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Experience Life

LIFE TIME[®]

January/February 2023

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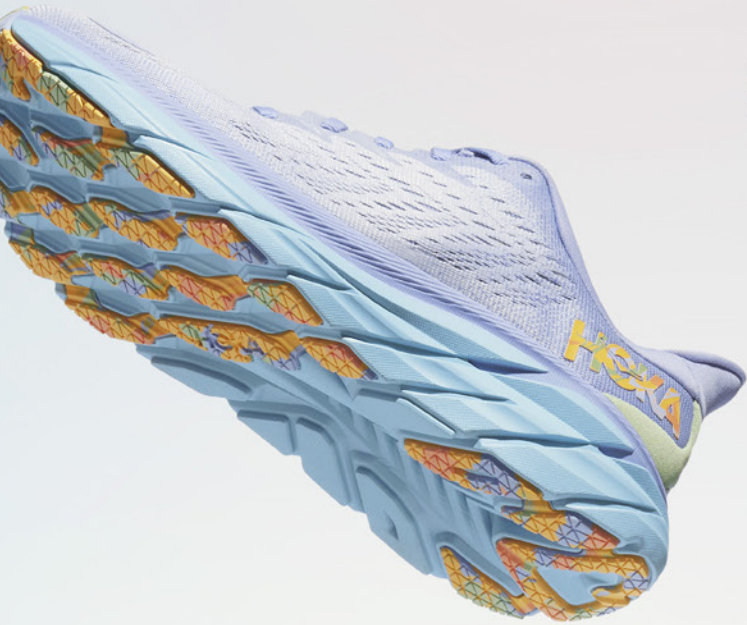
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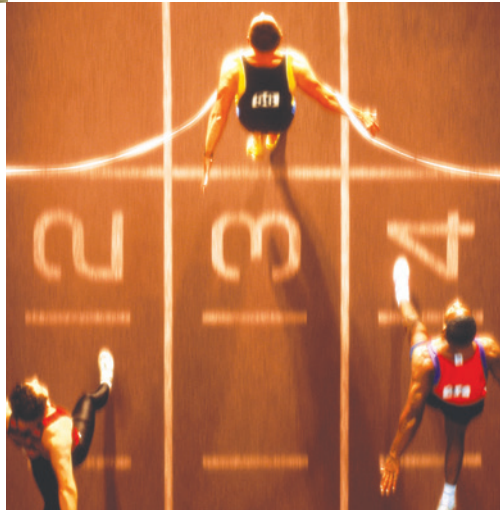
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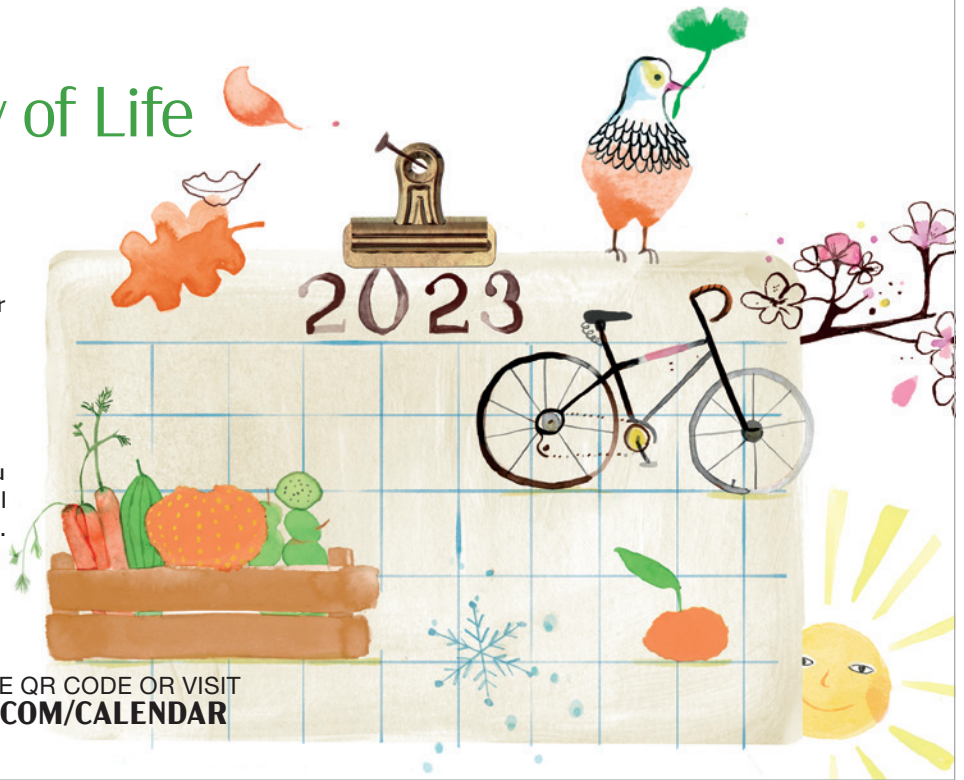
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Your Healthy Way of Life Calendar

The New Year is a good time to take stock of your life. Download this helpful calendar to support your health with reminders and ideas throughout the year — think of it as a mashup of a to-do list and a goal-setting session. Take what you need, leave what you don't, and bring some seasonal organization to the year ahead.



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Gym Bag Bundle



Having the right gear can help you keep your workout routine on track this year. Sign up for your chance to win this bundle — including an eco-friendly gym bag, naturally antibacterial skin mist, whole-food energy bars, and more — at ELmag.com/januarygiveaway.



BEYOND BMI

Why true health is about more than what you weigh. ELmag.com/beyondbmi

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Whether you're considering a dry January or simply looking for a festive drink, you can enjoy healthy twists on some seasonal favorites with these recipes. ELmag.com/wintermocktails



BLACK ALLYSHIP

Observe Black History Month this February by learning about and celebrating African American culture. Here are a few of our favorite ideas to inform and uplift. ELmag.com/ally



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HEALTHY WAY OF LIFE

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Experience Life shares health-and-wellness information and healthy-way-of-life stories that reflect a wide variety of human experience. We respect individuals' pronouns and personal descriptors; for this reason, terms may vary from article to article.



It's in that spirit and in keeping with this issue's theme, 'Begin Again,' that I'm proud to share what's new in these pages for 2023."

YOUR THOUGHTS?

Email us at experiencelife@experiencelife.com.

A Fresh Slate

For more than two decades, the entire *Experience Life* team has met multiple times each year to imagine, plan, and develop the concepts for the magazines that end up in your mailbox. Discussing current healthy-living topics and sometimes even drawing on the real-life experiences of our own family and friends, we've produced hundreds of issues and thousands of articles.

I often describe our process as a well-oiled machine — one that's maintained thanks to the care and attention of an extraordinary team of passionate individuals. Each issue takes about seven months to execute, from ideation to delivery; four issues are in progress at any given time.

You might think this process would get tiresome and repetitive. Yet because of the fresh slate that each issue offers, it almost always feels new and exciting. As we move through each year, we learn and discover new things: what's resonating with you, our readers; what's new and updated in research; what our trusted experts are researching, practicing, and focusing on; and what's trending in the broader culture, as well as in fitness, nutrition, personal development, and more.

Keeping all these elements in mind, we annually revisit the editorial content and visual design of the magazine, much like many of us reflect on our own achievements and ambitions at the New Year. So, it's in that spirit and in keeping with this issue's theme, "Begin Again," that I'm proud to share what's new in these pages for 2023:

- **One Healthy Habit:** This at-a-glance article offers quick tips for consistently embracing one healthy habit each month — and building from there. Additional digital resources delve deeper into the why and how, so you can make sustainable change, one day at a time (see page 20).
- **Expert Answers:** Senior fitness editor Maggie Fazeli Fard gets so many questions about movement and fitness. She's tapping into her own and others' expertise to answer your queries about exercise and its effects. This month's focus: muscle soreness (see page 35).
- **Something Simple:** Healthy cooking doesn't have to be complicated, maintains senior editor Kaelyn Riley. And each featured recipe is proof that with a handful of ingredients and a willingness to try, you can have a tasty, balanced meal on the table in well under an hour (see page 43).
- **Joy Lab:** This evolution of the Natural Mental Health column by integrative psychiatrist Henry Emmons, MD, shares highlights from his latest work — a podcast and program he created with Aimee Prasek, PhD, that's focused on "connecting science and soul to help you uncover your joy" (see page 73).
- **Renewal:** Making a return to our pages after a few years away, this section offers a straightforward take on common sources of stress in our lives, along with strategies for stress management and recovery (see page 74).
- **Natural Healing:** Features editor Courtney Helgoe is at the helm of this new department that covers energy medicine, a branch of complementary and alternative medicine that's often misunderstood and misrepresented but has a growing body of research behind it. She'll explain individual healing modalities in each issue (see page 76).

And finally, I hope you enjoy the striking design updates, cover treatment, and fonts delivered by our amazing art team. Their ability to bring all these stories to life, from the cover to the very last page, ties each issue together beautifully.

As we begin another year, I hope you'll explore the opportunities for updates and change in your own life and work — and make the shifts that feel right and fresh for you. Cheers!

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



NAVIGATING MENOPAUSE

[On "What You Should Know About Menopause," October 2022]

This was an excellent article — and it arrived at a perfect time to share with my daughter as she enters this time in her life. It's important to remember that it's a natural phase. The more you embrace your personal experience, the less disruptive it may feel.

Kathleen M.

I liked this article a lot, but I wonder what is being done to help doctors and other medical professionals to learn more about how to care for women.

My journey has been a long and suffering one. I take melatonin to sleep after years of taking Advil PM and Tylenol PM. I took trazodone for many years during the onset of menopause in my 50s. I weaned myself from that medication at 62, as I retired early from teaching. These medications helped me tremendously.

Karen S.

STUCK WITH SOCIAL ANXIETY

Thank you for this article ("What Is Social Anxiety Disorder?," October 2022). I am the person you describe in the story, and I have suffered from this as long as I can remember. Strangely enough, I have a career in sales, and this disorder affects me every day. I believe there is no cure, however, so I disagree with the writer on that point.

Pam B.

LET'S TAKE A BREAK!

[On "The One-Minute Brain Break," October 2022]

Back in the 1980s at the Honda plant here in Ohio, soft music would play at regular intervals and all employees would do tai chi movements. The Japanese recognized the value of this way back then.

William P.

Great logic, explanation, summary, visuals, and instructions. And you can do this in as little as a minute? Fabulous!

Peter J.

SUPPLEMENTS AND SLEEP

You probably don't need supplements to sleep ("Which Nutrients and Supplements Can Help Me Sleep?," October 2022). Wake up with the sun, get some morning sun, don't consume caffeine much after noon, don't eat late at night, and turn off your blue-light screens a couple hours before bed.

Robert J.

CLEARING UP MISCONCEPTIONS

As a Latina from Central America, I found Anahi Ortiz-Prieto's article very informative and right on ("How to Celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month as an Ally," September 2021). There is such a misconception about our culture. I hope everyone reads this article!

Maria T.

ON HEARING LOSS AND DEMENTIA

Great information ("Is It Time for a New Take on Dementia?," July 2022). I am 71 and have many friends in their 80s who need hearing aids. They have the money for them, but they won't spend it to improve their hearing. I wish there were more information about how to keep our hearing.

Kathy

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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The Link Between Inflammation & Mental Illness



What causes mental illness? Despite centuries of research, the answer remains ambiguous.

Though certain risk factors — stress, trauma, genetics — increase the odds, an understanding of how and why they lead to mental illness in some and not others continues to elude us. Yet some revolutionary (and surprisingly simple) findings are emerging.

By chance, a weight-loss intervention upended perceptions for psychiatrist Christopher Palmer, MD, an assistant professor at Harvard Medical School.

Palmer had been working for years with a patient diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder, a chronic condition that involves debilitating mood and psychotic symptoms. Despite years of medication trials, he still experienced hallucinations, paranoia, and delusions.

The patient also asked for help losing weight; Palmer suggested trying a ketogenic diet, which limits carbohydrates in favor of high-fat foods. He had noticed mood improvement among some patients who adopted the diet.

Sure enough, after a few weeks, his patient reported fewer depressive symptoms. Two months later, he said, “You know those voices I hear all the time? I think they’re going away.”

As his hallucinations subsided, the patient began questioning the paranoid delusions that had left him terrified for decades. He soon moved into his own apartment, enrolled in school, and even performed improv.

Palmer was astounded: How could something as simple as nutrition so dramatically reverse these seemingly intractable diseases? He began wondering whether mental illness is

not a brain disorder that corrupts our system, but a systemic disorder that corrupts the brain.

Inflammation is one of the body’s natural healing responses — but *chronic* inflammation can be deadly. It can occur in response to prolonged exposure to infections or toxic chemicals, or as a result of recurrent acute inflammation or certain autoimmune disorders.

In recent years, researchers have begun considering whether chronic inflammation contributes to psychiatric disorders.

Inflammation affects our mitochondria, which serve as the power plants of our cells and affect regulation of our hormones and neurotransmitters. The brain is highly sensitive to fluctuations in mitochondrial functioning, largely because it uses an outsize proportion of energy. Mitochondrial dysfunction has been linked not only to neurodegenerative disorders such as Alzheimer’s disease but also

to mental illnesses including major depression and bipolar disorder.

Determining whether mitochondrial dysfunction is a cause of mental illness remains complicated: These disorders manifest in far more heterogeneous fashion than their medical counterparts, making isolation of inflammatory biomarkers related to psychiatric dysfunction difficult.

Yet the possible link may be a game-changer, because, unlike our genes or our childhood experiences, mitochondrial functioning is something we can control.

If diet affects inflammation, inflammation affects mitochondria, and mitochondrial functioning affects mental health, a change to the first element of that chain reaction should affect the last.

A ketogenic diet is not the only tool for reducing inflammation and improving mitochondrial functioning. Physical exercise works wonders, while sleep, stress management, and supplements and hormone-replacement therapies can also be effective.

Most likely, a combination will generate the greatest impact. Palmer likens treatment to gardening: A healthy plant requires sun, water, and good soil — not simply one of these things. Therefore, it’s unlikely that any single treatment will ever offer a silver bullet.

— ALEXANDRA SMITH, MA, LPCC

In recent years, researchers have begun considering whether chronic inflammation contributes to psychiatric disorders.

DISCOVER MORE

For a longer version of this article, visit [ELmag.com/mentalillnessinflammation](https://www.elmag.com/mentalillnessinflammation).

Biocultivated Meats: Out of the Lab, Into Your Frying Pan

Lab-grown meat — it may soon be what's for dinner.

Faux meat has gone mainstream in recent years, with the new generation of fermented “genetically engineered yeast” from Impossible Burger, bean-and-rice-based Beyond Meat, and other soy options.

Meat grown in a petri dish may be next. Way back in 2013, Dutch scientist Mark Post, MD, PhD, unveiled the first “test-tube burger” live on TV. Dozens of companies began racing to bring such alt-meat to market.

Government watchdogs are now ready for this fare. In March 2019, the USDA and FDA announced an agreement to jointly oversee “the production of human food products made using animal cell culture technology and derived from the cells of livestock and poultry to ensure that such products brought to market are safe, unadulterated, and truthfully labeled.”

Alt-meat could be in supermarkets soon — and ranchers’ reactions have been predictable. The U.S. Cattlemen’s Association argues that “meat is meat, not a science project.” The group vows to fight use of the term “meat” in labeling, much like the dairy industry has battled producers that use the word “milk” for plant-based products. Monikers such as “clean meat,” “in vitro meat,” and “cultured meat” have been coined.

Proponents believe “bio-artificial meat” could create vast supplies of food to feed the world while eliminating many of the environmental hazards and ethical issues associated with factory farming and slaughtering animals.

Alt-meat is made from muscle stem cells harvested from a live animal, which are then planted in a nutrient-rich liquid base. Multiplying cells grow around a “scaffold” and can then be shaped into patties, nuggets, or steaks. That first burger took five years and more than \$250,000 to create; prototypes started with mouse meat before moving to beef. Still, food critics weren’t wowed, saying it lacked flavor and juiciness, even if the texture was spot-on.

In 2021, an Israeli company announced that its Future Meat would soon be available in a grocery store near you. The firm says its bioreactors are capable of churning out the equivalent of up to 5,000 cell-cultured hamburgers daily and are producing cultivated chicken, pork, beef, and lamb; other companies are developing in vitro seafood and fish.

Future Meat says its products use 99 percent less land and 96 percent less fresh water and emit 80 percent fewer greenhouse gases while providing 100 percent of the nutritional value of traditional meats.

— MICHAEL DREGNI



Antibiotic Aftereffects

Nothing clears up a nasty bacterial infection like a course of antibiotics, but a new study suggests the drugs could also reduce your ability — and willingness — to exercise.

Researchers at the University of California, Riverside (UCR), gave two groups of lab mice a daily dose of antibiotics for 10 days and then checked fecal samples to confirm the loss of gut bacteria. The mice that were bred to be sedentary displayed no change in their behavior, but those bred for running slowed down considerably. The time they spent on the exercise wheel dropped by 21 percent after the antibiotic course and didn’t improve for the next 12 days.

“We believed an animal’s collection of gut bacteria, its microbiome, would affect digestive processes and muscle function, as well as motivation for various behaviors, including exercise,” explains study leader and UCR evolutionary physiologist Theodore Garland Jr., PhD. “Our study reinforces this belief.”

The results of the study, published in the journal *Behavioural Processes*, suggest that the microbiome affects exercise because of its role in transforming carbohydrates into chemicals that trigger muscle performance. “Metabolic end products from bacteria in the gut can be reabsorbed and used as fuel,” Garland notes. “Fewer good bacteria means less available fuel.”

Further research could identify a specific bacteria that improve athletic performance, he adds. “If we can pinpoint the right microbes, there exists the possibility of using them as a therapeutic to help average people exercise more.”

Until then, however, don’t be surprised if you find yourself avoiding the gym once you’ve eradicated that pesky bug with a course of antibiotics. It may not be the aftereffects of your illness that are slowing you down; it may be the pills you took to fight it.

—CRAIG COX

More Exercise = Longer Lifespan

Exercise is essential for a long, healthy life, but we may need to do it more than the government recommends. *A lot* more.

That's the message researchers from Harvard's T. H. Chan School of Public Health convey in a recent study published in the journal *Circulation*. They found that doubling or even quadrupling the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' suggested weekly dose of moderate exercise (150 minutes) or its recommended amount of intense activity (75 minutes) resulted in as much as a 31 percent reduction in the risk of mortality compared with a control group over the course of 30 years.

Tracking the average amount of self-reported physical activity among more than 116,000 participants with an average age of 66 in the Nurses' Health Study and the Health Professionals Follow-up Study, researchers reported some surprising conclusions:

- Participants who met the government's guidelines for vigorous exercise (jogging, running, swimming, bicycling, and other aerobic activity) were less likely to die from cardiovascular disease (a 31 percent risk reduction) than their less aerobic-focused counterparts (25 percent), but they were slightly more likely than the lighter exercisers to die from other causes.

- The same held true for those in each category who doubled or quadrupled the amount of time spent on their chosen workouts. Intense exercisers enjoyed up to a 23 percent lower risk of death from all causes, while moderate movers were up to 31 percent less likely to succumb to all-cause mortality.

- Interestingly, those who exercised more than four times the suggested amount per week did not appear to lower their mortality risk beyond that of those who simply doubled or quadrupled their workout times.

— CC

What Is Medical Gaslighting?

Once an obscure example of emotional abuse featured in the 1944 film *Gaslight*, “gaslighting” has become mainstream parlance. These days, the behavior — manipulating people by trying to undermine their sense of the truth and to sow doubt about their own reality — seems to crop up in everything from politics to the climate crisis and beyond.

A host of recent reports and studies have now directed attention to medical gaslighting. Growing numbers of patients are sharing online personal stories of medical providers dismissing their symptoms as unimportant, psychosomatic, or the manifestations of hypochondria.

Women, people of color, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community are the most likely to have their concerns shrugged off by healthcare workers.

“Some form of diagnostic error occurs in up to one in seven clinical encounters,” according to a 2020 analysis. And between 8 and 15 percent of all U.S. outpatient and hospital admissions are affected by such “missed, wrong, or delayed diagnoses.”

Furthermore, the authors report, “more than 80 percent of diagnostic errors are deemed preventable.” The study does not delve into why this occurs, but it notes that “clinical culture discourages disclosure of diagnostic errors and they are largely neglected within professional training curricula and organizational quality and safety programs.”

Medical gaslighting occurs as a result of “toxic power dynamics” between patients and trained healthcare providers, writes general practitioner Sarah Fraser, MD, CCFP, in *Canadian Family Physician*. She differentiates it from “medical bullying,” which can include public humiliation, threats, or blatant insults.

“Gaslighting,” Fraser states, “has been used by physicians to dismiss women’s health problems, enforcing the misogynist stereotype that women are irrational and ‘hysterical,’ a prejudice that dates back centuries.”

(For more on gaslighting, see ELmag.com/gaslighting.)

— MD



Clinical culture discourages disclosure of diagnostic errors.”



In Awe

A Conversation With Dacher Keltner, PhD

Dacher Keltner, PhD, is a psychologist hunting the greatest and most elusive prize: happiness. How can we get it? How can we keep it? What's the road map, and what's throwing us off the trail?

He's shared his pursuit via his podcast, *The Science of Happiness*; his teaching as a University of California, Berkeley, professor; his work as director of Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center; and his inspiring books, including his latest, *Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life*.

"I grew up in the counterculture of Laurel Canyon in the late 1960s around hippies. At the time, I was often skeptical of all of it, as was my brother Rolf," recalls Keltner. "I realize now, so much of what I had, I wish everyone in our culture could have today: disregard for the rat race, questioning ideas of societal success, highly valuing feminism, civil rights, and the idea that happiness is not what you get from consumerism."

Then, Keltner's own connection to happiness fell apart. His lifelong partner in mischief and joy, Rolf, died of colon cancer, and the happiness researcher found his own happiness replaced by anxiety, grief, and disorientation.

"My brother's death blew me off the map. And I'm a terrible meditator, so the question became *What rewires human nervous systems to happiness?*"

That question led him to research, and he discovered one happiness-making solution: awe.

"If you just think for a moment to the last time you felt real awe — listening to Gregorian chants in an ancient church, watching someone do something so brave it blew your mind, hearing the death rattle of someone you love — you know those are the moments that rewire you.

"We can build awe into our lives intentionally and build up joy, bliss, mirth — all the things we know we want but don't think we know how to get to."

FIND MORE AWE

For a longer version of this interview with Dacher Keltner, see ELmag.com/inawe.

Iggy Pop Is Wellness, Too

"The wellness/mindfulness/happiness industry — it's all about calming your mind, practicing gratitude, finding your purpose. But it can be narrow in the ways you're 'supposed' to do those things: You're supposed to practice quiet meditation; you're not supposed to go to a punk-rock show. Well, that's ridiculous. People are starting to critique our industry for cognitive imperialism, and a lot of that critique is right.

"If Rihanna or another hip-hop artist inspires you with awe, that's wonderful — go into that feeling. For me, Iggy Pop changed my life. The mosh pit, the message of fight and freedom, the whole experience of awe stays with me to this day."

Awe Can Be Culturally — and Even Personally — Specific

Surveying 100 people in each of 26 countries, Keltner and his colleagues found that awe is often culturally specific. In China, more people identified great teachings as awe-inspiring; in the West, it was more often nature. This taught Keltner that awe might be admiring the feats of Michael Jordan or Simone Biles or going to a cathedral to pray and consider the stained glass.

"Awe is something my hero Jane Goodall defined as 'Being amazed at something outside of yourself.' If you want baby-steps to getting more awe in your life, think about what in your past has filled your heart or taken your breath away, and get more of that in your life."

Phones Are Small; Awe Is Big

"Researching, we boiled awe down to what we call eight wonders. And one thing we noticed was, in all our responses, no one said 'my phone.' Instagram makes people competitive and comparative; Facebook curates these moral-outrage bubbles. But something phones all have in common is they're small. Awe is triggered by 'vast.' Look up at the night sky. That's vast. That fills you with awe. Smartphones are tiny and antithetical to that. If you're looking to your phone for transformational awe, good luck."

Plan for Awe

"You don't have to fly to the Taj Mahal to experience awe, though that might also work. You can take an awe walk, just focusing on what brings you awe and wonder, what makes you curious. Is it the little purple flowers? Is it a bird? You can do noticing-nature exercises, like looking at the night sky. You can find music that brings you some awe — Beethoven, Kendrick Lamar, whatever you love. Just sit quietly and listen and think about why it brings you awe. Build some awe breaks into your life." 🎧

— DARA MOSKOWITZ GRUMDAHL





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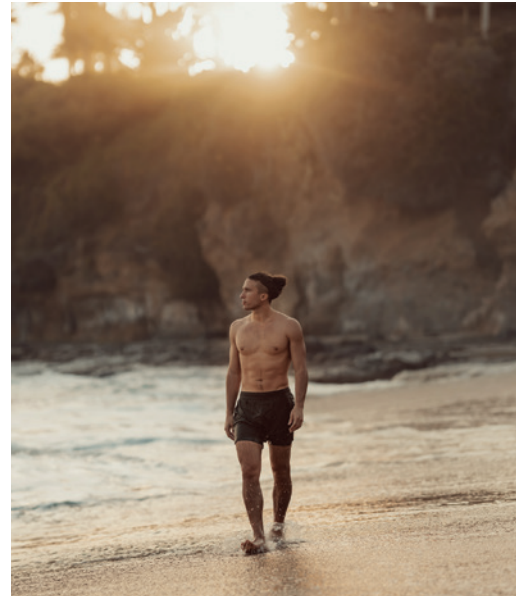
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THE PATH IS THE PRACTICE

Jonah Kest shares insights on the power of yoga
to support, nourish, and transform our lives.



BY **EXPERIENCE LIFE STAFF** ● PHOTOS BY **SHORTSTACHE**

Every breath you take is a new beginning, says yoga teacher Jonah Kest — so, every moment is truly an opportunity to start again, no matter what has happened in the past.

That's an inspiring mantra for this time of year, when many of us are making or renewing commitments to eating well, exercising, and all-around healthier living — and then at times despairing as those resolutions fall by the wayside.

“Another one of my favorite mantras is, ‘Life is the journey, not the destination,’” Kest explains. “What most people don't realize is, the path is the practice. It's so simple and so potent. Everything we experience in life, both pleasant and unpleasant, is an opportunity for us to move toward balance.”

From his own beginnings, Kest has been immersed in yoga. He's a third-generation practitioner: His grandfather Rohm Kest was a Detroit surgeon

who hurt his back and turned to yoga to help himself heal; at the time, it was a kind of far-out thing to do.

Jonah's parents are vinyasa yoga pioneers Jonny and Milla Kest, who founded Detroit's Center for Yoga in 1993. (Since 2011, Jonny has also led Life Time's LifePower Yoga Teacher Training program.)

The young Kest grew up in his parents' yoga studio, observing and eventually learning asanas; then he became a teacher, too.

Beyond teenage dreams of playing in the NBA, yoga has been his central purpose. “It's in my blood, and I've always been naturally drawn to the practice,” he says. “But sharing it changed everything.”

Kest now travels the world teaching yoga classes and leading yoga-teacher training sessions. He's also signed with Nike as one of its first yoga teachers.

Along the way, he's made a significant impact through social

media, where he shares inspirational videos and incredible imagery of himself doing yoga in unique places around the world.

“Poses and postures are simply tools to free the mind,” Kest explains. “Yoga is about treating every part of your body with gentleness. The postures and breath create a bridge to the deepest part of your nervous system. When you're breathing in a difficult pose, you're actually observing the deepest level of your mind.”

“So that's what I'm doing. When I was on top of a waterfall, I had to be in complete tune with my body and breath — or I'd fall. It was a complete rush. And maybe someone saw that and was like, ‘Well, if he can do that, maybe I can be with my breath for a few moments.’ Inspiration is all around us, and social media can be used as a tool in that way.”

We spoke with Kest in between his yoga classes in Miami.

Q&A

WITH JONAH KEST



EXPERIENCE LIFE | What is your favorite time of day?

JONAH KEST | Sunrise, because it reminds us that every day is an opportunity to begin again. This is a beautiful analogy from nature.

Often, when you're going through a challenge, it can seem like your suffering is permanent — like it's never going away or it's never going to stop.

Sometimes you just have to take that extra breath, or just breathe through four more minutes, one more hour, one more day, or one more week. And after thinking it's never going to end, it does, and everything becomes brighter. Your breath is a tool to help you face yourself and deal with stressful thoughts so you can come out smiling on the other side.

This ties back to a beautiful message in yoga of impermanence — the idea that everything is constantly changing. To me, this is one of the biggest teachings in all of yoga, because there's not one thing in this world or in this life that you won't someday have to say goodbye to.

It's one thing to understand impermanence on an intellectual level, but there's a greater depth required to understand it within your own nervous system. When you can really tap into that, you become less attached. You allow the waves of life to flow through you without being swept away.

There's more balance and ease with how you move about life because you know that everything is constantly changing and that nothing does, in fact, last forever. You become more present.

EL | What's another mantra that speaks to you these days?

JK | When my siblings and I were children, my father always reminded us that “things don't happen *to* you; they happen *for* you.” This resonates with me because everyone faces the ups and downs of life.

What helps is if you can look at those things as happening *for* you instead of *to* you. It's then that you can start to see these vulnerable moments as opportunities to grow.

This mantra is powerful because there are two ways you can look at the world: as friendly or unfriendly. And that dictates your entire reality. You can think that the world comes *at* you or that the world comes *from* you.

I think this is a mindset that allows me to breathe through — and get through — a lot of things that happen to me.

EL | In other words, it's like viewing the glass as half empty or half full?

JK | Yes! Yoga allows you to see things from different perspectives.

EL | Tell us about your own yoga practice and how it has evolved.

JK | In the beginning, I thought of yoga as only a physical practice, until I learned another incredible teaching from my father: The yoga student often goes through three stages.

The first is an ego-centered practice: It's physically focused and all about how it looks. People ask, “Am

I doing this right or wrong? Do I look good? Do I look off?”

I was all about getting into the perfect pose, constantly comparing myself with others, competing with others, and trying to win at the “posture race.”

Eventually the ego starts to fall away and people move into a practice where yoga becomes all about the breath. For me, the ego was still there, but I just gave more importance to my breath, and everything else seemed to fade away.

And then the highest level is the heart-centered practice, where every posture is about generating lovingkindness and compassion — those benevolent qualities that we're trying to cultivate in our lives.

EL | And how does your yoga practice feed your life?

JK | Yoga is like an obstacle course where you're practicing all these qualities — patience, equanimity, balance, kindness, softness, gentleness. The goal is to do all these things in real life: You want to *live your yoga*.

So, yoga is a safe way to practice those things in a supportive environment with a teacher and other like-minded people around you.

EL | And if you don't reach your goals or you fall off your commitments?

JK | I'm a lifelong student of self-acceptance. It is daily work. Yoga doesn't want to fix you or change you. It just wants to take care of you. 🧘

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Get Outside Every Day

This year, we're building healthy habits together. Join us by starting with this challenge.

BY **EXPERIENCE LIFE STAFF**

WHY

Spending time in nature is good for our physical and mental well-being. It boosts mood and helps us de-stress. Plus, it strengthens our immunity, encourages healing, and enhances creativity.

HOW

Start with just a few minutes outside to breathe deeply and set intentions. Any time of day works, but early-morning light helps align the body's circadian rhythms for better evening sleep.

TAKE ACTION

Looking for support? Join our challenge! Discover resources and tips — and find our February challenge — at [ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit](https://www.ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit).



9:33

5G



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A Sense of Security

For one man, a childhood dream to serve his community inspired a physical transformation.

Above: Jarron Lucas celebrating his 60day Challenge win in 2022. Inset: At a friend's wedding in 2017.

BY JARRON LUCAS

Be-coming a federal security officer is a dream I've had since I was a kid. Back then, it was sort of a superhero thing — I wanted to catch bad guys! (Plus, I watched pretty much every episode of *Law & Order* with my mom when I was growing up.)

But when I graduated from George Mason University in 2013 with my degree in criminal justice, I didn't feel much like a superhero. I felt out of shape, out of control with my eating, and out of energy.

I've always been tall — I'm six feet four inches — and when I was a kid, basketball was my thing. I played through high school, but during my senior year I got into a bad car accident. I suffered a subdural hematoma and broke the orbital bones around my eye socket. Forget basketball; I couldn't do much of *anything* for about four months while I recovered.

I know now that this was when my health began to spiral out of control. I went from being an active kid who was outside a lot to sitting in front of my computer playing video games

nonstop. I recovered from my injuries and went on to play intramural basketball in college, but playing video games often kept me online all night.

I also pretty much lived on fast food in college. There was a Taco Bell on campus, and you could use your meal plan to eat there. After classes, I'd stop by McDonald's on my way to and from work.

In short, when I graduated college, my body and mind didn't match my goal to be a strong protector. So I set my dream aside and focused on the job I had at a grocery store. I liked the job and worked my way up to being a manager. I don't think I was unhappy, but, looking back, I remember a voice in my head reminding me that I wasn't living the dream I'd imagined.

Dreams Don't Die

In 2017, when I was 25 years old, I was a groomsman in a friend's wedding, and the vest my friend had chosen for his groomsmen didn't come in my size. That meant I had to wear a different vest than the rest of the party. I hadn't realized until then how

heavy I'd gotten, and even now I don't recognize myself in those pictures.

Soon after that wedding, I went on a cruise with my best friend. He was preparing to go into the army, so he was in super-good shape. There we were on the boat, on the beach, at the pool, and the difference between us — in our energy, our bodies, and even our sense of purpose — was just so obvious.

I started thinking again about my dream to go into criminal justice. I needed to be physically strong for the kind of life I wanted, and I was ready to commit. I signed up for a membership at the Centreville, Va., Life Time.

Like a lot of people at the start of a fitness journey, I didn't know what to focus on. I'd show up to the club two or three times a week and do whatever. I mostly did cardio and tried a few of the machines. Finally, I signed up for some workouts with a few different trainers, which is how I met a trainer called Solo.

Solo helped me get strong from the ground up — literally. In our first session I had to bend over from standing, walk my hands out to the top of

a pushup, and then lower myself down to the ground and press back up. Ten of those and I was gassed!

I started going to Solo's Alpha group-training sessions (Alpha is a Life Time training program focused on Olympic-style lifting and metabolic conditioning), where I was motivated not just by him but by a group of super-strong — and super-supportive — athletes.

I also began reducing my fast-food intake and worked on making substitutions for some of the foods I liked to eat at home. For instance, instead of eating ground beef, I started eating more turkey burgers.

I should mention that I'm competitive. I like to challenge myself and win if I can. When I learned about Life Time's 60day Challenge series, I signed up for every one that came along. I liked the idea of competing against a bunch of other people to improve myself.

But it turns out that changing your life isn't as simple as being competitive. For the first few years, I'd sign up for a 60day, get all excited and throw myself into it, then falter partway through. I'd let other people's progress get into my head: If someone lost more weight one week than I did, I'd find fault with myself. If I went to Burger King one day, that voice in my head was mean: *You haven't changed at all. You're still doing the same old things.*

Self-Knowledge Is Power

It's taken time to understand how my body and mind work. I used to go cold turkey on

Jarron and his trainer Solo the day Jarron won the spring 2022 60day Challenge.



habits I wanted to change, like eating fast food, and then I'd throw in the towel when I inevitably lapsed. And I'd set goals without understanding exactly how I could get there.

I decided to approach the spring 2022 60day differently. I set two tiers of goals this time — one big goal (I wanted to achieve a certain percentage of body fat) and a subset of little goals. I've learned it's important to celebrate small wins, so I gave myself a win each day I showed up at the club no matter how my workout went.

For me, tracking what I ate helped, so I set mini goals around that as well. But I stopped tracking things like daily steps and calories burned, which never seemed to match how I felt.

I also stopped comparing myself to my Alpha teammates. They had different goals. I wanted to lose fat, which meant I wasn't as focused on building muscle. When I saw my Alpha teammates getting stronger, I reminded myself to stick with my own plan.

Recovery was huge, too. I tried to hit the steam room a couple of times a week, and I slept a lot! People asked me how I could be so active, and the answer is that I slept eight hours a night. It's cool how that works — working out helps me sleep, and sleeping helps me work out.

Those two months were tough, but by focusing on my small goals and not giving up when I'd slip a little, I hit my big goal and won the spring 60day!

Funny story: I didn't think I would win, because Solo was playing it cool. I remember passing him on my way into the club the morning I found out. Solo was on his phone, and I didn't think anything about it, but he was letting the staff know I was on my way in. There's nothing like walking in and having everyone pop out from behind the desk with balloons and confetti. It was awesome.

The confidence I gained through participating in multiple 60days and making progress on my fitness gave me the boost I needed to finally apply for my dream job — and now I'm getting started in my new role as a federal security officer.

The sense of purpose I was looking for before I started this journey has come to light, and I'm proud to be where I am. I know I have the health and fitness needed to fulfill my mission to protect my community. 📍

Jarron's Top 3 Success Strategies

1

FOCUS ON PROCESS

GOALS. It helps break down the steps you need to take to achieve larger goals and offers lots of chances to celebrate small wins.

2

USE TRACKING IF IT WORKS FOR YOU.

Jarron found tracking his food intake helpful, but he ditched his fitness tracker when it made him feel worse about his workouts.

3

HOLD ON TO YOUR

DREAM. Jarron learned that being competitive wasn't enough. He had to focus on his own goals.

TELL US YOUR STORY!

Have a transformational healthy-living tale of your own? Share it with us at ELmag.com/myturnaround.





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Real Fitness

Page
32

Finding support in the form of a workout buddy or group class is one way to ease the anxiety of gymtimidation.

Discover more strategies for overcoming your nerves, building your confidence, and meeting yourself where you are.



Get Up, Stand Up

The ability to get up off the floor with minimal support is a marker of longevity. Practice these moves to improve flexibility, balance, motor coordination, and muscle power.

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

For many of us, the phrase “physical-fitness test” probably evokes memories of doing an assortment of exercises — pushups, pull-ups, toe touches, a mile run — in school PE. But one test of fitness is often overlooked, especially as we age: the ability to sit down on the floor and stand back up again.

“It seems like a simple-enough challenge: Sit down on the floor and get back up without the help of your arms. The sit-stand test requires you to lower yourself to the floor, crisscross style, without bracing yourself with your hands, knees, or arms,” explains Rob Glick, Life Time senior director of group fitness programming and innovation. “If you can stand back up again without the aid of your arms or hands, you score a perfect 10 — five points for sitting, five points for standing. You lose a point every time you support yourself with your arms.”

Earning a perfect score is harder than it sounds.

Researchers in 1985 and 2014 studies discovered that the ability to sit down and stand up without any help from your hands, knees, or other supports — demonstrating a level of musculoskeletal fitness that requires flexibility, balance, coordination, strength, and power — was linked

to a longer lifespan among the study participants.

“The sit-stand test helps to tell a part of a story that is important to pay attention to,” Glick says. Namely, that full-body strength and mobility can improve physical function and quality of life.

Whether you’re 20 or 40 or 80, it’s not too late to build physical strength and stamina. Glick recommends the following exercises:

- Squatting to a chair or box.
- Core-stability moves, such as plank variations.
- Mobility work that involves internal and external hip rotation.

Remember that the result of the sit-stand test isn’t fate. Rather, consider it a reminder to practice the skill of sitting and standing as well as you can for as long as you can.

“The best way to get better at anything is to keep practicing,” says Glick. “If you are persistent and tenacious, you will see progress quickly and find yourself getting down on the floor and up off the floor with ease.”

GET MORE ON THE MOVES

For full exercise instructions, visit
[ELmag.com/getupstandup](https://www.ELmag.com/getupstandup).

The Moves

EASY SEAT

Sit tall on the floor with your knees wide and legs crossed at the shins.

Hold for 30 seconds, or as long as you can maintain a tall posture. Then switch the cross of your legs and repeat.



90-90 STRETCH

Sit and position your legs in a pinwheel so that your knees and ankles form 90-degree angles.

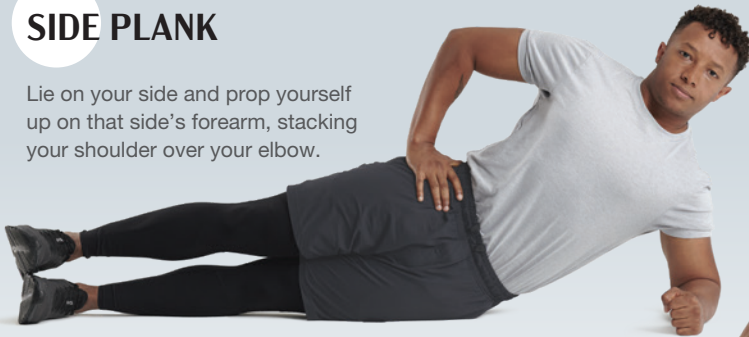
Using the hip muscles of your front leg, draw your front knee down toward the floor. You may notice little movement in your knee, but you will likely feel engagement in your hips.

Hold for 20 seconds to two minutes. Switch sides and repeat.



SIDE PLANK

Lie on your side and prop yourself up on that side's forearm, stacking your shoulder over your elbow.



Press through your base arm and feet and raise your body off the floor. Engage your core and the muscles of your base arm and legs, keeping your hips elevated.

Hold the position for 20 to 30 seconds. Relax, then repeat on your other side.



BOX SQUAT

Holding a kettlebell at chest height in front of a knee-high box, push your butt back and bend at the knees to lower into a squat.



Pause as you sit on the box, but don't relax. Drive through your heels and squeeze your butt to stand.

Perform eight to 12 reps. Over time, use boxes lower in height and keep progressing to sit closer to the floor.

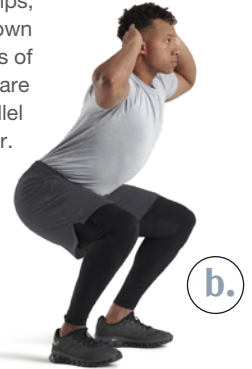


KNEELING GET-UP

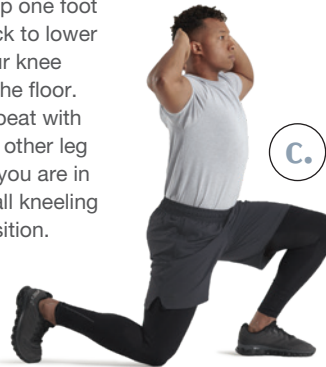
Stand with your hands interlaced behind your head and your feet parallel and slightly wider than shoulder width.



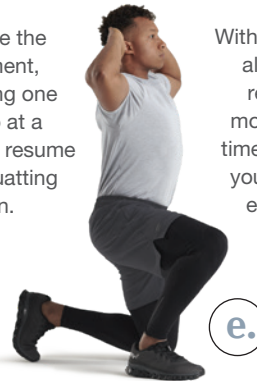
Slowly bend your knees and hips, squatting down until the tops of your thighs are about parallel to the floor.



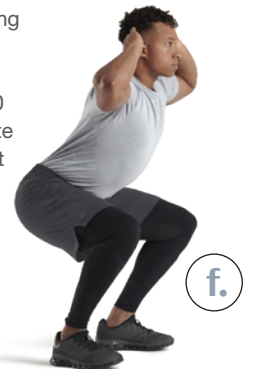
Step one foot back to lower your knee to the floor. Repeat with the other leg so you are in a tall kneeling position.



Reverse the movement, stepping one foot up at a time to resume the squatting position.



Without standing all the way, repeat the movement 20 times. Alternate your lead foot each time.



MORE FITNESS MARKERS TO WATCH

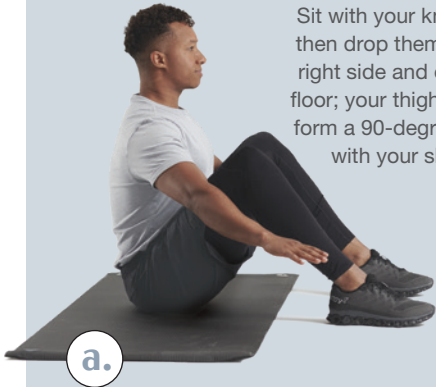
WHILE THE SIT-STAND TEST provides insight for some, it is not the be-all and end-all of fitness — no single test is. Neither is it accessible to everyone.

Thankfully, the ability to sit and stand without support isn't the only health marker researchers are studying. Here are a handful of other fitness attributes that may be relevant for you.

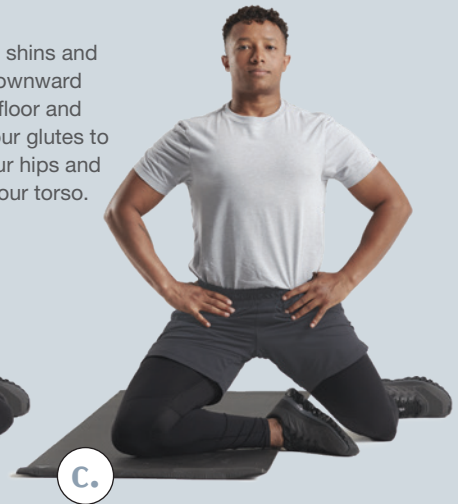
PUSHUP CAPACITY: A 2019 study linked pushup capacity to a lower risk of heart disease. The study, which followed 1,104 middle-aged, active male firefighters over the span of 10 years, found that those who could complete 40 pushups in the baseline exam had a 96 percent lower risk of cardiovascular disease during the 10 years studied than those who could do fewer than 10 pushups. The results may not be generalizable to women or to men of other ages or who are less active, the study authors note. (For a form check on your pushups and tips to build your muscular endurance, check out ELmag.com/pushup.)

SHINBOX GET-UP

Sit with your knees up, then drop them to your right side and onto the floor; your thighs should form a 90-degree angle with your shins.



Push your shins and knees downward into the floor and squeeze your glutes to extend your hips and elevate your torso.



Swing your back foot forward and up to get into a half-kneeling position, and then stand up.



Lunge back and return to the seated position. Repeat for five reps per side.



WALKING SPEED: A 2006 study concluded that regularly walking at a faster-than-average pace reduced the risk of death from cardiovascular disease by 53 percent for people 60 and older. The study also found that just walking at an average pace offered a 46 percent reduction in mortality risk for participants. (For details on refining your full-body walking stride, see ELmag.com/relearntowalk; for a walking workout that adds strength to your speed, visit ELmag.com/walkstrong.)

GRIP STRENGTH: A 2018 study found that an 11-pound decrease in grip strength, as measured by squeezing a hand dynamometer, was associated with a 16 percent (men) and 20 percent (women) increase in mortality from all causes.

No matter which marker you consider, the message from researchers is the same: Move! Moving your body and finding the balance of strength, cardio, mobility, and coordination work that's right for you is critical for aging well. (To learn more about staying fit for life, check out ELmag.com/fitforlife.)

A man with dreadlocks is shown in profile, lifting a heavy barbell. He is wearing a dark t-shirt and a purple wristband. The background is a gym setting with a blurred barbell rack. The text 'TRAINING IS EVERYTHING' is overlaid in large white letters.

TRAINING IS EVERYTHING

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Happy Baby

Open your hips, stretch your inner thighs, and relax with this restorative yoga pose.

Don't raise your head or shoulders. Maintain a neutral position in your spine, tucking your chin slightly and elongating your back onto the mat.

Rock side to side — and consider smiling.

Pull gently on your feet to deepen the stretch, but don't force it.

Keep your ankles flexed and the bottoms of your feet facing the ceiling.

Keep your shins perpendicular to the ceiling as you draw your knees close to your chest.



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

Happy baby — also known by *ananda balasana*, its Sanskrit name — is a restorative yoga pose that gently stretches the hamstrings, inner thighs, and groin while releasing tension in the hips, spine, and lower back. Holding this position, and even rocking back and forth or side to side, is also a great way to relax and simply feel better.

It looks fairly natural — so easy a baby could do it, you might say. All you need to perform the pose is a supportive place to lie back and kick your feet up high enough to grab. But to get the most out of this move, you'll want to be aware of some common pitfalls.

One mistake is trying to force the position. Muscling your way into a deep stretch creates tension.

A set of related issues is the inclination to raise the head, shoulders, or chin, or otherwise move out of a neutral, flat-lying spinal position. Suboptimal alignment can create pain or discomfort, as well as additional tension.

Remember: Happy baby is meant to be relaxing. Make adjustments to help support your body in its best position. That might mean testing different grips on your feet: Try grasping the outsides or insides of your feet; hooking your fingers around just your big toes; or, if you

can't reach your feet, holding your ankles. If reaching your feet while keeping your shoulders down and back flat is difficult, you might also try using a yoga strap, band, or towel instead of your hands.

Once you find a comfortable position, press your feet up while simultaneously pulling down gently with your hands (or strap). Challenge yourself to ground your sacrum more deeply into your mat without throwing off your alignment. You might even try rocking side to side to massage your back muscles.

At this point, a small smile might naturally appear on your face. But as with everything, don't force it.

INSTRUCTIONS

1

Begin by lying flat on your back on a yoga mat. Raise your feet and draw your knees toward your chest, keeping them bent to about 90 degrees so the soles of your feet face the ceiling.

2

Reach up to grasp your feet. You can grab the insides or outsides of your feet or wrap your fingers around your big toes.

3

Allow your knees to fall apart to about shoulder width. Take deep breaths and relax into the pose. Stay there for 30 seconds or as long as you like.

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

Overcoming Gymtimidation

Anxiety about being judged can lead to a fear of exercising in public settings. Try these tips to increase your confidence — and then celebrate what you *can* do.

BY MICHAEL DREGNI



T rue confession: I can't do a somersault to save my life. Never could, maybe never will. Since I was a kid, my attempts at the move have ended up as off-kilter corkscrews that excelled in humor but lacked in grace.

I'm reminded of my somersaulting "prowess" sometimes when I'm working out. I see other exercisers performing feats that are quite amazing. Some lift barbells weighted down with what seems like the equiva-

lent of a small car. Others sprint on treadmills like they're escaping from ravenous tigers. Still others do human flag holds like it's all perfectly normal and natural.

Sometimes this is all a bit . . . shall we say, intimidating. I occasionally feel self-conscious about what I'm doing — and at other times deflated about *not* doing what others seem to be able to do with such ease.

There's a term coined for this feeling: "gymtimidation." Not surpris-

ingly, the feeling's common. A 2019 survey of 2,000 American adults found that half of respondents felt that the idea of working out among other people in a gym environment is daunting. Of 3,140 responders to a 2022 survey, 38 percent said they fear being judged.

In the end, the two surveys concluded that gymtimidation can tip the scales against exercising at all.

"Gym anxiety can be a huge barrier for many people when it comes to

getting in shape and starting a new fitness routine,” explains Life Time personal trainer and Alpha coach Becca Rigg, NASM-CPT. “The gym can feel like a foreign country where people speak a different language. A lot of the equipment can be intimidating if you’ve never used

it before. Sometimes you see other people who look so confident, so fit, so sure of what they’re doing, and it makes you feel even more out of place, like you don’t belong there.”

Rigg herself has faced gymtimidation (for more on her story, see ELmag.com/beccariggpodcast), so she

speaks from the heart when she offers strategies on how to deal with it.

“Remember that most everyone has felt some gymtimidation or anxiety at one point or another,” she says. “The most fit and confident person you see at the gym was a newbie once just like you.”

Finding Your Home in a Fitness Center

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO.

Research health clubs and gyms online, read reviews, and then tour the facility, advises the National Academy of Sports Medicine (NASM). You might prefer a smaller space or a private studio; a gym without mirrors; or a fitness center that caters to specific interests or populations.

START SMALL. At first, try going during off-peak hours. Visit maybe once a week and build up over time. If you’re nervous about the locker room, begin by changing and showering at home. “When it comes to being seen in the locker room, it is truly my experience that no one is ever judgmental or condescending,” says Rigg.

PLAN AHEAD. “Having a plan ahead of time gives you confidence and purpose on the workout floor — but also make sure to have a plan B just in case certain equipment is not available,” she advises. “That way, you know what to do and you won’t get stuck or lost if plan A doesn’t work.”

DISTRACT YOURSELF. I find that bringing my own soundtrack can help me

tune out surrounding noise and concentrate on what I’m doing. And, of course, people all around me are doing the same — reminding me again that it’s not a comparison game. All of this helps me focus on why I’m there.

USE THE BUDDY SYSTEM.

Go with a friend. “Having an appointment with a friend will make it more likely for you to show up because you don’t want to let them down,” Rigg observes. “It will also help you feel less vulnerable to know that there’s somebody else with you. Even if they don’t know what they’re doing, at least you’re both in this together!”

GET SMART ABOUT THE

GEAR. If you’re new to the workout floor, weights and fitness machines can be puzzling — even daunting. “People are afraid of using them the wrong way; they might be nervous that their form isn’t right or that they’re doing a movement wrong,” says Rigg. “So, sign up for an equipment orientation with a personal trainer. Trainers will be happy to show you around and explain what all the equipment is for and how it works.”

SEEK PROFESSIONAL

HELP. In a health club, this means a personal trainer. “Working with a PT can give you confidence that you’re doing the right exercises the right way,” explains Rigg.

“A personal trainer can also help you navigate the gym floor when it’s crowded. They have a good understanding of etiquette, and they know how to pivot when equipment that you wanted to use is not available.”

Or you might wish to start with a class. “Moving and sweating together can be extremely unifying.”

START WHERE YOU ARE.

This concept is key to exercising at any level: It reminds you to avoid comparing yourself with others or lamenting slow progress toward your goals. It’s about self-compassion, which is essential to self-care.

“Let other people inspire you but never intimidate you,” Rigg suggests. “Showing up and starting new habits takes courage and strength.

Be proud of yourself for making this a priority and celebrate every tiny victory along the way.”

There’s a mental aspect to this as well, I realize. I try to accept my feelings of anxiety and nervousness — without letting them

intimidate me or derail my exercising.

That’s easier said than done, of course, but Rigg’s advice is an ideal way to build up to this. “Remember, being there in the gym is exactly what makes you belong there,” she says. “Keep showing up: The more you come, the more it will feel like home.”



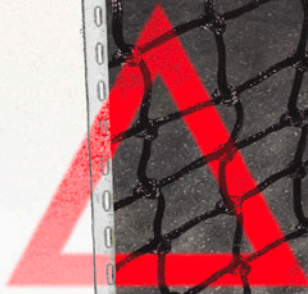
Being there in the gym is exactly what makes you belong there. Keep showing up: The more you come, the more it will feel like home.”

MICHAEL DREGNI is an *Experience Life* deputy editor.



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CLASH V2



“Do sore muscles mean I got a good workout?”

Our fitness editor explains what your muscle soreness is trying to tell you. (Hint: It has nothing to do with the quality of your workout.)

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

This is one of the questions I'm asked most frequently, and no matter how many times I receive the query, I'm happy to repeat myself: No. Plainly, simply, no.

The delayed onset muscle soreness (DOMS) that you experience in the hours or days following a workout tells you nothing about the quality of a workout. Being sore doesn't mean you exercised well — just as not being sore doesn't mean you had a bad workout.

What *does* soreness tell you?

DOMS is a sign that you've damaged your muscles by doing something new or different.

Perhaps you've recently started a new workout regimen. Or you've changed a workout variable, such as volume, weight, intensity, or exercise selection. Either shift could explain the soreness you're experiencing. Both novelty and progressive change have a place within any fitness routine.

There's often a second part to the question of sore muscles: "Should I be worried?"

If you experience DOMS and you can identify the new or different element in your routine, then no, there is nothing to worry about. DOMS causes no permanent damage and, though it is uncomfortable, it won't last forever.

Muscle soreness of this sort typically sets in within 24 hours of a workout, peaks 48 to 72 hours after a workout, and dissipates in a week or less. Such soreness will be short-lived, because your body recovers and adapts to new or changing stressors.

Still, it's important to listen to your body's pain signals and ask yourself if what you're feeling is normal, temporary soreness.

DOMS differs from acute pain that arises during or immediately after a workout, which could signal an injury, such as a muscle pull or strain. It also differs from the muscle fatigue you feel during and immediately after a workout, which typically subsides quickly with rest.

And DOMS differs, too, from *chronic* soreness, which can be a sign that you're mixing up the elements of your workouts too much, too often; working out too frequently without any active rest days; or skipping on other critical recovery efforts like sleep, nutrition, hydration, and stress management.

To determine what your soreness is trying to tell you, ask yourself these questions:

- *Did I start a new workout routine or change some element of my existing routine?*
- *How long after working out did the soreness set in, and how long has it lasted?*
- *Has the soreness lasted for more than a week? If so, what does my recovery routine look like?*

Now you might be wondering: If soreness isn't a good measure of the quality of a workout, then what is?

Well, I'm glad you asked! Having a clear intention and setting measurable goals — for your training in general and before each workout — can be a great way to gauge the efficacy of your regimen in the moment and over time.

A personal example: My long-term strength-training goal is to build and maintain muscle mass. My goals for each workout are to practice good form, to stay alert to any modifications or exercise variations my body might need that day, and to be curious about ways that I can challenge myself.

I hope you notice that soreness doesn't come into play as a goal.

All that said, sometimes I do get sore. And in some of those instances, I get the same rush that many exercisers experience: the feeling that this sensation of soreness is good and will get me closer to the "perfect" physique. "Pain is weakness leaving the body" — this myth is so conditioned in us. And even though I know better, I understand its appeal.

In these moments when I'm inspired to chase soreness, I double down on my recovery, make sure to stay consistent with the habits I know from experience are good for me, and remind myself that sensation is not activation. The sensations of pain, of soreness, of supreme discomfort are not the same as achieving a new level of fitness.

In other words, deal with the soreness if and when it comes — but whatever you do, don't chase it.



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

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Real Food



If your efforts to cook your own meals and eat well are stressing you out, try these easy, accessible, and nutritious dinnertime recipes from Danielle Walker's latest book, *Healthy in a Hurry*.

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Find Walker's recipe for this grain-free, dairy-free Mac and Cheese at ELmag.com/healthyinahurry.

Celebrate Citrus!

Why these bright, succulent fruits are so beneficial — and how to enjoy them in good health.

BY CAMILLE BERRY

The zeal for low-carb eating has had some unfortunate side effects. Chief among them is the sidelining of fruits (and even some vegetables) for their sugar content, even though those foods have much to offer in terms of flavor and phytonutrients. Citrus fruits, which have been sustaining humans for centuries, deserve better than that.

Citrus plants are part of the rue family *Rutaceae*. Fossil records dating to the late Miocene period indicate that the ancestor of our modern citruses once grew along the subtropical slopes of Yunnan Province in China.

Sometime about 6 to 8 million years ago, a major shift in the climate not only began the spread of citrus fruits beyond Southeast Asia but also produced an explosion of new species. Still in existence and cultivated, the citrus fruits citron, pomelo, mandarin, and micrantha are the ancestors of nearly all of the tart-sweet, zesty spheres we enjoy today.

Citrus fruits are a fixture in recipes across almost every continent, thanks to the bright lift they bring to dishes and the essential nutrients they provide. With their low sugar levels, high fiber, and huge array of nutrients — including vitamin C, B vitamins, and minerals such as copper, phosphorus, magnesium, and potassium — citruses have earned a place on our plates. (Though perhaps not filling our glasses: Orange and grapefruit juices, with their high sugar content and lack of stabilizing fiber, are still best limited.)

One of the most important nutrients citrus fruits provide in abundance is vitamin C. “Vitamin C is an antioxidant that protects our cells against damage from free radicals, otherwise known as oxidative stress,” explains Cindi Lockhart, RDN, LD, IFNCP. “Oxidative stress is like cutting an apple and leaving it out — it browns; that’s what happens at our cellular level.”

Oxidative stress can trigger inflammation, which drives all chronic disease and dysfunction, she says. But vitamin C helps to neutralize it.

And that’s not all it does. “Vitamin C helps defend against viruses, bacteria, and pathogens,” Lockhart explains. “And it is necessary to make collagen, which we need to build and maintain healthy bones, joints, and skin.”

The body can’t make vitamin C on its own, so including more citrus in your diet is one easy way to ensure you’re getting adequate amounts of this key nutrient. (For more, see “The Necessity of Vitamin C” on page 41.)

Whether enjoyed as a handful of tiny tangerines for a snack or grapefruit sections in a salad, citrus also helps you meet your fiber needs and reap the benefits of dozens of antioxidants. There are nearly endless healthy ways to enjoy these nutrient-dense fruits — these are just a few of them.





Lemon

Nutrient content per lemon

Fiber: 2.35 g

Sugar: 2 g

Vitamin C: 44.5 mg

Lemon is one of the most versatile citrus fruits: The juice brightens up savory foods and balances sweet ones.

Lemons also have a long history in folk medicine. The traditional Italian remedy *canarino* (so named for its canary-yellow hue) is made by boiling lemon peels in hot water; it's used as a digestive aid and cold remedy.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, lemons (and limes) were instrumental in keeping scurvy at bay for mariners at sea. With their sturdy peels, lemons could stay fresh onboard for weeks at a time.

While lemons are not particularly palatable eaten whole, the juice from one lemon offers about a quarter or more of the daily requirement for vitamin C. The fruit also contains abundant flavonoids that boast powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects, and the citrate in lemons may even help prevent the formation of kidney stones.

One thing to note: The acidity in lemon juice can wear down tooth enamel over time, so dilution is important.

TRY THIS:

- “Squeeze fresh lemon into your water or herbal tea,” suggests Lockhart. A glass of water with lemon first thing in the morning may also help stimulate liver function.
- Mix up homemade lemonade with fresh lemon juice, water, and maple syrup.
- Make a cough-soothing toddy with hot water, lemon, ginger, and honey.
- Liven up marinades and salad dressings with the juice and the zest.
- Add lemon zest to vegetables before roasting.
- Spritz lemon over cooked vegetables or any dish that needs a little life.
- Tenderize meat — the acidity of lemon juice makes it a natural meat tenderizer.

Lime

Nutrient content per lime

Fiber: 1.9 g

Sugar: 1.1 g

Vitamin C: 29 mg

Although lemons are the standard citrus for European and Mediterranean cooking, lime is quintessential to South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Latin American cooking. The bright sour flavor and subtle sweetness complement the fragrant spices and herbs common in these cuisines. Lime's popularity in these regions is likely due to the fact that the fruit thrives in tropical climates.

Limes are both sweeter and more acidic than lemons. Persian limes and Key (Mexican) limes are the most widely grown worldwide; makrut limes are the next most common.

Flavonoids like quercetin, kaempferol, and tangeretin are all found in the juice, peel, and pulp of limes. Like other citrus fruits, they also contain hesperidin, an antioxidant with neuroprotective properties.

All these phytonutrients are antioxidants, which means limes can help support your immune system and safeguard against inflammatory disease.

One important tidbit to keep in mind the next time you're squeezing limes: The compound furanocoumarin can cause phytophotodermatitis (a.k.a. “margarita burn”) if you go out into the sun with lime juice on your skin. Take care to wash your hands if you get any juice on your skin, especially if you're heading outdoors.

TRY THIS:

- Spritz lime juice over homemade curries garnished with cilantro or lemongrass; the citrusy flavors in these herbs perfectly complement lime.
- Add lime to guacamole or avocado salad to cut through the avocado's creaminess and help prevent browning.
- Season black beans with cumin and garlic and toss with juice and zest.
- Squirt lime on Caribbean meals, such as stewed or jerk fish, or on other seafood.
- Dollop a spoonful or so of Indian lime pickle (*nimbu ka achar*) over biryani or pulao to add a spicy, tangy, complex layer of flavor.
- Keep things simple with homemade limeade.



Orange

Nutrient content per orange

Fiber: 2.8 g

Sugar: 12 g

Vitamin C: 83 mg

The word “orange” has passed down to us from *nāraṅga*, the Sanskrit word for “orange tree.” Experts believe sweet oranges first appeared in the humid Indian forests that run along the foothills of the Himalayas or perhaps farther east in China. It’s no surprise so many orange varieties come from these regions.

Today’s oranges are a hybrid originally created by crossing pomelo with mandarin, and there are a lot of orange varieties out there. Tangerines, clementines, satsumas, blood oranges, Cara Cara, and Valencia are readily available in supermarkets.

Pure mandarins are one of the original citrus fruits; they’re the progenitor of oranges, not a subtype.

Carotenoids give the fruit their orange color, while the sanguine hue of blood oranges comes from anthocyanins, the same phenolic compounds that give red grapes, pomegranates, and red cabbage their concentrated hues and offer anticancer, anti-inflammatory, and antidiabetic health benefits.

Just one large navel orange satisfies more than 90 percent of your daily vitamin C needs.

In fact, the benefits of *eating* oranges significantly outweigh those of drinking the juice. One 8-ounce glass of OJ contains about 16 grams of sugar (an orange has 12), and none of the fiber.

Although oranges have more sugars compared with other citrus, their fiber and low glycemic-index count help prevent blood-sugar spikes. So does combining oranges with other foods or eating them for dessert.

“Having [citrus] as part of a meal reduces the risk [of blood-sugar spikes], and so having protein and fat prior to the citrus would also reduce the risk,” says functional-medicine physician Terry Wahls, MD, author of *The Wahls Protocol*.

TRY THIS:

- Chop oranges into homemade salsa with other citrus and onions.
- Enjoy them in leafy-green salads or hearty whole-grain bowls, where the combined fiber will help control blood-sugar levels.
- Use the juice to make glazes and marinades for meats and root vegetables (such as sweet potatoes) rather than drinking it.
- Save those peels! Use them to infuse olive oil; dry them and use for teas; add them to soups, stews, or stocks; or mix them into marinades. Dried orange peels add a lovely bitterness that rounds out a variety of dishes.



Grapefruit

Nutrient content per grapefruit

Fiber: 2.8 g

Sugar: 17.9 g

Vitamin C: 88 mg

Ranging across a spectrum from yellowish-white to the palest of pinks to rich salmon reds, grapefruits are a hybrid that appeared on the scene relatively recently, sometime around the 17th or 18th century, in Barbados. Although most orange subtypes are the product of deliberate crossing, the grapefruit is likely a wild crossing, a happy accident of nature and the haphazard planting of citrus trees in the West Indies.

Sweet, tart, and a little bitter, grapefruits are refreshing on their own, and they live up a range of dishes. Red and pink varieties contain carotenoids including beta-carotene, lycopene, lutein, and zeaxanthin. These not only give the fruits their intense color but also support eye health and protect the body from free radicals.

Along with certain orange cultivars like Seville oranges and pomelos, grapefruits contain furanocoumarins. But beware: In grapefruits, concentrations are high enough to disrupt the function of certain drugs. If you've ever seen the words "Do not take with grapefruit" on a medication label, this is because of furanocoumarins.

"Furanocoumarins block an enzyme produced by the liver and intestines to break down certain medications in the body," Lockhart explains. "This results in the body absorbing more medication than it should," which increases the risk of overdose and adverse side effects.

That's really the only situation in which grapefruit is best avoided. The myriad benefits of these nutrient-dense fruits can be enjoyed several ways.

TRY THIS:

- Slice in half crosswise, segment, and scoop out with a spoon, or peel, separate into segments, and eat it as you would an orange.
- Roast grapefruit to caramelize the sugars and highlight the fruit's sweetness.
- Add grapefruit to salads with avocado; they'll complement the avocado's creaminess.
- Include grapefruit in quinoa bowls or your morning oatmeal — the extra fiber may help moderate your insulin response to the grains.
- Add grapefruit to Greek yogurt, chia-seed pudding, or homemade granola for a hearty breakfast.
- Save and dry those peels! A little grapefruit peel adds a citrusy pop to virtually any dish.



The Necessity of Vitamin C

Vitamins A and D are fat soluble and can be stored in our bodies until they're needed. Vitamin C is water soluble, and so we require a daily dose in our diets to stay healthy.

Present in everything from citrus to bell peppers, kiwis, and strawberries, vitamin C plays a critical role in the health of blood vessels, muscles, bones, cartilage, and collagen. In this latter capacity, vitamin C — consumed or applied topically — helps with wound healing and overall skin health.

Also known as ascorbic acid, this antioxidant helps boost the immune system and reduce oxidative stress, thanks to its anti-inflammatory properties.

The recommended daily amount of vitamin C is 75 mg for women, 85 mg for pregnant women, and 120 mg for women who are breastfeeding; men should aim to get about 90 mg per day. 🍊

CAMILLE BERRY is a wine and food writer based in San Francisco.



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Baked Veggie Tostadas

This recipe calls for cooking all the ingredients on two sheet pans, so cleanup is a breeze.

BY **MADDIE AUGUSTIN**

Makes three servings (two tostadas each)

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 20 minutes



2/3 cup shredded cabbage



Sea salt, to taste



2 bell peppers, thinly sliced



1/4 large red onion, thinly sliced



2/3 cup corn (fresh, frozen, or canned)



3 tbs. avocado oil, divided



1 tsp. chili powder



1 15-oz. can black beans, rinsed and drained



6 corn tortillas



1 medium avocado, peeled and cubed



MACRO MAGIC

This dish offers everything you want in a weeknight meal, including a balance of macronutrients: protein from the beans, healthy fat from the avocado, and carbohydrates from the variety of colorful veggies.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F and line two baking sheets with foil.

Place the shredded cabbage in a strainer and add a pinch of sea salt. Lightly massage the cabbage to distribute the sea salt, and set over the sink to drain.

On one of the baking sheets, toss the bell peppers, red onion, and corn with a tablespoon of avocado oil. Sprinkle with the chili powder and a pinch of sea salt, and toss again. Bake for 18 to 20 minutes, or until the veggies are tender.

Meanwhile, add the beans to a small bowl with a pinch of sea salt and mash with a fork to make a mostly smooth paste.

While the vegetables are baking, lightly brush the tortillas with oil

on both sides and sprinkle with a small pinch of sea salt. Arrange them in a single layer on the second baking sheet.

When the vegetables have 10 to 12 minutes remaining, remove from the oven and place the bean mash in a mound next to the veggies. Place both sheet pans in the oven and bake until the beans are warmed through and the tortillas are toasted and crisp; flip the tortillas halfway through.

Remove from the oven and assemble the tostadas: Spread the beans over the tortillas, top with the vegetable mixture, and garnish with shredded cabbage and cubed avocado. Serve with hot sauce, cotija cheese, and fresh lime juice if desired.

20 Clever Kitchen Tricks

Cooking needn't feel like a chore. Try these tips to save time, money, and resources.



BY **KAELYN RILEY**

Cooking at home more often is a New Year's resolution worth keeping. Your homemade meals will be cheaper and healthier than take-out, you can try your hand at new techniques to stretch your skills, and you can feel confident that you're addressing food allergies or sensitivities. And that's all while performing a caring act of service for yourself and your loved ones.

Still, if you're an aspiring home cook who's not used to spending much time in the kitchen, the struggle can be real. Everything seems to take longer than you expect. Maybe you don't have all the right ingredients. Wow, onions really *do* make you cry. Do you truly have to peel ginger before you grate it? (Spoiler alert: Nope.)

At-home cooking doesn't have to be stressful or intimidating. Try some of these tips and tricks to make your kitchen work for you.

Waste Not

- 1. Just eat the peels!** When it comes to organic produce, peels are often where you'll find most of the nutrients. Plenty of peels are edible, even if they might not seem like it (looking at you, ginger). One major exception: Tropical fruits such as pineapple, mango, and papaya have thick peels that are tough to digest.
- 2. Save your pickle or olive brine** and use it to add a touch of acid to any recipe.
- 3. Always reserve some pasta water.** Adding a splash of pasta water to the sauce is the best way to help it bind to the noodles.
- 4. When you rinse rice** in a bowl of water to remove the excess starch, don't pour the water down the drain. You can save it to wash your hair or your face. It contains trace amounts of vitamins and minerals that encourage hair growth and soothe your skin. Or use it to water your houseplants, which might enjoy the extra starch. Just monitor them carefully, as rice water can also feed harmful soil bacteria.
- 5. Regrow veggies from scraps.** If you save the root end of your green onions, celery, cabbage, or lettuce, you can grow a new plant from the scrap. Put the root in a jar of water and place it in a sunny window. Change the water daily and monitor it until new leaves or roots appear. You can harvest green onions directly from the jar, but larger plants will need to be transplanted into a larger container or in your garden.
- 6. Save leftover pulp** from your homemade juice or nut milk and use it to add a boost of fiber to baked goods or smoothies. (Get our tips for using nut pulp at ELmag.com/nutpulp. Never made your own nut milk? Give it a shot with our template at ELmag.com/scratchrecipes.)



Freezer Fun

7. Keep a bag of veggie scraps in the freezer. Every time you peel a carrot or chop the top from an onion, add the scraps to the bag. Once you've amassed several cups of scraps, use them to make your own broth.

8. When you finish a block of Parmesan or other hard cheese, freeze the rind. The next time you make soup or stew, add the rind to the pot while it simmers to infuse the flavors of the cheese throughout the dish. Some rinds simply dissolve in the broth — if yours doesn't, fish it out before serving.

9. Have leftover broth or wine? Freeze it in ice-cube trays to make

quick flavor boosters for your favorite recipes. You can also do this with coconut milk, tomato paste, and even citrus juice. Use any wine cubes toward the beginning of cooking a dish so the alcohol has a chance to burn off.

10. If you love fresh herbs but hate when they wilt in your fridge, simply chop them up, place them in an ice-cube tray, and cover them with olive oil. Your frozen herb cubes are perfect for adding to soups, stews, roasts, and braises — or melting over roasted veggies or mashed potatoes.

11. Rescue your greens. Tired of racing against time to cook leafy

greens before they go bad? Try blanching the leaves in boiling water, then cool, chop, and squeeze out the excess moisture. Freeze greens in quarter-cup portions on a baking sheet until solid and transfer them to a resealable bag or container. Add to scrambles, stir-fries, or soups for an easy nutrient boost.

12. Label, label, label. You may think you'll remember the block of Bolognese sauce you made in March or the container of chicken curry you stashed near the back of the freezer last week, but you likely won't, and a simple label can save the day. Include the name of the dish and the date you froze it, and plan to use it within a few months.

Better Baking

13. Measure oily ingredients first, especially before sticky ones like honey or maple syrup. The oil residue will help anything else slide right out of the measuring cup or spoon.

14. Crack eggs on a flat surface, not on the rim of your mixing bowl, which can leave errant bits of broken shell in your dish. And use your fingertip to scrape out the last of the egg white from the shell. It may not seem like much, but if you're making a frittata with 10 eggs, those whites add up.

15. Use a scale. It's a much more accurate measurement

tool than cups and spoons. Plus, you might find that you use fewer dishes by measuring dry ingredients into the same bowl on the scale.

16. If a recipe calls for a room-temperature ingredient, follow that order. Room-temperature ingredients mix together with ease, but cold butter won't cream with sugar, and cold eggs can break the emulsion in a cake batter or sauce. You can bring eggs to room temperature quickly by submerging them in a bowl of warm (not boiling) water.

17. Forgot to soften butter ahead of time? You can try microwaving it at short intervals, but that often leads to a partially melted mess rather than the pliable room-temperature state you need for many baking projects. Try this instead: Fill a tall glass with boiling water, then let it sit for five minutes to heat the glass. Pour out the water and invert the glass over cold sticks of butter on your countertop. Check your butter after 10 minutes; the sticks should be just warm enough for your baking needs.

Knife Skills

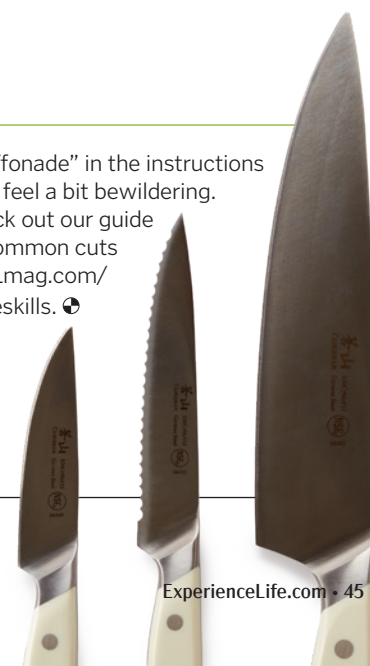
18. Stay sharp. It may seem counter-intuitive, but a sharp knife is safer than a dull one — it's easier to control and less likely to slip. Plus, a sharp blade means faster prep and a more enjoyable time in the kitchen. (Get our knife-honing tips at ELmag.com/honeknife.)

19. Safety first. Always cut on a stable cutting board and keep your eyes on the knife. Hold the ingredient

in your nondominant hand with your fingers curled under, so they're parallel to the blade — this reduces the odds that you'll slice your fingertip instead of the carrot. You can also wear a cutting glove, which will protect your hand in case the knife slips.

20. Master the basics. If you're not used to recipe jargon, reading terms like "julienne" and

"chiffonade" in the instructions may feel a bit bewildering. Check out our guide to common cuts at ELmag.com/knifeskills.



Healthy in a Hurry

Best-selling author Danielle Walker's latest cookbook is full of fast, approachable recipes to help you eat well with less stress.



Having avoided grain and gluten for more than a decade, Danielle Walker knows the power of healthy, nutritious food. It's what led her to write her best-selling cookbooks, including *Against All Grain* and *Eat What You Love*.

She also knows that to feel her best, she needs to balance her time in the kitchen with other priorities, like rest, exercise, and mindfulness. That's what inspired her latest book, *Healthy in a Hurry*, her fourth *New York Times* bestseller. In it, she shares some of her favorite recipes for busy times, plus tips for organizing and meal prepping, and other shortcuts to make cooking easier without compromising quality.

"Spending hours in the kitchen in an attempt to eat healthy can sometimes just add to the stress," Walker writes. "I wrote this book to achieve the former (healthy eating!) and avoid the latter (kitchen stress)."

Try one of these recipes from *Healthy in a Hurry* the next time you need a quick, nutritious meal.

— KAELYN RILEY





Shrimp Scampi

Makes four to six servings

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 25 minutes

- 1 medium spaghetti squash, about 3 lbs.
- 3 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tsp. fine sea salt, plus more to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- ½ tsp. garlic powder
- 5 tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 3 tbs. ghee
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- ¼ to ½ teaspoon red-pepper flakes
- 2 lbs. large shrimp, peeled and deveined with the tails on
- Finely grated zest and juice of ½ lemon

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees F. Line a sheet pan with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat.

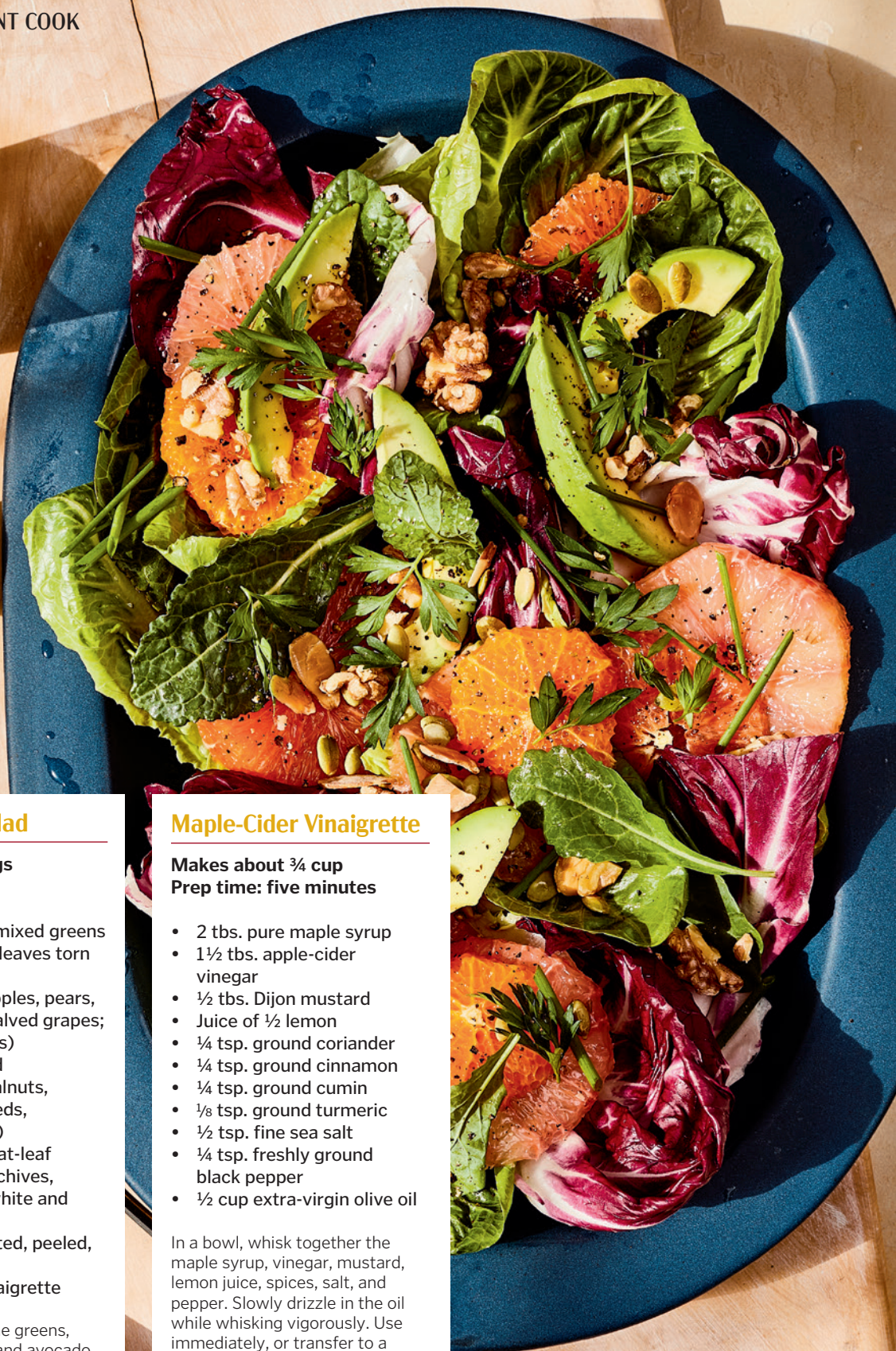
Slice both ends off the squash and cut the squash crosswise into four or five rounds. Scoop out the seeds from the center of each round. Coat the rounds on both sides with 1 tablespoon of the oil, sprinkle both sides with ½ teaspoon salt, and arrange in a single layer on the prepared sheet pan. Bake the squash for 20 to 25 minutes, until fork-tender. Let cool, then use a fork to pull the flesh into noodlelike strands away from the squash rounds, leaving the “noodles” on the sheet pan and discarding the skins.

Toss the squash noodles with any oil remaining in the pan, ½ teaspoon salt, the garlic powder, and 2 tablespoons of the parsley. Turn off the oven and return the noodles to the oven to keep warm.

In a large skillet, heat the ghee and the remaining 2 tablespoons oil over medium heat. Add the minced garlic and sauté for about one minute, until fragrant. Add wine, the remaining 1 teaspoon salt, and the red-pepper flakes to taste. Raise the heat to medium-high. Bring to a simmer and simmer for about two minutes, until the wine is reduced by half.

Add the shrimp and sauté for two to three minutes, until they just turn pink and curl slightly. Stir in the remaining 3 tablespoons of parsley and lemon juice and zest. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

To serve, divide the noodles among individual plates and top with the shrimp.



California Dinner Salad

Makes four to six servings
Prep time: 15 minutes

- 8 cups loosely packed mixed greens
- 1 small head radicchio, leaves torn into bite-sized pieces
- 1½ cups fruit (sliced apples, pears, oranges, and/or figs; halved grapes; or clementine segments)
- ½ cup toasted nuts and seeds (lightly salted walnuts, almonds, sunflower seeds, pepitas, and/or pecans)
- ¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, basil, cilantro, chives, and/or green onions (white and green parts)
- 2 avocados, halved, pitted, peeled, and sliced
- ¼ cup Maple-Cider Vinaigrette

In a large salad bowl, layer the greens, fruit, nuts and seeds, herbs, and avocado. Toss gently to combine. Drizzle with the vinaigrette and toss again to coat. Serve immediately.

Maple-Cider Vinaigrette

Makes about ¾ cup
Prep time: five minutes

- 2 tbs. pure maple syrup
- 1½ tbs. apple-cider vinegar
- ½ tbs. Dijon mustard
- Juice of ½ lemon
- ¼ tsp. ground coriander
- ¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
- ¼ tsp. ground cumin
- ⅛ tsp. ground turmeric
- ½ tsp. fine sea salt
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

In a bowl, whisk together the maple syrup, vinegar, mustard, lemon juice, spices, salt, and pepper. Slowly drizzle in the oil while whisking vigorously. Use immediately, or transfer to a jar, cap tightly, and store in the fridge for up to three weeks. Shake well before using.

Lemon-Caper Chicken and Cauliflower Rice

Makes four to six servings

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 10 minutes

- 2 tbs. ghee or avocado oil
- 2 lb. boneless, skinless chicken breasts, diced
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. fine sea salt, plus more to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 4 cloves garlic, diced
- 1 shallot, diced
- 2 tsp. dried parsley
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 12-oz. package frozen cauliflower rice
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup chicken bone broth
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup full-fat coconut cream
- 1 tbs. arrowroot powder
- Finely grated zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 1 bunch lacinato (Tuscan) kale, stems and ribs removed and leaves torn into bite-sized pieces
- 2 tbs. drained capers
- 2 tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

In a large skillet, melt the ghee over high heat. Season the chicken generously with salt and pepper, add to the pan, and cook, stirring occasionally, for two to three minutes, until well browned on all sides.

Turn down the heat to medium-high, add the garlic, shallot, dried parsley, and oregano, and cook, stirring occasionally, for three to five minutes more, until the shallots begin to soften. Add the cauliflower rice and $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt and cook, stirring often, for two to three minutes, until the cauliflower has thawed and is slightly browned. Pour in the broth and stir to release any browned bits from the bottom of the pan.

In a small bowl, whisk together the coconut cream, arrowroot, and lemon juice. Pour the mixture into the skillet and let it come to a boil. Turn the heat down to medium-low and simmer for three to five minutes, until the rice has soaked up most of the liquid. Stir in the kale and capers and season to taste with salt and pepper.

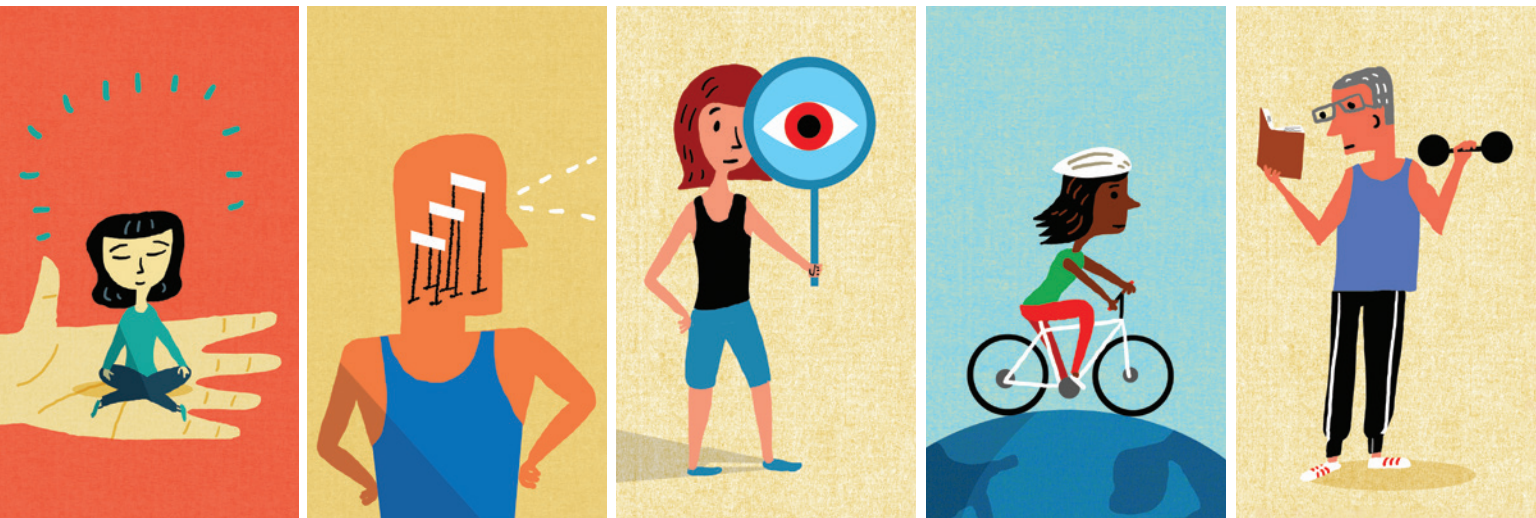
Remove from the heat and serve immediately, sprinkled with the lemon zest and fresh parsley. 🍴



ENJOY MORE

Find Danielle Walker's recipe for grain-free, dairy-free Mac and Cheese at [ELmag.com/healthyinahurry](https://www.ELmag.com/healthyinahurry).

From the book **DANIELLE WALKER'S HEALTHY IN A HURRY: Real Life. Real Food. Real Fast.** by Danielle Walker. Copyright © 2022 by Simple Writing Holdings, LLC. Photographs copyright © 2022 by Aubrie Pick. Published by Ten Speed Press, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House, LLC.



The Enneagram of Fitness

Harness your personality's basic instincts to build a sustainable, effective exercise routine you love.

BY LAUREN BEDOSKY

The best-laid fitness plan may come to nothing if it doesn't truly suit your personality. And sometimes understanding the motivations behind what you like and what you'll stick with can be tough.

Welcome to the Enneagram, a tool that synthesizes the wisdom of several spiritual traditions. It can help you maximize your inherent strengths, comprehend your weaknesses, and discover the activities and circumstances that can help you thrive.

In short, the Enneagram may be just the sort of personal trainer you've been looking for.

"What makes the Enneagram different from other personality tests is that it's not about your behaviors, so it's not that you're outgoing or shy," says Ashton Whitmoyer-Ober, author of *The Enneagram Made Simple*. "It's about your motivations behind those behaviors."

Ennéa is Greek for nine; "gram" is a figure or something written. The Enneagram includes nine basic personalities, each having its own traits,

fears, and desires. (For more on the system's background, see ELmag.com/enneagram.)

"The Enneagram is a great, in-depth way to learn more about yourself so that you can figure out how to make your personality traits work for you," says Life Time personal trainer Lindsay Ogden, CPT.

Understanding her Enneagram type — predominantly type 1 — helped Ogden better plan her workout routine.

Type 1s love organization and are often perfectionists, she explains. "Knowing this, I've hired coaches to write programs to help me get organized, while tracking allows me to see progress."

"If fitness is driven by motivation, you can relate what motivates or doesn't motivate you to your fitness

activities," says Whitmoyer-Ober, who is a type 2, the Helper or Giver.

Yet there are also benefits to stepping outside your comfort zone — that's how and where growth happens.

"A type 8 is usually more aggressive, so they typically like boxing and heavy lifting. However, that

may not be what they need for personal growth and greater self-awareness," says type 8 Dave Nixon, owner of Functional Fitness Australia and author of *Minding Yourself*.

If you're a type 8 — the Challenger — you might benefit from incorporating more relaxing activities like yoga, Pilates, and nose breathing into your routine, even if you find these pursuits challenging, he advises.

The first step to using the Enneagram is to figure out your type. To

The Enneagram is a great, in-depth way to learn more about yourself so that you can figure out how to make your personality traits work for you."



determine this, take an assessment at www.truity.com/test/enneagram-personality-test or any of several other Enneagram-related sites.

Next, familiarize yourself with the motivations, desires, and fears related to your personality type. Note that the core “desires” and “fears” are deeper than wanting to set a 5K PR and feeling spooked by spiders; core fears and desires form the basis of your motivation.

And they are closely linked. For example, a type 1’s core fear is being bad or being wrong, while their core desire is to be good or right.

Meanwhile, a 4’s core fear is having no significance or meaning; their core desire is to be authentic and find meaning.

Knowing your primary fears and desires — your core motivation — can help open pathways to overcoming obstacles and resistance as you pursue your fitness goals.

Once you have this awareness, it’s likely that some behaviors will change naturally. Take things a step further by applying your new knowledge to intentionally

modify behaviors that aren’t serving you and to create new systems in your life that support, rather than force, a sustainable fitness habit.

Keep in mind that working with your core desires and fears isn’t designed to change them. They are part of who you are.

This counters a deeply ingrained aspect of fitness culture: the belief that we must change who we are, and that exercise can help us upgrade to a new and better version of ourselves.

Enneagram is useful, in fitness and in other life areas, because it teaches us that we are not bad or wrong or undesirable as we are. It teaches us to start where we are, work with what we have, and grow from there if we want.

“Your fears and desires won’t go away, but you can learn how to manage them so they work for, instead of against, you,” Whitmoyer-Ober says.

Ready to get started? Our experts explain the nine Enneagram types in greater detail and offer suggestions to help each type thrive on their fitness journey.



Type 1

The Perfectionist or Reformer

Rational, idealistic, and wise, they have a strong sense of right and wrong. They can also be resentful and impatient.

Their core desire is to be good, ethical, and responsible.

Strengths: Well-organized and fastidious, they strive for high standards.

Weaknesses: They can be so preoccupied with doing things “right” that they fail to see that progress is a process, Nixon says. They can also be self-critical and impatient.

How to Thrive: Type 1 athletes can find fulfillment in activities or sports that are mastery-focused and that can be progressed over time. Strength training offers nearly endless opportunities for improving form and increasing weight. Running and cycling might be good fits because they allow for boosting your distance and speed. Pilates epitomizes the discipline and control that define many 1s.

Tracking sets, reps, and other details will likely motivate them to come back and do better. Training styles like bodybuilding or powerlifting, which are structured and measurable, are also great ways for 1s to gauge progress.

How to Grow: Type 1s can stretch by taking on an activity that is outside of their comfort zone and may never result in mastery or real-life application. Dance classes and martial arts are examples of activities that can help relieve some of the rigidity that 1s are prone to and incorporate elements of joyful movement.

Team or partner sports are a way for 1s to learn how to be flexible and adapt their approach in the moment, which can be tough for them.

Type 2

The Helper or Giver

Empathetic, generous, and friendly, they want others to know how much they care. They can also be needy and possessive. Their core desire is to be loved and appreciated.



Strengths: They do well in group situations and make others feel welcome.

Weaknesses: They can be too focused on the successes of others to acknowledge how far they've come in their own pursuits.

How to Thrive: Type 2 athletes thrive doing activities and sports that are team or community focused. Interactive group fitness classes, such as boot-camp-style training and Zumba, are great ways to feed a 2's need for connection — and they offer plenty of opportunities to support and cheer for others while building strength and cardio. Activities in which people sync up, like dance, lap swimming, or indoor rowing classes, can feel good. Additionally, 2s often find fulfillment in training for races and other fitness events that raise money or awareness for charitable causes. An often-overlooked activity that is well suited to 2s is gardening.

How to Grow: Nixon recommends pursuits that help 2s “connect with your mind and body” rather than solely focusing on others. In a group class, a 2 could benefit from the simple act of stopping to receive support from others — and noticing how it feels when someone cheers them on. Yoga and meditation, as well as strength training, are other activities that can help deepen 2s' relationship with themselves.

Powerlifting is an activity that nourishes internal and external connections: Lifting heavy weights requires people to tune in to their bodies and hone self-awareness; at the same time, it comes with a strong sense of community and support.

Type 3

The Achiever or Performer

Ambitious and self-assured, they strive to succeed in every pursuit. Their core desire is to be valuable and admired.

Strengths: Self-driven and hard-working, they strive to be their best.

Weaknesses: They can be competitive and overly concerned with what others think of them.

How to Thrive: Competition fuels many type 3s, so classes with a competitive element are motivating. Periodized training plans are especially valuable for 3s, who typically want to know exactly what to do and what they will get for their efforts. Goals not only give them guidance in building a training plan but also motivate them to keep training. Ideal activities include running, cycling, swimming, and lifting weights. Sharing their progress with others is a way that 3s can stay accountable and on track in their training.

How to Grow: Type 3s can challenge themselves by resisting the urge to constantly share their fitness efforts with the world: Exercise where there aren't any mirrors, leave the phone behind, and avoid posting about their workout.

Yoga is a great choice for people who want to work on tuning in to the present moment while tuning out the need for approval — “shifting their attention to their breath or building a stronger mind-muscle connection rather than a number on a scoreboard,” Nixon explains.



Type 4

The Individualist or Romantic

Creative, inspired, and deeply feeling, they want to find and express their significance to others. Their core desires are to be authentic and to find their place in the world.



Strengths: They are self-aware and creative, with an innate ability to be in tune with their body.

Weaknesses: They can get stuck comparing themselves with others, which limits their ability to reach their full potential.

How to Thrive: Joy, creativity, and self-expression are guideposts for type 4s looking for a sustainable fitness routine, Nixon says. Dance, primal movement, martial arts, yoga, trampoline, gardening, and aerial arts using a trapeze or aerial hoop are perfect examples. Yet Nixon says that any activity can fit the bill if approached with an eye toward exploration and play.

(Like running? Mix in some skipping and galloping. Like kettlebells? Try kettlebell juggling.)

Because 4s can be sensitive and withdrawn, an activity like indoor cycling, where they can do their own thing while being surrounded by other people, can be quite fulfilling.

How to Grow: For 4s ready to step outside their comfort zone, Nixon suggests trying a team sport that requires them to play an active role and abide by a set of rules. “Another option is a smaller group fitness class where you can still interact with fellow workout buddies without getting lost in the crowd.”

Because rules can feel stunting to 4s, consider this: Are the rules of, say, volleyball stifling creativity and self-expression, or are they providing space for exploring creativity in a new way?

Type 5

The Investigator or Observer

Insightful, curious, and independent, they can concentrate on developing complex ideas and skills. Their core desire is to be competent, capable, and self-sufficient.

Strengths: They are extremely studious and willing to follow a program that offers results.

Weaknesses: Prone to being high-strung and secretive, 5s can get stuck in their heads and fail to build a deeper connection with their physical bodies.

How to Thrive: Type 5s love research and shy away from group activity, so ideal fitness pursuits typically combine the opportunity for precision with the ability to do it on their own. Cardio activities (running, cycling) and strength training are

often rewarding. Type 5s do well when they follow their sense of curiosity, so trying new things and exploring new fitness trends could be up an Investigator’s alley.

How to Grow: Type 5s will find a challenge in activities like martial arts or yoga, which encourage them to get outside their heads and tune in to their bodies. “It doesn’t matter too much which forms of yoga or martial arts you choose,” Nixon says, “but I recommend martial-arts styles that have moderate amounts of sparring — where you’re forced to not just learn the movements and lines but also respond in the moment.”





Type 6

The Loyalist or Skeptic

They are reliable, hard-working, and excellent troubleshooters, capable of foreseeing problems and encouraging cooperation. Their core desire is to be secure and supported.

Strengths: They do their research to find qualified personal trainers, group fitness instructors, and other experts. Then, they follow the expert's advice to the letter.

Weaknesses: They can be defiant and rebellious, suspicious of authority figures other than the ones they trust. They can also be indecisive and battle self-doubt, which keeps them from pursuing their goals.

How to Thrive: Type 6s crave security, which means they can thrive in cooperative activities and fitness pursuits that foster strong relationships. Team sports, working out with a partner, and small-group or personal training can be great fits. The key is to commit to a full season, a series of classes, or several sessions to build rapport while learning and improving their performance.

How to Grow: Strength-based workouts like powerlifting, Olympic lifting, and strong(wo)man training can encourage self-growth and resiliency, Nixon says. Loyalists often fear a lack of support and guidance, and these forms of training can help them learn to trust themselves and their bodies. (Learn more about how exercise fosters physical and mental resilience — and find a resilience-building workout that you can do alone or with a partner — at ELmag.com/exerciseandresilience.)

Type 7

The Enthusiast or Epicure

The busy, fun-loving type, they are playful and spontaneous, and they love variety and adventure. Their core desires are to be content and to have their needs satisfied.

Strengths: Extroverted and versatile, they're always trying new things.

Weaknesses: They can be impatient and impulsive. At their worst, they may not finish what they start.

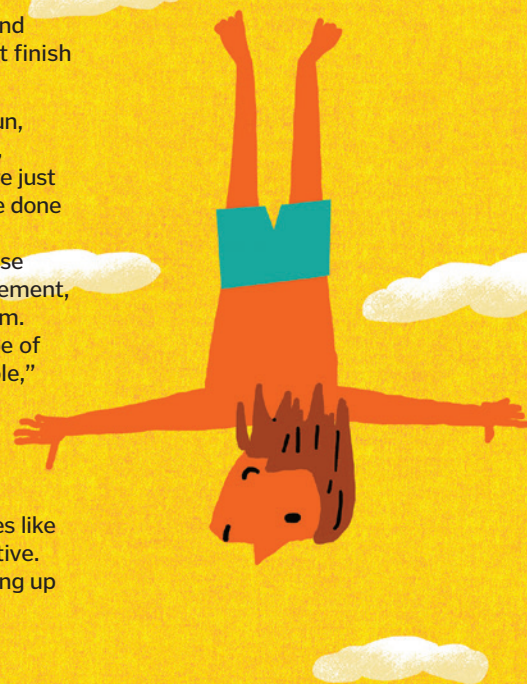
How to Thrive: Type 7s are drawn to fun, fast-paced endeavors. Mountain-biking, skiing, hiking, skydiving, and kayaking are just some of the exciting activities that can be done on a 7's own time in the great outdoors.

Group fitness classes, particularly those that raise the heart rate — be it through excitement, effort, or both — are also great choices in the gym. (Dance cardio, anyone?) "It doesn't matter which type of class, so long as there are plenty of options and times available,"

Nixon says. Finding a positive, encouraging environment is important.

How to Grow: Following a program from start to finish, without skipping steps or fudging details, is a challenge worth pursuing, Nixon says. "Type 7s can be guilty of not finishing things or changing things up for the sake of making them more fun."

Another way that 7s can stretch is to slow down — primal movement modalities like MovNat and Animal Flow are fun and playful while also precise, efficient, and intuitive. Primal movements can help 7s connect to their bodies in the moment without giving up the sense of spontaneity they love.





Type 8

The Challenger or Leader

Strong and assertive, they face challenges head-on. Their core desires are to be independent and to be in control of their own lives.

Strengths: They are straight-talking and decisive, and they enjoy using their strength. They will give projects and commitments all they have.

Weaknesses: They can be domineering and confrontational and can have an all-or-nothing attitude.

How to Thrive: Activities that leverage the strength of type 8s, like powerlifting, strong(wo)man training, and rock climbing — as well as combat sports like boxing and Mixed Martial Arts — are common favorites of this personality type.

Some 8s may also enjoy longer runs and bike rides, Nixon says, though he notes that it's rare for a type 8 who loves lifting to also love long-distance cardio.

How to Grow: Slowing down and finding focus are great challenges for 8s, who can tend to be bullish in their pursuits. Yoga, Pilates, and nonsparring martial arts like tai chi are examples of activities that can teach dominant 8s how to relax and calm their nervous systems.

Type 9

The Peacemaker or Mediator

Easygoing, creative, and supportive, they strive to bring harmony to their environment. Their core desires are to be at peace and to have inner stability.

Strengths: They get along well with a variety of people and are willing to chip away at projects while following and trusting the process.

Weaknesses: They may struggle with commitment, which delays them from starting or completing something. They also avoid conflict.

How to Thrive: Type 9s thrive with peaceful settings and activities. Yoga, nature walks, gardening, and other types of noncompetitive — even spiritual — movement can feel great.

Strength training can also be powerful for 9s, whose conflict avoidance can veer into suppression of difficult feelings, such as anger, grief, or sadness. Nixon advises that 9s follow a plan rather than wing it in the weight room.

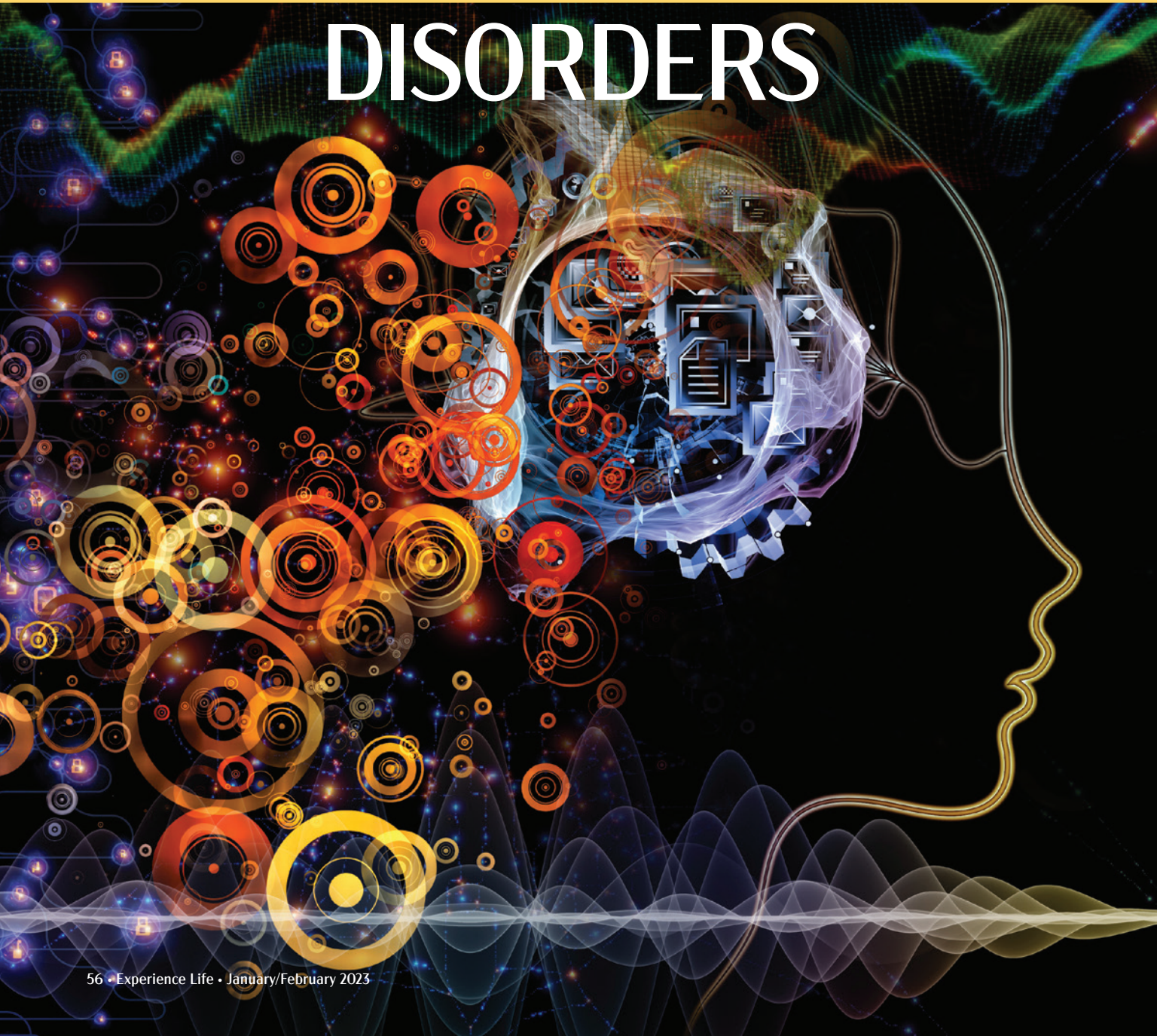
How to Grow: Once 9s are ready to stretch themselves, increasing the challenge of their strength training — particularly through powerlifting or strong(wo)man types of training — can help them “truly access their strength and aggression in a safe and healthy way,” Nixon says. 🧘




UNDERSTANDING

FUNCTIONAL
NEUROLOGICAL

DISORDERS



BY **MO PERRY**



Hybrid disorders of the brain, mind, and body once confounded physicians and researchers. Today they're beginning to uncover the conditions' complexities — and how to treat them.

In 2010, Gavin Martin suffered a series of injuries at his workplace. None of them were terribly serious, and they healed on their own. But Martin (not his real name), who was in his mid-20s, found that the resulting disabilities — shooting pain, weakness, and speaking difficulties — persisted. Then they began to spread.

During the next few years, Martin lost function in his vocal cords and his limbs. “At my most disabled, I was in a wheelchair, unable to walk. I couldn’t use my hands for more than grasping weakly,” he recalls. “There were months at a time when I couldn’t speak.”

His quest for a diagnosis took him to neurologists, rheumatologists, allergists, and immunologists. He visited five major medical centers, but no one could figure out what was wrong. Some of the doctors thought he might have an undiscovered genetic condition that could prove fatal, a hypothesis that only increased Martin’s alarm.

“Eventually, I ran out of places to go,” he says. “I just could not get referred anywhere else.”

In a last-ditch effort, he applied to the highly selective National Institutes of Health Undiagnosed Diseases Program, and was accepted in 2017. A team of specialists from multiple disciplines examined him.

Their diagnosis was clear: Martin had functional neurological disorder (FND).

“I think their team actually knew what I had just by looking at my application,” he says.

The FND-affected brain looks healthy on MRI studies or CT scans. But the way it communicates — with itself, the body, and the outside world — has gone awry. It’s not a “hardware” problem, as in stroke or multiple sclerosis (MS). Structurally, the brain is healthy.

Yet FND does represent “changes in the software circuitry of the brain,” says

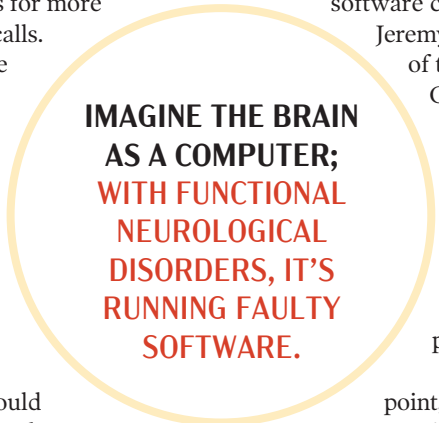
Jeremy Schmoe, DC, DACNB, director of the Functional Neurology Center in Minnetonka, Minn.

Imagine the brain as a computer; with FND, it’s running faulty software.

Therein lies the conceptual challenge of the disease: It is rooted in the brain, but the brain is healthy; it’s a signaling problem, not a structural one.

“I hit a real emotional low point,” says Martin. “I thought they were saying I had a delusion of illness — like I had inflicted it on myself or there was no substantial disability beyond me thinking that I had one. It was incredibly unnerving.”

Yet as Martin researched FND, he started to understand the condition in a new way. He also gained access to emerging insights and treatments that have made a world of difference to his recovery.



**IMAGINE THE BRAIN
AS A COMPUTER;
WITH FUNCTIONAL
NEUROLOGICAL
DISORDERS, IT'S
RUNNING FAULTY
SOFTWARE.**

Complicated Signals

Through the centuries, FND has been given various names, including “conversion disorder” and “hysteria.” Stigma has often followed it.

“People thought these patients were constitutionally weak, exaggerating their symptoms, or making it up,” says London-based psychiatrist Alastair Santhouse, MA, FRCP, FRCPsych, author of *Head First: How the Mind Heals the Body*. “We have a far more sophisticated understanding now of what this is. These symptoms are not made up or imagined.”

Symptoms of FND can include weakness or paralysis, abnormal movements, changes in speech, difficulty swallowing, seizures, numbness, and sensory challenges, such as difficulty seeing, smelling, or hearing. Many of these symptoms are also present in other neurological conditions, such as Parkinson’s, MS, epilepsy, or stroke, but the underlying causes are different.

Back when it was known as conversion disorder, FND was thought of as a diagnosis of exclusion, made only when tests had ruled out all other possible diseases. The diagnosis also required a connection to a psychological stressor.

“It was thought that some psychic distress was being converted into a physical symptom,” explains Santhouse. For instance, if someone had seen something upsetting, the belief was that they might develop blindness in response.

But functional symptoms are rarely that literal. And although many people diagnosed with FND do have a history of traumatic or stressful life events, not all do.

Neurologists can now confidently diagnose FND using specific neurological examination features, says David Perez, MD, MMSc, director of the Functional Neurological Disorder Clinical Unit and Research Program at Massachusetts General Hospital. By the time the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)* was published, in 2013, the disorder had been reframed as a “rule-in” diagnosis

— which means a specific list of criteria must be met rather than ruled out — and renamed FND.

Some of the positive signs used to diagnose FND include Hoover’s test for functional weakness, in which a person may have significant weakness in one leg when they consciously try to move it but find that their strength returns to normal when movement is triggered in a different way. Or someone might be unable to walk or turn, but if they’re distracted, mobility returns.

Estimating the prevalence of FND is challenging because of how the definition has changed over time. But a 2010 multicenter study in Scotland found that functional/psychological disorders were the second most common diagnosis category in outpatient neurology clinics, behind only headaches. And an investigation published in *JAMA Neurology* in 2021 estimated annual spending for FND-related emergency-room visits and inpatient care to be more than \$1.2 billion per year.

FND and the Brain

“FND is a condition that lives at the intersection of neurology and psychiatry,” explains Perez. It falls under a larger category of hybrid brain-mind-body conditions that are often referred to as functional

disorders — a category that can include conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and fibromyalgia, which are distinguishable mainly in their effects.

Functional disorders are contrasted with “organic” diseases, such as MS or cancer, which are diagnosed based on biological changes in the body.

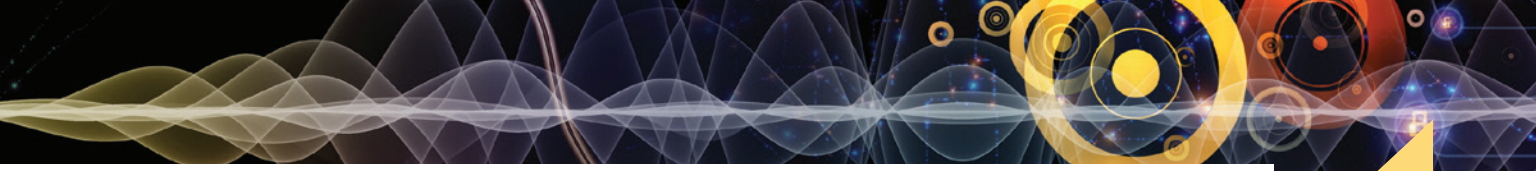
What makes FND unique is the way it rewires the brain to produce neurological symptoms. In FND, the amygdala (part of the limbic system that’s involved in the stress response) is hyperactive, while the brain’s frontal lobe (which plays a role in calming the amygdala) is underactive, explains Stanford University neuropsychiatrist Sepideh Bajestan, MD, PhD.

“This is what we see in PTSD and panic disorder also,” she says. But in types of FND



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that involve abnormal movements, the limbic system is also hyperconnected to the parts of the brain that control movement. This means that bodily movement can be affected by current or even past stresses. (Imagine the way your hands might involuntarily shake after narrowly avoiding an accident. Now imagine if that state didn't pass.)

"Think of the brain as an ensemble," says Martin. "Different brain areas communicate in a way that allows us to move around and think and sense things." When someone has an illness, injury, or upsetting experience, it can change the way these brain areas talk to each other.

"Certain parts of the brain, like the amygdala, can influence the operation of everything else because they're highly interconnected with other parts of the brain," he explains. "All of a sudden you have one part of the brain that's yelling at everyone else, and the other parts of the brain respond to that."

Functional symptoms for which no physical cause can be found — headaches, stomachaches, back pain, fatigue, dizziness, or chest pain — are incredibly common. In one study, a physical cause was shown in only 16 percent of the 567 new complaints of common symptoms presented to U.S. primary-care practices over a three-year period.

Anyone who has experienced a tension headache or nervous stomach in a stressful moment knows that our emotions can lead to physical symptoms. "The difference between FND and some other more passing functional symptoms is that in FND, these patterns get stuck," says Martin. "The brain has the ability to learn and change, and sometimes it doesn't go back."

Functional disorders like fibromyalgia are likely driven by at least *some* different mechanisms than FND. But commonalities that might underlie the broader category of brain-mind-body conditions are an active area of research. "A subset of patients with FND also have fibromyalgia or IBS — what we think of as functional somatic disorders," Perez says. "The increased coexistence of these conditions

in one population potentially suggests some shared mechanisms."

This means that as research into FND progresses, people suffering from other chronic brain-mind-body disorders also stand to benefit. Advances in understanding FND also start to erase the often arbitrary distinction between mental and physical health, he notes.

"In fact, maybe with the challenges of the pandemic and everything else going on, we're realizing that physical health and mental health are interconnected — that one's mental health is one's physical health."

Risk Factors and Triggers

For FND, Perez says, it's important to investigate potential risk factors and triggers that can also perpetuate the disorder. Yet, for each patient, these elements might be unique and interact differently.



Adverse early life experiences, such as abuse or neglect, can be a risk factor for FND. So can a history of depression, anxiety, and trauma symptoms. But these are far from universal among FND patients, and an assumption of their centrality to the condition has contributed over the years to neglected and misunderstood patients.

"Some FND patients do not report adverse life experiences and have never been in therapy," Perez says. "They're used to pushing through and doing 120 percent. For reasons that might be personal to each case, that person with high-achieving tendencies can also develop FND."

Returning to the brain-as-computer analogy, Perez notes that there are many ways that software can crash. "That's why a one-size-fits-all formulation falls flat in the FND population."

FND tends to be triggered by something that draws attention to the body. That might be a common event, such as a minor physical injury, a viral illness, or even a vaccination. "The physical triggering event is usually something that would be expected to get better," explains St. George's, University of London, neurologist Mark Edwards, PhD, on the website FND Hope.


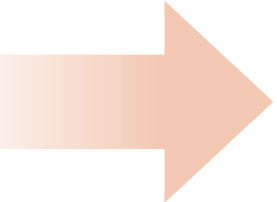
FUNCTIONAL SYMPTOMS FOR WHICH NO PHYSICAL CAUSE CAN BE FOUND — HEADACHES, STOMACHACHES, BACK PAIN, FATIGUE, DIZZINESS, OR CHEST PAIN — ARE INCREDIBLY COMMON.



“For example, a flu that would be expected to go [away] after a few days’ rest, but instead symptoms continue and functional symptoms emerge. Sometimes this process can be very quick and dramatic or sometimes much slower.”

It’s not the injury, illness, or event itself that triggers FND, but the attention, awareness, emotion, and meaning-making that accompanies it. If someone has an injury to their leg, they might then fixate on it, says Santhouse. “They notice the sensations in that part of the body, they’re hesitant to use it, and the symptom develops further. By the time you see them in the clinic, they may already be walking with a limp or using walking aids.”

Paying attention to the body is not inherently dangerous, notes Martin. But attention can amplify signals and give form to ambiguous feelings in a way that isn’t always helpful. “Imagine I’m walking through a field and feel the tickling of the grass on my legs, and I suddenly encounter a spider and it freaks me out: In the future, my brain at a subconscious level will be more likely to associate the ambiguous feeling of grass on my legs with the presence of a spider.”



In this way, FND isn’t caused by physical or psychological factors alone, but by the way they interact in the brain. “They’re both converging on a common system in the brain, where all these things are processed together. To some extent, they become indistinguishable,” he explains.

This process is not voluntary and can result in symptoms that are very real. It also helps explain why postconcussion patients or people with “organic” neurological disorders such as Parkinson’s, epilepsy, or MS are particularly vulnerable to developing functional-neurological symptoms in addition to those caused by their primary condition.

As Martin describes it, “The brain learns the injury, absorbs it, and then reenacts it.”

“We are not talking about personal flaws or weak-willed patients wishing to be sick,” Perez stresses. This understanding is crucial for providers to deliver a diagnosis of FND clearly and empathetically — and to point patients toward helpful treatments.

Treating FND

Educating patients about FND is the first step in treating it. “The starting point is to come to a shared understanding of what’s causing the symptoms,” Santhouse says. “Then you can start to treat them.”

Like many chronic conditions, FND benefits from a multidisciplinary approach. “The two mainstays of treatment are physical rehabilitation — including physical therapy, occupational therapy, and/or speech and language therapy — coupled oftentimes with psychotherapy,” Perez says.

For Martin, the most successful treatment was physiotherapy that got him out of his wheelchair, and then off a cane, until he was walking normally again. He has also benefited from mind-body techniques, such as body scanning, awareness exercises, and progressive muscle reaction, and an app to help deal with chronic pain.

Physiotherapists can also work with patients to retrain particular movements, usually using some kind of diversion so the patient isn’t actively focusing on the body part in question.

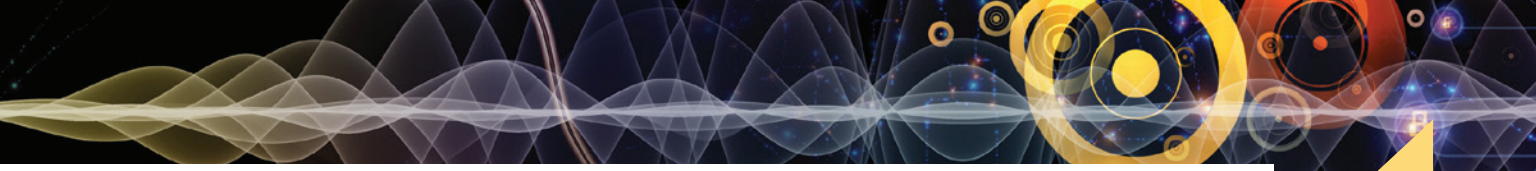
For instance, some patients who can’t walk as they once did are able to run or walk on a treadmill. Using music or automatic movements from learned dances can also help improve movement.

Researchers conducting a pilot trial of 60 patients who’d had FND symptoms for more than six months found that after five days of specialized physiotherapy intervention, 72 percent of patients reported symptom improvement, compared with 18 percent of patients in the control group who received standard physiotherapy.

The combination of movement retraining, cognitive behavioral therapy, and limiting



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overwhelming stimuli was transformative for Martin. (For some FND patients, symptoms are triggered by sensory overstimulation — a hypersensitivity that’s like what people with autism experience: Lights can feel too bright, touch can be uncomfortable or painful, and smells or sounds can feel overpowering.)

“It took time and many false starts, but my symptoms began to stabilize, and then to recede,” Martin recalls. “I found I could walk for longer and work more consistently, and I felt less pain. When a limb started to twitch, I’d pull my attention off it, occupy myself with other movements, or moderate my pain with deep breaths.”

In 2018, he had more than 150 days of headache and was hospitalized multiple times. In 2019, the benefits of his persistent healing work became evident — he had only three headaches and recovered at home.

Perez says that patients with FND have reason for hope, but he also cautions that more research into additional therapeutic interventions is needed. “Out of the first 100 patients that come through our clinic, about 40 to 50 percent saw at least some degree of improvement. A similar 50 percent or so continue to be significantly impaired by their FND.”

Schmoe finds that some of his FND patients benefit from hypnosis and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) — practices that aim to access and calm deep limbic areas of the brain.

And interest is growing in the potential of psychedelics to treat a range of challenging neuropsychiatric conditions, including FND. (Research on the use of psychedelics to treat FND is ongoing in the United Kingdom.)

Other potential novel therapies might include neuromodulation (such as vagus-nerve stimulation) or transcranial magnetic stimulation, which uses magnetic fields to stimulate nerve cells in the brain.

Building an evidence base for effective treatments is challenging for conditions, such

as FND, that benefit most from highly individualized treatments, Perez notes. “Patients with FND keep us on our toes in a variety of ways. A rich and varied toolkit is likely to be needed.”

Much work remains to be done for people with functional seizures, which have proven tough to treat. But here, too, there are hopeful signs. A recent small pilot study of children with functional seizures trained those patients to reinterpret their body signals and engage in movements to counteract the onset of seizures. Every one of the kids in the treatment group was seizure-free after one week, and 82 percent remained seizure-free two months later.

For now, FND treatment can be difficult to access, with only a limited number of multidisciplinary centers and specialized clinics. Perez hopes that eventually all major neurology outpatient clinics will be able to offer integrated, multidisciplinary care, not only for FND, but for a range of brain-based conditions across neurology and psychiatry.

Martin envisions a day when it won’t take specialists to offer this kind of support. “A sports-medicine clinic already has physical and occupational therapists, sometimes an osteopath, and sometimes a physiatrist,” he notes. (Physiatrists are physicians who specialize in rehab involving the brain and spinal cord.)

“If those people were able to offer psychologically informed treatment as well, then we could see FND treatment in the community.” (Martin shares emerging insights into FND on Twitter under the handle @FndPortal.)

Today, Martin has recovered more than most people with FND. He still has weakness in his arms and legs, plus occasional headaches and voice problems. But his symptoms have receded enough that they no longer dominate his days.

“FND is still there,” he says. “But I’ve carved out enough recovery that I can live my life again.” 🌱

“

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MO PERRY is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

Picture Th



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Guided imagery can be a powerful support for health recovery, goal realization, and emotional healing.

BY **QUINTON SKINNER**

The practice of deliberately imagining positive outcomes is nothing new. It's likely been around for as long as humans have been able to conceive realities beyond the five senses. Plato's Allegory of the Cave, for instance, is an image-centered allegory from ancient Greece that emphasizes the value of seeing beyond what is before us.

Today, sports psychologists and coaches routinely work with athletes to visualize techniques and success. The record-breaking Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps has used guided imagery throughout his career to improve his performance. Other Olympians, including Canadian bobsledder Lyndon Rush and American skier Emily Cook, say training in their minds has been key to their success.

Our innate ability to imagine is at the core of guided imagery, a cost-effective

tool that can support any number of goals, including relaxation, performance, healing, and more.

Other names for it include "guided meditation" and "mental rehearsal." It's a cousin to hypnosis, and a wide range of research studies have shown that it can improve outcomes for a variety of conditions, including depression, anxiety, PTSD, and certain inflammatory diseases.

It's been promoted by major hospitals as a helpful support during cancer treatment and a useful preparation for undergoing surgery and giving birth.

Guided imagery may sound abstract, but the practice itself is straightforward. What's more, it's largely free, and something we can do ourselves — anywhere, anytime — with a pair of headphones and time enough to close our eyes, relax, and listen.

The Brain and Body in Conversation

Guided imagery engages the brain's ability to evoke pictures and other sensory experiences. Psychotherapist Belleruth Naparstek, ACSW, BCD, is a key figure in the development of the practice, and she describes it as a "deliberate, productive daydream."

While meditation and other mindfulness techniques often encourage detachment from a specific outcome, guided imagery involves a goal. It may be specific, like lowering one's race time, or somewhat diffuse, like overcoming the effects of PTSD.

Naparstek believes most of us have engaged in some version of guided-imagery practice all our lives, whether we know it or not. She notes how children learn to internalize images of their caregivers so they can picture them when they're absent, a key component of self-soothing.

When you picture yourself relaxing comfortably in your bed after a successful surgery, making the perfect tennis shot, or successfully completing an important project, you're doing some version of the same thing — internalizing the image of a desired outcome, which may also replace a fear-based image.

Seeing something in our minds makes a difference, because our bodies appear to register imagined experiences in the same way they do lived ones. "[Guided-imagery] therapies take advantage of the connection between the visual brain and the involuntary nervous system," explains integrative-medicine trailblazer Andrew Weil, MD. "When . . . the visual cortex . . . is activated without receiving direct input from the eyes, it can influence physical and emotional states."

Our emotional states often reflect the unconscious

imprint of past experiences. These subterranean memories routinely influence our daily functioning, as well as our performance at tasks and ability to heal. This is especially true for traumatic memories.

"When we have a traumatic experience, we go into a fight, flight, or freeze response, which effectively takes the brain offline," says Jane McCampbell Stuart, MA, LMFT, CPCC, a trauma therapist and coach who uses guided imagery in her practice. "That experience ends up being stored in its isolated neural network in the

While meditation and other mindfulness techniques often encourage detachment from a specific outcome, **guided imagery involves a goal.**

midbrain and doesn't get integrated into the rest of your overall life story. It can stay there for years until it gets bumped or triggered by something."

The midbrain is part of the central nervous system, located below the cerebral cortex at the top of the brainstem, and it's where we process sensory information related to sound, vision, pain, sleep, and arousal. Creating an experience through guided imagery provides the midbrain with an expanded template to work from, enabling us to perceive situations differently than we could before.

"The imaginal experience is like an update to the operating system

that smooths out the glitches that were causing distress or difficulty in our relationships," explains McCampbell. "Once the update has run, it's hard to remember how things used to feel."

After a series of negative experiences or trauma, midbrain patterns may get caught in stress reactions such as anger or numbness. As these patterns begin to shift and relax in response to a positive image, the brain can produce sensations of calm and clarity instead. This contributes to the sort of ease in which healing, rest, and relaxed achievement become possible.

"We're giving you something to focus on so you can keep your busy mind occupied," McCampbell says of guided-imagery exercises. "You're keeping the logical, cognitive mind distracted so that the emotional mid-brain can do its work." (For more on healing trauma, see ELmag.com/movementfortrauma.)

Guided Imagery in Action

The most likely explanation for the efficacy of guided imagery is that it seems to ease the nervous system out of crisis mode. Even though it makes intuitive sense that this relaxation would produce better outcomes, the evidence supporting guided imagery is more substantial than we might expect.

"I think it's particularly useful for any kind of emotional challenge, such as depression or anxiety. It was made to order for coping with anxiety," explains Naparstek. "It is a beautiful intervention for traumatic stress. . . . It's very good for helping people recover from stroke or bodily injury. It's wonderful when used pre-surgically for better outcomes, like reduced length of stay, intraoperative blood loss, use of pain meds, and pre- and post-op anxiety."



We're giving you something to focus on. . . . You're keeping the logical, cognitive mind distracted so that **the emotional midbrain can do its work.**"

One randomized controlled trial linked guided imagery with less preoperative anxiety, lower postoperative pain, and earlier discharge times after same-day procedures. A 2018 study from the University of California, San Diego, involving a small group of multiple-sclerosis patients, found “improvements in depression, fatigue, and physical and mental quality of life.”

Another randomized controlled trial published in 2015 pointed to the benefits of combining guided imagery with dietary modification to manage irritable bowel syndrome. Guided-imagery practice has even been linked to greater muscular strength in conjunction with weight training, too.

A review of more than 300 randomized controlled trials involving nearly 18,000 individuals concluded that guided imagery improved pain, stroke recovery, anxiety, coping with stress, and sports performance in more than 75 percent of the studies.

Time constraints were cited as a barrier for medical practitioners using guided imagery, but not for patients, who can circumvent the limits of the conventional doctor’s appointment by pursuing its benefits at home on their own.

The research shows how well guided imagery works in conjunction with conventional interventions. It also empowers the patient. “We learn helplessness, and then we’re not aware of the power we have inside to heal ourselves,” says guided-imagery pioneer Emmett Miller, MD.

Although contemporary medical treatment affords many benefits, the self-healing powers of the body and the mind appear well suited to amplify them.

More Than Just an Image

Guided imagery involves more than just imagining visual pictures and scenes. “Some people think

you have to be able to visualize, and that’s not necessarily true,” Weil says. “There are other ways to access the mind-body connection for healing.”

Not all of us are visual thinkers; some of us may be more oriented to sound or other senses. Naparstek points out that around 45 percent of people report difficulty evoking detailed imagery, so she endorses a multisensory approach to help create scenes and evoke experiences in the mind.

“Kinesthetic sensation, and emotional sensation, and all your other senses play into this,” she says. “People think they know whether they’re visual or they’re

Emotional sensation is often an integral aspect of a guided-imagery session; you might be encouraged to evoke feelings of gratitude, love, or fulfillment.

auditory, but actually we don’t know what combinations will ‘ping’ the best for us. So, it’s good to try them all. I never call it visualization for that reason: It’s misleading.”

Indeed, emotional sensation is often an integral aspect of a guided-imagery session; you might be encouraged to evoke feelings of gratitude, love, or fulfillment. You might imagine feeling the satisfaction of an achievement or feeling relaxed and strong during childbirth.

If you’ve been especially stressed or pressured, you may just

cultivate a sense of how it feels when you move through life with greater ease.

Trusting the Mind-Body Connection

For those who remain skeptical of such an abstract process, it’s worth remembering that guided imagery is a low-to-no-stakes investment — it’s easy to approach it as a mental experiment. Find a guided-imagery script on an app and set aside 20 or 30 minutes to relax, listen, and see how you feel.

A great deal of research now supports the idea that the mind and body are a single organism, so what happens with one can be reasonably expected to affect the other — though depending on where we grew up, we may be conditioned to think otherwise. “Guided imagery runs up against the materialistic paradigm that . . . doesn’t see the mind as real and capable of influencing the physical,” notes Weil.

Miller points out that many of us have been influenced by the European philosopher René Descartes and his famous concept of the mind-body split. “There’s little mention of consciousness in Western science,” Miller says. “The past couple of decades we’ve started to dip a toe into the water, but we need to step away from the Cartesian approach to know that everything is integrated, everything is dependent on everything else.”

In the end, philosophers will continue to philosophize about what the mind and body can do. For the rest of us, we need only understand that we may have more power to heal and change than we might think — and that at least some of that power lies right behind our eyes. 🧠

QUINTON SKINNER is a Minneapolis-based writer.

How to Use Guided Imagery

One of the notable features of guided imagery is its accessibility. You can listen to scripts with an audio app and a pair of headphones. The popular apps Insight Timer and Headspace both feature large catalogs of guided-imagery audio recordings focusing on a range of outcomes, from general relaxation to supporting health during cancer treatment. The organization Health Journeys, affiliated with psychotherapist Belleruth Naparstek, ACSW, BCD, also provides extensive resources.

Several therapeutic modalities, such as EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing), routinely make use of guided imagery, so you may also choose to do scripts with a mental-health practitioner. The Academy for Guided Imagery offers a directory of certified practitioners on its website.

When you're practicing on your own, be sure to give yourself adequate time and space. Carve out quiet, uninterrupted time — almost every recording's description will include its length, so you can plan accordingly. Find a place that's as comfortable as possible both physically and emotionally, where you feel safe closing your eyes and relaxing. You might take a few deep breaths and focus on trying to release muscle tension for a minute or so before you begin.

Take a moment beforehand to set an intention. You can silently say to yourself something as simple as *I am going to open myself to healing as much as I can in this moment*. Then go ahead and relax. There's no need to judge what you're experiencing or place expectations on yourself.

Guided imagery is speaking to your unconscious mind as much as to your conscious awareness. That means, in theory, you may not even be paying attention but your awareness beneath the surface is absorbing the message.

Your only task is to release your habitual worries and let yourself imagine what you would like to see and how you would like to feel. Your body will do the rest.

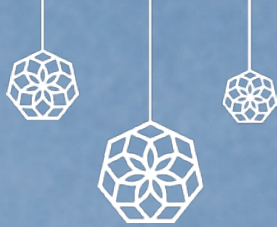
How to Find the Right Guided Imagery for You

Before you select a recording, ask yourself what you want from this experience. Are you preparing for a medical procedure? Recovering from a breakup? Seeking more general relaxation and ease?

You'll find there are scripts designed for a huge range of experiences, so keep looking until you hit on one that feels right to you. That said, guided-imagery exercises all share the same technique: speaking to your unconscious mind to help improve your conscious life. They're not a substitute for medical treatment or therapeutic intervention, but they can be a good complement to them.

On that note, steer clear of any guided-imagery experiences that promise miracle cures or encourage you to take any view of yourself or other people that feels discordant or hostile. The goal is to align your unconscious beliefs with your conscious desires for well-being, nothing more or less.





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Rejoice in life



“Joy is part of who we are; it’s accessible to us as a birthright gift.”

— Henry Emmons, MD,
and Aimee Prasek, PhD

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Rediscover your joy by reconnecting with the four foundational pillars of a joyful life.

The Myth of Laziness

Psychologist Devon Price, PhD, deconstructs the myth that we'd all be better off if we were a little less idle.



BY KATIE DOHMAN

Devon Price, PhD, had always been a hard worker. A clinical assistant professor in psychology at Loyola University Chicago, he had prided himself on this trait. To his mind, overwork and overcommitting to loved ones — and even sometimes near-strangers — was better than the alternative. Buying into a culture that often ties productivity to self-worth, Price viewed laziness or idleness as basically the kiss of death.

Then, in 2014, while finishing his dissertation, Price became debilitatingly sick. For almost a year. And he realized everyone around him was also burned out, unwell, and overcommitted. It was this realization that led him to write *Laziness Does Not Exist*.

“The feelings we write off as ‘laziness’ are some of humanity’s most important instincts, a core part of how we stay alive and thrive in the long term,” Price writes. He calls the book a “full-throated defense” of those who have been maligned by this label or disillusioned by this myth — which, he notes, is pretty much all of us.

And he has a lot to say about the origin of what he calls the “Laziness Lie” — and how we can begin to resist it.

The Laziness Lie

Price coined the phrase to highlight the pernicious set of internalized messages that keep us working harder and producing more. There are three main tenets: Your worth is your productivity; you cannot trust your own feelings

and limits; and there is always more you could be doing.

When we buy into this myth, he explains, a dangerous disconnect occurs between mind and body. Because we can’t trust our own feelings, we can’t advocate for ourselves. And because we could always be doing more — and we’re worthless if we don’t — there’s virtually no limit to what the lie can persuade us to strive to do.

“The other day on Instagram, I saw a mental-health infographic telling people that taking a break to use the bathroom while at work is a form of self-care. That’s how divorced capitalism and overwork has us from our bodies,” he notes.

“Most of us spend our entire working lives ignoring our hunger,

ignoring our tiredness, working through sickness, even ignoring our bowels and bladders, because being a full living being with needs and emotions is viewed as a threat to our productivity, and productivity supposedly determines our worth.”

This connection between worth and productivity is tied to Puritanical culture and the history of slavery in the United States, he writes. Identifying those roots is key to understanding how damaging the Laziness Lie has been — and who stands to suffer or benefit most from its persistence.

“The Protestant work ethic that the Puritans brought to the colonies was politically useful when enslaving whites wished to justify enslavement to themselves and to other people,” Price explains. At that time, forced daily work was considered a Christian moral obligation.

Today, the Laziness Lie affects most everyone, but some of us remain more vulnerable than others. The more marginalized a person is, he says, the more likely they are to be evaluated in terms of the profit they offer someone else — and to be deemed lazy or useless if that profit isn’t considered sufficient.

“Many in our culture still treat disabled people as complainers who are faking their illness and are presumed to have not tried ‘hard enough’ to deserve benefits.”

As an Autistic person, Price has experienced this dynamic personally. “People like me are only accepted professionally because there is this myth that Autistic people are savant-like geniuses who therefore deserve to be tolerated, because we can be ‘useful’ to the abled people around us,” he says.

“This is basically what every marginalized group experiences, in one form or another, under the Laziness Lie: Only the most productive, conforming, convenient forms of difference are conditionally tolerated, so long as they keep producing.”

How to Advocate for Less

Even when people embrace the concept of doing less, they often do

so with an optimization mindset, because the ideal of better, faster, stronger has been so ingrained in all of us. But these issues aren’t personal, Price emphasizes; they’re systemic.

“We aren’t workaholics with random neuroses that came out of nowhere,” he says. “We are exploited laborers stuck within capitalism.”

And because the problem is communal, he adds, we can’t fully solve it for ourselves. Still, there are small steps you can take to resist the Laziness Lie in your own life.

Price suggests that we start with “doing less, saying no, and letting ourselves be just ‘good enough’ at our jobs, and as parents, volunteers, creatives, or whatever else we are. When we work together to refuse unrealistic expectations, we all do better.”



All we can do is choose to do less, and to lighten the loads of others, and to keep doing that every day.”

The Way Forward

There’s strong scientific evidence that doing less is actually good for our health. “When we’re able to rest, we can learn new things about ourselves or have fantastic insights that never would have occurred to us when we were focused on work,” Price writes, adding that psychologists have called this phenomenon the “incubation period.”

“The creative parts of our minds require safety, rest, and relaxation in order to produce unique ideas or insights.”

It’s why great ideas often come to us as we’re falling asleep, taking a shower, or walking leisurely. Our unconscious minds are doing powerful work — but they work best when we

nurture the conditions that allow for unstructured time. (For more on the surprising benefits of taking a break, see ELmag.com/downtime.)

Changing your personal habits is a good place to start, but given the scope of the problem, it’s not the final solution. “We can’t self-care our way out of labor exploitation,” Price says. “We need unions, universal basic income and healthcare, and an end to the many ways in which our legal system criminalizes poverty.”

He’s seeing shifts in how people think about productivity and self-worth, especially during the “great resignation” spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic. Attitudes have not necessarily changed among policymakers or business leaders, he acknowledges, but many workers are realizing that employers consider their lives to be disposable.

That understanding has already spurred changes in the labor market, such as workers at Amazon, Starbucks, and other workplaces beginning to unionize.

“COVID has cost us a lot. It’s been a multiyear, international mass-death event that nearly all of us were forced to continue working through, even when doing so came at a great risk to our lives,” Price says. “The only positive I see is that a growing number of people are realizing just how wrong that is — and their actions, reflected in our labor and economic data, are causing these old, oppressive systems to begin to break down.”

Because overwork is so prized in American culture, even if you oppose it, there’s no way to avoid it completely. “The goal here is not to ‘cure’ the Laziness Lie in ourselves or to be perfectly serene and above it all,” he explains. “Rather, the goal is to develop the tools and the resilience to not let these messages destroy us. All we can do is choose to do less, and to lighten the loads of others, and to keep doing that every day.”

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

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A Joyful Life

Connecting science and soul to help you uncover your joy.

BY **HENRY EMMONS, MD,**
AND **AIMEE PRASEK, PHD**

Anxiety and depression rates are skyrocketing in the United States. This started long before COVID-19, but the pandemic has worsened the situation. It's not an exaggeration to say that anxiety and depression are epidemic; they are also pandemic, because they're prevalent globally.

Unfortunately, our standard approach to these problems involves taking medications, which *can* help. But they can also produce side effects that actually feel like depression.

There's another approach that's rarely addressed in mental-health treatment: Support human flourishing and joy.

We believe it's possible for anyone, no matter what you've dealt with before and what you're dealing with now, to create a more joyful life. If you can go beyond recovery and prevention to what really helps you thrive, there is simply less room for depression or anxiety to find its way back in.

And so, with this Joy Lab column — based on our podcast and program of the same name (learn more at joylab.coach) — we offer ways to overcome stress or depression *and* to rediscover your joy. To get started, we're delving into the four pillars we see as foundational for a joyful life.

WHENEVER POSSIBLE, CHOOSE JOY.

Joy is part of who we are; it's accessible to us as a birthright gift. Simply put, joy is what remains when we stop wanting things to be different than they are at this moment.

Joy comes easily — and that can feel like a paradox, because it can seem hard to achieve. Yet, in its essence, joy is less about effort and more about allowing things to be as they are. It's less about grasping and struggling and more about letting go.

Joy also involves choice, which is where things start to feel difficult. Every moment, we are faced with a simple, straightforward choice: Where do we place our attention? What are we feeding with our mind, our awareness, our focus? We can make the choice to nourish the heart and the soul.

SEEK TO BROADEN AND BUILD.

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is the best-studied, most-effective approach known for mood and anxiety disorders; it can help remove obstacles to joy, like recurring, negative thoughts. But CBT can feel a bit dry when the goal is to uncover joy.

Recent developments, however, have built on CBT to create a more nourishing approach. One such method is known as the broaden-and-build model.

This comes from the work of psychologist Barbara Fredrickson, PhD, and others in the field of positive psychology, who suggest that you can intentionally infuse life-giving thoughts and feelings into your mind. You can create what you might think of as a virtuous cycle that builds on itself. Feeling hopeful, for example, creates a more positive inner state than when you're feeling fearful or pessimistic.

When you open up in this way, you broaden your experience so you can draw from a wider range of possibilities. When you're coming from this place of greater inner strength, it's easier to keep building the skills that lead to flourishing.

BECOME MINDFUL OF JOY.

Research has shown that the practice of mindfulness benefits your brain health and your mood. It's also a core skill for uncovering your joy: directing your attention to where you want it to be.

Your mind may get stuck on a particular problem with a work colleague, for example, creating a narrow, repetitive focus. Mindfulness allows you to step back from your emotions or impulses and observe the many supportive interactions you have every day with others. That can help you respond to your challenging colleague in a healthy way.

You do not have to become an expert at meditation or even enjoy it. You just need to see what is true and to focus more on what gives you joy.

FEED YOUR SOUL.

The first three pillars to uncovering joy are all rooted in science. This fourth one is harder to quantify, but we think it's really important.

Science and soul are not mutually exclusive; they are mutually enhancing. Bringing the science to life through things like poetry and stories is a practical way to help you connect with the deeper part of your being — the part fed by meaning and connection.

So, when you begin the practice of cultivating joy, try spending a little more time seeking out activities that feed your soul. That might involve reading novels or spiritual texts, volunteering, learning a musical instrument, or pursuing other creative or community endeavors.

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With a Little Help From My Friends

We all need somebody to lean on, but it's not always easy to ask for help when we need it. These expert insights offer ideas for overcoming resistance — and knowing what to say.

BY **JON SPAYDE**

Maybe it's running an errand for us when we're swamped, explaining a complicated problem, or fulfilling a bigger, more demanding request. Whatever the reason, we all need someone else's help from time to time. Still, the prospect of asking for support can be even more stressful than the problem that sent us looking for it in the first place.

Chicago-based business coach M. Nora Bouchard, MA, PCC, author of *Mayday! Asking for Help in Times of Need*, uses two words — “fear” and “shame” — to explain our hesitation. But she also acknowledges that it can be genuinely difficult to determine whom and how to ask, and she offers some suggestions to help us figure it out.

Stress Sources

Concerns of seeming incompetent or lazy. “If we confess to needing help on something specific,” says Bouchard, “we might fear that what we’re really saying is that we’re unable or unwilling to deal with other things — maybe *everything* — in our lives.” This thinking is based on the feeling that we really ought to be able to run our own lives without help, and that if we can’t, we’re a failure.

Fear that our independence will be compromised. Americans are taught to “stand on our own two feet,” Bouchard says. The idea of independence — political and personal — is part of our national DNA.

For women, independence has a particular poignancy. “I coach a lot of female leaders,” she notes, “and many of them have seen women dependent on their husbands or other male partners. They’ve sworn that this would never

happen to them.” Asking for help can sometimes seem like entering the kind of dependent relationship we’ve worked to avoid.

The possibility of being ostracized. Especially if we have asked for help before, we may fear that doing so again might label us as “needy,” Bouchard explains. “And we worry that might lead to being subtly ostracized by our workmates or some other group we belong to.”

Making assumptions about how others will respond. We may assume that people are too busy or that they don’t really want to help, she says. “Or that they have their own issues to deal with, and those issues are much more important to them than my problem.” They’re going to say no, we assume — or if they say yes, they’re going to say it unwillingly and resentfully.

Context-based insecurity. Hesitating to ask for support may have a lot to do with the context in which you’re asking. “Some people are actually very comfortable asking for help at work,” Bouchard observes. “But it’s at home, within their family, that they are worried and hesitant.”

Gender stereotypes might play a role here; a man might feel that he ought to know how to make minor repairs around the house, for example, and be hesitant to ask for help when he’s actually clueless. When asking friends or non-immediate family for support, a similar unease can surface: You might worry that your relationship isn’t close enough for this sort of request.

Not knowing whom to ask. Separate from our hesitations based on a sense of our own possible inadequacy or neediness, there’s the problem of figuring out who can really help us.

Strategies for Success

Reframe your request as a skillful move. Rather than a reflection of cluelessness, seeking support is really a form of mature, rational problem-solving, Bouchard argues. What’s truly irrational is the idea that anyone, including you, could possibly handle everything alone.

Consider the value of interdependence. We all depend on other people all the time, whether it’s to make deliveries, follow traffic laws, prepare meals, or keep the environment clean and orderly — the list goes on. You already need other people, and they need you. Asking for help is simply one form of this general interdependence that helps define human existence.

Know that assisting you will usually make your helper feel good. To illustrate this point, Bouchard tells a personal story. “I was getting on an airplane,” she recalls, “and a gentleman offered to help me put my suitcase in the overhead rack. I refused and refused, but he kept offering. When I finally agreed, the look on his face was so wonderful! He was so happy to help me. And it just hit me hard.” Most people are flattered

and gratified by being asked for help; after all, it’s a vote of confidence in their competence and general goodness.

Make the request a conversation, not a plea. One of the best ways to avoid appearing needy — and to underline the rational, problem-solving aspect of asking for help — is to initiate the ask as a simple, open-ended conversation. “Having a discussion about what you’re facing, what you think about it, and where you feel you might need some help is a start,” Bouchard advises. “You can sit down with the person over coffee and ask them if they would be willing to brainstorm some solutions with you.”

Use the conversation to assess your potential helper. Another benefit of the conversational approach, she says, is that the other person’s response will clarify how helpful they might be and how willing they are to help. “Even if the person says yes, they’ll help you, you might hear some hesitation,” she notes. “So you can say, ‘OK, I hear that you’re hesitating a little. What are your concerns? What can we work through to make this work for both of us?’”

By the same token, the conversation can hint at whether the other person has the knowledge that you need to solve your problem. “If they’re stymied by your problem themselves or they just don’t know what you need, you can move on.”

Ask early. Hesitation to ask naturally produces procrastination, so a problem that would be easy to solve in its early stages becomes a bigger deal — and a more difficult ask — as time passes. Bouchard suggests initiating the I-need-help conversation at the first hint of difficulty. “Don’t wait until things are dire,” she says. “Let people know that you’re working on something and you may need their help in the near future.”

Realize that a no isn’t the end of the world. “Honestly, most people will say yes to a request for help,” she notes. “It’s unusual for someone to flat-out say no. But even if they do, you can ask them to point you in the right direction, to someone else who could help you.” 🗺️

JON SPAYDE is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

Exploring Energy Medicine

Healing modalities that are nonpharmaceutical and noninvasive may sound “soft,” but many of them have been proven by centuries of use.

BY COURTNEY HELGOE

When I was 37, my periods suddenly went haywire. They started

appearing at a breakneck pace, with intervals between them of two weeks or less. It was exhausting and a bit scary.

Yet when I went to my clinic, the doctor just sighed, looked at her watch, and told me I was probably starting menopause.

Since the average age for reaching that milestone is 51, I would have been about 14 years ahead of schedule. I do like being early for things, but I still hoped we could consider other causes, and maybe some other solutions beyond beleaguered acceptance. She didn't think so.

In search of a more satisfying approach, I went to the neighborhood acupuncture clinic. My intake form asked an array of bizarre questions about nonperiod matters: Did I crave cold drinks? Did I wake in the night, and if so, at what time?

When I sat in the treatment chair the kind-eyed practitioner took my pulse, nodding to himself. We spoke briefly, after which he placed tiny needles in my feet, along my shins,

in my hands, and in my ears. None of them hurt. (OK, maybe one or two hurt a little.) Then I rested for an hour. That was it.

I returned weekly for the next few months for the same routine. Within eight weeks, my periods had resumed their normal monthly intervals, and they remained regular as clockwork for years.

If you had asked me what happened, I couldn't have told you, but I also didn't care. I was no longer menstruating near-continuously — that was explanation enough for me.

Energy Medicine, Considered

Many nonpharmaceutical, noninvasive healing modalities involve language that sounds suspiciously soft. What, for example, is an “energy blockage”? Can you see it, measure it, touch it? Is there a lab test for that? All fair questions. Illness makes us vulnerable. The practice of medicine has always included charlatans peddling miracle cures and false hope, and none of us wants to be taken advantage of, especially when we're down.

But the practice of medicine has also always included practitioners and practices that defied easy understanding — even as they routinely produced

A body is more than just muscles and bones. It also has an energy field, subtle and powerful, that strongly influences its overall function.

positive outcomes for their patients. This includes the category of healers who fall under the rather large umbrella of what's now called "energy medicine."

Acupuncture is but one example. This practice rests on the principle of qi (pronounced "chee"): vital energy. In this model, qi travels through the body in channels called meridians, and when we're feeling healthy and strong, it's flowing freely to all our organ systems.

Illness, by contrast, is seen as the result of this energy being blocked, weak, congested. Health is recovered (usually gradually) by finding and releasing these blockages.

That is a too-simplistic explanation of a remarkably complex practice — one that also happens to have a substantial amount of evidence proving its efficacy in treating a broad range of conditions.

Yet the basic principle of energy medicine is relatively simple: A body is more than just muscles and bones. It also has an energy field, subtle and powerful, that strongly influences its overall function.

When healing is elusive by other means, an energetic imbalance in that field may be what remains to be treated. And even if we don't believe in such ethereal stuff, or understand it, energy-healing practices often work anyway.

What Are We Doing Here?

Different people use different terms for the body's energy. In Traditional Chinese Medicine it's called "qi"; in Ayurveda, a system of traditional medicine in India, "prana"; in kinesiology, energy is called . . . "energy." Scientists refer to Reiki and other forms of healing touch as "biofield therapies." And that list is hardly exhaustive.

Energetic healing modalities don't require any particular leap of faith. They can be used on their own to treat mild symptoms or in conjunction with conventional treatments for acute and chronic conditions.

Energy-based healthcare practices are slowly gaining an evidence base to support their efficacy, even as explaining how they work has persistently bewildered researchers. The authors of one 2015 survey of biofield research acknowledged that it was still unclear whether the pain reduction demonstrated in some studies was produced by "bottom-up" processes, such as reduced cellular inflammation, or "top-down" processes involving pain receptors in the brain.

But work they do. One 2021 study of 120 women with osteoarthritis found that those who received healing-touch therapies experienced a significant reduction in pain compared to the control group.

And although results in cancer studies have been inconsistent, some have shown healing-touch practices corresponding to tumor inhibition and reduced spread of malignant cells when compared to controls. Hardly a reason to abandon conventional cancer care, but reason enough to consider including healing touch as a complementary component to a treatment plan.

Which brings us to the mission of this column. Given the vast troves of medical misinformation that have circulated throughout the pandemic, many of us now feel increasingly skeptical of any healing practices that

fall outside the mainstream. I've noticed that in myself. And I haven't only had a positive experience with acupuncture; I'm a healthcare journalist whose beat is integrative medicine.

Nonetheless, I believe it would be a terrible loss for our collective health if we were to ignore the potential benefits of a range of available healing practices, many of which have been in use for centuries.

Energetic healing modalities don't require any particular leap of faith. They can be used on their own to treat mild symptoms or in conjunction with conventional treatments for acute and chronic conditions. They can often tip the scales toward health when nothing else does.

It's true that many of these approaches are not covered by health insurance — which is a real barrier for many of us. Yet some are inexpensive; my community acupuncture sessions were offered on a sliding scale of \$15 to \$40.

Others are free, and still others may ultimately prove themselves worthy of the expense.

So, for now, this column will be dedicated to profiling a different natural healing modality in each issue. It will introduce some practices that may be unfamiliar and explain some modalities you may have heard of but never really understood. It will also address, from time to time, the thorny topic of how natural healing has been misused and misrepresented during the pandemic, and beyond it.

Our hope is to leave you better informed and more aware of your options, and perhaps even to open some doors to healing that you may not have known were there. ☺

COURTNEY HELGOE is the *Experience Life* features editor.



How to Talk With Kids About Climate Change

The most important conversations may be the ones we're not having.

BY JILL PATTON, FMCHC

I don't think my husband and I had any real conversations with our kids about the climate crisis when they were growing up. We read Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* and had a subscription to *National Geographic Kids*, which I assume touched on the topic. But until recently, we'd never asked our kids — now in high school and college — what they know, wonder, or fear about our swiftly warming planet.

We never discussed how extreme weather events, the loss of clean water, species extinction, and the displacement of millions around the globe might affect their futures — or what can be done about it.

Our family's silence on this subject is not unusual. Though more than 80 percent of U.S. parents think kids should be learning about climate change, only 45 percent of us have actually talked to our own kids about it, according to a 2019 NPR poll.

As for why I never brought it up, I'm sure it had to do with my own anxiety and ignorance, plus not knowing what to say that wouldn't freak them out.

But just because we're not talking to them doesn't mean our kids

aren't aware of what's going on. Some learn about climate change at school (though that same NPR study reports that only 42 percent of teachers talk about climate change in the classroom). But if my kids are representative of the millions of other young people with smartphones, they're getting the bulk of their information — and misinformation — about climate change from Instagram, TikTok, and Twitter.

"Climate change is in the air and on the air," says clinical psychologist Daniel Masler, PsyD, who works with children and adults struggling with the impact of climate change on their emotional well-being. "Your kids are going to hear about this, and they're going to be dealing with it."

Without trusted adults to provide context and a safe emotional environment to process what climate change might mean for their lives, kids are vulnerable to climate anxiety. In a recent international survey of 10,000 people ages 16 to 25 published in the *Lancet*, 45 percent of respondents reported that their feelings about climate change had

"negatively affected their daily life and functioning."

"Teens in particular are at risk," says Masler. Climate anxiety, the COVID-19 pandemic, social-justice issues, political unrest, bullying, substance abuse, mental-health factors, and more — today's kids are facing an unprecedented array of worries.

As a result, Masler says, "We're seeing increasing rates of suicide and suicidal thinking among this group."

Why Talking Matters

"We know from work with children who are at risk that when we talk things through, we can contain the emotions better and adapt," says Masler.

Talking normalizes fear and decreases feelings of isolation. "While inviting kids into these discussions can be scary — especially since we don't have all the answers — conversation can generate problem-solving, action, and new ways of thinking. And that's what's needed most," he says.

"Kids are often leading these conversations," adds environmental author and educator Bill McKibben.

“People like Greta Thunberg have emerged as voices of sanity and reason because they’re not willing to sugarcoat or minimize our dilemmas.

“But kids are also anxious. We need to be able to assure them that there are lots of us working in tandem to at least try to solve these crises.”

Keep the Conversation Going

If you’d like to talk about climate change with the kids in your life, consider Masler’s four guidelines for initiating and sustaining conversations with kids grade-school age and up.

1. CHECK IN. When the topic comes up (or you want to bring it up), take a deep breath and ask yourself, *What’s going on here?* This could mean simply looking at the child in front of you, noticing the physical space you’re in, and reflecting on what’s been happening that day, so you get a sense of the state of mind of the young person. Or pause to notice your own feelings and thoughts as you enter the conversation.

2. START WITH AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION. Make a simple observation and ask a question that invites discussion: “You seemed worried about that hurricane video you showed me the other day — what are you thinking about it now?” Then listen.

Your child may have questions for you, too, and it’s OK if you don’t have the answers: “Let’s think about this together.” This sets you up to talk through ideas that empower the child to envision a healthier world, including ways to act.

Younger children may be interested in picking up trash in a park or planting a garden with you; older kids may be ready to connect their concern to political action.

It’s OK to share that you’re worried, too. You don’t have to withhold hard information — with support, most kids can handle the truth — but be careful not to perpetuate messages of doom and gloom.

3. WATCH FOR INFO OVERLOAD.

After you’ve responded to your child’s questions, pause and ask, “Is there anything more you want to know?” This gives children the opportunity to tell you exactly where they are developmentally. They might say “I’m good,” which means they’ve taken in enough and they’re going to go off to process.

Meet kids where they are, and don’t push an agenda that’s too far outside their own.



One thing you did by having the conversation was raise awareness.”

4. LEAVE THE DOOR OPEN. When you wrap up your conversation, let your child know the subject isn’t closed. “Let’s talk about this more sometime soon” is a great way to let kids know they can come to you with further questions, and it sets the expectation that you’ll bring the topic up again after they’ve had some time to absorb any new information or emotions.

You and your kids are not alone in facing this challenge, and there are many resources online and elsewhere to help. Masler and his colleagues have put together a website with resources for parents, educators, and older kids including free handouts and other tools to share with kids

from pre-kindergarten up. Check it out at www.talkclimate.org.

A Long-Overdue Conversation

I recently initiated my own long-overdue conversation about climate change with my daughter and three of her cousins — a group ranging from 12 to 17 years old. I wondered what they knew and what they wished adults would talk to them about.

The two middle-schoolers were aware of climate change but didn’t seem particularly worried, certain that technology would come to the rescue. “Developmentally, they’re right on track in their thinking,” says Masler. “Tweens are putting together the world rationally, even scientifically. They want to know if technology can save things — like, can we all get electric cars and make it all right?”

The high-schoolers, however, were angry. “It’s the people in power. They’re not doing anything that’s helpful,” my oldest nephew said.

I asked the teens what they wished adults would say to them. “I wish schools would offer us more support and teach us what’s really happening,” said my daughter.

My nephew added, “It seems like a lot of adults don’t really care, like they’re pushing it away from themselves and saying it’s our problem.”

Honestly, I didn’t feel great after our conversation; we didn’t resolve anything. I worried that the younger ones weren’t paying enough attention and the older ones weren’t able to evaluate the information they were seeing on social media.

But Masler assures me that I’d gotten an important ball rolling. “One thing you did by having the conversation was raise awareness,” he says. “And you probably relieved a bit of anxiety, because now this is something they can talk about. It cannot lurk while we’re talking about it.”

JILL PATTON, FMCHC, is an *Experience Life* contributing editor and certified functional-medicine health coach.

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LIFE TIME



On Gratitude

As we start another new year, let's make a new type of resolution: to express more thanks.

BY **BAHRAM AKRADI**

For about 4,000 years, people around the world have celebrated the arrival of the new year. Nowadays, in much of the world, this transition occurs on the first of January, the month named in honor of the Roman god Janus, who had two faces: one looking back, the other looking forward.

The New Year holiday is a threshold that marks the passing of time, encouraging both reflection on the past — *What kind of impact did I make? Did I stay true to myself? Did I learn something? What were my mistakes?* — and a vision for the future. We feel the possibilities within us as we continue to grow and become who we wish to be.

Yet over the last few years, some of the focus has shifted away from resolutions. Perhaps, collectively, we've realized they are rooted in a mindset of lack or dissatisfaction, rather than appreciation, celebration, and acceptance of lessons learned and all that was accomplished.

This latter perspective is one of gratitude — a powerful human emotion that's a thankful recognition of all we have and receive.

Long held by many theologians and philosophers as a central element of human virtue, gratitude is now heralded by many experts as a verifiable component of a healthy state of mind — and a healthy way of life.

Physically, gratitude affects our blood pressure, kidney function, and brain chemistry. Emotionally, people who practice gratitude report higher levels of vitality and optimism and lower levels of stress, depression, and anxiety; they tend to feel better about their lives and make meaningful prog-

ress toward their goals. Socially, it can help us build good relationships.

Gratitude itself is something to be thankful for. The more we practice it, the better we feel, which can start to show up in our actions and relationships.

People around us feel uplifted and, consequently, thankful, too. This can, in turn, inspire their generosity, creating a ripple effect of good energy through the world.

It's no wonder that gratitude — along with integrity, perseverance, kindness, and forgiveness — is a virtue that helps us thrive.

Gratitude is now heralded by many experts as a verifiable component of a healthy state of mind — and a healthy way of life.

The New Year is by no means a one-and-done on gratitude, but it is a great time to begin to grow a practice. Here are a few of the simplest things you can do.

1. Focus on your blessings.

Acknowledge what is good in your life. Notice the things you're grateful for and focus less on what you lack.

2. Write them down.

People who write about what they're grateful for report feeling healthier and more optimistic. Start with three things. You'll notice how uplifted you feel and how positive your outlook can become.

3. Be appreciative.

Practice saying "thank you" for happy *and* challenging

experiences. Share your blessings and express your appreciation out loud.

4. See the bigger picture.

Try to recognize that at least some of what you're grateful for is outside of and larger than yourself. Look to other people, to nature, to your interpretation of spirit or a higher power.

We don't intentionally fail to say "thank you" or notice all that we're grateful for. But between the dull patina of habit and the many immediacies of everyday life, we can allow it to elude us; we become oblivious to its power within our reach.

I hope as you move forward in this coming year, you will take the time to summon gratitude more intentionally. With even a small amount of time and energy toward it, you can begin to shift your lens.


With little effort, the power of "thank you" provides a moment in which the sun streams in, and you find yourself awash in a feeling of gladness. As it happens again and again, you may notice that the feeling evolves into a more continuous state of contentment.

So as this beautiful blank page of the new year unfolds before you, may you feel an appreciation for all you are, all you have, and all you have done — and embrace the sheer anticipation of all that lies ahead.

And as you continue to practice gratitude, one of the most important and powerful things you can do, remember to always start with a simple "thank you."

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





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is a fresh start for you.
**That every sunrise is a new chapter
in your life waiting to be written.**

— JUANSEN DIZON

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