATION

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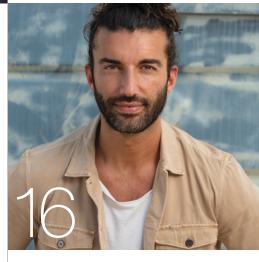
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season can be a painful time of mourning loved ones lost. Get expert advice for coping with grief at **ELmag.com/** holidaygrief.

• YOUR SKIN'S SIGNALS. Eczema, breakouts, and other skin conditions can be signs of larger health concerns. Discover what your most prominent organ is trying to tell you — and get tips for clearer skin — at ELmag.com/skinsignals.

OUR GO-TO GUIDE

Discover some of our favorite brands and products in the Instagram Guide on our profile page at **Instagram.com/**experiencelifemag.

Create more joy in the holiday season with less stress around gift giving. Find eight ways to give with a more peaceful heart at **ELmag.com/mindfulgifts.**

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As the holidays approach, I find myself, as many do this time of year, reminiscing and longing for the way things were."



My Grandma's Mug

hen I was growing up, one of my favorite traditions was Sundaymorning breakfast with my maternal grandparents. They lived up the street from the church in our tiny river town and welcomed any mass-goers from our large extended family to their home

after. We always had bacon, fried eggs, and toast — and on most occasions, there were powdered doughnuts and a loaf or two of homemade banana bread, too.

As soon as we walked in the door, Grandma got busy brewing a fresh pot of coffee, while Grandpa took charge at the stove, frying the bacon and eggs. My parents or an aunt or uncle were on toast duty, while the rest of us set the table before gathering around it in anticipation of the meal.

The sights, sounds, and smells of those cherished mornings are etched in my mind, and they washed over me recently when I went to pour my own morning coffee. As I caught sight of a certain ceramic mug in the cupboard, the memory of my grandma in her kitchen — coffee in hand, making sure we were all taken care of — brought tears to my eyes.

I could see her watching over those breakfasts, as well as countless family gatherings. No matter the event, there was always an abundance of food and we practically fell over each other in attempts to get a taste of our favorite dishes. There was my great-grandma's whipped-cream fruit salad in a special bowl at Thanksgiving; oyster soup on Christmas Eve; my aunt's creamy mashed potatoes at every major holiday; the veggie tray loaded with black olives, which disappeared faster than the cookies.

Grandma had those gatherings down to a fine art — or at least it appeared that way. She never seemed flustered; she had seemingly endless patience. She loved having her great big family together, even if we were loud and messy and ate her out of house and home.

Once her family had finally had their fill, Grandma would settle in her comfy chair in the living room, leaving the chaos in the kitchen for cleanup later. Her coffee mug on the table next to her, and usually a grandchild in her lap (and a few more at her feet), Grandma chimed in on the various conversations that were happening around that cozy, comfortable room.

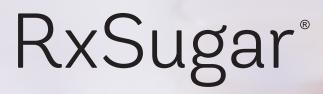
Both of my grandparents have passed in recent years, and family gettogethers, while still so special, are not the same without them. As the holidays approach, I find myself, as many do this time of year, reminiscing and longing for the way things were . . . to see Grandma and Grandpa in that kitchen just one more time.

We can't go back, but we can try to recreate some traditions that honor and connect us to what was. And that's what I'm trying to do with a few of the memories that mean the most to me. I'm teaching my children how to make Grandma's delicious banana bread, for instance — and her refrigerator pickles, too. (Do you have a cherished food moment, experience, or memory of your own? I'd love for you to share it with me on Instagram: @jamiemartinel.)

The coffee mug in the cupboard that I mentioned earlier was, of course, my grandma's. Knowing her hands once held it helps me feel connected to her and the love we will always share. It's on the table next to me now, as I write this letter.

For a collection of stories about favorite food memories from members of the Experience Life team and several of our contributors, see "Eating Joyfully," on page 42.

JAMIE MARTIN is *Experience Life*'s editor in chief, Life Time's vice president of content strategy, and cohost of the *Life Time Talks* podcast.



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Talk to Us



CAN-DO SPIRIT

(On "Yes, You Can," September 2021)

Main The Roasted Tomato Sauce recipe in the September issue couldn't have come at a better time. We've been harvesting so many tomatoes and didn't know what to do with them all. This is an easy-to-prepare recipe, and it's very flavorful! It fills the kitchen with a heavenly aroma while it's roasting in the oven. My first batch was all Roma tomatoes, and for my second batch I used both Roma and beefsteak. Both worked well, and we'll be making more sauce as more tomatoes ripen. I think this means I need to try the Apple-Maple Butter next. Pam Z.

© Love this stuff! #Giardiniera #italian #pickle @turtlesalacart

A HOPEFUL MESSAGE

▶ I just read "Plastics: The Beginning of the End" in your September 2021 issue. I am stunned, grateful, and completely surprised. There are so many bad things being reported and habits that are destructive, but here you give us a measure of hope. "Hope" is a word I recently reintroduced to my active vocabulary. Within a week of adjusting my thoughts to be more in line with hope, here is a gift of words that are just that. Thank you for being aware and taking ownership of the plastics issue. I have been reducing my use with every grocery run and in making decisions on other purchases. It's not easy to do at first, but it does get easier with practice.

When companies make a change for the better, suppliers take notice and develop innovations to accommodate the changing market. It's similar to dietary changes: When they catch on, the foods involved become easier to find. The more that earth-friendly packaging and reuse becomes popular, the more it is normalized, and companies either do better or fade away. Sarah M.

PASSING THE SMELL TEST

(On "Physical Therapy for Your Nose," September 2021) Thank you for this! I lost my smell when I had COVID last December and eating is not the same! Very helpful and relevant. **@angelaloves**

▶ I just picked up the September issue of *Experience Life* and really appreciate the breadth and scope of your magazine. But I would like to inform you that "physical therapy" is a protected term. It guards a very specific doctorate program and all the years of training it represents. As a DPT, I respect and appreciate other healthcare professionals enough to support and defend their specific treatment terms.

A roller workout for the spine, for example, shouldn't be labeled "chiropractics," and a trigger-point release shouldn't be labeled "acupuncture." Thus, I respectfully ask for your thoughtful consideration before labeling something as "physical therapy" in your future publications. **Christina F.**

BACK AND FORTH

👨 I am LAT (living apart together) with a man who is 13 years my senior ("Your Place or Mine?" July 27, 2021). Although I like my space, I find that carrying my backpack back and forth is getting to be a pain. When I cook at his house, I need something at my house. He can well afford medical care should something happen, and he has four daughters (three close by) who are willing to help with his care. I wonder how other LAT partners divvv up their time to be involved with their partner yet have alone time. He is young for his age and is fun and interesting, but I still enjoy time by myself. Adele P.

PERSONAL INSIGHTS

 I find that intermittent fasting works for my schedule, lifestyle, and wellness goals ("A Closer Look at Intermittent Fasting and Weight Loss," April 2021). Thank you for sharing!
@unavitawellness

 I do a water workout nearly every day, and I shall definitely incorporate your ideas into my routine ("Workout With a Splash," March 2014). Thanks for the help.
Barbara L. Thank you so much for clarifying BMI as it relates to health ("Beyond BMI: Why True Health Is About More Than What You Weigh," August 25, 2020). Your article is one of many reasons I continue to subscribe to *Experience Life*. **Kitty B.**

If you take vitamin D, keep the dosage low or have a doctor monitor your blood levels ("The Vitamin D Debate," December 2011). Too much vitamin D can cause toxicity for your kidneys. I learned the hard way — even though I was taking it per my doctor's recommendation. **Polly W.**

For a more recent article on vitamin D (and the rare possibility of getting too much), visit ELmag .com/vitamind.



Experience Life welcomes your comments and suggestions. Email experiencelife@experiencelife.com, connect with us on social media, or send feedback to:

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Old Bodies, Young Brains: How Super-Agers Stay Sharp

he chance of developing some form of dementia as we age can cloud our pursuit of a long and functional life: No one wants to spend their golden years suffering from Alzheimer's. But a recent study suggests that even centenarians can avoid cognitive dysfunction — despite the presence of the tangles and plaque associated with the disease.

These centenarian "super-agers," who avoid dementia despite having plaque in their brains, display a level of both resistance and resilience that is uncommon among their elderly peers, explains lead study author Henne Holstege, PhD, an assistant professor at Amsterdam's VU University Medical Center. "While centenarian brains revealed varying loads of postmortem neuropathological hallmarks of [Alzheimer's], this was not associated with cognitive performance or rate of decline," she reports in JAMA Network Open.

Her team recruited 330 centenarians who were cognitively healthy and living independently and evaluated their cognitive health at the beginning of the study and again in the months that followed — some as many as four years later. They observed a modest decline in memory among some participants but found no noticeable erosion in overall cognitive function.



Alzheimer's disease is not an inevitable result of aging. Those genetically predisposed can markedly delay it or show no evidence of it before they die by doing the things we know are healthful."

For various reasons, these superagers were able to resist the forces that typically cause dementia or were simply able to deal with them more effectively than other older adults. In fact, some exhibited the cognitive skills of people much younger, according to the *New York Times*.

Genes and lifestyle may play a role in allowing certain centenarians to completely avoid cognitive erosion, Boston University geriatrician Thomas Perls, MD, tells the *Times*. The resilience these super-agers displayed — withstanding damage to the brain until much later in life — may be due to what Holstege describes as "cognitive reserve." Some people fortify their brains over the course of decades, allowing them to stay sharper longer.

"We found that next to physicalhealth factors, factors of cognitive reserve, such as education, frequency of cognitive activity, and premorbid IQ, were associated with cognitive performance," she explains. "This is in line with our previous study, in which we demonstrated that the cognitively healthy centenarians in our cohort had higher levels of education and a higher socioeconomic background compared with birth-cohort peers."

We can't control all these factors, but some are within our grasp. As Perls notes, basic lifestyle choices can make a difference. "Alzheimer's disease is not an inevitable result of aging," he argues. "Those genetically predisposed can markedly delay it or show no evidence of it before they die by doing the things we know are healthful."

(For more on Alzheimer'sprevention measures, see ELmag.com/ alzheimers.)

Lessons From COVID to Improve Our Ailing Healthcare System

It's common knowledge that COVID-19 challenged our healthcare system in ways few public-health experts could have imagined. But the pandemic also may be remembered for the many ways it sparked new thinking throughout that sector.

Chief among these revelations:

• Many surgeries and screening procedures may be unnecessary.

• In-home care, in many cases, may be just as effective as hospitalization.

By some estimates, almost half of Medicare beneficiaries undergo some unnecessary treatment annually. But the pandemic caused many people to delay or cancel elective surgeries and screenings. As a result, some researchers plan to track their outcomes against those of people who underwent the procedures in prepandemic times — with the goal of imagining a system that focuses solely on "high-value" treatment.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the healthcare landscape," writes health-sciences researcher Allison Oakes, PhD, in *Health Affairs*. "It has created a novel sense of scarcity, which has forced health systems to cut profitable services and prioritize seriously ill patients. At the same time, it has revealed a previously unseen counterfactual: a health system in which there is no low-value care."

A study published earlier this year in Annals of Surgery supports such a shift. Comparing the outcomes of people who canceled specific surgical procedures at Veterans Affairs hospitals during the early days of the pandemic with those of patients who underwent the same surgeries in 2018 or 2019, researchers found that people who put off the procedure were no more likely than those who went under the knife to experience adverse outcomes.

Meanwhile, financial issues — and our lengthy COVID-mandated quarantine have convinced more hospitals to begin experimenting with a broad range of in-home-care options.

As Kaiser Health News reports, about 30 percent of people currently admitted to hospitals with conditions such as pneumonia or heart failure could be monitored remotely and visited daily by their practitioners. The concept received a significant boost recently when Kaiser Permanente and the Mayo Clinic invested \$100 million to help Medically Home, a Boston-based firm, expand its in-homecare services.

"In a lot of ways, this remains aspirational; this is the early innings," says Dean Ungar, who follows the insurance and hospital industries for Moody's Investors Service. But he sees major costsaving opportunities for hospitals that

"will increasingly be reserved for acute care [such as surgeries and ICUs]."

Significant obstacles remain not the least of which is whether Medicare will support in-home services; Medicare was covering these services during the pandemic, but only temporarily. But, as Oakes notes, "there has never been a better time" to turn the pandemic's harsh lessons into positive change.

—CC

HOW Fit can you get?

We all benefit from exercise,

but some of us reap more rewards than others from the same workout. A 2021 study published in *Nature Metabolism* examines why this may be so — and might also lead to future tests to predict how fit we can get.

"The variability in responses between any two individuals undergoing the very same exercise regimen is actually quite striking," reports senior study author Robert Gerszten, MD. "For example, some may experience improved endurance, while others will see improved blood-sugar levels."

To examine exercise's effects. Gerszten, chief of the Division of Cardiovascular Medicine at Boston's Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, and his team measured the blood levels of some 5.000 proteins in more than 650 sedentary adults before and after a 20-week endurance-exercise program. "We identified proteins that emanate from bone, muscle, and blood vessels that are strongly related to cardiorespiratory fitness and had never been previously associated with exercise training responses," Gerszten explains.

They identified 147 proteins to measure baseline $VO_2 max$ — the peak rate at which a person is able to consume oxygen — and 102 proteins linked with VO_2 max potential. They then created a protein score to gauge an individual's ultimate "trainability."

"Baseline levels of several proteins predicted who would respond to the exercise training protocol far better than any of our established patient factors," says Gerszten.

This study's scorecard may someday be used to map workout regimens with the most beneficial exercises for an individual — and even to foretell your ultimate fitness potential.

— MICHAEL DREGNI

Well Informed



The Wild World of Fermentation **Q&A WITH SANDOR KATZ**

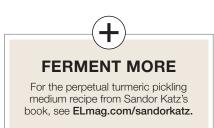
Most of us can name yogurt and pickles as examples of fermented foods, but Sandor Ellix Katz's new book, *Sandor Katz's Fermentation Journeys*, reveals a wide world of ferments beyond what you can find at the supermarket. His more than 60 recipes include Mexican *tepache* (a fermented pineapple drink) and Burmese *lahpet* (pickled tea leaves) — and much more.

A self-described "fermentation revivalist," Katz is the author of five additional books on the flavors and nutritional benefits of

Experience Life | Do you have any new favorite ferments thanks to your adventures? And was there a ferment that truly surprised even you?

Sandor Katz | I have a lot of favorites! Fermentation creates compelling flavors, and many of the ferments I have been exposed to leave me craving their unique flavors and trying to recreate them.

The biggest surprises have been types of ferments that I knew from one cultural context that unexpectedly turned up in others. For instance, I have known about the Japanese soybean ferment natto for decades but did not expect to find something similar in China or Burma. In these contexts, the fermented soybeans are typically combined with other seasonings and dried, rather than being eaten fresh and sticky, as they are in Japan.



And do certain ferments provide specific health benefits — sauerkraut in contrast to miso, for instance?

> **SK** | I've been living with HIV for 30 years, and I'm happy to report that my health remains robust. I certainly cannot attribute this to fermented foods alone, since I've been on antiretroviral drugs for 22 years. However, many people I meet who are on drugs like the ones I take report chronic digestive problems, which I have never experienced.

I've also tried and learned about

natto-like seasonings from Nagaland in

northeastern India and from West Africa.

EL | How do you think eating fermented

food has affected your own health?

Each ferment has its own character and nutritional qualities, but there are clear patterns: Nutrients are more easily bioavailable in fermented foods than in nonfermented equivalents. Ferments often have higher levels of certain vitamins, as well as micronutrients.

And the probiotic bacteria in live ferments (not cooked or heat-processed after fermentation) can build gut biodiversity and thereby improve digestion, immune function, and potentially even mental health.

Because each type of ferment has its own distinctive microbial communities,

fermentation, food sovereignty, and fermentation as a metaphor for human culture.

His latest work was born from his global travels dedicated to learning and teaching about fermentation. And it's more than just a cookbook: Katz also describes how fermentation techniques have evolved and introduces us to the people who are keeping the tradition alive.

We spoke with Katz about his journey.

incorporating a range of different fermented foods and beverages means greater biodiversity.

EL | Your book describes traditional fermentation techniques and customs, suggesting that fermentation is a way people can connect with the past. That said, are there any new recipes or innovations in fermentation that you find especially exciting?

SK | The primary focus of *Fermentation Journeys* is traditional foods around the world, but it also includes many innovative applications.

One that I really love, that I learned about from a fermentation enthusiast I met in Tasmania, and that has become a permanent feature in my kitchen, is using a paste made of turmeric, garlic, turnips, and salt as a perpetual pickling medium. I bury different vegetables in it, and when I pull them out a week or two later, they are deliciously pickled, flavored, and colored by the turmeric.

Traditional fermentation processes can be great sources of inspiration, but creative practitioners inevitably experiment and embellish them with their own twists, as many of the examples in the book illustrate.

— MARCO DREGNI

The True Costs of Online Shopping

nline shopping is big business: Americans spent more than \$860 billion on e-commerce in 2020, up 44 percent from 2019. Much of that increase was due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which pushed millions of consumers online for reasons of safety as well as convenience.

But fast, frictionless delivery also exacts a considerable environmental toll, according to several onlineretailing-industry studies. Consider these factors.

- KAELYN RILEY

GREENER ONLINE SHOPPING

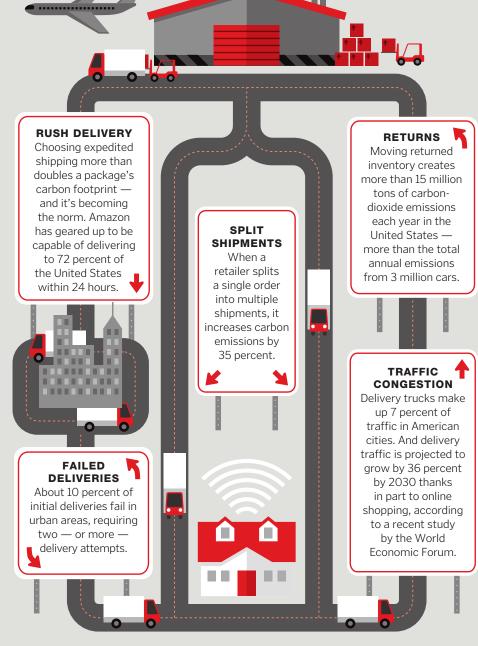
Online shopping can be more ecofriendly than brick-and-mortar retail, as long as you make your choices with sustainability in mind. Try these tips to shrink your shopping footprint.

• Choose a slower shipping option. Two-day shipping is tempting, but it requires air freight, which is much more carbon intensive than ground delivery. Picking the longer shipping window means the retailer can prioritize efficiency over speed, rather than the other way around.

• Avoid unnecessary returns. Nearly two-thirds of online shoppers in 2020 bought multiples of the same item with the intention of returning some of them, a practice that significantly increases a delivery's carbon footprint.

• Seek out sustainable retailers. Some companies, such as prAna and Toad&Co, prioritize sustainability in their shipping practices, whether it's through plastic reduction or reusable packaging.

• Shop mindfully. Try making fewer purchases, whether that means buying less or simply waiting until your cart is full before ordering. That way, your order can be consolidated into fewer boxes, which means fewer vehicles and less packaging.



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On the Cover



Self-Reflections

After years of feeling like he wasn't "man enough," actor, director, producer, and author Justin Baldoni has realized his own worthiness.



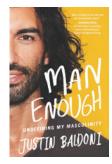
ustin Baldoni is tired of performing. The 37-year-old filmmaker isn't retiring from Hollywood — his latest project, *Clouds*, was released on Disney+ in October 2020. But in his book, *Man Enough: Undefining My Masculinity*, Baldoni writes about giving up a different kind of performance: our culture's definition of what it means to be a man.

Those societal expectations — to always be strong, brave, successful, and stoic, to name a few — set what Baldoni calls an "impossibly high and unachievable mark of masculinity.... It was as if the bar were set too high and I couldn't reach it, or more like the box was built too small and not all of me could fit inside it."

That socialization leads a lot of men to feel as if they're lacking — and it simultaneously denies them an outlet to express their insecurity. "And if you're not allowed to be insecure, you're not allowed to cry, you're not allowed to be vulnerable, then all of that gets buried until you don't even know it exists," he explains. "And how are we ever going to heal if we don't know how we feel?"

Man Enough chronicles Baldoni's own healing — what he calls "the journey from inside the box to inside myself" — in an effort to encourage others to undertake the difficult work of questioning long-held cultural standards that tell us who we're supposed to be. "You are good," he writes, "inherently and intrinsically good. . . . Who you are, as you are, is enough."







We should all be allowed to be who we are — and we shouldn't be forced to choose between being accepted and being our full selves."



EXPERIENCE LIFE You write that our culture presents young boys with a false choice. Tell us what you mean by that.

JUSTIN BALDONI We teach boys to fit inside of a predetermined box. They have to be tough, impermeable, resilient. They can't question authority or ask for help. They can't display compassion, empathy, or emotional intelligence, which our culture frames as feminine.

So young boys are faced with this false choice where they have to choose their masculinity at the expense of their humanity, because what makes them human are those "feminine" qualities.

I didn't realize until recently that even the language that was reinforced in me made me unconsciously distrust women. When we tell a boy to "man up," to not act like a girl, we're conditioning him to hate the "feminine" parts of himself. That language sticks with us. It follows us into our friendships and marriages and workplaces.

It comes down to allowing everyone to be the fullest version of themselves, however they identify. We should all be allowed to be who we are — and we shouldn't be forced to choose between being accepted and being our full selves.

EL | What does it mean to you to "undefine" masculinity?

JB When I first started doing this work, I thought I was on a journey to redefine masculinity. I think it was very surprising for people that someone like me — a white, straight, cisgendered man who had fallen into some success — was willing to challenge the patriarchy and to have uncomfortable conversations about things that aren't working for our society.

But who am I to get to redefine anything? I'm just a guy who recognizes that the system I was raised in has hurt me more than it's helped me. It's helped me materially, but it's hurt me emotionally.

And everywhere I look, I see that the system is broken and that other people are suffering — and hurt people hurt people. And I want to heal, because healed people can then heal people. More than that, I realized that by redefining masculinity — by creating a new box — I would just be creating more suffering, because boxes are the very thing that hurt us. It's the undefinition that can set us free.

EL You often speak on your podcast, *Man Enough*, about the importance of calling people in rather than calling them out. Why do you think that approach is so important?

JB | These conversations can be really tricky to navigate in today's culture. There are a lot of people with immense privilege who don't know how to talk about things like social justice. And what I think we often fail to recognize is that while oppressors are benefiting from an unjust system, they're not bad people. And what oppressors don't realize is that the fact of their privilege triggers a painful response from marginalized communities who have been trying forever to make their voices heard.

What I see happening right now is that instead of building bridges, we're building emotional walls. There's incredible work happening in social justice and activism, but the gap is widening between the folks who really need to hear those messages and those who are willing to hear them.

What's scary about our current climate is that a social-media post can literally alter the course of someone's life. A lot of people are walking on eggshells when they need to be in the conversation — they need to be at the table listening.

I think what we need as a society is the ability to sit at the table and listen, and to hold space for an individual who's hurting, to hear their story and recognize their pain. So, what I'm trying to do is call in people like me — people with immense privilege — and help them understand the conversation, so the burden of education isn't on the oppressed group.

Then, ideally, they need to be willing to hear how their actions are hurting people, how they're benefiting from an unjust system, and not take that personally.

EL | You write quite a bit about "the hard work of heart work." What does that phrase mean to you?

JB I believe that one of the purposes of life is to grow — and not your bank account or your muscle size. I'm talking about emotional and spiritual growth, which, at the end of our lives, is all that matters. There's an old saying that the longest distance that a man will ever travel is the distance between his head and his heart. And men, from a very early age, are taught to sever that head-heart connection out of self-preservation.

I think we all need to reconnect our heads and hearts and take that gusto for material growth and apply it inside. But there's no monetary value for that growth, no tangible way to measure it.

You can measure it in how much love you give, how happy you are, how grateful you feel for what you have. That's the growth that will allow you to be more present for your family, to show up fully in your relationships, to apologize when you're wrong, or to sit at the table when it's uncomfortable.

That's what I mean by the hard work of heart work. And that doesn't start with social media. It starts with an audience of one in the mirror.

EL | How has that work changed the way you show up in your own life?

JB I'm practicing radical honesty in my life, which means not shying away from the things that scare me and being willing to have real conversations with my wife, with my children, with my parents.

If we could all learn to be honest with each other, I think our culture would change overnight. Our children could grow up without this unrealistic expectation of gender and this weight of needing to be enough, and they could see that their parents — the people who love them the most — are deeply flawed, complicated human beings. And that they too will grow up to be deeply flawed and complicated.

It's in that imperfection, I believe, that we find perfection. That's where the humanity is. The poet Rumi wrote that the wound is where the light enters you. We're all wounded; therefore, we're all full of light. \textcircledlambda

KAELYN RILEY is an *Experience Life* senior editor.



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How to Make Beeswax Candles

Avoid unknown fragrances and toxic ingredients by crafting your own candles.

BY COURTNEY LEWIS OPDAHL

he flickering of soft candlelight is synonymous with cozy winter evenings. But most candles emit a range of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) that can lead to headaches and respiratory problems. Candles made from petroleum-based paraffin wax have raised health concerns, and scented varieties often contain formaldehyde.

To create a comfy ambiance anywhere in your home, you can purchase natural, unscented beeswax candles or follow these steps to make your own with the optional essential oils of your choice.

COURTNEY LEWIS OPDAHL is *Experience Life's managing editor.*

SUPPLIES:

- Beeswax, about 1 lb. pastilles (or 1½ lb. for candles without add-ins)
- 4 wicks
- 4 mini tulip jelly jars (or any small jars)
- Lightweight sticks or pencils (for wick placement)



Melt beeswax in a double boiler or in a bowl set inside a saucepan or stockpot with a few inches of water. (Melted beeswax is tricky to clean, so use a dedicated glass or tin bowl.) Stir pastilles frequently to break up clumps of wax.



While the beeswax is melting, secure a wick to the bottom of each jar (wicks come preassembled from online retailers). Wrap the loose end around a pencil or stick until taut and straight; rest pencil or stick on jar so the wick is centered.

OPTIONAL:

- Essential oils
- Coconut oil
- Dried herbs or pine twigs and twine or ribbon, for decoration



If desired, stir 1 to 2 tablespoons of your chosen essential oils into the melted beeswax. (Mixing in ½ cup coconut oil will help retain the scents.) Slowly pour the melted wax into the jars, leaving about ¼ inch of clearance at the top. Let cool overnight. Once the candle is solid, shorten the wick and decorate the jar by tying herbs or pine twigs with twine or ribbon to give as a gift.



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My Turnaround





Katia Smirnov launched her company in 2019 after a quest to find better-tasting bars.

Raising the Bar

When one woman began investigating ingredients in her food, she found preservatives, chemicals, and hormones she wasn't expecting. Her decision to prioritize organic whole foods improved her mood, weight, and overall well-being.

BY KATIA SMIRNOV

rowing up, in Russia, I didn't give much thought to what I ate or where my food came from. Frankly, I didn't need to. My grandmother was a gourmet chef who made sure I ate a lot of vegetables and fruits, and the produce we bought was always fresh.

But things changed after my family moved to the United States in the '90s: I started gaining weight, breaking out, and feeling really lethargic and down.

I was confused. I had continued living a similar lifestyle, eating the same foods and maintaining the same activities that I had back in Russia but I knew there had to be something behind the changes. I attributed them to the move, a subsequent culture shock, and puberty. As a 13-year-old city girl, I was having some trouble adjusting to small-town life in a new country, where I felt like a fish out of water. It made sense that my body would be responding to the stress of the move.

Yet when a few years passed without improvements, I decided I needed to do something. Together with my mom, I began researching possible causes and realized that the issues I was experiencing might be from the food I was eating.

Going Organic

This realization came as a shock at first. My diet hadn't really changed since we'd moved; in fact, I was mostly eating the same foods that I had eaten in Russia.

But when I learned about the chemicals, preservatives, fillers, hormones, and GMOs that are pervasive in the U.S. food supply, the issue became clear: Beneath the surface, the food I was eating wasn't the same.

With that knowledge, I decided to adopt a more intentional whole-foodsbased, organic diet.

The change was drastic. Very soon after adopting these new eating patterns, I noticed that my sleep improved, my skin cleared up, and my energy and mood bounced back. It was amazing: I felt like myself again.

Encouraged by my progress and eager to capitalize on it, I decided to join the Life Time near our family's home in Columbus, Ohio. Though I'd never established a stable fitness routine, my lack of experience didn't deter me from diving headfirst into the club's offerings. I jump-started my fitness education by taking classes, trying different cardio machines, and testing my limits through strength training.

As a result of my healthier diet and fitness routine, I lost the extra weight I'd gained, and the difference in my well-being was like night and day. I knew I'd found the lifestyle that would support me moving forward.

Finding the Right Fuel

My routine kept me energized throughout college and into the start of my career working for a global payroll company. I moved up the corporate ladder until I decided to branch off and cofound a company in the finance and real estate industry.

For the next few years, I remained extremely busy. As the company became successful, I was on the go all the time, and with everything on my to-do list professionally, I simply didn't have the time to cook the wholefood, organic meals and snacks that had fueled me the past few years. I needed something quick that I could eat on the run.

Protein shakes and bars seemed like the logical solution to my dilemma. The trouble was, I couldn't find a single protein bar I liked. After trying a number of options, I noticed very quickly that if a bar tasted great to me, it usually meant there were a lot of unnatural additives and flavorings I wanted to avoid.

On the other hand, the bars that were "good for you" — at least according to their labels — often tasted like bricks to me. I knew there had to be a better way, so I decided to create my own.

Armed with my experience of cooking gourmet meals with my grandma, along with my knowledge of nutrition and whole foods, I approached the challenge with the conviction that I could make a delicious bar that would fuel my lifestyle.

I tried a bunch of different recipes — combining foods like spinach, kale, pomegranate, and lemon with other nourishing ingredients — and after some trial and error, I finally created a bar that made me think, *Wow, this actually tastes really good.* I was thrilled.

Creating a Better Bar

After I'd found my winning recipe, I felt compelled to take this further than my own kitchen — I couldn't be the only one who wanted a better-tasting and more nutritious bar.

So I started bringing batches to parties and gatherings without telling anyone about my hope to sell the bars. I wanted honest opinions, and I knew that if people knew my plan, they'd be too quick to tell me what I wanted to hear.

Soon I had friends and colleagues coming up to me and asking if I could make bars for them to buy. I began making small batches as a side hobby, eventually creating two more flavors I liked. Finally, I reached a point where I felt ready to take the plunge.

I stepped away from my first business venture and created Katia Foods in 2019. I found a co-packer — a company that could help me make and package my bars on a larger scale — who ran a sample batch for all the flavors. Over the next three weeks, I took goodie bags of my bars to 45 different retailers in the area to see if they would be willing to carry my product.

That's when things really took off. Amazingly, 40 retailers agreed to sell Katia bars. My bars hit the shelves in October 2019, and for the first couple of months, things were great. I was elated with how well they were selling.

But then came COVID-19, throwing a wrench into our progress. Rather than lose hope, I used store closures as an opportunity to revamp my website and develop marketing campaigns and I'm glad I did. My online efforts helped get the name out, and now Katia bars are selling better than ever.

I noticed that my sleep improved, my skin cleared up, and my energy and mood bounced back. It was amazing: I felt like myself again.

Staying the Course

Though I've only become busier since starting Katia Foods, I've learned how to pace myself and set my priorities. I recognize that my health is critical to the health of my business.

The most important thing is to feel good and have enough energy to carry out the goals I've set for my company, which I've learned I can achieve by sticking to a regular fitness routine and nourishing myself with food that's free of preservatives and chemicals.

It's hard to believe how far I've come from the 13-year-old Katia, who struggled to understand the changes her body was going through. Now, I feel incredibly grateful to have found the diet and lifestyle that fuels me, as well as to have the opportunity to share what I've learned with others.

Editor's note: Katia Bars are sold in Life Time's LifeCafes. Life Time publishes *Experience Life*.

Katia's Top 3 Success Strategies

NOURISH YOUR BODY WITH NUTRITIOUS FOOD. After realizing the benefits of a mostly organic diet, Katia committed to fueling herself with fresh, organic products and foods whenever possible.

2

FOLLOW YOUR PASSION. "Choose something you are truly passionate about," Katia recommends. "Make sure it's something you really, truly, absolutely love and believe in."



BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF.

"Just take it one day at a time," Katia advises for anyone making a big life change. "As long as you're making little changes on a daily basis, it will all add up and eventually turn into a habit."



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Real Fitness

When it comes to how our bodies look, feel, and perform, few phrases are as loaded with emotion as "I used to . . ." Yet the wisdom won from past fitness successes and failures can help you move forward, starting today.



Find motivation from earlier exercise experiences while meeting yourself in the present moment and honoring the body you have now.

Small Bands, Big Strength

Learn how to use mini bands for a challenging and portable full-body strength workout.

BY LAUREN BEDOSKY

ini bands are some of the simplest pieces of exercise equipment on the market. But what these small, closed-loop resistance bands lack in size, they more than make up for in benefits.

"The best thing about mini bands is how portable they are. You can do mini-band workouts literally anywhere," says Life Time personaltraining manager Jennifer Blake, RKC-II. Just toss a couple in your bag for gym and travel workouts or keep a set handy at home for days when you can't get to the club.

The other perk of mini bands is that they're surprisingly versatile you can do both upper- and lowerbody exercises with them.

Blake designed the following mini-band workout with the goal of strengthening your whole body. It's challenging and ideal for any setting.

To do it, you'll need two bands:

one lighter and one heavier. Blake notes that you may want to test out different mini bands before you begin the workout to make sure you've picked the right ones.

"You want enough tension [on the band] that it's hard when you do the exercise, but you don't want so much tension that you have to shorten your range of motion," Blake says.

Complete three rounds of this full-body circuit. Perform as many repetitions of an exercise as you can manage with good form for one minute. Rest for 30 seconds before moving on to the next exercise.





The best thing about mini bands is how portable they are. You can do mini-band workouts literally anywhere."









Do-Anywhere Barre Routine This low-impact, body-weight workout builds stability and flexibility from head to toe.

flexibility from head to toe.

BY LAUREN BEDOSKY

f vou believe barre workouts are just for dancers — or folks who have a stereotypical "dancer's body" — think again. Barre offers an effective body-weight workout that is adaptable to nearly every body and fitness level. Plus, its low profile means you can reap its stabilitybuilding, flexibility-boosting benefits regardless of your location.

Barre blends body-weight movements from ballet, Pilates, and yoga. High repetitions of small movements build muscular endurance, and postures build isometric strength the ability to engage your muscles without moving your body.

"One of the things I love best about barre is that it can be done from anywhere and without any props at all," says Alicia Sokol, a Washington, D.C.-based barre instructor and studio owner. While classes typically make use of a wooden ballet barre to assist with balance, you can easily use a chair or countertop instead.

"Just a few exercises can yield immediate and noticeable benefits for anyone — elevated heart rate, muscle activation, sweat, a feeling of calm," Sokol says.

To prove it, Sokol designed the following do-anywhere barre routine. Perform the following moves in order, focusing on form and resting only when needed.

For detailed exercise descriptions and demos, visit ELmag.com/ barreworkout.



BODY-WEIGHT SQUAT

Stand with feet slightly wider than your hips and your toes slightly turned out. Bend your knees and lower your hips toward the floor. Push through your heels and drive upward to return to standing. Repeat for four minutes.



POWER LEG

Stand with feet hip width apart, toes pointed forward. Push through the balls of your feet to lift your heels. Bend your knees slightly. Lower your hips about 1 inch and then push back up. Move up and down 1 inch for about 90 seconds.



CRESCENT-LUNGE BURPEE

Begin in a crescent-lunge position. Plant your palms and step back into plank. Then, step the opposite foot forward into crescent lunge. Repeat slowly for two minutes. To finish, hold the plank for 30 to 60 seconds.



Begin in a split-squat position, with a slight bend in both knees. Keeping your front knee over your ankle, lower your back knee 1 inch, then lift up 1 inch. Move up and down 1 inch for two minutes, then switch sides.

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Learn how to personalize this challenging unilateral "pistol" move to build lower-body strength, mobility, and balance.

BY MAGGIE FAZELI FARD, RKC, MFT-1, ALPHA

he single-leg-squat variation known as the pistol is an aspirational lowerbody exercise. To squat with one leg planted and one leg fully extended in front of you — and to go a depth that brings your hips to your heel with balance, control, and great form - requires tremendous flexibility, mobility, stability, and reflexes.

Mastering this challenging exercise can take years; for some, a full pistol may never be possible.

But the pistol's benefits — including strengthening the quads, hamstrings, glutes, and core - are not reserved solely for those who have nailed the move. Thanks to modifications and variations, it's possible to find a version that fires up your strength, power, balance, and confidence.

By personalizing the single-leg squat, you can improve your strength and mobility over time. Perhaps someday you'll do a full pistol. And if not, that's OK, too. If the point is to get stronger and more functionally fit while honoring your body, you're on the right track.

These tips can help finesse your singleleg-squat form, no matter which variation you choose.

Gaze forward and keep your neck neutral.

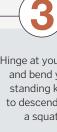
> Stay active through the core and arms. Alternatively, as a counterbalance, try holding a light weight in front of you or grasping your extended leg.

Keep your hips squared, and lower yourself only as far as you can with control. If stability is an issue, try squatting partway to a bench or box, or use TRX straps for support.

> Press actively through both feet.

Start standing Extend both arms Hinge at your hips When you reach the end with feet and one leg out in and bend your of your range of motion, shoulder width front of you. Ground standing knee press through your apart, core down through the to descend into standing foot and return engaged. standing foot. a squat. to standing with control.

MAGGIE FAZELI FARD, RKC, MFT-1, ALPHA, is an Experience Life senior editor.





NSTRUCTIONS

The Past and Future You

How to find fitness motivation in your past while meeting yourself in the present moment.

BY NICOLE RADZISZEWSKI

hen it comes to how our bodies look, feel, and perform, few phrases are as loaded with emotion as "I used to ..."

Perhaps your "I used to" involves a sport you excelled at in high school

or college. Maybe it's an old 5K or marathon personal record, or a lifting PR. Or maybe it revolves around an aesthetic, such as being lean, having great posture, or having thick legs.

There is a nostalgic element to all this — "I used to, and now I don't (or can't)." We may conjure up pride and self-esteem when reflecting on past accomplishments.

At the same time, comparing our current selves with our past selves can have a profound negative effect on self-worth and make it difficult to feel motivated to honor the bodies we have now.

"Being in a chronic state of selfjudgment can have both an acute and chronic impact on your mental and physical health," says Jen Elmquist, MA, LMFT, a mental-wellness expert and the director of Life Time Mind.

There are countless reasons someone might not be fit in the same way they were two decades ago, or even one year ago. Common life changes that can disrupt our habits and affect our bodies in ways we didn't intend include transitioning from school to work; a new job that calls for long hours behind a desk or steering wheel; pregnancy; menopause or other hormonal changes related to growing older; injury or illness; and even starting a new sport or activity that challenges the body in a different way.

"Things in life will take away from who we are and help us turn into who we are becoming," says Brianna Battles, MS, CSCS, and founder of Pregnancy and Postpartum Athleticism. Some chapters of our lives tend to relay this message more intensely than others.

Recently, the collective trauma of COVID-19, and the physicaland mental-health implications of surviving a global pandemic, resulted in sometimes significant unwanted changes to people's bodies and fitness levels. According to a Harris Poll conducted for the American Psychological Association in February 2021, 42 percent of U.S. adults report experiencing unwanted weight gain during the pandemic, and 18 percent report unwanted weight loss.

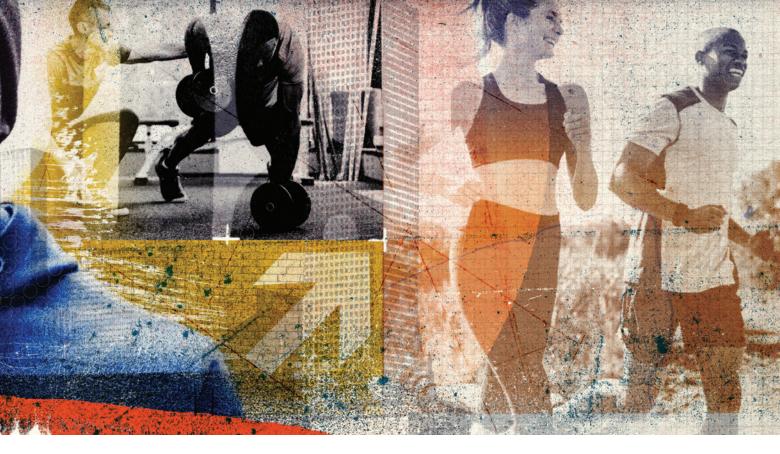
While weight isn't the only (or even the best) marker of fitness, the

fact that so many people experienced unintended and undesirable changes to their bodies is notable. A quick scroll through social media provides anecdotal support for the idea that people want to return to their prepandemic fitness levels.

You might be wondering: *What's* so wrong with finding motivation in the past?

Nothing, experts say — as long as you're truly seeking out motivation and not succumbing to self-flagellation. It *is* possible to integrate past experiences and our past selves without getting caught in a comparison trap. We can use the wisdom of past successes and failures to move forward, with the present moment as our starting point.

"A lot of folks say, 'That's what I was; that's what I want to be again,'" says Frankie Ruiz, a distance-running coach based in Miami and cofounder of the Life Time Miami Marathon. "My advice is to forget where you once were, be it at the height of your fitness, before your break, or possibly as your younger self. Assume you are starting from zero. You can honor your past, but you don't have to let it define your future."



The only way to move forward is to start where you are, agrees Elmquist. That includes understanding where you've been, but not necessarily striving to get back there.

"Looking at the physicality of your body through time, it can feel like a roller coaster," she says. "We can find a lot of wisdom in a mindset of selfcompassion. We're evolving creatures. We're always moving forward."

Use Your Experiences to Find Confidence in Your Future

Confidence isn't just one thing. It's a cumulative effect of many things — only one of which is what you've been able to accomplish in the past, says Ruiz. If you're an athlete who is returning to your sport after a break, you may feel intimidated. But you can find confidence in this process by recalling other times when you had to start again.

"You can tell yourself, 'I've been here before. I've started up again after a setback and it turned out OK. I know I can do it again,'" explains Ruiz.

Instead of thinking about returning to where you were, think about what you want to achieve this time, and set small goals, Battles adds. "You don't need to see the end goal to think, What's the next right thing that will help me prioritize what I'm working toward?"

Separate Your Sport From Its Values

If you are unable to perform an activity at the same level as you used to — or even at all — it can be hard to cope with this loss. "There's an identity piece wrapped up in the sports we play or how we move. It's important to take time to sit with this," says Elmquist.

"For example, if you used to be a runner, what is the part of your identity for which running makes you feel whole? Is it the high you get? The feeling of health? Being part of a community? If we can get to the values of why we do something, we realize it's the values that we want to continue to take with us."

Maybe you can continue to find these values in the same sport at a different level, or maybe you need a different activity — or activities. If you find another that checks all the boxes, remember: You're not trying to replicate the same experience.

"You can't expect to get the exact same thing out of one sport or activity that you got out of another," says Ruiz. "Adjusting your expectations will help you keep the door open to new experiences."

Grow From a Place of Acceptance

"There's always going to be internal reconciliation with change," says Elmquist. It's important to remember that life may be different and your body may be different — but neither is necessarily *worse*.

We are socialized to process narratives as good or bad, journeys as taking us someplace better or worse. But those are oversimplified versions of the truth. You can accept the present for what it is and still grow.

Elmquist recommends framing your acceptance with gratitude: "You can tell yourself, 'That was *that* season. I honor that season. I feel proud of that part of my life. Now I'm in a new season. I'm going to find new things to be proud of.' Or simply, 'I'm so glad I have the chance to be in this body and move in this way.'" **•**

NICOLE RADZISZEWSKI is a writer and personal trainer in River Forest, III.



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Experience Life

Up and Down the Mountain

This tough, 15-minute body-weight circuit takes you from base to summit and back again. Get ready to sweat.

BY MAGGIE FAZELI FARD, RKC, MFT-1, ALPHA

ometimes all I want in a training session is to get sweaty and feel strong fast. This craving typically pops up when I'm short on time or low on motivation, or when I simply feel an itch to mix things up. And when the mood strikes, I turn to a training format called "up and down the mountain."

It was introduced to me in a bootcamp class, though I don't know its origin. It describes a circuit that begins on the floor (the base of the mountain), moves up to standing (the summit), and returns down.

Putting myself in the mindset of climbing and descending a metaphorical mountain is energizing. A tough workout becomes doable; flagging motivation is transformed into confidence: Yes, I can take one more step!

The circuit becomes more than a series of exercises I need to complete: "Up and down the mountain" is an exciting story I want to see play out.

Though the name implies that you must begin with floor work and gradually make your way to standing, feel free to make it your own: Go down and up instead! Start standing, descend into a "valley," and make your way back up. The exercises, the number of moves, and the reps are customizable, too.

This is my go-to version, which focuses heavily on jumping and lowerbody moves.



MAGGIE FAZELI FARD, RKC, MFT-1, ALPHA, is an Experience Life senior editor.

THE WORKOUT

You'll need a mat and a timer, and you might want a towel and some water. Set your timer to go off every 30 seconds. Perform as many good-form reps of each exercise for the prescribed interval as you can, then move immediately to the next exercise on the list.

Work from the first move (the bottom of the mountain) up to the last move (the top) and then all the way back down. One up-and-down will take 15 minutes. If time, energy, and interest allow, repeat up to three times.

If you need to rest, pause for 30 to 60 seconds at the bottom before repeating the circuit. But the idea is to pace yourself so you don't need to stop for rest: Each exercise is meant to be a "rest" from what came before. That said, this is a great opportunity to listen to your body. If you need to rest, rest. If you need to make modifications to help pace yourself to avoid rest, make those modifications. In this imaginary climbing scenario, your goal is not to die on the mountain. Take care of yourself.

- 1. HOLLOW HOLD, 30 seconds
- 2. GLUTE BRIDGE, 30 seconds
- **3. MARCHING GLUTE BRIDGE,** 30 seconds, alternating feet
- 4. PLANK JACK, 30 seconds
- 5. PLANK TO DOWN DOG WITH REACH, 30 seconds
- 6. MOUNTAIN CLIMBER, 30 seconds
- 7. BURPEE, 30 seconds
- 8. CURTSY LUNGE, 30 seconds on each side (60 seconds total)

- 9. PUNCH JACK, 30 seconds
- **10. SIDESTEP SQUAT,** 60 seconds, alternating sides per rep
- **11. REVERSE LUNGE WITH KNEE RAISE,** 30 seconds on each side (60 seconds total)
- 12. JUMPING JACK, 30 seconds



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Real Food

Baked goods don't have to be off-limits — especially when alternative flours made with whole grains, nuts, beans, and other gluten-free blends are available to accommodate every taste and dietary restriction.



Get the recipes for the treats seen here, plus tips for baking with gluten-free flours. **REAL FOOD** | Nutrients

A Toast to Moderation

The health effects of moderate alcohol consumption — and why no two people will experience drinking in the same way.

BY MO PERRY

ew pleasures rival the sharing of good food and drink with dear friends. From raising a toast at the outset of a meal to lingering over dessert with a digestif, alcohol can add fun, pleasure, and ceremony to social gatherings.

"Animals feed, but humans tend to eat and build a culture around it," says nutrition-psychology educator Marc David, MA. "Lingering and socializing over a meal gives us a chance to celebrate food and drink, a chance to get to be human."

Still, the health effects of drinking alcohol are hotly debated, with advocates and abstainers who are equally passionate. While most of us know that drinking to excess isn't in anyone's best interest, and addiction issues are a separate category, we might still be wondering what's up with moderate social imbibing: What is moderation? How does it affect health? Are certain drinks more beneficial (or risky) than others? What factors contribute to a higher or lower alcohol tolerance — and how does it change over time? We decided to dig into these questions.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF DRINKING?

Many cultural traditions feature moderate drinking as part of a healthy life. Four of the five Blue Zones cultures around the world with the longest-lived populations — include modest social drinking as part of their routines. (The exception is Seventh-day Adventists, who refrain.)

The jury is still out on precisely how or whether alcohol actually contributes to longevity, but many experts believe modest drinking can help facilitate stronger social networks, and those do sustain us.

"Research shows that people who drink socially . . . tend to have more friends and so more emotional support, a key source of mental health," writes neuropsychopharmacologist David Nutt, DM, in Drink? The New Science of Alcohol and Your Health. "They also feel more contented and more involved in their local community."

In a 2012 study, psychologists filmed groups of three people getting to know each other: Some groups drank alcohol, some a placebo, and some a control beverage. Unsurprisingly, the members of the mildly intoxicated group reported more feelings of closeness in their interactions and displayed more genuine smiles than those in the other two groups.

Beer and wine may also offer some modest health benefits. Red wine contains resveratrol, a polyphenol in red grapes that's beneficial for heart wellness. Functional nutritionist Jesse Haas, CNS, LN, notes that the silicon and hops present in beer may protect brain cells and slow neurological disorders, such as Alzheimer's.

"Beer can be a source of magnesium, calcium, and phytoestrogens that are beneficial for hormonal balance," adds Haas.

David notes that alcohol's relaxing effects are also supportive. "Give me a stressed-out human, and after a drink or two they're going to relax," he says. "Alcohol stimulates the mental and emotional but also the physiologic relaxation response. That's where we're designed to do our most optimal digestion, assimilation, and natural appetite regulation."

HOW DOES THE BODY PROCESS ALCOHOL?

Here's what happens under the hood after that cold beer or celebratory margarita. First, the alcohol is absorbed through the walls of the stomach and small intestine. The bloodstream carries it to the liver, where an enzyme called alcohol dehydrogenase starts to break it down, producing a byproduct called acetaldehyde. (An excess of this chemical compound is the culprit behind hangovers.)

The alcohol and acetaldehyde mixture travels from the liver to the heart and crosses the blood-brain barrier to enter the brain. This gives you a buzz, usually within 10 or 15 minutes of your first sip. Your blood vessels start to expand, possibly making you feel warmer and a little flushed.

Alcohol then activates the calming GABA (gamma aminobutyric acid) system in the brain, which

relaxes you and lowers your inhibitions; it also stimulates the release of the feel-good neurotransmitters serotonin and dopamine as well as endorphins, your body's natural opioids. These chemical rewards all contribute to alcohol's de-stressing effects as well as its addictive allure.



How we detoxify is different from person to person."

WHY DO WE EACH HANDLE ALCOHOL DIFFERENTLY?

Have you ever wondered why you seem to tolerate alcohol so differently than your Uncle Bill, who spills all his secrets after two sips of beer? Or your Aunt Bethune, who can drink the entire family under the table? Several factors influence how we process alcohol, including age, sex, genetics, body composition, and hormonal fluctuations.

"How we detoxify is different from person to person," notes functional-medicine practitioner Marcelle Pick, OB/GYN, NP.

In general, male bodies tend to tolerate alcohol better than female ones, due in part to larger size, but also because of differences in body composition, including water (which dilutes alcohol) and fat. "People with ovaries have higher body fat than people with testes. Alcohol doesn't absorb into fat, so it ends up being in the blood longer and at higher concentrations," explains Haas.

Women also have lower levels of alcohol dehydrogenase, the enzyme that breaks down alcohol in the liver. And roughly a third to half of people of Asian descent possess a genetic variant that lowers levels of this enzyme, which means they don't break down alcohol as easily and may get flushed and nauseated from drinking.

HOW DOES TOLERANCE CHANGE AS WE AGE?

When we're in our 20s, enthusiastic social drinking might fit seamlessly alongside fitness routines, jobs, and other obligations. A couple of decades hence, the same approach to alcohol might tank our functioning.

That's because as we age, we process alcohol less efficiently. "Some are surprised by it and find they feel intoxicated by the same amount of alcohol they used to drink [without a problem]," says Pick. But as we get older, we have less muscle mass and body water, she explains, which affects alcohol processing.

The liver's capacity to break down alcohol also decreases with time. Think of a bathtub: When the drain is open, the tub empties easily. As we move on in years, the liver's drain tends to slow down. "One hypothesis is there's less blood flow to the liver as we age," says Haas. "If blood is flowing to the liver at a lower rate, then that drain is also slower."

There's also the simple fact that the longer we live, the greater our exposure to various toxins — and the greater their cumulative burden on the liver.

"The more you're hanging on to those toxins, the more the drain is clogged and metabolism is slowed down," cautions Haas. "It's important for everyone to cultivate a detox-supportive diet and lifestyle, and keeping alcohol consumption moderate is important for that. The less effectively those detox pathways function, the more likely we are to experience disease as we age."



HOW DO HORMONES INFLUENCE TOLERANCE?

Like age, hormones can also affect how we process alcohol. Higher estrogen levels, for example, slow alcohol metabolism. For women, that means tolerance is generally highest around menstruation, when estrogen levels drop, and lowest around ovulation, when estrogen is high. (Other factors can affect this equation: Overall hydration, for instance, can dip during menstruation, decreasing tolerance.)

In general, excess alcohol consumption increases production of estrogen and decreases the ways it's metabolized, says Pick. "There are different pathways where estrogen is metabolized, and some pathways increase the risk of breast cancer. That may be one reason there's an association between regular alcohol consumption and breast cancer."

People with uterine fibroids, endometriosis, or PMS symptoms may want to be especially careful to moderate their consumption, says Haas. "PMS symptoms like breast tenderness or night sweats are indicative of an estrogen imbalance."

Alcohol may exacerbate perimenopause symptoms, too, in part because it increases noradrenaline, which contributes to hot flashes. It can also lower testosterone by increasing levels of the enzyme that breaks it down.

WHAT IS MODERATION?

Everyone's tolerance is different, so the question of moderation can be tricky.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) defines it as no more than two drinks a day for men and one per day for women. Functional-medicine physician Elizabeth Boham, MD, MS, RD, encourages men to aim for 10 or fewer drinks per week; women for five or fewer. "It's healthier not to concentrate those drinks into one or two days, but to spread them out."

If you're regularly drinking more than this, she suggests looking for the underlying reason. Is it to relax? To socialize? Or has drinking simply become a habit?

"Once you figure out what's driving it, you can find other ways to meet those needs," she says. Going for a walk or hitting a yoga class can be a great way to relax and transition after work. If it's the ritual you miss, try swapping in sparkling water or a mocktail.

Finally, if you pay closer attention to how drinking makes you feel, it may become easier to notice — and switch to water — when you're overdoing it.

"Alcohol, like caffeine and sugar, is a powerful substance," says David. "With any powerful substance, it's always about the dose. You want to come to that substance with a healthy respect and understand *I* can get a great benefit from this if *I* can hit the sweet spot, where *I* get what *I'm* looking for without stepping over the line."

CAN DRINKING AID DIGESTION?

It certainly can. Digestifs such as aquavit, *amaro*, and brandy are made with herbs and spices containing potent digestive benefits. "These can be quite intense in their taste and herbal profile," says David. They help stimulate digestive enzymes after a big meal, ushering the contents of the stomach along the GI tract.

Historically, alcohol was sometimes used to protect the gut against parasites; fermenting grains was a way to create drinkable beverages in the absence of clean water. And Haas notes that vermouth is made with wormwood, which is antiparasitic.

Still, alcohol's most important contribution to digestion is stimulating the relaxation response, critical for our ability to digest and assimilate nutrients from food. "Anything that helps us move out of the stress response makes us more open to pleasure," says David, noting that the stress hormone cortisol naturally blunts our pleasure receptors. "If you eat a dessert when you're stressed, you'll have to eat more cake or ice cream to get the same amount of pleasure."

In short, by catalyzing the relaxation response, enjoying a drink at the beginning of a meal can help attune us to the pleasure of eating, which helps enhance our digestion.

HOW DO DIFFERENT ALCOHOLS AFFECT US?

Though many of us feel that certain alcohols affect us differently (red wine disturbs our sleep, or tequila makes us euphoric), there's little science to explain why this is so. "From a chemical standpoint, there's no difference from one alcohol to another — though there may be a difference in other compounds in the beverage," says Haas.

Brown liquors, such as brandy and bourbon, as well as darker beer and red wine, tend to have more congeners — complex alcohols formed in the aging process that are associated with worse hangovers and possibly greater intoxication.

And if gluten gives you trouble, so will glutencontaining beverages, such as beer or rye whiskey.

> As for tequila's reputation as a "clean" spirit, it is grain-free and made from agave, and it doesn't spike blood sugar as much as other liquors. This may account for why some people feel less of an impact after drinking it.

The way alcohols are processed also has an effect. "There are toxins and pesticides in alcohol that can impact how much stress it puts on the body's detox system," notes Boham. Opting for organic or biodynamic wines can minimize the toxic load. As with most things, you'll have to experi-

ment to find which alcoholic beverages, if any, feel right for you. "If you want to occasionally have a drink, experiment to see what's less problematic for you," advises Pick. And then savor it — ideally in wonderful company. •

MO PERRY is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

The Problem of Excess

If you're not prone to alcohol addiction and are able to drink socially, keeping consumption occasional and modest does have real benefits — including avoiding the pitfalls of excess.

According to the CDC, excessive alcohol use can put you at risk for high blood pressure, heart disease, digestive problems, cancer, weakening of the immune system, dementia, depression, and alcohol dependence. And risks from drinking alcohol are not linear but exponential, meaning they don't just increase with more drinking — they worsen.

There are toxins and

pesticides in alcohol

that can impact how

much stress it puts

on the body's detox

system."

There is a small silver lining here: "If you drink a lot, cutting down will reduce your risk of harm much more than if you are reducing from a low level," explains David Nutt, DM, author of *Drink? The New Science of Alcohol and Your Health.*

Cutting down on frequency and taking occasional breaks can also be helpful. Elizabeth Boham, MD, MS, RD, notes that 90 percent of people who have two or more drinks a day are at risk for fatty liver, where sugars from alcohol are stored in the liver as fat. (Fatty liver has also been linked with insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes.)

But stopping alcohol consumption even just for a couple of weeks can start to reverse the condition. (For more on fatty liver, see ELmag.com/liverhealth.)

Eating Joyfully



Small, satisfying food moments can bring big, valuable pleasure to our lives.

n the wellness world, the subject of food is often fraught with speculation and apprehension. But food can also be much more: a form of connection with our loved ones and our ancestors, a way of showing care for ourselves and one another, or even just a source of simple pleasure. Here, *Experience Life* staffers and regular contributors share some of their favorite food memories. It was just before sunset in Mykonos, Greece, and I'd spent the day zipping around on an ATV with the wind in my hair, touring the island's beaches. My partner and I found a restaurant nestled near a small cove, with an outdoor patio and a breathtaking seaside view. We were greeted with warm smiles and complimentary wine. While waiting for our table, we swam in the salty Mediterranean. I ordered grilled squid and whole whitefish and devoured every bite, fish brains and all. It was delicious, fresh, and authentically Greek. That evening, I was fully immersed in the energy of Mykonos, with no food rules and no comfort zones in sight.

— MADDIE AUGUSTIN, recipe developer



One day last winter, after having our ice skates sharpened at the sporting-goods store down the street, my husband and I stopped at the local bakery. We bought two "state fair" doughnuts (a prized delicacy in my adopted home state of Minnesota) and ate them as we walked home through light flurries of snow.

It was a perfectly ordinary moment — a little treat with my favorite person — and one that would have been entirely out of reach for me just a few short years ago, when my determination to adhere to a "perfect" diet meant always saying no to little treats. My relationship with food has required intentionally developing a peaceful appreciation for these moments: greeting them with enthusiasm, taking them in, and then letting them go. Life's too short to not include a doughnut every once in a while.

- KAELYN RILEY, Experience Life senior editor

Every day, I think about potato salad. Even though I can never again have the most perfect, artfully made, secret-recipe potato salad, the yellow bowl my mom used to make it is now on my kitchen counter. She inherited the bowl after her mother died, in the same way that I did.

She made hundreds of batches in that bowl weddings, family picnics, funerals — and although she tried to teach me all her magic ways, I gave up after she passed, because something was always missing: a flavor I couldn't quite place. But we know what that was. Still, I hold the memory close, and sometimes, if I lean in, I can almost catch the aroma of the potatoes, freshly cooled, waiting for her steady hands.

— ELIZABETH MILLARD, *Experience Life* contributing writer

The day after Christmas, I always travel from Minneapolis to my parents' house in the Chicago suburbs, so I can (a) outsource the kids' care to eager grandparents and (b) eat my mother's food. My parents are from Kashmir, the disputed territory between India and Pakistan, and I grew up eating Indian food that is very different from what you find in most Indian-restaurant buffets: *karela* (bitter melon in a spicy-sour tamarind sauce), *haak* (braised collard greens), *nadru yakhni* (lotus root in a fennel-yogurt sauce), and *monj achar* (kohlrabi pickles fermented with mustard seeds).

What I most look forward to eating, however, is my mom's *tsir tsot*, a Kashmiri breakfast crepe made from a thin batter of rice flour, water, black cumin seeds, and salt, which gets cooked in olive oil until crispy. Alongside, we always have Kashmiri *kahwa*, a green-leaf tea brewed with cinnamon sticks, cardamom pods, and sugar, topped with crushed raw almonds.

There are so many elements to this meal that bring me joy — the salty-sweet combination of the crepe and tea, the hit of childhood nostalgia, the fact that someone is cooking for me. But the best part is just having an excuse to sit in the kitchen and talk to my mom.

- ANJULA RAZDAN, Experience Life digital director

My story is about how food saved my life. It's also a love story — about loving food, loving family, loving friends, and loving myself enough to take an active role in managing my own health. When I was 22, I was diagnosed with severe ulcerative colitis, an autoimmune disease resulting in life-threatening malabsorption, malnutrition, and anemia. I have experienced a decadelong cycle of diagnosis, disease, remission, setbacks, recovery, and loss, but one thing has held true: Food continues to save me. I promise you, you can effectively manage your symptoms while still enjoying truly amazing food. Discovering the life-giving world of grain-free, gluten-free, and dairy-free living, and the incredible healing power of food, has been the greatest gift of my lifetime.

> DANIELLE WALKER, self-trained chef and author of three New York Times bestsellers

"Told you to put your shoes on" is

what my father said as I scorched three of my toes. This was his stock reaction to my curiosity when it came to getting the charcoal started for grilling. On this particular day, a coal had found its way through the vent at the bottom. I considered it an initiation, the first time I felt the heat, the fire calling me like a moth to a flame. Though I didn't know it would at the time, it remains my first food memory: the smoldering coals, the ambient heat, the thrill when the grill is ready.

- RYAN DODGE, executive chef at LifeCafe



REAL FOOD Foodstuff



My 15-year-old returned from the local Asian market, his canvas tote bulging. "They had pomelos!" he exclaimed, unloading four of them. I looked up from my laptop and felt the joy that only unasked-for pomelos can bring.

Pomelos, a fussy cousin of the grapefruit, have a rind that smells a bit like jasmine flowers and a sweet, tart interior with a mixture of standard grapefruit-like segments and little pockets and ellipses of fruit and pith that never quite turned into anything easily eaten. A lot of pastry chefs candy the rind and discard the fruit, so passionately do they want that fragrant exterior. Not me.

The flesh has a thousand flavors, mint and apple blossom, passionfruit and cucumber, and my favorite activity is to sit with one and make a mess on a dishtowel, prying out the good stuff. That was the first joy my son carried home.

The greater joy: I've taught my son so many things. To see and care for the people he lives with. To shop the Asian market on his own. He brought home seaweed snacks for his lunch, jelly straws for his sister, red-roast barbecue and broccoli for family dinner. Years ago, we started a family plan: Each kid makes dinner once a month. At first, it was a hassle. Any honest parent will tell you it's faster to make dinner yourself than to play assistant to someone who thinks it might be more fun to stand at a distance and throw each strand of spaghetti into the boiling water like a javelin.

Over time, though, they each gained competence, confidence, and speed. These days, my daughter will text me her ingredient list for three-day ragu, and my son has half a dozen dishes he makes without glancing at a recipe, bopping around the kitchen to lo-fi hip-hop.

What more does a parent of a teen want than to know they can feed themselves, care for themselves, and care for those around them? The pomelos are just the cherry on top of this day-to-dayhome-cooking sundae — sweet, fragrant, and much appreciated.

 — DARA MOSKOWITZ GRUMDAHL, James Beard Award-winning food critic and *Experience Life* contributing writer **During the pandemic,** when everyone suddenly had to cook at home even when they didn't want to, I was working on recipes for my new cookbook, *Nom Nom Paleo: Let's Go!* I wanted to offer supersimple things like sauces and flavor boosters that could help people make joyful dishes with relative ease — but I also wanted to include more complex recipes that reminded me of my childhood, especially while we weren't able to see my parents.

It was my husband's idea for me to create a version of *dan tat*, or Hong Kong egg tarts. They're the most popular Cantonese dessert in the world, a kind of mash-up of English custard tarts and Portuguese *pastéis de nata* — so of course I had to create a paleo version!

At the time when I was developing the recipe, no one was vaccinated yet, but I knew I needed my parents to sign off on my egg tarts. I left a few test batches on their doorstep for them to sample. My whole life, food has always been my parents' primary love language — so when they told me my tarts were "not bad for a paleo dessert," I knew I was on to something.

 MICHELLE TAM, food blogger and best-selling coauthor of Nom Nom Paleo: Food for Humans and the upcoming book Nom Nom Paleo: Let's Go!

The great majority of my best moments have involved food, which is not surprising, given that whenever there's celebration, grief, or just deep connection with other people, food is almost always involved. Most recently, though, I had a meal on the patio at the little restaurant down the block from our home. My husband and I treasure its presence, since it has generally meant we're less than 100 steps from a martini on any given evening, but the pandemic shook their foundations just as it did all of ours. We committed to weekly takeout as soon as they offered it, and our first pickup felt like an illegal heist — meet us in the back of the building; the burgers will be in a bag on the card table. Still, our favorite server stood back from us there, her hearty laugh bellowing from behind her mask, somehow making all the weirdness feel OK.

About 10 months later, two weeks to the day after my second vaccine, we walked up to the host stand to be escorted to our patio table. That was the first time I cried that night. The second was when the waiter brought me a glass of unfiltered prosecco, which I'd never had before, and which tasted like some combination of starshine, vinegar, and a stiff ocean breeze. The third was when I took my first bite of the pasta course, with its sauce of "ramps ramps and more ramps." And the last tears fell into the unlikely rhubarb barbecue sauce that covered the trout fillet on my plate, which was indescribably good. That defiance of description means that bliss will remain a private experience between me and that trout forever.

This is part of why I love eating food in a little restaurant, because at its best, this food can be a gift from strangers who are not strangers, who have poured their art into something practical and then shared it with you, just for showing up. I'm so relieved and happy to be able to accept that gift again.

— COURTNEY HELGOE, *Experience Life* features editor



BLADE V8





RETURN TO THE WILD

The new Blade v8 celebrates the return to your natural element of competitive tennis – renewed and reconnected to the game you love.

Wilson

REAL FOOD Confident Cook

These baked goods made with alternative flours are fit for any celebration.

BY ROBIN ASBELL

aked goods don't have to be off-limits in a healthy diet. This is especially true these days, as interest in alternative flours has created a burgeoning market of options beyond the standard allpurpose stuff. It's relatively easy to find flour made with whole grains, nuts, and beans, and even glutenfree blends to satisfy every taste and dietary restriction.

Some of our favorite healthybaking ingredients add unique flavor to a dish, like the earthy nuttiness of spelt or buckwheat flour. Leaning on these components (plus alternative sweeteners) means you can create flavorful baked goods that aren't cloyingly sweet — and that bring vitamins, minerals, and extra nutrients to the table.

So start a new tradition this year: healthful, celebratory holiday baking that everyone can enjoy.

Our Healthy-Baking Pantry

FLOUR ALTERNATIVES

COCONUT FLOUR is made from the meat of the coconut after it's been pressed to make coconut milk or oil. It is defatted, high in insoluble fiber, and gluten-free. It's also a thirsty flour, so if you want to use it in place of a grain flour, start with a quarter to half as much and let the batter sit for a few minutes to hydrate after you've added the liquid.

ALMOND FLOUR is made from almonds, either blanched (skins removed) or unblanched (the entire almond, skin and all). Unblanched almond flour is sometimes called almond meal. It's not defatted, like coconut flour, so it is a little denser and doesn't absorb much liquid. Look for extra-fine almond flour for light and fluffy baked goods (like our Orange Almond Cake, on page 49), or use a coarser grind if you don't mind the heavier texture.

SPELT FLOUR is ground from spelt berries, an ancient grain from the wheat family. Spelt contains gluten, but some people with gluten sensitivities can tolerate it. (For more on the benefits of cooking with ancient grains, see ELmag.com/ ancientgrains.) Spelt flour is higher in zinc and protein than conventional wheat flour, and it has a lovely nutty flavor.

BUCKWHEAT FLOUR is

ground from buckwheat groats, a seed more akin to rice than wheat. The flour is gluten-free with a pleasant earthy flavor. Because it contains all nine essential amino acids, it's a complete protein.

EGG AND SWEETENER ALTERNATIVES

GROUND FLAXSEED, like whole chia seeds, can be mixed with liquid and used as an egg replacement in baked goods. It's high in fiber, omega-3 fatty acids, and vital minerals like magnesium. (Learn how to make a flaxseed "egg" at ELmag.com/flaxseedegg.) MAPLE SYRUP is produced from the sap of maple trees. Although it's mostly sucrose, it has a lower glycemic load than table sugar and may produce less of a blood-sugar spike. It also contains calcium, potassium, manganese, and other minerals. Read labels closely to make sure you're picking up pure maple syrup — many pancake syrups are made with high-fructose corn syrup and maple extract.

COCONUT SUGAR is made from the sap of coconut-palm trees. It also has a lower glycemic load than table sugar perhaps because it contains some inulin, a type of fiber that may slow glucose absorption.



Buckwheat Chocolate-Chip Banana Bread

Makes eight servings Prep time: 15 minutes Cook time: 45 minutes

- 1 cup spelt flour
- 1 cup buckwheat flour
- 2 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- ½ tsp. sea salt
- ¹/₂ cup nondairy milk
- 2 tbs. ground flaxseed
- 1 cup mashed banana
- ¹/₂ cup maple syrup
- ¹/₄ cup avocado oil
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- ½ cup chocolate chips or chopped walnuts, plus more for topping if desired

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Lightly oil a 9-x-5-inch loaf pan and line with parchment paper.

In a large bowl, whisk the spelt flour, buckwheat flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt.

In a medium bowl, stir the nondairy milk and flaxseed; let stand for 10 minutes, until slightly thickened. Stir in the mashed banana, maple syrup, oil, and vanilla. Add the wet ingredients to the flour mixture and stir until just combined. Fold in the chocolate chips or walnuts.

Scrape the batter into the prepared loaf pan and smooth the top with a spatula.

Bake for 45 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into the center of the loaf comes out clean. Garnish with chocolate chips or walnuts as desired.

Let cool on a rack for at least 10 minutes before lifting from the pan.

Coconut Cutout Cookies

Makes about 30 cookies Prep time: 25 minutes Cook time: 12 minutes per batch

- ³⁄₄ cup coconut flour
- ½ tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. sea salt
- 6 tbs. unsalted butter, room temperature
- ½ cup coconut sugar (or ¼ cup each granulated sugar and coconut sugar)
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp. almond extract
- 1 large egg (or 2 egg whites)
- Maple Cream-Cheese Frosting (see recipe at ELmag.com/altflour)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F and line a sheet pan with parchment paper.

In a medium bowl, whisk the coconut flour, baking powder, and salt.

In a large bowl, using an electric hand mixer (or a stand mixer fitted with a paddle attachment), cream the butter until pale yellow, light, and fluffy, about two minutes. Beat in the sugar and extracts until incorporated, then add egg or egg whites and beat until smooth, about another two minutes.

Place a square of parchment paper on the counter and scoop the dough into the center. Use your hands to shape it into a square about ¹/₂-inch thick and 5 inches long on all sides. Wrap and refrigerate for 10 minutes.

Unwrap the dough and sprinkle with coconut flour. Roll out with a rolling pin, sprinkling more flour as needed and pressing the dough back together if it breaks. Roll out very thinly, about ½-nich thick.

Use a cookie cutter or drinking glass to cut out cookies, then transfer to the prepared baking pan, leaving an inch between cookies.

Bake for 10 to 12 minutes, until the edges of the cookies are golden brown. Transfer to a rack to cool completely.

Frost with cream-cheese frosting just before serving, as the frosting will soften the cookies. Store in an airtight container for three to four days. USE COCONUT SUGAR AND A WHOLE EGG FOR A SOFTER COOKIE, OR TRY GRANULATED SUGAR AND EGG WHITES FOR A COOKIE THAT STAYS CRISP LONGER.



Orange Almond Cake

Makes 12 servings Prep time: 10 minutes Cook time: 30 minutes

- 1¹/₂ cups extra-fine almond flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- ¼ tsp. sea salt
- 1 tbs. orange zest, plus more for garnish, if desired
- 4 large eggs, separated
- 2 tbs. orange juice
- 3 tbs. unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly
- ¹/₂ cup coconut sugar, divided
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1/2 tsp. cream of tartar
- Maple Cream-Cheese Frosting (see recipe at ELmag.com/altflour)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Place an 8-inch circle of parchment paper in the bottom of a lightly oiled 8-inch cake pan.

In a large bowl, whisk the almond flour, baking powder, salt, and orange zest. Add the egg yolks, juice, and butter, and stir well to mix.

Using a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment (or a separate bowl and electric hand mixer), beat the egg whites, half the sugar, the vanilla, and the cream of tartar on high speed until the whites form soft peaks, about one minute. Beat in the remaining sugar gradually.

Scoop half a cup of the beaten egg whites into the almond-flour mixture, and fold in gently. Repeat to make a light batter.

Transfer batter to the prepared pan and smooth the top with a spatula.

Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.

Place the pan on a rack to cool. Run a knife around the sides of the pan to loosen, then place a cake plate on top, hold firmly, and flip to invert the cake onto the plate.

Peel the parchment paper from the cake, then top with cream-cheese frosting and orange zest. ${\bf \bullet}$

ROBIN ASBELL is a Minneapolis-based recipe developer and cookbook author.





LEVEL UP FOR ALL BONDI X SIGNATURE BONDI CUSHIONING GETS A CARBON FIBER UPGRADE.





BY ELIZABETH FOY LARSEN

t the beginning of most relationships, tokens of affection — love letters, playlists, spontaneous weekends away — help cement a couple's sense of connection. But those random acts of infatuation often wane as a relationship matures. Even finding the right gift for birthdays and holidays can start to feel like a chore.

But a gift-giving mentality becomes even more important as a relationship evolves — and some of the very best presents can't be wrapped. They're the thoughts and gestures that come straight from the heart and can transform a good partnership into a truly great one. "One thing that stands out in the research is that the actions you perform are the most important," says Gay Hendricks, PhD, coauthor with

his wife, Kathlyn Hendricks, PhD, of *Conscious Loving: The Journey to Co-Commitment.* "A lifetime dedication to gift giving will take your relationship to the next level."

So this time of year, when presents are on everyone's mind, is the perfect opportunity to transform your relationship from good to great — or from great to greater — by giving your partner these six very important gifts.



Each of us wants to feel loved by our partner and wants our partner to feel loved by us. The challenge for many couples, according to Gary Chapman, PhD, author of *The 5 Love Languages*, is that the way one person shows love often isn't the way the other person intuitively feels it.

One partner, for example, may experience physical affection as love, while the other experiences help with the household chores as the ultimate token of affection. They are, in essence, speaking different languages. "These miscommunications aren't a matter of not having good intentions," says Chapman. "They're a matter of not touching the heart or emotions of the other person."

Most of us grow up learning the emotional language of our parents, he explains. And we become confused and upset when our partner doesn't understand us.

Chapman advises couples to identify what he calls their love languages and share them with each other to get past miscues. If you're not sure which of the following five languages best describes you, take Chapman's Love Language Quiz to figure out your type (see page 57 for more information).

He also suggests identifying what you most often demand of your spouse. "The thing you have most often requested is likely the thing that would make you feel the most loved," he notes. These are Chapman's five love languages:

WORDS OF AFFIRMATION. Some people experience love most directly through warm words, whether they're compliments or encouragements — "I appreciate that you found a babysitter for tonight" or "I know you can run that 10K!" Whether or not words of affirmation are your primary love language, research suggests that supportive comments help couples develop a sense of "we-ness" — a feeling that enhances satisfaction with one's partnership.

QUALITY TIME. If this is your primary love language, you want your partner's undivided attention. It's important to you to have time together without distractions where you can nurture conversations and enjoy activities together. Quality time, according to Chapman, helps couples build reserves of positive memories, which are linked to increased marital stability and satisfaction. **RECEIVING GIFTS.** Actual presents have their place on the spectrum of relationship gift giving, too. The key to speaking this love language, however, has nothing to do with the price tag — it's all about making your partner feel understood. This could be a store-bought bracelet or a beautiful rock you pick up on a hike or a watercolor you paint. These kinds of gifts demonstrate that you've been paying attention, and that you really see who your partner is and what they love.

ACTS OF SERVICE. This love language emphasizes doing things you know your partner would like you to do, like making dinner, changing the cat's litter, or paying the bills. These acts show your partner that you notice what's going on and want to help.

PHYSICAL TOUCH. Back rubs, holding hands, deep hugs, kisses, putting your arm around your partner — for some people, physical intimacy is the signal of love and affection. If your primary love language is physical touch, nothing will say "I love you" more than being held or touched.



Passion often gets sidelined as a marriage becomes more established, but there are far-ranging benefits to bringing it back, says clinical psychologist David Schnarch, PhD, author of *Intimacy and Desire: Awaken the Passion in Your Marriage*.

For starters, tapping into passion helps us discover more about who we are, which allows us to share more of ourselves with our partner. "When we are the object of our partner's passion, it makes us feel desirable and desirous," says Schnarch.

Passion also improves relationships by making people more tolerant of one another. "When we think our partner likes us, we are much more forgiving of grievances, and we're also more tolerant of the inherent nicks and bruises of being in a relationship," he adds.

Good sex has other benefits, too. Orgasm increases levels of oxytocin, a hormone that boosts feelings of connection and trust. Higher oxytocin levels have also been linked to increased feelings of generosity, reduced stress, and improved cardiovascular health. And sex increases selfesteem: A five-year study at the University of Texas found that one of the reasons people have sex is to boost feelings of positive self-regard.

If passion is in short supply in your life, Schnarch recommends these simple strategies: **HUGGING TO RELAX.** Most hugs last an average of four seconds, says Schnarch. Extending a hug to 10 minutes without the pressure that it should lead to sex can be a way to reconnect with your partner. "The focus of a 10-minute hug isn't about holding your partner," he explains. "It's about putting your arms around your partner and calming yourself down. This calms the anxieties that separate people."

HEADS ON PILLOW. For many couples, it's tough to transition from washing the dishes to rolling around in the sheets. That's why Schnarch advises partners to lie in bed with their clothes on and face each other with enough distance so that they can clearly see each other's face. "Hold hands, look at each other, and stay there for 10 minutes," he advises. Most people feel passion start to kick in when they're relaxed and lying down.

FEELING WHILE TOUCHING. Many couples develop the habit of touching each other without really feeling each other. "It's very irritating to be touched by a partner when their touch feels mindless, like your partner is not invested and you are being taken for granted," Schnarch says.

Bring passion back to touch by connecting emotionally as well as physically. You can do this by having each partner tune in to what touching feels like. He suggests taking turns deliberately touching your partner and noticing how it feels to touch and be touched. Do this experiment once when each person is tuned in to the experience and once when each person is tuned out. This helps both people understand the importance of really being in the moment, he says.

"When both people focus on the same spot at the same time on opposite sides of the skin, it creates an electric sensation that is the byproduct of emotional attention."



When author Laura Munson and her husband got married, their ceremony included a quote from the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, which read, in part: "A good marriage is one in which each partner appoints the other to be the guardian of his solitude, and thus they show each other the greatest possible trust."

After almost two decades of marriage, Munson's husband began to have doubts. But instead of begging him to stay, Munson took Rilke's quote to heart and gave her husband the emotional space he needed to reflect and reconnect with himself.

During an especially difficult stretch where her husband took up residence in another part of the house, Munson focused on trusting the process, and her promise. "If a person needs to reconnect with who they are, the greatest gift a partner can give is the gift of space," she says. "It's a refueling time."

Munson's story, which she recounts in her memoir, *This Is Not the Story You Think It Is: A Season of Unlikely Happiness*, is a dramatic example of how powerful the gift of solitude can be. Giving your partner the gift of time not only helps repair relationships but can transform them from good to great.

Time apart — whether it's a night out with friends, a quiet morning alone, or a solo weekend away — helps your partner get in touch with their needs, interests, and priorities. It allows them to more authentically share them with you. And finally, making room for mutual solitude also helps you stay grounded in your own well-being. This makes you a better partner, too.



Gift NO.4 don't skimp on time together

Some solitude is healthy, but as with all things, balance is key. Too much can weaken a relationship by creating separate spheres of interest, which can lead to couples having less and less in common over time. After all, we tend to fall and stay — in love with the person we have the most fun with. That's why relationship expert Willard F. Harley Jr., PhD, advises couples to do the things they enjoy the most together. "Couples who spend their most enjoyable time together tend to have great marriages," he says.

Giving each other the gift of what Harley calls "recreational companionship" benefits both giver and receiver by combining two important human needs: to have fun and to have a companion. Harley recommends spending most, if not all, of your recreational time with your significant other.

Stumped about what to do together? To jumpstart your imagination — and recreation — he developed the Recreational Enjoyment Inventory at www.marriagebuilders.com. It's an extensive list of activities, including archery, astronomy, cribbage, croquet, gardening, and more. Each partner ranks each activity based on level of interest. When both people give an activity a high score, it's one worth trying.



Nothing can sink a relationship faster than unrelenting negativity, says marriage researcher John Gottman, PhD, author of the classic book *The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*.

In his research at the University of Washington's Love Lab, Gottman found that successful relationships have a 5-to-1 ratio of positive interactions — compliments, loving glances, offers to help out — to negative gestures, such as criticism and nagging.

Whether you nag or simply turn your back when your partner is talking, these negative gestures erode your sense of togetherness. Researchers have even found that eye rolling after a spouse's comment can be a strong predictor for divorce.

To bring your interaction ratio in line with Gottman's recommendation, try to become more aware of how often you're criticizing your partner. One way to do this is to create some kind of lighthearted stopgap when you notice critical commentary — put a coin in a jar or create a silly code word to use when catching yourself (or your partner) in the act.

Then try consciously focusing on each other's strengths instead. Criticism will be naturally tamped down, and that will give each of you more opportunities to feel successful, appreciated, and loved.

Accentuating the positive in your relationship doesn't mean you should ignore tough issues. It's just that you need to do it in an environment that's fortified with positive feelings and exchanges.

"There's a big difference between asking for change and criticizing," says psychologist Noelle Nelson, PhD. "If what you want is more participation with the kids or the house, that's fine. But you need to start out from the perspective that you respect your partner, and his way of doing things is as valid as yours."



During the courtship and honeymoon phase, it's easy to hang on your lover's every word. "Being listened to in childhood develops our sense of self and is how we know we are important, and the same is true for adults," says psychologist Jan Hoistad, PhD, author of *Romance Rehab: 10 Steps to Rescue Your Relationship*.

Unfortunately, when couples are together for a long time, it's common to become less attentive. But with a little practice, you can renew your capacity for rapt listening.

Hoistad suggests taking turns actively talking and listening at least four times a week for 20 to 30 minutes. Alternate which of you goes first and talk about something important to you, excluding well-traveled topics and hot-button issues as much as possible.

Be honest, but don't just focus on what's bringing you down. Hoistad recommends sharing personal successes and things you find exciting, rewarding, and worth celebrating. Then, when it's your partner's turn, actively listen to what they have to say without interrupting.

What's most important, Hoistad says, is to listen with a readiness to give and take. "When we're generous with others it creates such nice feelings," she says. "And then the other person naturally starts giving back." •

ELIZABETH FOY LARSEN is a freelance writer based in Minneapolis.

Relationship-Building Resources

FOR EXCELLENT RELATIONSHIP INSIGHT AND ADVICE, CHECK THESE OUT.



THE GOTTMAN RELATIONSHIP QUIZ

Take a quiz on how well you know your partner. If the answer isn't what you hoped, you can find books and exercises to help get you back on track. www.gottman .com/how-well-do-youknow-your-partner.



THE LOVE LANGUAGE QUIZ

Learn to identify your love language with this quiz developed by Gary Chapman, PhD, author of *The 5 Love Languages*. Don't be afraid to ask your partner to take it, too. www.5lovelanguages .com/quizzes



WHERE SHOULD WE BEGIN? WITH ESTHER PEREL If you find it helpful to hear other couples work things out, this podcast lets you listen in on (and benefit from) real couples in session with renowned psychotherapist Esther Perel, MA, LMFT. (Identities are hidden, of course.)



THE LEADING EDGE IN EMOTIONALLY FOCUSED THERAPY EFT has been a boon for

many couples seeking to reconnect, and this podcast shares insights from two leading therapists in the field, James Hawkins, PhD, LPC, and Ryan Rana, PhD, LMFT, LPC, ICEEFT.

How Winter How Winter

Follow Mother Nature's rhythms to banish workout boredom, stave off injury, and build your fitness year-round.

BY ELIZABETH MILLARD





or many people, winter is a season of contradictions. We know that getting exercise is key to keeping our bodies and minds healthy, especially during this period of celebration and indulgence.

At the same time, many of us might be feeling a pull to hibernate: to slow down, get comfy, and turn inward. It can feel impossible to choose between finding the ease you crave and pursuing your fitness goals.

This inclination to downshift isn't a problem to overcome. Rather, it can be an opportunity.

"When we try to maintain this drive to be productive, even in our fitness, it goes against the energy your body wants to be in during the winter," says Cat Thompson, founder of the coaching company Emotional Technologies. "You'll end up feeling even more tired than when you started." This can make it harder to work out at all and potentially render those workouts less effective.

As it does for all animals, winter affects human beings in unique ways — not just because of the temperature outside for those in cold climates, but because of a change in how much daylight we see.

"Light is energy in so many ways, and you can feel that in your body and your mind," says Thompson. "No matter how old you are, there's that feeling of play during the summer, that feeling of lightness, literally. By the time winter comes, that energy has waned considerably."

And that's a good thing. Not only does honoring this natural change make it easier to sustain a consistent fitness routine and ward off injury by taking time to recover, but it also means you get to embrace the season for its unique qualities calling on you to turn inward and slow down beyond your workouts.

Although progressive overload and consistency are integral parts of any training regimen, it's important to adapt to seasonal weather changes, making sure safety and health are top of mind, says Megan Looney, NASM-PT, CES, a Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Life Time master personal trainer.

Mother Nature is the creator of fitness periodization. Based on the idea of nonlinear progression, periodization emphasizes gradual progress by alternating between periods of intense training and intentional recovery over many weeks and months.

Winter is a time of rest and recovery, a respite before new energy blooms in spring. Our experts offer guidance to help you thrive — and reach your fitness potential — during winter.

The Flip Side

There are wide variations in temperature and daily-light duration depending on where you live: If you're in Arizona or Texas, you may not experience the same sort of meteorological or energetic change as someone living farther north. If that's the case for you, all this advice is still relevant — but for the summer.

Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Life Time master personal trainer Megan Looney says she makes plenty of training adjustments to deal with the intense summer heat, which can have a withering effect similar to that of winter's chill.

"In the winter, I encourage my clients to get outdoors because of the plethora of mental- and emotional-health benefits, especially after the hot summer months," she explains.



LOW ENERGY

Solution: Direct your energy intentionally.

As it is with plants in winter, this is a time for us, too, to turn inward and toward the roots, Thompson says. You're nurturing a sense of inner vitality, and that might mean adopting a slower practice, such as yoga or tai chi.

That doesn't mean being sedentary, Thompson says — although lounging and sleeping certainly have their place — because these pursuits can be intense. The difference is in seeing movement as a practice instead of a workout, she explains.

"Winter movement is more about emotional healing that the body needs and less about the physical work — it's about going within," she says.

That inner focus allows you to be quieter and more intent on feeling what's going on in your body. Spoiler: This is not easy, and it's not always peaceful, but Thompson believes it's worth the effort —

and winter is the perfect time for that exploration.

Although such exploration can be challenging, Thompson says, it creates space for more joy and abundance. "Think of winter as an energy colonic," she says. "All that old gunk you're holding on to — you can let it go now."

Having low energy can also help us focus on needed rest, adds physical therapist Kate Ayoub, DPT. Put a real bedtime and wake-up routine in place, along with restorative practices like catching up with friends, journaling, starting a gratitude list, and taking time to stretch more often.

"Your body will tell you when it needs to rest, and that happens often to people in the winter," she says. For example, if your caffeine consumption is ratcheting up because you're tired, or you find that you're catching every cold and flu that floats by, Ayoub says, those are indications you need a reset that's more restorative.

Still feel sluggish? Shake it out, advises Cristi Christensen, author of *Chakra Rituals: Awakening the Wild Woman Within* and creator of Soul Fire, yoga that incorporates dance and meditation. Literally shake every

Your body will tell you when it needs to rest, and that happens often to people in the winter." part of your body wildly, from your fingers to your booty to your toes. Shake as if you were trying to dry yourself off without a towel (for at least 30 seconds to two minutes). This activity will get your heart

pumping and your lymph circulating and will give you a burst of energy.

Christensen also recommends taking mindful movement breaks at least a few times a day. "I am a big fan of micromovement practices like doing a handful of sun salutations, jumping rope, or putting on your favorite song and dancing and shaking all the heaviness out," adds Christensen. "This can [also] be a great way to get your body and mind warmed up for more intense exercise, such as cross-country skiing [or] winter trail runs, as it lubricates all the joints and gets the energy flowing."

CHALLENGE: LACK OF MOTIVATION

Solution: Seek out novelty.

Why do New Year's resolutions have such a notoriously abysmal success rate? A possible answer is that motivation doesn't always generate enthusiasm — and you can force yourself to keep up an unfulfilling movement practice for only so long, says Mike Matthews, author of *The Little Black Book of Workout Motivation.*

If your chosen activity doesn't feel good physically or mentally, motivation may wane before you're able to create a sustainable habit. In other words, building a habit around something you hate is hard.

You can discover your fitness likes and dislikes at any time of year, not just in winter, Matthews notes. "But during a season that's more introspective, when you might be thinking about what you enjoy, it's a good time to think about why you're pursuing a certain activity," he says.

Instead of doing certain pursuits because you think you should, or because of the potential outcome, use changes in motivation as a chance to try and assess new options. Dance, yoga, martial arts, skiing, pickleball, weightlifting, group fitness — there's a broad range of opportunities for you to be a beginner again. You don't need to plant your flag and declare that this is your new activity from now on. The goal is to play.

"When you find your thing, the one that makes you excited, you won't need much motivation," says Mike Fitch, creator of the Animal Flow body-weight movement practice. "Try a lot of things, keep exploring, and if you don't like something, move on to the next thing."

He adds that it can be particularly helpful to choose something you've believed you would never do. Maybe you're a powerlifter who hasn't tried Pilates, or you're a triathlete who passes the indoor climbing gym and never stops in.

Find your motivation again by giving yourself the chance to be awkward and maybe a little terrible at first. "You may be shocked by how bad you are at an activity," Fitch says. "And then you may discover that this thing you'd dismissed is one you absolutely love."

CHALLENGE: TIGHT MUSCLES AND CRANKY JOINTS



Solution: Focus on your mobility.

Even if you live in a warm location, the tendency to go inward during winter can increase sedentary time, especially if you're catching up on rest. Balance this not by pushing yourself back into hard-charging workouts, but rather by using the time to move in new ways, advises Fitch.

"The way to reduce injury risk and improve health for our muscles, joints, nervous system, and everything else is to create resiliency in the body," he says. "Our bodies are little adaptation machines, which is good. But it can be bad if we're doing the same movements again and again."

That goes for everyday movements as well as exercise, he adds. We tend to operate in one plane of motion and stress the same muscles repeatedly — think of how much you sit, which puts your body in one position. Fitch adds that if you live in a place that gets cold in the winter, this shorter range of motion can get even smaller because now you're sitting more inside and hunched against icy winds outside.

"You get more restricted in your movement," he says. "And you tend to sit for longer periods of time."

Increasing your mobility involves adding more variety into your everyday movement, he says. The good news is that this doesn't take much time. In fact, you can do it by adding short "movement snacks" into your day, where you deliberately do different types of motion, suggests Katy Bowman, founder of Nutritious Movement and author of *Move Your DNA*.

"We tend to wear bulky clothes in the winter, and this can leave joints stiffer because they're not getting their usual range of motion," she says. "Give your shoulders, hips, ankles, and feet some extra mobility work each day to make up for lost movement."

CHALLENGE FITNESS LOSSES

Solution: Mix it up to get even stronger.

"Many people worry the winter months will harm their progress in whatever physical activity or sport they're doing, but that's not the case at all," says physical therapist and strength-and-conditioning specialist Carol Mack, DPT, CSCS. "Working on form, strength training, or cross-training can make you a better runner, cyclist, triathlete, or whatever you do — as long as it's done with intention and purpose."

Professional athletes have an off-season for a reason, she says. It's not just because games and races aren't scheduled then it's to allow for conditioning that helps them maintain their high performance level.

In the same way that new types of activity can replenish your motivation, amp up your enjoyment level, and improve mobility, that strategy can lead to significant gains when you go back to your favorite activities. "Giving your body and mind a break from routine is huge in terms of what it provides the rest of the year," Mack says. "You'll be less likely to experience burnout, injury, and training plateaus."

She suggests starting winter with shortterm goals specific to the season. These should be different from the longer-term goals you might have for the rest of the year. You might even have daily or weekly goals based on what you want to achieve.

For example, if you started swimming at an indoor pool, you might set a goal based on frequency, such as going two times this week, or a goal about duration or intensity, such as two additional laps per session or a faster time.

Reevaluate your progress every couple of weeks, suggests Mack. "What matters most for winter training is for this goal to keep you challenged, interested, and engaged."



CHALLENGE: WINTER DOLDRUMS *Solution:* Get fresh air on every level.

Studies show that time in nature can improve sleep, reduce stress, boost attention, and elevate mood — all important for emotional health and fitness goals.

"Going outside at any time has major mental-health benefits, but in the winter, when there's less light, it's particularly important," says Mack. Even just a few minutes outside can serve as a break, she notes, especially if you're getting some activity along the way.

If you're the indoor-fitness type, an outdoor activity can be a refreshing change, Mack says, and it can go with the vibe of being more thoughtful and intentional about how you move. Try a winter hike that's not about how far or how fast you go (if you're in a snowy locale, you'll need to slow down to avoid slipping anyway) but instead draws your focus to your surroundings.

Another doldrums buster is cultivating more curiosity, says wellness coach Kate Larsen, MCC, CWC, NBC-HWC, author of *Progress Not Perfection*. In terms of fitness, that might mean spending the season thinking about whether you're still joyful in your chosen activity. Maybe you've always been a runner, for instance, but you haven't taken time to explore whether you run because you truly love it or it's just part of your identity.

"Think about what's prompting you to stay moving — what's your intrinsic motivation, and has that changed over time?" she suggests. "This is a great time to look at the judgments you may have put on yourself. Are you doing something because you want to or because you think you should?"

Most likely, mixing up your activity and trying new things will start this process and help you see that this could be the winter you make a big change — or maybe you fall in love with your usual activity all over again.

"Being curious is such a gift," says Larsen. "What intrigues you? What haven't you done? Start there." �

ELIZABETH MILLARD is a writer, editor, yoga teacher, and personal trainer based in northern Minnesota.



Know Your Beauty Products

HOW THE INGREDIENTS IN PERSONAL-CARE ITEMS CAN AFFECT HEALTH – PLUS TIPS FOR FINDING WORTHY ALTERNATIVES.

BY JESSIE SHOLL

ricia Pingel, NMD, a naturopathic doctor in Arizona, was surprised and frightened when her mother was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

Thankfully, she says, her mother managed to live 13 more healthy years before requiring chemotherapy and eventually passing away.

As a daughter and as a physician, Pingel was interested in how her mother's genetics may have contributed to her illness. After her mother died, Pingel investigated her genetic profile, and she learned that her mother didn't have the ability to break down benzene.

This meant something to Pingel. "The cancer that she had was 100 percent due to environmental exposure," she explains. "She lived a healthy lifestyle. But the one thing that she did every month from the time she was in her 20s until the time of her death was dye her hair. And one of the main components of hair dye is benzene."

Most mainstream personal-care products — and even many so-called clean ones — contain ingredients that can disrupt hormones, affect fertility, and contribute to cancer risk as well as a host of other health problems. Because the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has little to no regulatory power over what goes into these products, inclusion of potentially dangerous ingredients in cosmetics and personal-care products has gone unchecked for years.

That's changing. Consumers are educating themselves and demanding that companies disclose — and in some cases change — what's in their products. This is crucial, Pingel says.

"We may not have complete control over the chemicals in the air we breathe or in some of the foods we eat, but we have 100 percent control over what we put on our skin."

Why Skin Matters

Our skin is one of our largest and most vulnerable organs. "Skin is our barrier to the outside world, and it's very permeable," says wellness expert Cindi Lockhart, RDN, LD. "When we eat or drink something, it gets processed through the liver to determine if we're going to detoxify it or absorb and use it." But skin doesn't have this set of defenses. "When something is applied to your skin, it can be absorbed directly into your bloodstream."

There are also stages of development in which we're more vulnerable to the toxic effects of harmful chemi-

cals. These include periods of rapid growth and development, such as in utero, infancy, puberty, and pregnancy.

Yet in the United States, there's almost no oversight of the chemicals used in personal-care products. This is different from the European Union, where premarket safety assessments and mandatory registration of cosmetic products are required by law. Many multinational companies even create separate formulations to sell in Europe, while their U.S. products continue to contain unsafe ingredients.

"Cosmetic products — legally defined as both beauty products and personal-care products — are one of the least regulated consumer products in the United States today," says Janet Nudelman, cofounder and director of the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics coalition, a project of Breast Cancer Prevention Partners. "The \$100 billion cosmetics industry is regulated by only two pages of federal law, and that was enacted in 1938." Since 1938, those two pages have been amended only a handful of times.

More than 1,300 ingredients have been banned from personal-care products in Europe. In the United States, just 11 are barred or restricted.

One reason for this discrepancy is a hindered FDA. Most people wrongly assume that the FDA has the same oversight powers with personal-care products as it does over food and medications, but there's no real parallel, thanks in part to a powerful industry lobby.

A vivid example of the FDA's limitations occurred with the company Brazilian Blowout, which marketed its hair-straightening products as formaldehyde-free. "Formaldehyde is a known human carcinogen," Nudelman says, "and this product was making hairdressers sick, because it was releasing formaldehyde when the product was heated, which is how the application takes place."

When the product was tested, it was found to contain more than 10 percent formaldehyde. "So here you have a product being marketed as formaldehyde-free and containing more formaldehyde than an undertaker uses to embalm a dead person."

The FDA wrote Brazilian Blowout, asking it to voluntarily recall its products and change the formulation to make it safer. "The company basically laughed at them and said, 'We're not going to, and there's nothing you can do to make us.'"

It took the California attorney general (Kamala Harris at the time) suing the company to finally compel Brazilian Blowout to change its marketing claims — though she still couldn't force the company to change the formulation itself.

Yet even this power differential is changing. Some states, tired of waiting for Congress to grant the FDA more regulatory power, are enacting laws of their own. In 2020 California governor Gavin Newsom signed the Toxic-Free Cosmetics Act, which bans 24 ingredients and is "aimed at chemicals often linked to cancer, reproductive harm, birth defects, and endocrine disruption." (The law won't go into effect until 2025.)

Consumer advocacy groups, such as the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, have also had an impact. By highlighting the fact that multinational corporations are able — when forced — to make safer products in Europe, the group successfully convinced major players



within the nail-polish industry to stop using what's referred to as the "toxic trio" (dibutyl phthalate, toluene, and formaldehyde). "These three chemicals are linked to reproductive harm and cancer," Nudelman says. "So that was a big win."

Predictably, given this rising awareness, some companies now use greenwashing tactics to appear safer. Buyers must beware: There are no regulations about calling something safe or using words like "natural" and "organic." These two standards apply only to agricultural products.

This is no reason to give up the search — and it may be easier than it's ever been to find safe personalcare products. Armed with some information, patience for reading ingredient lists, and resources to use when you're in a hurry, you'll be able to clean up your cosmetics and find new ones that you enjoy using. To start, know that these are the most important ingredients to avoid. Because fragrances are considered trade secrets, companies don't have to disclose what's in them.

FRAGRANCE

This may be the trickiest word on a product-ingredient list. Because fragrances are considered trade secrets, companies don't have to disclose what's in them. And fragrance is found in the majority of personalcare products, including those intended for babies. Even "unscented" products can contain fragrance to mask other scents.

The International Fragrance Association lists 3,059 materials reported as being used in fragrance compounds, including phthalates and other endocrine disrupters. Evidence links some of these to allergies, cancer, reproductive toxicity, and other health issues.

But seeing "fragrance" on an ingredient label also presents an opportunity. Lisa Fennessy, founder of the clean-beauty website *This Organic Girl*, says that instead of putting a product back on a shelf if the word "fragrance" appears in its ingredient list, sometimes she picks up the phone or sends an email with a question.

Calling the company to ask what's in its fragrance does two things, she says: "It gives you the personal knowledge to make an informed decision, and it alerts the company that their buyers have a stake in what's in their fragrance."

Finally, if the product is free of most other toxic ingredients, give it a whiff. A synthetic fragrance will hit you like a brick wall. An essential-oilbased fragrance will likely be more subtle. Trust your nose. (For more on scents and health, see ELmag.com/ perfumes.)

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PARABENS

A group of preservatives that prevent the growth of microbes, such as yeasts, molds, and bacteria, parabens can be found in just about every type of personal-care product: deodorant, shampoo, conditioner, lotion, sunscreen. Five parabens have been banned in Europe: isopropylparaben, isobutylparaben, phenylparaben, benzylparaben, and pentylparaben. Others are strictly regulated.

Again, they're not regulated in the United States. The FDA's website states, "At this time, we do not have information showing that parabens as they are used in cosmetics have an effect on human health."

The Environmental Working Group (EWG), a nonprofit environmental research and advocacy organization, disagrees. Citing studies that have connected parabens to reproductive harm, it notes: "Parabens can act like the hormone estrogen in the body and disrupt the normal function of hormone systems, affecting male and female reproductive-system functioning, reproductive development, fertility, and birth outcomes."

If we were exposed to parabens only occasionally, the body might be able to detoxify them. But because they're ubiquitous — and often found in products that are used daily — their cumulative effects add quickly to the body's toxic burden, or the sum total of chemicals If stored in fat cells.

As for less harmful preservatives, there are many. Dana Jasper, manager of renowned clean-beauty store Merz Apothecary in Chicago, says that some companies are using plant-based alcohols as alternatives to parabens. "Witch hazel is really good, too," she says, "and it has a naturally antibacterial property to it."

PHTHALATES

Known as "the everywhere chemical," phthalates are used in a wide range of products, including plastics, solvents, and personal-care products. If an ingredient label lists "fragrance," phthalates likely lurk inside: They're often found in nail polish, hair gel, deodorant, soap, and body lotion, because they help fragrances linger longer. They also make formulations stick to the skin better, explains Lockhart.

Phthalates are endocrine disrupters, which means they can contribute to infertility, hormone imbalances, and birth defects. According to the nonprofit Zero Breast Cancer, "Children under the age of 3 are more at risk from phthalates because of their developing, smaller body size and ever-present exposure to children's products manufactured using multiple types of phthalate compounds."

Black consumers may also be more vulnerable to phthalate exposure. A recent study from the Silent Spring Institute found that hair-care products marketed to Black women contain higher percentages of endocrinedisrupting chemicals, including phthalates, than those marketed to the general public.

If we were exposed to parabens only occasionally, the body might be able to detoxify them. But because they're ubiquitous, their cumulative effects add quickly to the body's toxic burden. Phthalates are endocrine disrupters, which means they can contribute to infertility, hormone imbalances, and birth defects.

The study looked at 18 hair products marketed to Black women, including hot-oil treatments, anti-frizz hair polishes, leave-in conditioners, root stimulators, and hair relaxers. Forty-five endocrine disruptors were detected in the products, and 84 percent of the chemicals detected were not on the product label.

Several types of phthalates are banned or restricted in the European Union. In the United States, two types — dibutyl phthalate and diethylhexyl phthalate — will be banned in California beginning in 2025 as part of the Toxic-Free Cosmetics Act.

On labels, look out for phthalate, diethyl phthalate (DEP), dibutyl phthalate (DBP), diethylhexyl phthalate (DEHP), and fragrance. Choose nail products with labels that say "phthalate-free."

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P-PHENYLENEDIAMINE

Derived from coal tar, p-phenylenediamine (PPD) is mixed with other chemicals to create darker shades of hair dye. (It's also used in printing, as well as oil, gas, and rubber products.) According to the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, "p-phenylenediamine, as well as the products of its reactions with hydrogen, can alter the genetic material of cells."

It is also suspected of being carcinogenic and therefore is banned in Europe.

Look for it on ingredient lists as follows:

- P-phenylenediamine (PPD)
- Paraphenylenediamine
- 4-aminoaniline
- 1,4-benzenediamine
- P-diaminobenzene
- 1,4-diaminobenzene
- 1,4-phenylenediamine

TOLUENE

Another harmful chemical found in hair dye, toluene is also used in nail treatments and polishes to suspend the polish and create a smooth finish.

Restricted in Europe, toluene is listed as a hazardous air pollutant by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), yet it is still legal in the United States. After pressure, some companies have removed toluene, along with dibutyl phthalate (DBP) and formaldehyde, from nail polishes.

Salon workers are particularly susceptible to toluene's harmful effects because it's inhaled as well as absorbed through the skin. The fumes can irritate the throat, eyes, mouth, and skin, and they can cause headaches, dizziness, confusion, and anxiety.

Long-term exposure may lead to fatigue,

slow reaction, difficulty sleeping, numbness in the hands or feet, reproductive-system damage, and miscarriage.

ETHANOLAMINES

This family of chemicals includes monoethanolamine (MEA), diethanolamine (DEA), and triethanolamine (TEA). They are used as surfactants to help a product become sudsy and as emulsifiers to prevent ingredients from separating. They are found in soaps and shampoos, hair dyes, cosmetics, fragrances, and sunscreens.

Research suggests that DEA may alter sperm structure. It can also accumulate in the liver and kidneys, potentially triggering organ toxicity and neurotoxic effects such as tremors. Another study suggests that DEA can negatively affect fetal brain development. It may also have carcinogenic effects.

DEA is prohibited in Europe. In the United States, avoid products containing TEA, DEA, cocamide DEA, cocamide MEA, DEA-cetyl phosphate, DEA oleth-3 phosphate, lauramide DEA, and TEA-lauryl sulfate.

Salon workers are

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to toluene's harmful

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inhaled as well as

absorbed through

the skin.



1,4-DIOXANE

This ether is prevalent in products that create suds think shampoo, liquid soap, bubble bath — and in hair relaxers. Not an ingredient itself, 1,4-dioxane is created during ethoxylation, in which ethylene oxide is added to other chemicals to make them less harsh, according to the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics.

The EPA has classified 1,4-dioxane as "likely to be carcinogenic to humans" by all routes of exposure, and it is banned in Canada and Qatar as well as restricted in New York state. Yet the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics says it "may be found in as many as 22 percent of the more than 25,000 cosmetics products in the Skin Deep database."

> Because it's technically a manufacturing byproduct, according to the FDA, 1,4-dioxane doesn't appear on labels by name. It hides under the names laureth-23, sodium lauryl sulfate (SLS), or polyethylene glycol (PEG) compounds.

Because of 1,4-dioxane, DEA, and other toxic chemicals used as surfactants, Pingel advises her patients to be wary of products that are sudsy. "People think if a product is sudsy, they're getting clean, but that's actually not true. If it foams up, we've got a problem."

A SAFER-PRODUCT PROTOCOL

Once you decide to clean up your personal-care routine, it may be tempting to toss everything and start fresh. This approach may be exactly right for some people, but it's not the only way. Some experts suggest replacing products as they run out, which gives you a little time to research and find safer brands or formulations that you like.

As for order of importance, Fennessy suggests paying close attention to what stays on your body the longest and making sure the products you use most frequently are as nontoxic as possible. (And don't leave out items that you use seasonally, like sunscreen.) The good news is that resources abound for finding cleaner cosmetics, as well as for researching your current favorites. These tools and resources will get you started.

TO EVALUATE PRODUCT SAFETY:

The EWG maintains the Skin Deep database, which takes the stress out of finding clean products and checking on formulations you already have. MADE SAFE, Ecocert, and COSMOS are thirdparty certifiers that research and vouch for the safety of particular products.

TO FIND AND PURCHASE CLEANER PRODUCTS:

Retailers such as Beautycounter, Credo, and the Detox Market sell only products that meet their standards for safety. Their websites offer very clear information about their safety policies and ingredients.

TOOLS TO USE IN THE PRODUCT AISLE:

The Yuka and Think Dirty apps allow you to scan a product's barcode for a quick look at its safety score. When you're perusing products online, try Clearya, a Chrome extension that checks ingredient labels as you shop. P

JESSIE SHOLL is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.



Some people opt out of the guessing game altogether and make their products themselves. If that sounds appealing, try out these recipes for eight products you can make at home, including beet lip gloss and a chocolate facial mask: **ELmag.com/diybeauty.**

Learn how to make your own facial oil at ELmag.com/ facialoilvideo.





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Real Life

The rituals we create for the beginning and end of each day can have a powerful and positive effect on our well-being and our happiness.



Journalist, visionary, and *Experience Life* founding editor Pilar Gerasimo offers insight into her essential daily practices.

Courageous Communication

Most relationships are at their best when we're present, connected, and communicating clearly. Our experts share insights on using your words to help your friendships flourish.

BY KARA DOUGLASS THOM

common interest, a shared joke, a memorable bonding experience — almost anything can be the basis for a friendship. But two things in particular keep them going: regular interaction and intimacy of communication.

If "intimacy" is a word you've always reserved for romantic partners, consider its full context. It implies closeness, familiarity, and quiet understanding, which are qualities that deepen any relationship. And cultivating a variety of social connections (romantic, familial, professional, and so on) is proven to reduce mortality, even when other risk factors are taken into account. Close friends can literally be a lifeline.

We don't always nurture these valuable relationships with the depth of communication they deserve. And no wonder: Our culture offers few models of platonic intimacy. Social norms show us what closeness between a parent and child looks like, and there's plenty of media representation of romantic relationships — but we don't necessarily know how to express our love for our closest friends. "People downplay how influential friends are. Marriage is seen as the ultimate relationship," explains friendship coach Bailey T. Hurley, author of the forthcoming book *Together Is a Beautiful Place*, who notes that many of us have close friendships that last longer than marriages. Timidity about



True friendships weather all kinds of ups and downs."

communicating more deeply with our pals, she says, can come from the fragility of the relationship. "There is no contract keeping you together — it's not the same bond as a parent or child. Friends can leave you."

This fragility can be fueled by our own fears: fear of what our friend will think if we're vulnerable, fear of being betrayed, fear of coming on too strong.

But there is more richness and ful-

fillment in communicating intimately. Doing so regularly, Hurley adds, will establish a pattern of communication that can create more safety in your friendship. "The reward is worth diving in and going deep, because that's where all the heart is," she notes.

Try this expert advice for more courageous communication.

Speak Your Truth

Deeper intimacy can't flourish without authenticity. Letting your friends see you as you are — your history, your concerns, your weaknesses — makes for stronger connections.

So, when your friend asks how you're doing, give a real answer. "Our knee-jerk reaction is to say we're fine and move on. It's a tic in our communication," says Kate Hanley, author of *How to Be a Better Person* and host of a podcast by the same name.

She suggests challenging yourself to say something more: Admit you're tired. Maybe you're annoyed that your favorite Netflix show was canceled. Or you're refreshed after a satisfying night's sleep. "Whatever is top of mind," she says. "It doesn't need to become a therapy session, but it could be a conversation starter."

We can figure out who's open to these more intimate conversations, Hurley suggests, by leaning in to those friends who reciprocate our communication style. "There are friends you don't talk about the hard stuff with, and that's OK. We need those relationships, too. Work to have grace for the ones who don't communicate as deeply." (For more on understanding your own style, see ELmag.com/communicationstyle.)

In our younger years, when we had the luxury of copious time to spend with our friends, we knew all the details of one another's life. Even as we grow older, we still crave this level of connection. "True friendships weather all kinds of ups and downs," Hanley explains. "If you talk to your friends only when you're up, you're keeping your relationship at a surface level." Being open about the mundane or moments of struggle helps relationships grow deeper roots.

Really Listen

"In order to be there for our friends, the most important thing we can do is be an empathetic witness to them," Hanley says. "About 80 percent of friendship magic is listening and acknowledging them and what they're going through."

Good listening often requires more than your ears. If you're together, make eye contact and don't try to double-time your attention between your friend and a screen. Humans tend to mimic facial expressions as we read emotion, which increases our capacity to empathize and respond appropriately. That might include asking questions or providing reassurances that you're listening, with a simple "I hear you" or by nodding or reaching out to touch your friend's hand.

"One way to be a good listener is to follow up on what you're hearing," Hurley says. "If a friend has an important appointment, make a note and follow up. It shows you listened and remembered." (For more on how to be a better listener, go to ELmag.com/listeningtips.)

Praise and Affirm

We might assume that our friends

already know they're important to us. Friendship, after all, involves a mutual understanding of each other's place in our lives. Yet there's a fine line between intuitively knowing something and taking it for granted, which is why it's worthwhile to consciously affirm your closest pals from time to time.

Technology can be helpful here sending a text or tagging a friend in a meme can be a quick way to say, "I'm thinking of you." But that's not as intimate as using your words, in a written note or spoken in person. "I appreciate your laugh." "Thank you for knowing I'm not a morning person and leaving me alone until noon." "I love you and I love that you're in my life."

Nonverbal affirmations are important, too. "Constancy is an ingredient for a wonderful friendship," Hurley notes. "Be constant in the way you're available, in how you show up." (For more on how to maintain meaningful connections, see ELmag.com/connect.)

Ask for Help

It's not always easy to directly ask someone for support, especially because we don't want to inconvenience them. But good friends are in our lives for more than fun and conversation. In fact, knowing that a friend will show up for you is valuable relationship currency.

"People feel an affinity toward those who have asked for their help," Hurley says. Though we often presume that people don't want to be burdened, coming through for a pal — or having a pal come through for you — can strengthen your bond and reduce that feeling of fragility in a friendship.

What's more, Hanley adds, humans have a primal need for meaning. "Helping a friend in need gives us an immediate and tangible way to do something of value," she says. "Beyond that, asking a friend for help requires you to be vulnerable, and when your normal everyday protections are down, there's a real opportunity for deeper connection." •

KARA DOUGLASS THOM is a Twin Citiesbased writer.

WHAT TO SAY WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY

When a friend is struggling, we might feel at a loss for words. Instead of offering frantic advice or trying to cheer them up, start by simply being present.

"The first thing to do is listen and be receptive," says Kate Hanley, author of *How to Be a Better Person.* "Be open enough to let their words in and validate what they shared with you by saying things like 'I hear you saying ...' or 'It makes sense that ...' or 'It sounds like ...'"

Hanley also suggests repeating words your friend uses, so you don't use language that implies judgment.

Though you might feel like you want to do more to help your friend, it's important to remember your role. "We get mixed up on what is actually helpful," Hanley says. "It's not helpful to view their challenges as your problem to fix."

What is helpful is to empower them to find their own solutions. Ask questions like "What do you need?" Or, "What do you think is the way forward?" Or say, "I'm here for you as you work through this."

"Big emotions aren't there to torture us," Hanley notes. Rather, they show up to offer us some insight, to point out something that needs healing, or to help us address a deeper problem. "Jumping in to problem-solve or attempting to absolve their fear with toxic positivity may inhibit your friend from recognizing the insight that the emotion is trying to help them understand." (For more on toxic positivity, see ELmag .com/optimismdownside.)

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FEEL THE DIFFERENCE. MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

Growing Edge

Journalist and visionary Pilar Gerasimo on the pursuit of health and happiness.

BY DARA MOSKOWITZ GRUMDAHL

wenty-five years ago, from the carriage house she was renting in St. Paul, Minn., Pilar Gerasimo launched this very magazine. "There was a galley kitchen on one wall, and a desk piled with article drafts from freelancers," Pilar recalls, "and that's how it all began."

I was one of those freelancers.

What a long, great trip it's been! *Experience Life* has grown into one of the most visionary voices in body-mind health. Many ideas championed in these pages have gone mainstream.

And Pilar? She is back working in a carriage house. "I just liked that creative space so much," she says, "I built a little carriage-house studio on my farm in Wisconsin!"

Pilar spent the years between workspaces figuring out how to live a healthy, happy life in a fastchanging world.

Since leaving *EL* in 2016, she's launched a podcast (*The Living Experiment*) and written a book (*The Healthy Deviant: A Rule Breaker's Guide to Being Healthy in an Unhealthy World*). She's now leading a variety of online courses and communities through her Healthy Deviant Academy platform.

"While we've been encouraged to see health and happiness as the product of individual endeavors, our choices don't happen in a vacuum. They happen in the context of our communities. Our wellbeing depends on a whole set of intersecting influences and circumstances."

What circumstances does Pilar put into place in her own life nowadays? These, to name a few.

FEEL-GOOD COMMUNITY

"Even during the pandemic, my Healthy Deviant groups and I stayed connected online. Being rooted in those communities has been a source of real joy for me. It feels like a too-rare blessing to be surrounded by thoughtful, kind, health-motivated people who are openly sharing their challenges and cheering each other on."

LEARNER'S MIND

"For me, continuous growth and learning is both a mindset and a daily practice. My life right now is about how much more I can learn — and share."

MORNING PRACTICE

"If you can make just one change, try this: Spend the first few minutes of your day — *before* you reach for your phone or turn on the news — doing something you enjoy. Light a candle, meditate, breathe, set an intention. Come to waking gradually. This practice is hugely transformative."



HEALTHY-DEVIANT MOCKTAILS

"During COVID, a lot of us found ourselves drinking more, so I started coming up with mocktail alternatives. My favorite: Pour a third of a glass of kombucha over ice, add a splash of good juice, fill with bubbly water, and add a garnish, like citrus peel, bitters, or fresh mint. It marks a moment of transition, and it's about pleasure — not self-denial."

Give yourself the gift of personal development and community by joining Pilar's Refine Your Life workshop in January. Learn more at **ELmag.com/refineyourlife.**



EVENING ABLUTIONS

"Take your normal nighttime

putting on moisturizer, or

routine — brushing your teeth,

whatever — and just slow it way

down. Make it a ritual. Dial down

a candle to the bathroom. Treat

experiences of the day be acts of

a tiny win, but people who try it

self-kindness and calm. Seems like

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REAL LIFE Natural Mental Health

How B vitamins can help lift depression.

BY HENRY EMMONS, MD

vitamins do a lot of good things for mood: They're key to the production of feel-good neurotransmitters, they're important players in the body's energyproducing system, and they protect the brain during times of stress.

So it comes as no surprise that many people diagnosed with depression are found to be deficient in B vitamins. But even without a test to confirm deficiency, almost anyone dealing with the difficult effects of the illness may benefit from a moderate-dose, high-quality activated B-complex vitamin.

In my practice, there are three main situations that prompt me to suggest a B-complex supplement:

• Someone whose depression started early in life or who has a strong family history of the illness.

• Whenever energy, motivation, and focus have become a struggle, as with winter depression.

• If someone is undergoing unusually severe or prolonged stress.

I also consider adding a B supplement when antidepressant medications are insufficiently effective, or when the dose must be kept low because of side effects.

How B Vitamins Work

Biochemically, there are two crucial ways the B vitamins affect mood. First, they play a central role in the Krebs cycle, which is the energy-production mechanism within each cell. This metabolic process releases the energy stored in food and makes it available to the body. Glucose is virtually the sole source of energy in the brain, and B vitamins assist with the conversion of food to glucose to keep the brain humming. That process involves oxidation, which inevitably creates waste byproducts.

This is where the second role for B vitamins comes in. Not only do they support the intracellular metabolic process, but their antioxidant properties also help with cleanup, protecting cells from the byproducts of oxidation.

Antioxidants help the brain recover from the effects of stress. Severe or long-term stress contributes to higher metabolism and, by extension, greater production of metabolic waste products. These must be cleaned up to protect sensitive neurons, and B vitamins wield the mop.

It's also common to develop systemic inflammation from chronic stress, which can damage brain tissues. B vitamins help buffer those effects.

Many people Finally, B vitadiagnosed with mins support mood depression by serving as partare found to be deficient in ners, or "cofactors," B vitamins. in the production of serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. An anxious brain is, essentially, an unhappy brain, and many people with depression feel better when these neurotransmitters are boosted.

B Vitamins and Genetic Depression

There's a genetic component to depression, and it too can involve B vitamins. About 1 in 10 people carry a genetic polymorphism on the MTHFR gene that regulates folate (naturally occurring) and folic acid (synthetic, as in supplements).

Folate (along with B6) is a key nutrient in the production of neuro-

transmitters. It's prevalent in fresh, leafy greens, but it degrades quickly. Even if you eat plenty of greens, the folate may only be effective if you eat them within a few days after they've been picked.

People with MTHFR face an additional challenge with folate: Even though they may eat a perfectly healthy diet that's brimming with freshly harvested green vegetables, they don't have sufficient quantities of the enzyme that converts dietary folate into a form the body can use.

This inherited folate-processing issue may be one of the reasons depression runs in families; it may also explain why some children experience depression, even without any sort of traumatic experience

that might have triggered it.

Fortunately, there are supplements that provide B vitamins in an "activated" form that the body is able to use.

One thing to be aware of: Activated B vitamins can make some people feel jittery. Some of us are

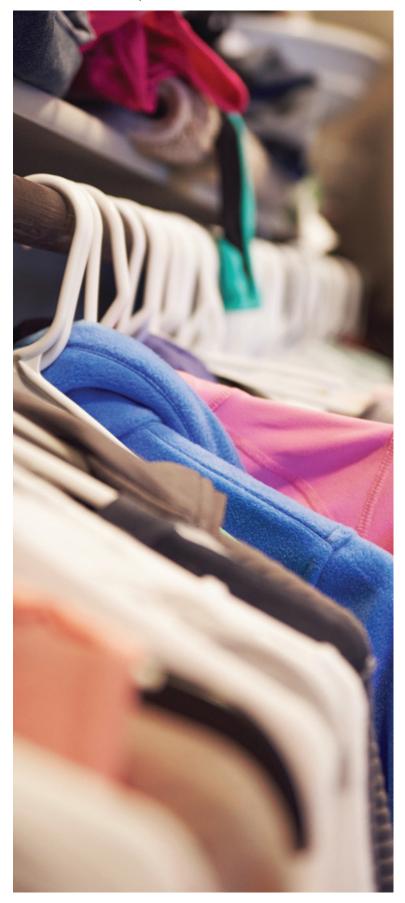
constitutionally more sensitive to anything activating. So B-complex supplementation may be great for a person who feels very lethargic in winter, for example, but it may make someone who is already feeling heated up or agitated feel worse.

As always, listen to your body — you're the one who knows you best.





is an integrative psychiatrist and cofounder of Natural MentalHealth.com. He is the author of *The Chemistry of Joy, The Chemistry of Calm*, and *Staying Sharp*.



Putting the Brakes on Ultrafast Fashion

The ultimate in looking good is sustainable style. Industry insiders offer their tips.

BY KATIE DOHMAN

ashions these days are changing at warp speed. Clothing companies rush to meet the demands of those wanting the latest runway knockoffs, while the ease of one-click ordering offers the feel-good hit of a new outfit.

At one point in the not-so-distant past, fast-fashion retailers, such as H&M and Zara, provided the fix. But they're now being eclipsed by ultrafast fashion — sold by online-only companies, such as Shein and ASOS. By using lowerquality fabrics and construction, preying on cheap labor, and accelerating production even further, they offer an unparalleled variety of the latest duds at prices you simply can't refuse. Shein releases 2,000 to 8,000 new items *daily*.

Instant gratification has its drawbacks. According to a 2019 United Nations report, the fashion industry uses 24.6 trillion gallons of water each year — enough to meet the needs of 5 million people. And the industry dumps into the ocean half a million tons of microfiber annually — the equivalent of 3 million barrels of crude oil. Plus, the fashion world is responsible for more carbon emissions than all international flights and maritime shipping combined.

"Historically, it's a piggish industry built on exploitation and gluttony," says Deirdre Clemente, associate professor of history and curator of 20th-century American material culture, specializing in clothing and fashion at University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

The human-rights and environmental costs of the latest in ultrafast fashion are not included in the price tag.

That's the bad news. The good news? You can still be fashionable without supporting the system. These tips can help you build a healthier "slow-fashion" wardrobe while also protecting the planet.

TIP 1 Reduce consumption.

It can be hard to resist the dopamine hit delivered by clicking "buy now" while shopping for new duds. Clemente notes that the pandemic has allowed us to reexamine our consumer habits: "We need to look more critically at what we own and what we need. Sustainability starts with ourselves."

Quitting cold turkey is not only likely to backfire; it's also unrealistic because, well. everyone wears clothes. Alternatives that offer the thrill of the hunt at an affordable price? Buy secondhand, thrift, or vintage, from traditional shops or websites such as Mercari, ThredUP, or Poshmark.

TIP 2 Build a capsule wardrobe.

We typically wear 20 percent of our wardrobes 80 percent of the time. And chances are, those are the most well-made, wellfitting, comfortable options in your closet. So it pays to invest in good threads.

For one producer, on-demand fashion is key to reducing consumption. Meghan Litchfield is the founder of RedThread, an ondemand apparel brand that offers custom-fit clothing delivered to your door. Designers create pieces, bespokestyle, in a sustainable sewing practice in Reno, Nev.

"The dirty little secret about the traditional [size-run] method is that you mass-produce all these sizes offshore, transport them on boats or by air, and then the unsold units end up in a landfill," Litchfield says.

TIP 3 Start at the source.

Not all fabrics are created equal: Some are made from plastics, others from plants. "The fundamental reason we have fast fashion is that we can just say, 'We don't have to shear a sheep to make extra shirts; we can get it from plastic or textile distributors.' There wouldn't be fast fashion without synthetic fibers," explains Clemente.

But even natural fibers differ in their environmental toll. Charlie Bradley Ross, founder and director of the Sustainable Fashion Collective and Offset Warehouse, focuses on sourcing sustainable fabrics for designers. "Cotton, for example, is a fabric we are all led to believe is natural and therefore good — which it certainly is if it's organically produced," she says. "But commercially grown cotton is not."

"Occupying more than 55 percent of the world's cultivated land, its production is responsible for releasing \$2 billion of chemical pesticides into the environment every year," she explains. "Just under half of these chemicals are toxic enough to be classified as hazardous by the World Health Organization."

Bradley Ross says we can make better choices to reduce environmental impact and improve our self-image. "I love sourcing and designing fabrics made with more unusual fibers — such as hemp, soy, bamboo, and banana that are cultivated in a sustainable way."

And though more ethical fibers have suffered negative reputations, she is increasingly finding soft, fashionable fabrics in ecofiber versions, including hemp-silk blends in stunning colors.

TIP 4 Drive demand with your dollars.

Question where your fashion comes from, including what it's made of, who makes it, and how it's delivered. Then carefully choose pieces that fit your personal sustainability criteria: Your purchase will help steer the larger companies to better behavior because they'll follow the money.

Being discerning is not simple, Clemente warns. "Being a sustainable-fashion advocate will take more work. Like recycling, no one takes it out for you and sorts it. Do the research on companies that are really trying versus gimmicking."

"With systemic change, the fashion industry can lift millions of people out of poverty, providing them with decent and dignified livelihoods. It can preserve and restore our living planet," says Bradley Ross. "Fashion can be a powerful force for good — bringing people together as a source of joy, creativity, and expression." •

KATIE DOHMAN is a writer and editor in St. Paul, Minn.

CLOTHING CONSERVATION

Preserving what you have is a big part of cutting waste. Laundry evangelist Patric Richardson, coauthor of *Laundry Love: Finding Joy in a Common Chore* and star of the show *The Laundry Guy*, offers tips for taking care of what's already in your closet.

EXTEND ITS LIFE, no matter what its life is. Who cares if it's expensive or cheap — you like it! Whether it's an heirloom or an item you extend for three seasons rather than one, that's environmentally a better choice.

EXPRESS WASH, warm water. Contrary to popular belief, warm-water wash will not ruin clothes more quickly. Any energy you gain from using cold water is negated by the length of the cycle and wear and tear on clothes from abrasion in the machine. "Warm" water is not even warm enough for a bath for humans, and newer machines use only about 4 gallons of water.

HANG EVERYTHING UP. Tumbling in the dryer is not

the environmental choice — or the best choice for clothes, because the real problem is the abrasion. Lint is your clothes dying, and abrasion shaves years off their lives. Get a drying rack. Clotheslines are heaven.

DON'T WASH IT just because you wore it. Richardson says, "I wear my jeans at least 10 times before I wash them, and I call myself the Laundry Guy."

LEARN HOW TO REMOVE STAINS. Most of them take two seconds to get out. Use some laundry soap or a laundry bar; scrub the stain with a wet brush; and rinse.

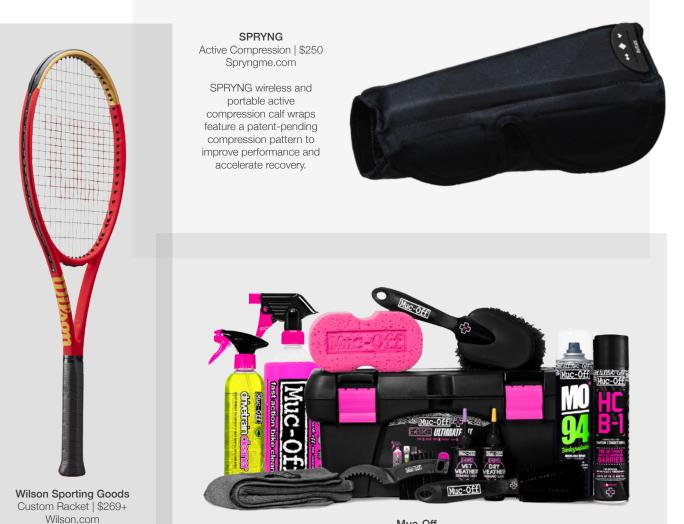
WEAR WHAT WORKS for you. Wearing something a lot is better than having a few things you wear twice.

EXPLORE OTHER WAYS to get a fashion fix. Once you know how to remove stains and care for fabrics, you can buy thrift, vintage, or from estate sales. It's a good cheap thrill, and it's sustainable.

LIFETIME

HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

Hand-picked gift ideas for those who live healthy, active lives.



This season, start a new

tradition by giving the gift of custom racquets, gloves, or balls.

Design today at Wilson.com.

Muc-Off Clean, Protect, Lube | \$5-\$30 Muc-Off.com

Help the avid rider in your life keep their bike in top shape with a variety of cleaning and maintenance products.



Leathercraft Oasis Recliner | \$4,620+ Leathercraft-furniture.com

Sit in the lap of luxury with fully customizable furniture by Leathercraft. A trusted source for high-quality, long-lasting furniture for Life Time Athletic Resorts, Work, and Stay.

OtterBox Backpack Cooler | \$70 Otterbox.com

Looking to be even more nimble on foot, yet still carry plenty of provisions? This cooler offers convenience and comfort for the trail.



Beautyrest[®] Beautyrest Black[®] Mattress | \$2,099+ Shop.lifetime.life/sleep/beautyrest-black

Beautyrest Black[®] seamlessly integrates luxury and technology for an indulgent sleep experience that provides the rest and recovery your body deserves.

More Than a Bystander

This expert advice on bystander intervention can help you learn to identify and interrupt harassment in your community.

BY DÉJÀ LEONARD

magine you're riding the bus and you see something that gives you pause. A man a few rows in front of you is snarling at the woman next to him, and you can see that she's uncomfortable. You're not sure if this is a minor squabble, or whether her safety is in jeopardy. And you don't know if it's your place to intervene — so you put your head down. Once you get home, you regret not doing more.

"When we see people experiencing harassment or hate, too often we freeze. We don't know what to do," explains Emily May, cofounder and executive director of Hollaback!, a nonprofit organization that combats harassment. "Bystander intervention is simply overcoming that freezing instinct to get back to our core human desire to take care of one another."

One result of that freezing instinct is the bystander effect, a socialpsychological theory suggesting that individuals are less likely to help someone in distress if there are other people nearby. It's a complex phenomenon: When in a crowd, people typically don't act, because they believe it's not their responsibility. They're also following a social norm — because no one else is stepping up, either.

Certain individuals will also be less comfortable intervening depending on their identity. May explains that people of color, queer individuals, and other marginalized groups face more challenges when encountering harassment.

Psychologist Catherine Sanderson, PhD, author of *Why We Act: Turning Bystanders Into Moral Rebels*, describes three common reasons people avoid intervening when they witness harassment:

AMBIGUITY ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON. "So you hear or see something, and you're like, *Is that person in serious medical trouble? Or are they just kind of joking around?*" says Sanderson.

This ambiguity extends to other situations, too: Is that person just playing in the pool or is he drowning? Is that joke funny or is it actually kind of racist, sexist, or homophobic?

DIFFUSION OF RESPONSIBILITY. When you see something you know is problematic, but you're in a big crowd, Sanderson says, it's common for people to look to others to take responsibility.

CONCERNS ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES. She believes this is the top reason people choose not to intervene, whether it's social consequences or fear of physical harm.

May has been working to combat harassment for 15 years, and she reports a shift in the perception of bystander intervention. "Fifteen years ago, people didn't even see harassment as a problem. If it wasn't physical violence, there were practically no resources to deal with it," she recalls.

"And now people are watching this rise in hate and harassment and saying, actually, 'That's not enough. I want to do something more than just not hate or harass other people. I really want to be proactive in addressing this.""

The five Ds described on the following page are various bystander intervention methods from Hollaback! They can help you support individuals who are being harassed, show that harassment is not OK, and set an example for others so we can all learn how to make our communities safer.

The Five Ds of Bystander Intervention

Hollaback! intentionally lists the intervention methods in this order. As you move down the list, your level of personal involvement may increase, with the fifth tactic being the last resort.



1. Distract.

Creating a distraction can indirectly deescalate a situation. Try starting a conversation with the person who is being targeted. This helps create a safe space for the victim while starving the harasser of the attention they're looking for.

You can also create a physical distraction by dropping something you're holding to momentarily shift everyone's focus.

DO: Draw attention away from the harasser, perhaps through conversation with the target. You can say something simple, like "Do you know when the next bus is coming?"

DON'T: Start a conversation with the person who is harassing the victim. Though it could still de-escalate the situation, May says, it leaves the victim alone and likely upset.



2. Delegate.

If you can, find someone else to help you. Look around and see who else is present. If you can, let that person know that someone is being harassed, and ask that person for help.

DO: Try to find someone in a position of authority (like a bus driver, teacher, store manager, or flight attendant). Then, check in on the victim.

DON'T: Call the police without the express permission of the victim. "We caution folks not to contact the police unless they have checked in with that person first, because many communities do not feel safer with police presence," May explains. If you're not able to ask the victim directly whether vou should call law enforcement, use your judgment to make a decision.



3. Document.

It can be helpful for the target to have video of the encounter, which can be used as evidence. Just recording can even deter the harasser. It is generally legal to record someone in public, but check your local laws to be sure. Be mindful if you're on private property, since it is likely illegal to take video or photos.

DO: Ensure that the target is getting aid and that you are safe before documenting. "You want to make sure that somebody is doing something," May says. "You don't just want to put your camera in somebody's face when nobody is stopping the harassment." Maintain a safe distance. state the date and time, and record landmarks to identify the area.

DON'T: Share the footage without the victim's consent. Give the victim the choice of what to do with it.



4. Delay.

After the incident is over, check in with the victim to offer support or resources. A great place to start is asking questions like these: "Are you OK?" "Can I sit with you?" or "Can I help you report this incident?"

DO: Acknowledge the victim and communicate your willingness to support them. "Our research shows that as little as a knowing glance can reduce trauma," May explains. "Nonverbal connections are also really effective if you don't speak the same language as the person being harassed."

DON'T: Focus on your potential guilt about not intervening sooner. Make sure you focus on helping the person who was targeted. You can still make a difference in the victim's experience, even after the situation is over.



5. Direct.

As a last option, sometimes you do want to confront a situation directly. In those instances, assess your safety and then speak out firmly and clearly about the harassment you are witnessing. You can tell the harasser that what he or she is doing is inappropriate or ask the harasser to leave the target alone. You can also address the target and ask whether he or she would like to be escorted away from the harasser.

DO: Gauge your own safety and the safety of the target before intervening. Keep your message short and succinct.

DON'T: Argue or debate with the harasser. "We don't want you to get in a back-and-forth with the person doing the harassing," says May. "Instead, we just want you to clearly, firmly set that boundary."

THE FIVE Ds ARE AN AMAZING TOOL, but May emphasizes that we must also be sure to check our own matimation. "The biases of the buster day can show up in

motivation. "The biases of the bystander can show up in how they perceive danger or harassment or harm," she says.

One common mistake May sees is bystanders viewing a man of color as the most threatening person in any scenario, which can distort both your understanding of the situation and your sense of safety.

It's also not about heroism, Sanderson notes. "The key to bystander intervention is that it's not jumping into the burning car," she explains. "It's not being a big hero.

"There are little, tiny steps that we can take that are about intervening, distracting, and changing the narrative in ways that can make a big difference." \bullet

DÉJÀ LEONARD is a freelance writer based in Calgary, Alberta.

ADVERTISEMENT

Bound & Determined

Life Time member Edna Mason shares how a renewed commitment and consistent habits have shaped her ongoing journey to improved health.

Edna Mason's young adult life revolved around working overnight shifts as a registered nurse and raising two kids with her husband. Life was full, and life was busy. "I was constantly on the go, and I wasn't really thinking much about my health," Mason recalls. "I knew the healthy way — it's not that I didn't know what I was supposed to do. It was actually a matter of taking the time to do it."

That inattention to her health eventually caught up with her. In 2006, at 50, Mason was already on medication for hypertension — and at almost 350 pounds, she began having issues with her heart. She became determined to get healthy.

"I lost 131 pounds through regular exercise by following a popular weight-loss protocol and working out at two gyms," says Mason. "I felt great, looked great, and was active. I participated in walk-run events, and did kickboxing and yoga — I just did everything."

A few years later, however, Mason's husband, who was older, was diagnosed with emphysema, and she devoted her time to helping him battle his illness. "I was trying to take care of him, and I let myself go," says Mason.

Her husband passed away in July 2013, and Mason retired from full-time nursing in 2014. "By that time, I had gained most of the weight back, and I was not as active as I used to be. I was also not able to get around like I used to."

TURNING THE CORNER

Over the next several years, a few mishaps — falling down the stairs and not being able to stand from a low couch, for instance — made Mason realize her body was not in a healthy state. "Before I knew it, I was over 300 pounds again. I was miserable," she recalls.

In December 2018, she saw an advertisement for Life Time and was inspired to check it out. Snow was falling in Pickerington, Ohio, on the December day when Mason drove herself to the

Edna's go-to shoe is the HOKA ONE ONE Clifton Edge: "They are so comfortable. I wear them when I work out with my trainer – he says they seem to help me walk better."

ADVERTISEMEN

health club for the first time. "I met with a nice gentleman who said, 'We're going to help get you in shape. And if you want to lose weight, we can help with that, too.' He set me up with my personal trainer, Zak Stephenson."

When Mason started working with Stephenson, she had several health issues, including diabetes, hypertension, and arthritis in her hips, ankles, knees, and back. They talked, strategized, and initially focused on incorporating regular movement and exercise, and using a food journal, to jump start her weight loss.

"Zak was really encouraging," says Mason. "Sometimes I'd come in and be the same weight, or only a half a pound less than last week, and he kept encouraging me. I've even cried a few times because I was so frustrated, and Zak told me to keep going."

REAL PROGRESS

Measurable results came when Mason shifted more of her focus to nutrition. At first, she kept a food journal and simply wrote down what she ate. It wasn't until she began tracking macronutrients, however, that she started seeing results. "I had the notion that to lose weight, you had to work out really hard, so my initial emphasis was on that. But that's not the case," says Mason. "Zak really helped me understand that I was eating all wrong."

Thanks to Mason's background as a registered nurse, she understood certain aspects of nutrition — but she still was not eating healthily. Stephenson guided her to pay attention to the amount of protein, carbohydrates, and calories she was consuming, and she was blown away. "When I started writing this stuff down and adding it up, I couldn't believe it," says Mason.

For the first time in her life, she began making most of her meals at home — though she did not relish the task in the beginning. "I found out that if you really want to lose some weight, you have to cook your own food so that you know what's in it," says Mason. "I'm at the point now where I do enjoy cooking. I find myself trying different recipes or making things that I have never cooked before."

Mason still believes in the importance of keeping a food journal, too. "I have been writing down my meals since 2019 — breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks," she says. "You have to be aware and accountable of everything that you put in your mouth."

In addition to prioritizing her nutrition, Mason exercises with Stephenson at Life Time on a consistent basis. "Sometimes I do have to perk myself up because I get frustrated," says Mason. "For instance, if Zak has me trying a new exercise, all I can do is try, and tell myself that I can do it."

LIFE, HERE AND NOW

Mason's transformation is the result of an ongoing commitment to the fundamentals — and her efforts are paying off. "When I went to



see Zak recently, I realized I have lost a total of 88 pounds," says Mason. "I try to live a healthier life by improving my diet, focusing on my water intake, and trying to increase my activity."

Stopping along the way to celebrate her achievements, big and small, is crucial for Mason. Sometimes she'll mark a physical victory by going to the grocery store and picking out a few new spices to try — it's one way she makes cooking more fun. Other times she'll treat herself to a new nail polish color, a new lip stick, or a new pair of earrings. She wants to find healthy ways to reward herself for the progress she has made.

And even when something could be made easier or performed with a little help, she's choosing to accomplish tasks on her own. When Mason's children ask if they can help her pick up an item or reach for something on a top shelf, she firmly says no. She challenges herself every day to move and accomplish tasks, even when it's hard.

"There might come a day that I will need someone to help me and that's OK," says Mason. "But before I get to that point, I'll keep doing everything while I still can."



Life Time has partnered with performance footwear and apparel brand HOKA ONE ONE to amplify voices and inspire people to move by spotlighting Life Time members and team members within Humans of HOKA athlete stories.

Goods to make the most of long winter nights.

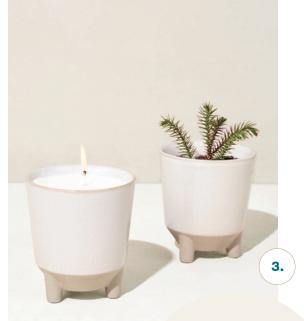


1. SIP AND SAVOR

Enjoy the richness of a traditional Vietnamese coffee at home with a Vroom! Vroom! starter set from The Reluctant Trading Experiment. It includes a blend of Vietnamese and Thai coffee beans, condensed milk, and a stainless-steel filter. \$32 at **www.reluctanttrading.com.**

2. WARM UP

The sustainable wool for these cozy, elegant blankets is sourced and woven in Massachusetts. All wool goods from Ibex are designed to last a lifetime, so you can relax with this heirloom blanket for years to come. \$225 at **www.ibex.com**.



3. LIGHT THE WAY

This candle from Modern Sprout contains the future. Once you've enjoyed hours of candlelight scented with pine essential oils, the vessel becomes a planter to start a spruce tree — a grow kit with seeds and fertilizer comes tucked in the bottom of the box. \$39 at **www.modsprout.com**.

4.

5.

4. TREAT YOUR FEET

A quality slipper can add so much comfort to your life. These shearling-lined delights are the first house shoe from the iconic German company Birkenstock, whose sandals are renowned for their comfort and durability. About \$100 from **www.birkenstock.com.**

5. PLAY ON

Wood from the Hood uses reclaimed downed trees from urban neighborhoods to craft its beautiful products, including this cribbage board. Each board has a live edge, with a unique grain and pattern. From \$54 at www.woodfromthehood.com.



Reflect, Assess, Adjust

How a simply daily discipline can help you give your life a makeover.

BY BAHRAM AKRADI

One of the things I love about the world of business is that it regularly serves up insights that are equally applicable to life in general. It provides a context where continuous improvement isn't just desirable, it's necessary. Because in business, if you aren't innovating, you're dying.

I think that's true for us personally, too. Unless we are regularly finetuning our lives, we miss a great many growth opportunities, and eventually some part of us begins to atrophy.

One powerful means of personal innovation that I've borrowed from the business realm involves paying close, daily attention to incremental results.

At Life Time, for example, we track a few key business metrics every day. We pay close attention to how many people have joined and departed. We know which clubs are experiencing increases in traffic and which ones are down. We also pay close attention to how our customers are rating various aspects of our performance.

We watch these numbers closely, because we have learned that in those areas we measure regularly, we are most likely to achieve our big-picture goals — and to notice when we are getting even a little bit off course.

The same holds true in our personal lives. We have a higher chance of succeeding in the areas we assess every day. And we risk losing ground in any areas we tend to ignore or take for granted for weeks or months at a time.

In life, of course, it's less about concrete numbers and more about our sense of relative satisfaction and achievement. But doing an end-of-day check-in on how things went, perhaps loosely rating how we felt about the quality of choices, our use of time, or other key metrics of success, can be an incredibly powerful practice. And if you don't do these daily assessments, a number of things can go wrong.

First, you miss the opportunity to fix mistakes when they're small. By measuring daily (both in business and in life) we can far more quickly spot negative and positive trends. We can put energy and resources into solving potential problems before they get out of hand.

We also learn valuable lessons about what's working well and can more quickly extend those successes to other areas.

Second, when we don't do regular assessments, potential problems have a way of seeming more overwhelming than they are. By checking in daily, we're making problem solving a part of our regular routine. Dealing with adversity becomes a less emotionally charged scenario and can be approached in a matter-of-fact way.

Third, if we don't assess often and honestly enough, trouble spots have a way of becoming acceptable habits. We gradually adapt to negative trends we'd be better off nipping in the bud.

Let's say that you place a high value on treating other people with care. But one day you're in a bad mood. You're short with a few people, maybe downright rude. If you were to reflect on your behavior that night, you might notice what triggered you and why. You'd have a chance to choose your responses more consciously the next day. If you fail to reflect, however, you miss that opportunity. You risk allowing the negative behaviors and feelings to carry over, uninvestigated and unchallenged. If you continue on that path for a while, you may lose sight of your values-based intention and let your reactive nature take over.

Suddenly, you're no longer a good, kind person who had one bad day. You're an angry, lonely jerk who doesn't understand why so many of his relationships have gone off the rails.

The way I see it, self-reflection is like anything else in life: Small and consistent beats grandiose and occasional. You don't have to wait for the New Year or take a six-month road trip to undertake it. To start, try asking yourself a few basic questions:

• Where did I do some good or make some progress today?

• Where did I let myself or others down?

• What can I do to keep my good habits going?

• What can I do to address any negative triggers or trends before they get out of hand?

Answer these questions for even a few days running, and I'm guessing you'll start to feel a greater sense of ownership and motivation around your chosen priorities. And pretty soon, you'll start to see the kind of progress that only close, consistent daily attention can deliver.

BAHRAM AKRADI is the founder, chairman, and CEO of Life Time — Healthy Way of Life.

Courage doesn't always roar. Sometimes courage is the little voice at the end of the day saying, "I will try again tomorrow."

- MARY ANNE RADMACHER

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