

HEALTHY. HAPPY. FOR REAL.

# Experience Life

LIFE TIME®

April 2023

## CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH

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TO BUILD  
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## FIND YOUR OWN WAY

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gravel racer

### Sarah Sturm

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about navigating  
unexpected obstacles —  
on race courses  
and in everyday life.

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# BUILT TO BREAK RECORDS

## ROCKET X 2

ADVANCED CARBON PROPULSION  
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**HOKA** FLY  
HUMAN  
FLY







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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.





Transitions are hard. One minute, things are going one way; the next, **something changes, and you have to adapt and respond.**”

## YOUR THOUGHTS?

Email us at [experiencelife@experiencelife.com](mailto:experiencelife@experiencelife.com).

# Navigating Transitions

“When you reach half court, turn around so you can see the ball — and find the player you’re guarding!” If you’ve played or watched basketball, you probably recognize this as a transition from offense to defense. This past winter, it was a cue I often used to remind the third- and fourth-grade girls on the team I coached to change gears and shift focus during games. Easier said than done.

Transitions are hard. One minute, things are going one way; the next, something changes, and you have to adapt and respond. In the case of basketball, you and your team are in possession of the ball; suddenly, you’re working to get it back as you defend the opponent. How do you move between the two with less confusion and more confidence? With less chaos and more coordination?

Transitioning well takes learning, practice, and experience — in sports *and* in life. The more we understand the factors at play in any given circumstance, the more we can prepare and use the information we have to make the shifts feel easier and more natural.

All sorts of transitions occur in our daily lives: from being asleep to awake, from walking to running, from leaving work to arriving home. They happen seasonally, quarterly, annually. There’s often a rhythm to them, and when we know they’re coming, we can set ourselves up to move through them with patience and compassion.

But transitions also happen unexpectedly: a random injury, the loss of a job, a scary health diagnosis, the sudden passing of a loved one. It’s these experiences that tend to take our breath away — and turn our lives upside down. How do we navigate this space between the before and after?

This in itself is a skill. As clinical psychologist Stuart Ablon, PhD, shared with *Experience Life* in “7 Strategies for Navigating Big Life Changes” (November 2018), “Some people have an easier time than others, but here’s the good news: Being flexible is a skill that can be practiced. Every time you learn to navigate through change, you’ll be better the next time.” (See [ELmag.com/biglifechanges](http://ELmag.com/biglifechanges) for all seven strategies.)

In the midst of pain, sadness, anger, or grief, this insight may feel untenable or upsetting. Yet consider the periods of significant transition in your own life: How did you find your way through? What did you learn in the process?

When my 18-month-old nephew passed away from a rare genetic disorder in 2014, I remember worrying about how our family — and especially my sister and brother-in-law — would continue on without him. Yet we did. They did.

As for me, I relied on the foundational habits that keep me grounded (regular movement, good nutrition, quality sleep), communicated honestly about how I was feeling, and sought professional help.

Since then, I’ve come to realize that transitions often require resilience, persistence, and grace. And that we each have to find our own way to get to the other side.

Professional cyclist Sarah Sturm did this when she stepped away from racing for a period of time (see “Stepping Back, Riding Forward,” page 16). We’re all doing this as we deal with challenging emotions in our lives (see “Hard Feelings,” page 50).

As for those shifts on the basketball court? By the season’s end, all the girls were moving from offense to defense with greater confidence and ease. Perhaps someday they’ll view that experience as one small example of their own ability to be flexible and thrive through the inevitability of change.

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**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



## A REFRAMED IDENTITY

📧 I have been reading *Experience Life* magazine forever and always love Maggie Fazeli Fard's pieces. Her December article "Identity Crisis" is one of my faves. It hit my heart like an arrow and it's helping me (and so many others, I am sure) reframe and rephrase how I define myself. This has been a lifelong struggle, but now, at 53, I will be "verbing myself." @chixrock

## ON AGING

📧 I watch my mom aging and I'm perplexed. Getting old is scary. We're afraid of the unknowns. We're afraid we'll die a painful death ("What Are Seniors' Most Common Mental Health Issues?," November 2022). Medicine gives us security from fears, pains, and anxieties, but I'm not there yet. It's a deep mystery to me. Being young gives us security. Being old with disabilities gives us insecurities. Old people have lots of baggage. Forgive them. We can't change an old person. We can only love them for who they are. Lizzie C.

✉️ I love your magazine, but I want to comment on the December 2022 cover story ("Seen and Heard"). It depicts Paulina Porizkova, a beautiful model, at age 57 with no lines

or wrinkles. I am not sure if your art department did Photoshop work on her images, but she is not typical of the 57-year-old women I know, and it misrepresents most of us.

There is one comment at the end of the Q&A interview noting that she has explored "reassembling" herself. Your images only represent a glamorous celebrity at 57 presenting an impossible image that most or all of your readers cannot achieve.

Linda L.

To learn how *Experience Life* treats image editing, visit [ELmag.com/elimages](http://ELmag.com/elimages).

## READER SUGGESTIONS — AND TESTED TOOLS

📧 I travel back and forth between Europe, where I live, and the United States, where family lives, several times a year. It's been my goal to reduce the acclimation period. I've employed many of the items listed in your article ("Six Common Travel Illnesses and How to Treat Them," November 2022). But my two favorite tools for resetting in a new time zone that aren't mentioned are travel earthing mats and flotation tanks (for sensory deprivation). The latter requires finding a float center at your destination, but it pays off if you really want to adjust faster. Ali S.

📧 I would like to add a few more suggestions to your list of things that aid sleep ("Which Nutrients and Supplements Can Help Me Sleep?," October 2022). They are not supplements, but they have been far more helpful for me than anything else I have tried.

One doctor's recommendation that is quite easy, inexpensive, and fairly effective is to sit outside during the afternoon for 20 to 30 minutes. (You don't have to be in the sun, just where sunlight can reach you.) A similar effect can be accomplished by using a light box, often recommended for those with seasonal affective disorder, also in the late afternoon (and no later than 7:30 p.m.) for about 20 minutes.

What was most helpful to me, though, was biofeedback. I came across it quite by accident, but it was truly a miracle. I wish this information was more widely available. It took me more than 10 years to find out about it.

Linda H.

📧 Massage can certainly ease your pain, but the person giving it should be trained in more than one technique ("Can Massage Soothe Pain?," November 2021). The person giving the massage should ask about movements or actions that cause pain.

They should also ask about the type or feel of the pain. All that information can ensure that the massage is not causing more damage to the body.

Ray K.

## POSITIVE STEPS

📧 Sometimes I get overwhelmed by trying to take 10,000 steps a day, so I end up taking none at all ("Do We Really Need to Take 10,000 Steps a Day?," March 2022). But it's better to get some than none.

Since I lowered my daily goal, I feel better when I accomplish it, and that might push me

to work harder to increase it over time.

Sarah E.

## SOMETHING FOR ALL

✉️ I just want to say how much I enjoy and appreciate your magazine. Even if I'm just slowly starting to take better care of myself, your magazine is inspiring. The thing I appreciate most is that it's not geared toward 20- to 40-year-olds only. It's for everyone.

It has been so depressing and sometimes infuriating (one magazine uses cutesy abbreviations for words trying to appeal to the younger crowd, but it comes off as sappy) for me to read other magazines that are only for younger women.

Gina K.



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## Letters to the Editor

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# Research: More Factors for Reducing Dementia Risk

**A**fter decades of hope and hype, dementia research, including into Alzheimer's disease, seems as far away from offering a cure as it's ever been.

Cases of this cognitive impairment continue to increase along with the aging global population. A recent FDA-approved anti-Alzheimer's drug — Aduhelm — has not lived up to promises. And a new medication, Leqembi, attracted skeptical reviews.

Meanwhile, even what experts thought they knew about Alzheimer's pathology is under suspicion following 2022 reports of fraudulent past research.

Still, recent findings on reducing the risks of dementia are optimistic — and many of the strategies involve lifestyle choices. “Living a fit and healthy lifestyle is your best protection against getting Alzheimer's,” says trailblazing dementia researcher Alison Goate, DPhil.

The best preventive measures remain fundamental: Eat well, watch your blood pressure for stroke risk, get enough sleep, move your body, and exercise your brain.

The latest research has added some other items to this list. While many measures logically revolve

around the importance of social connection, others may be surprising.

**PROTECT YOUR VISION.** A study of 16,690 adults age 50-plus published in *JAMA Neurology* in 2022 suggests that eyesight impairment could be a key, modifiable factor. An estimated 1.8 percent (more than 100,000 people) of all U.S. dementia cases “could potentially have been prevented through healthy vision,” study authors write.

And a 2021 University of Washington study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* found that participants who underwent cataract surgery lowered their risk of dementia by 29 percent compared with those who avoided the procedure.

**MAINTAIN YOUR HEARING.** The *Lancet* Commission on Dementia Prevention, Intervention, and Care ranks hearing loss as a top concern in its 2020 report. A 2019 study in *JAMA Otolaryngology* reviewed the cognitive effects of hearing loss on 6,451 older adults and concluded that every 10-decibel reduction in hearing resulted in reduced cognition. The *Lancet's* report encourages the use of hearing aids as a preventive measure to reduce the risk of associated dementia.

As of October 2022, hearing aids are available over the counter in the United States.

**PREVENT HEAD INJURIES.** The 2020 *Lancet* report warns that concussions and traumatic brain injuries increase dementia risk. Research uncovering the brain's neuroplasticity — the ability of the brain to grow and adapt throughout our lives — has led to progressive therapies for treatment. (For more on treating head injuries, see [ELmag.com/tbi](https://www.ELmag.com/tbi).)

**LIMIT ALCOHOL USE.** It's long been known that heavy drinking is associated with cognitive impairment and dementia. The *Lancet* report states, “Decreasing harmful alcohol drinking could potentially reduce young-onset and later-life dementia.”

**BREATHE WELL.** Air pollution — including smoking — is another new addition to the *Lancet* list. “Reduce exposure to air pollution and second-hand tobacco smoke,” the authors advise. “Stopping smoking, even in later life, ameliorates this risk.”

— MICHAEL DREGNI

**55 million**

Number of people worldwide living with dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, as of 2022, according to the World Health Organization. Nearly 10 million people are diagnosed with dementia annually. And one in 10 Americans over 65 lives with dementia.

## DISCOVER MORE

For links to our other coverage on dementia, see [ELmag.com/dementia](https://www.ELmag.com/dementia).

# Boost Walking and Biking, Boost a City's Overall Health

**Many people know** about the myriad health benefits of walking and bicycling — but what happens when an entire community proactively focuses on improving its walkability and bikeability?

New research shows that the public-health advantages are much more far-reaching and complex than the physical-health benefits that any individual rider experiences from biking, according to Blues Zones, an organization that studies the world's longest-lived cultures as a way to empower everyone to live better.

"Bikeability has other benefits not directly related to population health as well, such as decreased traffic congestion, better air quality, and improved sales at local businesses in areas that have been made more accessible to bicyclists," writes Blues Zones' Lisa Monroe in a 2022 analysis.

Adding bike lanes to roads,

creating new bike paths, installing bike racks at businesses, and other measures that promote bicycling improve a city's overall health in numerous ways.

"We conclude that investments in bicycle lanes come with an exceptionally good value because they simultaneously address multiple public-health problems," write the Columbia University authors of a 2016 study on bike lanes in New York City. "Investments in bike lanes are more cost-effective than the majority of preventive approaches used today."

Similar advantages — as well as benefits to the climate overall — are attributed to better walkability, according to a 2021 report from the Climate Reality Project.

"The world's longest-lived people . . . live in environments that constantly nudge them into moving without thinking about it," explains Blue Zones founder Dan Buettner.

— MD

“  
The world's longest-lived people . . . live in environments that constantly nudge them into moving without thinking about it.”

## FDA Proposes Updates to “Healthy” Food Criteria

**It may become harder** to find packaged foods labeled “healthy” on your grocery shelves in the future if a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposal to tighten its labeling criteria becomes the rule. And the products you do find with the label may actually be good for you.

The FDA's proposal, which was announced in September 2022, would prevent food manufacturers from using the “healthy” label on a product if it contains more than 2.5 grams of sugar (though this can vary depending on the food) and 230 mg of sodium per serving. This proposal also includes limits on saturated fats, depending on the food.

“The old rule was really outdated — you could create any kind of Frankenstein food that met the nutrient criteria and label it as healthy,” cardiologist Dariush Mozaffarian, MD, MPH, tells the *New York Times*. “This is a major advance.”

Many sugary cereals, white breads, sweetened yogurts, and granola bars are among the estimated 5 percent of packaged foods now marketed as healthy that would lose the designation under the proposed rules.

Fare currently considered unhealthy because of its high fat content — avocados, nuts and seeds, fatty fish, and some oils — would qualify for the “healthy” label under the new guidelines.

Manufacturers are not obligated to label their products, however, a fact that may lead consumers to assume anything unlabeled is to be avoided, says Peter Lurie, MD, MPH, president and executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest.

“It's not really helpful in that respect,” he notes. “It allows the industry to decide what to convey to the consumer, as opposed to providing the consumer with what they would clearly want.”

— CRAIG COX





# The Hidden Costs of Family Caregiving

**Caring for aging** or ailing family members carries considerable financial, emotional, and socioeconomic costs, as outlined in reports from the American Enterprise Institute/Brookings Institution and the Aspen Institute. The majority of caregiving responsibilities weigh on the shoulders of women — especially women of color. And many caregivers are often forced to take time away from their jobs to fulfill these responsibilities. The 2020 reports detail the breadth of caregiving in the United States — and some of its hidden costs.

## 33 million

Approximate number of Americans — about 10 percent of the population — responsible for providing care for another adult.

## 3 out of 4

Number of caregivers to older adults who oversee medication management. Additionally, some 65 percent also assist in medical functions or duties at home. Family caregivers rarely have the necessary training to administer certain drugs or medical treatments.

## 30%

Percentage of a typical family's income spent on additional outside caregiving services in some states.

## 10

Average number of hours per week spent tending to a family member by caregivers already working 40 hours a week.

## 67%

Percentage of participants at the start of a study of 280 family caregivers who suffered from depression. Younger caregivers tended to be more depressed than the rest. "One of the study's most important findings is that caregivers of critically ill family members may still be at risk for clinical depression for months, if not years, after the crisis is over," an analysis from Harvard Health explains.

— JAZZ WARD

# Wastewater Woes

**If we think about it at all** when we flush the toilet, it may be reassuring to imagine that a modern wastewater-treatment facility deftly removes all the harmful substances before finally sending a splash of pristine water into some nearby river, lake, or ocean. The reality, however, is not so comforting.

As marine ecologist Stephanie Wear, PhD, a leader at the nonprofit Ocean Sewage Alliance, concludes in a recent study published in *Biological Conservation*, our treatment plants are struggling to keep up with a steadily increasing volume of waste, as well as chemical compounds that evolve faster than filtering technology. As a result, more than 1.2 trillion gallons of untreated sewage flows into U.S. waters each year.

Some, though not all, of the problem originates in our toilet bowls. The caffeine, antibiotics, antidepressants, and even microplastics we ingest and eventually deposit there as part of our human waste tend to evade filtering mechanisms at treatment facilities and land in our waterways.

Once there, the drugs can inhibit the growth and reproduction of fish

— and even alter their behavior — while untreated fecal matter can trigger algae blooms and other environmental hazards.

The oceans are facing a similar assault. Wear and her team tracked the presence of a common anti-inflammatory drug, diclofenac, in

salt marshes to determine the extent of the problem. "We found that

31 percent of salt marshes globally were heavily polluted with human sewage," she tells *Nautilus*. "We are destroying the ocean with our pollutants."

Wear's organization aims to "re-potty-train the world" in response. To do

so, she explains, leaders of the conservation and public-health sectors need to work together to develop more-effective sewage-treatment technologies — including affordable, resource-capturing toilets — while also exploring natural solutions, such as wetland construction.

"Prioritization of cross-sector collaboration at that level," she argues, "has the potential to catalyze new approaches and increase our chance of turning wastewater into a valuable resource, instead of a source of death and disease for people and nature."

— CC

“We found that 31 percent of salt marshes globally were heavily polluted with human sewage. We are destroying the ocean with our pollutants.”



# The Emotional Toll of Financial Stress



**R**ising food and fuel costs, soaring housing prices, increasing interest rates, and a volatile stock market have left many people hurting financially — and emotionally. Even if you're not in dire straits, spiraling negative thoughts and feelings about money can threaten your mental health.

A 2022 study found that even our *subjective* assessment of our financial well-being — including worries and perceptions regardless of our actual situation — is predictive of psychological distress.

Financial stress can leave you sleepless, delay your response time, and make you question yourself, according to financial therapist and advisor Ashley Agnew, MBA.

This distress can affect your ability to make good financial decisions, which can further erode your fiscal health and, in turn, your mental health.

“If financial pressures are causing emotional pressures that impact the way that you work, the way you relate to the people you care about, your self-esteem, and your ability to feel motivated to resolve these issues, know that there is help,” says coach and financial behavior specialist Sandra Davis, MSFP.

Financial coaching and therapy are two types of care that may be helpful if you're trying to make emotional and fiscal sense of your situation. We asked Davis and Agnew to share their insights about how you can relieve the stress yourself — and when to seek professional advice and care.



## GET GROUNDED.

The first thing to do is be present with what you're feeling, says Davis. Feel your feet on the floor, breathe, and notice where you're holding tension in your body.

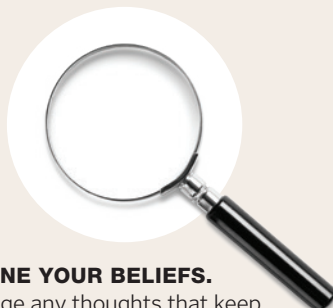
“Mindfulness doesn't mean you have to sit on a cushion and be quiet with your eyes closed,” she adds. Journal about your feelings or about your financial strengths and weaknesses.

“When you're making quick financial decisions, the same hormones release in your brain as those that prepare you for battle,” explains Agnew. Anything you can do to reduce stress helps — whether that's exercising, singing, or playing.

“The less stressed you are, the better decisions you can make.”

## FIND FINANCIAL CARE

For more on various kinds of financial assistance, see [ELmag.com/financialcare](https://ELmag.com/financialcare).



## EXAMINE YOUR BELIEFS.

Challenge any thoughts that keep you stuck in a money story, Davis advises. “If a client is saying things like ‘I'll always be broke’ or ‘I'll never have enough money,’ I'll ask them, ‘Is that true? Has there ever been a time that you did have enough? What would enough look like?’”

In a journal or with a confidant, look for a gap between the reality you're experiencing and your thoughts about what your experience means. Feelings of shame, for example, can cloud your belief in your ability to make change.

“Your financial struggles do not define you,” says Agnew, noting that these times are particularly challenging for many people. “If you're behind on a bill, that instance does not make you a bad financial manager or bad with money. Treat yourself with compassion.”

Financial therapists can help with the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, relational, economic, and integrative aspects of your financial health.



## START WHERE YOU ARE.

“In times of high inflation, there are only three things you can do: You can make more, spend less, or do a combination of the two,” says Davis.

To move forward in this environment, look at what you're already doing: What's working? What's not working? What further information do you require to make changes?

You may find that you've got what you need to make an action plan for yourself and start executing. But you may find you need further help, either with the emotional side of this work or with the practical side. Or both.

“Talk to someone,” advises Agnew. “Talk to a financial coach or financial advisor who has training in financial therapy, because it's all going to be more connected.”

“Even in times like this, you have a choice,” adds Davis. “You can work with someone who can help you recognize your strengths, identify your weaknesses, and create a plan.”

— JILL PATTON, FMCHC





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# STEPPING BACK, RIDING FORWARD

Pro cyclist Sarah Sturm on winning, losing,  
and the value of taking a break.





BY **JILL PATTON, FMCHC** ● PHOTOS BY **BRYNNE MOWER**

**O**n her way to becoming one of the top gravel racers in the country, competitive cyclist Sarah Sturm had to get comfortable with being *not good*.

She had to fall — a lot. She had to walk her bike on trails others could crush. She had to come in last. Eventually, she had to quit.

As a young professional mountain biker, Sturm struggled with discipline and focus, and, she admits, it showed. She longed for the joy she'd felt as a student-athlete and craved more balance between cycling and her other interests.

So, at 24, Sturm stepped away from competing to pursue a career as a graphic designer. She traded her light-weight racing bikes for a trail bike and

started exploring the high country near her home in Durango, Colo., on weekends with friends. “Like a normal person!” she jokes.

Way up in the mountains, Sturm’s perspective began to change. “I realized you could push yourself really hard and do something challenging and no one cared if you finished,” she says. “There was no finish line. There was no cheering. There were no coaches, sponsors, or anything — and I loved it. I think that’s what saved me from fully quitting cycling. It was just enjoyable.”

After a couple of years away from the racing circuit, Sturm began dabbling in competition again, exploring off-road genres that included enduro, cyclocross, and

eventually gravel. In 2019 she won the 100-mile-plus Belgian Waffle Ride in San Marcos, Calif.

“I won the right race at the right time on a gravel bike,” she recalls, “and it blew my career up in a good way.”

Older and wiser (she’s now 33), Sturm asserts her own approach to riding, competing, and living. She is learning to take care of her needs as a person who also happens to be a professional athlete. That means negotiating racing demands and other priorities, including creative projects, friends, and advocacy work with Protect Our Winters, an organization that lobbies for legislation regarding climate change.

We caught up with Sturm to ask about her lessons from the trail.

# Q&A



**EXPERIENCE LIFE** | Off-road biking didn't come easily for you. What kept you from giving up right at the beginning?

**SARAH STURM** | I'd played soccer from elementary through high school and had planned to play at Fort Lewis College in Durango. But then I decided to try something different. As it happened, Fort Lewis had one of the top-ranked collegiate cycling teams in the country, so I signed up.

All my teammates were experienced mountain bikers who had chosen Fort Lewis for cycling — and I was so bad! It was emotionally and physically painful to be the worst one on the team. I remember very clearly the first mountain-bike ride I went on when I *didn't* crash.

But I am someone who enjoys learning new things, especially if they're physical. And my friends were on the cycling team. I'm probably naturally better at road cycling, but I fit in better with the mountain bikers.

**EL** | When you quit racing, you discovered a love of cycling that wasn't about winning. How did that mindset guide your return to competition?

**SS** | I was in New Zealand for a summer, and my partner, Dylan, traveled down to race the Enduro World Series. I decided to sign up, just along for the ride.

Enduro mountain biking is everything I'm bad at. I'm a climber. I'm 5 feet 2 inches tall, so I go uphill a lot faster and I go downhill a lot slower. In enduro, they only time the downhill portions of the ride. They add up all your times and the person with the lowest time wins. I'm pretty sure I came in last!

Then there was a blind jump in one of these races — a huge gap in the trail.

You go down this incredibly steep chute and jump to the other landing. I was the only one who couldn't do the jump.

I remember crying on the bathroom floor and then realizing I had a choice: I could beat myself up — or I could *not* do the gap jump, be the slowest one, and have a good time. It was a big shift to be OK with not being good at something.

**EL** | And now you're competing at a high level in something you *are* good at. How do you reconcile ambition with self-acceptance?

**SS** | I struggle with this. I have that annoying high-achiever, perfectionist mindset already, but when you get paid to race, it ups the ante.

I used to not put everything into the sport because I wanted a reason, in case I failed, to say to myself, *Oh well, I didn't do my best because I never put my best into it.* It was sort of a self-protecting mechanism I had.

But even now, I feel like if I was all-in with just cycling — if my life consisted of training, coming home, putting my legs up, doing my rest, eating everything correctly, doing my strength workout, and then rinsing and repeating — I would have quit for good long ago.

I can't only focus on bike racing even though that's my job. I've stepped away from graphic design professionally, but I've filled that space with other projects.

**EL** | It sounds like you're seeking balance.

**SS** | I've been thinking a lot about what balance means and whether it's achievable. I don't think it is. I think life's always a moving puzzle where you have to fill in different pieces. Sometimes family is really important and needs to take priority. Other times, I have to

focus on biking. And then other times, I've got to get a project done.

I've found I need to have other things going on, within reason, to be successful on the bike. My sense of value and self can't all come from a finish-line number.

**EL** | Tell us about your involvement in Protect Our Winters.

**SS** | Living in Colorado — where we have winter! — I've admired this organization for a long time. They've recently expanded their advocacy efforts to include professional athletes of non-winter sports, such as trail runners, alpinists, hikers, and cyclists. As part of this, I went with a group of cyclists last summer to Washington, D.C., to talk with lawmakers about how climate change affects our jobs as professional athletes.

I explained how the 4,000 people who competed last summer in the Unbound Gravel race (a Life Time-owned, 200-mile gravel race in the Flint Hills of Kansas) had to change our route due to unprecedented rainfall and flooding caused by climate change.

I told them how I can't take the kids I coach in Colorado on mountain-bike rides when the smoke from increasing wildfires affects air quality. I explained how burn zones and mountain-pine-beetle outbreaks caused by warmer, drier summers are destroying our forests and trails.

Getting people to vote and getting political leaders to commit to the environment is part of our job, too. So, we'll write emails, make phone calls, and send out mailers. It's pretty cool. It makes me feel like my platform as an athlete is being put to good use, which is important to me. 🗳️

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**JILL PATTON, FMCHC**, is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.



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# Declutter Your Spaces

Build healthy habits with our monthly challenge. This month, we sort through all the stuff.

BY **EXPERIENCE LIFE STAFF**

## WHY

“Clutter is just stagnant energy,” says feng shui expert Tisha Morris. “Where there’s clutter in your home, there will be clutter in you — either physically, mentally, or emotionally.”

## HOW

Make decluttering a daily habit by starting with a single surface or contained area. One drawer, the mail pile, your wallet or purse — take five minutes and start small.

## TAKE ACTION

Feeling stuck? Decluttering can generate conflicting emotions. Discover resources and tips to support your efforts at [ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit](https://www.ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit).





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# Empty Nest, New Beginnings

Turning toward the next chapter of her life, a single mother hears the call to improve her health and finds inner peace at her local health club.

BY **LISA B. SAMALONIS**

In August 2017, the house was quieter than ever before. My elder son had just left for college; my younger son was a junior in high school and was busy with school, friends, and activities. Suddenly, I had hours of unoccupied time. I had no hobbies. My few friends were busy with their families.

In the stillness, I heard my body's cries for help. Since my divorce 10 years earlier, I'd spent most of my time caring for my sons, who were then 7 and 9. I'd go to work, tend our home, cook meals, and shuttle the kids to sports activities. I hadn't had time to care for my physical or mental health.

Yet as the years passed, I noticed my weight and blood pressure increase. I avoided mirrors, the scale, and the doctor's office, where my rising readings and family history of hypertension spurred talks of lifestyle changes and medications.

Over time, I experienced other concerning symptoms. I was exhausted and my neck and upper back ached constantly. I frequently suffered from headaches.

I also struggled with self-doubt, and my internal dialogue could be cutting. I chided myself for not eating well consistently or exercis-

ing enough. When I did look in the mirror, I appeared tired and worn out. My body seized with stress; I couldn't turn my neck easily some days.

My health needed attention, stat. I'd spent years pouring all my time and energy into my sons; now, at 47, I needed to care for myself.

## Wake-Up Call

As an editor with a 100-mile workday commute, I was largely sedentary — despite my life being busy. I spent most of my days working and driving to and from my office, and it had been a long time since I'd committed to a fitness plan.

I'd swum competitively in school. I'd participated in group fitness classes with my sister at a local gym before having kids. But once my boys were born, I simply couldn't keep up the routine.

Although I belonged to a gym with cardio machines and weights, I didn't go often. When I did, it was begrudgingly after dinner.

On top of that, my eating habits weren't ideal. I often opted for pizza, pasta, burgers, and other convenience food; I snacked after the boys went to bed; and I indulged in ice cream on the weekends to soothe my loneliness when my sons visited their father.

At my annual physical after my elder son left for college, my doctor warned me about the risk of a stroke based on my lifestyle and health markers. I was taken aback.

My son had just settled into the next phase of his life, and his brother would continue on his own path as well. I wanted to be healthy for them and myself: *How had I let this happen?*

My physician and I discussed eating a more nutritious diet and creating a consistent exercise plan. I agreed to start on a low-dose medication for my hypertension. Then I sobbed in my car before I drove home. It was past time to make a change.

## Plan of Action

In addition to taking my medication, I began eating more consciously. I focused on vegetables and fruits and tried to cut back on sugar, meat, and highly processed breads. I monitored my portion sizes and drank more water. When I indulged, I gave myself grace and reset the next morning.

I also looked for a less stressful job closer to home and joined the Life Time club in Mount Laurel, N.J. If I went directly after work, I could exercise for one hour and miss some of the heaviest traffic. (One



Top: Lisa Samalonis attended a New Year's yoga intention-setting event in 2019. Inset: Lisa, with her sons, in 2021.



year later, I accepted a new position closer to home.)

It was a win-win. I had a place to go during my newfound spare time, and I could get out of the house, which now often felt too quiet and empty, and do something to improve my health.

My goals were simple at first: I wanted to move for 45 to 60 minutes and relieve stress. Yet I found the open layout of the club — filled with people of various ages and fitness levels — intimidating. Was everyone looking at me, the stressed-out, out-of-shape mom? I tried to tamp down my anxiety and focus on myself, but it was hard.

I started in my comfort zone with cardio machines. From the treadmill, elliptical, and stationary bike, I saw people coming in and out of the group fitness rooms. Remembering the classes I used to take and how much I'd enjoyed them, I decided to check out some yoga classes.

I began with a gentle flow and then a yin class — my first ever — where I laid on my mat and stretched in the softly lit room. When was the last time I'd remained still for this long without sleeping?

My mind raced through my to-do list and other worries, but the instructor's calm voice brought me back to the simple act of breathing. As music played and I extended in the positions, I felt peaceful for the first time in a long time.



## Positive Future

I started attending yoga classes two or three times each week, and the regular practice increased my awareness of my body, my tension, and my thoughts. I realized going to classes worked my mind and spirit, as well as my muscles, which had begun to relax.

Soon I was attending more classes — not to get to a lower number on the scale, but to feel better, reduce my mind chatter, and find my inner smile.

I also found my way back to the pool. I couldn't swim laps as fast as I had in high school and college, but the sense of gliding through the water — stretching my body, moving my muscles, and resetting my mind — reinvigorated me. After swimming laps or attending a yoga class, I slept more soundly.

I tried other activities, too, including weight and strength classes, Pilates fusion, cycling classes, and water fitness. The classes were friendly and fun. I laughed with others as I tried to master the moves; I marveled at how my quads and butt ached when I sat in my desk chair two days after a strength workout.

I became more aware of my negative inner voices, and I learned to talk more nicely to myself. I realized that I don't need to strive to be perfect.

Instead, I began to see myself as a work in progress. I practiced being as gently supportive of myself as I would be of a friend.

Now, exercise and self-care alleviate my neck and back pain, and along with the medication I take every morning, they help me control my blood pressure.

When I feel overwhelmed or am craving sweet or salty treats, I sit quietly, meditate briefly, drink a glass of water, or take a quick nap. I might jot a few notes in my journal, talk to a friend, or go for a walk.

I see a healthy, positive future for myself. Although I often miss my sons, who no longer orbit around me as they did when they were young, I have learned to savor the moments we share together. And I have (re)developed another side of myself — an active, self-caring, and happy one. 🌱

# Lisa's Top 3 Success Strategies

1

### **DON'T BE AFRAID TO TRY NEW THINGS.**

"I connected immediately with the people in the yoga studio and later found my other favorites, like Pilates fusion and hydro training," Lisa says.

2

### **FOCUS ON HOW EXERCISE MAKES YOU FEEL.**

"When I miss days at the gym, my body reminds me to go back," she says. "Once I'm exercising, I feel better."

3

### **TAME YOUR MIND.**

"I'm an overthinker who internalizes stress and turns to emotional eating," she allows. "Yoga and meditation helped me become more aware of my feelings and how they are connected to my behavior."

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# Reval Fitness

Barre arms moves are a great way to multitask and recruit larger lower-body muscle groups and smaller upper-body muscle groups simultaneously.

— Danica Osborn, CPT,  
Life Time personal trainer  
and certified barre instructor

Page  
26

Build upper-body strength and endurance with dance-inspired moves.

# Barre Arms

Harness the dance-inspired movement of barre to build upper-body strength and endurance with this low-impact routine.



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

**W**hen it comes to improving upper-body strength, many people think bigger — and heavier — is better. Full-body compound moves, such as pushups and pull-ups, as well as challenging lifts, such as bench presses and heavy rows, are key for resistance training. But they aren't the only options for building strength and endurance in the arms, shoulders, and back.

Workouts for barre arms, or dancer arms, are gaining popularity — especially among lifting newbies and folks who are short on time or don't have access to heavier weights or machines.

"Barre arms workouts — or as I've playfully coined them, 'barrms' — take light weights and develop our upper-body strength by relying on small isometric movements or eccentric movements paired with lower-body, ballet-inspired moves," says Life Time personal trainer and certified barre instructor Danica Osborn, CPT.

Some people assume that this style of training delivers the long, lithe limbs of a ballerina, but that's a misconception; the length of your bones and muscles are set. What the barre arms moniker alludes to are the dance-inspired movements that are

fluid and controlled, and require coordination between the upper and lower body.

"Barre arms moves are a great way to multi-task and recruit larger lower-body muscle groups and smaller upper-body muscle groups simultaneously," says Osborn. "Combining

upper- and lower-body exercises mimics real-life movement patterns, as we're rarely isolating

a muscle group in our day-to-day life. These combinations also promote coordination and can keep us mentally sharp."

This type of training typically involves higher repetitions with lighter weights. "Barre arms exercises recruit our slow-twitch muscle fibers to promote endurance and long-lasting energy," Osborn explains. "This isn't the time to grab weights that are heavy."

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ON THE MOVES**

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





# The Workout

Many moves are done with body weight only. Still, you can add weight by holding 2- to 5-pound dumbbells or attaching wrist or ankle weights, as long as you can maintain proper form.

High-rep, low-weight training likely won't help you build maximal strength. But it is useful for building muscular endurance, which contributes to overall stability; aerobic capacity of the muscles; and the ability to carry out repetitive, everyday tasks.

In other words, barre arms workouts aren't designed to take the place of heavier resistance training. "I love lifting with heavy weights a few times a week and supplementing my strength training and cardio with one to two days a week of lighter weights or body-weight exercises like you might find in a barre workout," Osborn says.

"These lighter sessions are like fine-tuning our bodies, hitting the spots we might overlook in our other training. In fact, barre exercise classes originated in the late 1950s by an injured ballerina who began using ballet-inspired movements combined with physical-therapy exercises to rehabilitate her back. So, barre exercises are a great way to promote flexibility, mobility, balance, and strength."

The following barre arms workout, designed by Life Time personal trainer Danica Osborn, CPT, features combos that pair upper-body strength moves with lower-body barre movements.

Do eight to 10 repetitions of each of the following combos (per side, where noted), performing the upper- and lower-body moves in each pair simultaneously. Complete two full rounds of the circuit.

Begin with only your body weight until you get the hang of the exercises. Use 2- to 5-pound weights when you're ready to progress.

## UPRIGHT ROW AND FORWARD TENDU



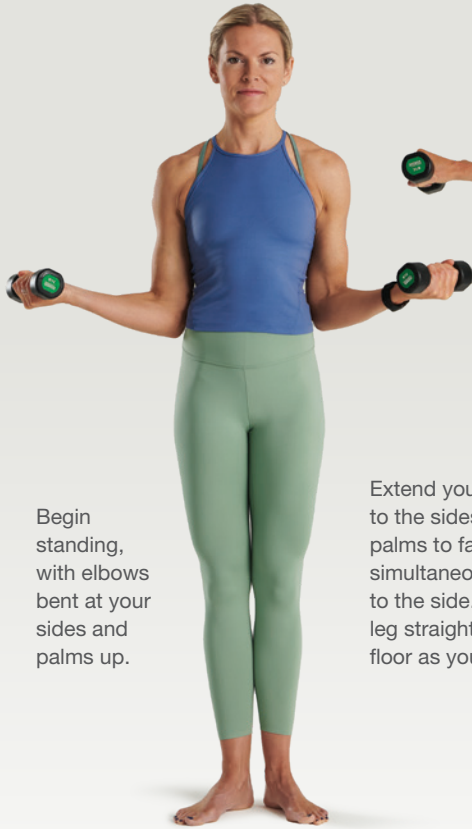
Begin standing tall with shoulders relaxed and weights, if using, in front of your body.

Perform an upright row — keeping your hands close to your body and lifting your elbows to shoulder height — while simultaneously reaching one leg in front of you. Aim to keep your leg straight and toes on the floor as you reach forward.

Return to the starting position, then repeat for eight to 10 reps. Switch legs to perform the move on the other side.

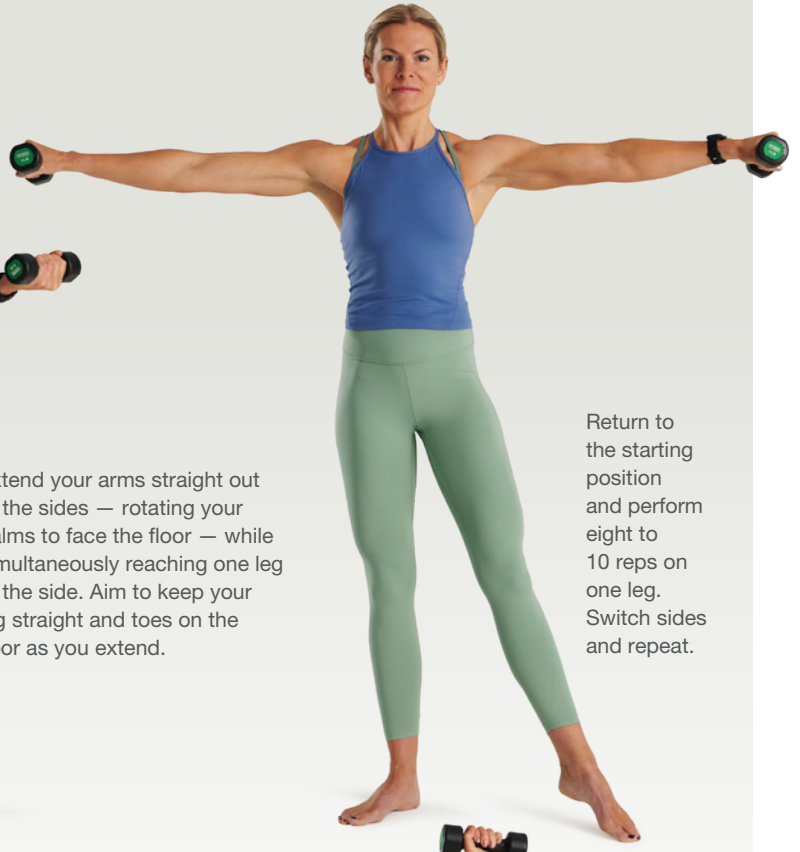
The Workout, cont.

**LATERAL EXTENSION AND TENDU**



Begin standing, with elbows bent at your sides and palms up.

Extend your arms straight out to the sides — rotating your palms to face the floor — while simultaneously reaching one leg to the side. Aim to keep your leg straight and toes on the floor as you extend.



Return to the starting position and perform eight to 10 reps on one leg. Switch sides and repeat.

**FRONT PRESS AND PLIÉ HEEL POP**

Begin in a wide squat position, with toes turned out, and hold the weights at shoulder height, palms facing in.



Extend one arm overhead — rotating your palm to face forward — while simultaneously raising the same-side heel.

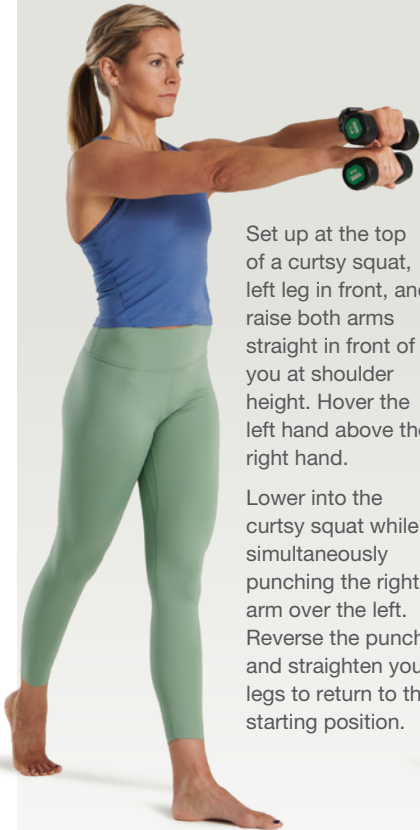
Return to the starting position and perform eight to 10 reps on one side. Switch sides and repeat.



Tip: Stay low in the squat position and aim to avoid raising your hips as you lift your arm and heel.



## PUNCH AND CURTSY



Set up at the top of a curtsy squat, left leg in front, and raise both arms straight in front of you at shoulder height. Hover the left hand above the right hand.

Lower into the curtsy squat while simultaneously punching the right arm over the left. Reverse the punch and straighten your legs to return to the starting position.



Perform eight to 10 reps on one side, then switch your stance and repeat.

## LATERAL RAISE AND PASSÉ

Begin standing tall, with toes slightly pointed out and weights at your sides.

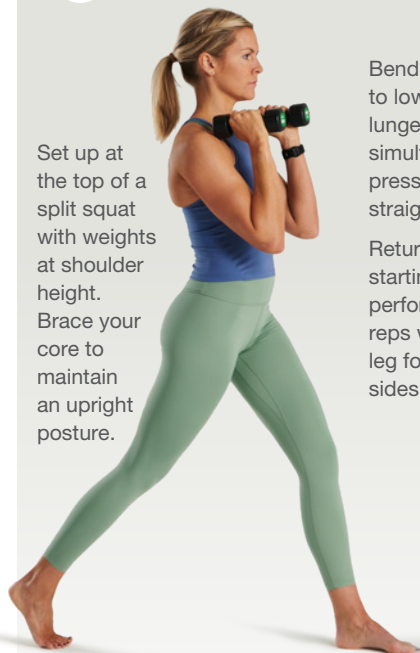
With a slight bend in the elbows, raise your arms out to the sides no higher than shoulder height. Simultaneously bend one knee to the side and tap the inside of your other knee with your toes.

Lower to return to the starting position. Perform eight to 10 reps on one leg, then switch sides and repeat.



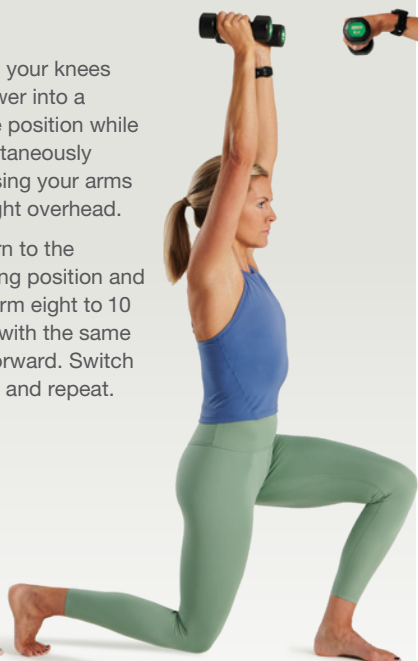
## SHOULDER PRESS AND SPLIT SQUAT

Set up at the top of a split squat with weights at shoulder height. Brace your core to maintain an upright posture.



Bend your knees to lower into a lunge position while simultaneously pressing your arms straight overhead.

Return to the starting position and perform eight to 10 reps with the same leg forward. Switch sides and repeat.



Tip: Keep your hips stable and squared to the front and only lightly tap the inside of your knee with your toes, exerting no pressure against the knee. 🔄



# Riding Gravel

Back roads, dust, beautiful scenery, and bicycling joy: a primer on gravel cycling.

BY MARCO DREGNI

I'm always ready to take the road less traveled. It's a trait that recently led me to gravel cycling, a catchall term to describe riding on a mix of unpaved surfaces — trails, fire roads, and singletrack, any of which might contain some loose or crushed rock and stone.

Sure, sometimes that means I carry my bike across train tracks or hold on tight as I slide my way down a rocky hill. Yet there's something exciting about getting off the beaten path that keeps me coming back for more — and I'm not the only one who feels that way.

Sales of gravel-specific bikes increased 109 percent between 2019 and 2021. And gravel racing has exploded in popularity: Life Time's 200-mile Unbound Gravel race in Kansas, for example, grew from 34 riders in 2006 to almost 4,000 in 2021.

What makes gravel racing special, according to many riders, is the community. Some feel it's more inclusive than the road-cycling scene.

The sport boasts unique terrain challenges while also being less

treacherous than mountain biking and easier on the body than other endurance sports.

"After some injuries while mountain biking, I started spending more time on the gravel bike," explains professional bike racer Emily Schaldach. "I still felt that sense of technical challenge left over from mountain biking, but the risks felt significantly lower."

## Gear Up

Gravel bikes incorporate features from road and mountain bikes, and they are optimized for riding off-pavement. They resemble road bikes thanks to drop handlebars and a lack of suspension, but they have easier gearing and tires that can be as wide as those used on mountain bikes. (These specialized components mean that gravel bikes can be pricey, running between \$2,000 and \$3,000 for a good balance of value and performance.)

There is also variety *within* the category of gravel bike. Someone riding

flat, packed roads could opt for harder gears and smoother, faster tires. Those riding more mountainous terrain might want a bike with lower gear ratios for climbing and knobbier tires for traction.

"Part of riding gravel is building in a sense of flexibility," says Schaldach. "The bike is not going to be ideal all of the time."

You can get away with riding a normal road or cyclocross bike on hard-packed, well-maintained roads. Mountain bikes will also allow you to try out gravel cycling; just be prepared to feel slower, especially if using knobby tires intended for trails.

The tires are key: "Pay attention to tire width and tread pattern in particular," advises off-road-bicycle racer Rachel Olzer, PhD, executive director of All Bikes Welcome and cofounder of Pedal 2 the People. "You may want narrow and low tread for smoother gravel. For chunkier gravel, you may want wider, knobby tires for more traction."





## Plan a Ride

Because gravel riders often travel on unpaved roads instead of bike paths, finding routes can be more difficult than just searching online for “gravel-cycling routes near me.” That said, planning a ride doesn’t have to be hard if you know where to look.

There are several online communities devoted to gravel cycling. Dirty Freehub features a collection of shorter curated routes, while Bikepacking.com provides detailed information for overnight, multiday, and multiweek rides all over the world.

It’s also worth searching Ride With GPS and Strava, apps that share gravel rides uploaded by users in your area.

“I typically plan routes using a combination of applications and help from other FTWN-B [femme, trans, women, and nonbinary] and BIPOC cyclists,” says Olzer, who uses they/she pronouns.

Group rides are a good way to try gravel cycling. Many bike shops and clubs hold weekly or monthly rides, so check in with your local shop — even if they don’t host a ride, they can usually refer you to groups that do. If you are new to riding, look for “no drop” rides that are slower paced and beginner friendly.

Riding with a group can help you stay safe. Still, Olzer notes that gravel cycling can feel risky for women and people of color.

“Being in rural parts as a person of color, in particular, can be really scary. That’s why it’s important to talk with other marginalized folks about the perceived and real risks of riding gravel in groups or solo,” says Olzer.

“Be alert and make sure to listen to your gut. Be prepared to reroute if you are uncomfortable at any point in your ride,” they add. “Sharing your location with a friend or family member and asking them to be on standby in case you need to bail helps give peace of mind.”

## Go Gravel

Experienced bicyclists won’t have too much trouble adapting to gravel, but



**The sport boasts unique terrain challenges while also being less treacherous than mountain biking and easier on the body than other endurance sports.**

there are a few skills that can help you ride safely.

When you’re going uphill or cornering sharply, the top layer of gravel can shift underneath you. To combat this, carry momentum into hills and remain in the saddle while climbing. Staying seated keeps your weight over your back wheel and stops it from spinning out.

At corners, you may have to be less aggressive than you would be on a paved road. Slow down before you begin turning to avoid skidding. While cornering, push your outside foot down on the pedal and your inside hand down on your handlebar. This prevents your wheels from slipping and helps you balance through the turn.

Staying on the most packed portions of routes also makes riding and cornering easier. “While maintaining a regard for safety on the road, check out different sections to find the smoothest path,” advises Schaldach. Sometimes the shoulders are nice and smooth; other times, riding where car tires have packed down the road is most comfortable.

Don’t be discouraged if you aren’t barreling along gravel roads at a quick pace right away.

“Be consistent and patient,” says Kristi Mohn, a member of the

marketing team for Life Time’s off-road events and cofounder of the *Girls Gone Gravel* podcast. It might take a few tries to get the hang of riding gravel.

## Get Race Ready

Gravel racing doesn’t have to mean months of preparation for a 200-mile contest — unless you want it to. While long, intense races often garner the most attention, many events also cater to new riders. “Start small and local if you really find it intimidating,” suggests Mohn.

There are gravel races across the country that feature shorter courses or beginner categories. Races such as Unbound offer 25-mile events for riders looking to get started, or for those who are just not interested in competing in the 200-mile marquee event.

If you are serious about racing, having a training plan is vitally important.

“I’d suggest either getting a coach or finding a training program,” says Mohn, who last year was inducted into the Gravel Cycling Hall of Fame. “Unbound Gravel has programs available for free, and they are a good place to start.”

When it comes to training, a common mistake is focusing only on endurance riding. Because of mass starts, steep rollers, race tactics, headwinds, and the possibility of having to sprint at the finish, it’s essential to also develop your all-out power.

“Remember the sprints and top-end efforts, even though for the majority of the race you will benefit most from long-endurance-style training,” says Schaldach.

Perhaps most important, the gravel-racing community prides itself on fostering a welcoming, all-inclusive environment.

“Realize the folks you are meeting at these events are super stoked you are joining,” notes Mohn. “They are really glad you are giving it a go!”

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**MARCO DREGNI** is a Minneapolis-based writer.





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## “Can I Plan Around the Phases of My Menstrual Cycle to Boost Athletic Performance?”

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

The approach this question alludes to is known as cycle syncing, and it can help you tailor your training to the phases of your menstrual cycle. Each phase has unique hormonal fluctuations that can influence energy levels, perceived strength, and more.

You can think of it as a personalized periodization program, in which you match exercise modality, frequency, and intensity to best meet you where you are at a given moment. The approach could aid you in optimizing performance and improving your long-term gains.

For help explaining what cycle syncing is, how it works, and who might benefit from trying it, I reached out to Steph Gaudreau, a sports nutritionist, lifting coach, and author of the training and nutrition guide *The Core 4*. Cycle syncing

is a topic of professional and personal interest for Gaudreau, who has discussed the subject on her weekly podcast, *Fuel Your Strength*, and trains athletes who are interested in this approach.

It is worth noting that while cycle syncing is gaining popularity and exposure in fitness circles and on social media, there is a lack of supporting scientific research. That's not because it's been disproven; rather, it simply hasn't been sufficiently studied. (There is a staggering dearth of fitness research relating specifically to women and other menstruating folks, but that's a topic for another article.)

If cycle syncing interests you, there's no harm in trying it and deciding for yourself whether it works. As Gaudreau explains, you might learn something about yourself in the process.

### Menstrual Cycle 101

To understand cycle syncing, let's first review the menstrual cycle. There are four phases, each marked by hormonal shifts.

**MENSTRUATION:** When the uterus sheds its lining, this marks day one of the cycle — and also the start of the follicular phase. You may notice mood changes, cramps, and sleep issues that can affect how you feel during training. If your energy and stamina are low, feel free to stick with gentle movements and lighter weights.

After the first couple of days, these symptoms generally pass and estrogen begins to rise, which might give you a renewed sense of strength and energy. “This can be a good time to start upping cardio intensity and moving into heavier resistance training,” says Gaudreau.

**FOLLICULAR PHASE:** This refers to the first half of the cycle, which begins on the first day of menstruation. The body is preparing to release

an egg from one of your ovaries due to the influence of follicle-stimulating hormone, or FSH. Because estrogen peaks around ovulation, and progesterone is lower in this phase than it is in the luteal phase (more on that later), the follicular phase is often called the low-hormone phase.

Following menstruation, which early on might cause low stamina, “you may notice you feel stronger and more coordinated, so it may be a great time to sneak in an extra lifting session, lift heavier, work on more technical lifts like snatches or clean-and-jerks, or emphasize higher-intensity cardio,” Gaudreau says.

**OVULATION:** Toward the middle of the cycle, estrogen rises and luteinizing hormone causes the ovary to release an egg.

“Many people notice strength training, HIIT [high-intensity interval training], and exercises that require more balance or coordination still feel good during this time due to the spike

in estrogen and testosterone,” Gaudreau notes. “However, other people may feel a bit off during ovulation, so pay attention to your body's signals.”

**LUTEAL PHASE:** This is the second half of the cycle, occurring after ovulation. If there was no fertilization, the egg disintegrates. Progesterone rises, and estrogen — despite dipping briefly after ovulation — levels back up. This stage is often called the high-hormone phase, and the last five to seven days of the luteal phase are often associated with PMS.

Common changes during this latter part of the luteal phase include increased body temp (up to 1 degree F), reduced balance and coordination, diminished sleep quality, increased fatigue, mood changes, bloating, cravings, headaches, and lack of motivation. Progesterone declines at the end of this phase, before menstruation begins again.

“These [changes] can absolutely affect how you feel during your



“  
Menstruating people should be empowered to modify their workouts based on how they're feeling whenever they choose.”

workouts, so you may want to reduce the intensity and/or volume of your cardio or lifting,” says Gaudreau. “This might be a time to shift to more moderate, steady-state cardio or moderate loads in your strength training. This could also mean focusing on more mobility work or lighter technique work in your lifting, active recovery, or taking an extra rest day or two.”

She emphasizes that the option to choose gentle movement in the luteal phase does not mean that doing hard things is harmful or that you are “somehow too fragile” to lift heavy or do high-intensity work if you are inspired to do so.

“Menstruating people should be empowered to modify their workouts based on how they're feeling whenever they choose,” she explains. “[But] there is no compelling evidence that you need to stop training completely — or even stop lifting — during the luteal phase.”

### The Benefits of Cycle Syncing

A major plus of this approach is that people often finally make the connection between menstrual-cycle phases and how they feel during exercise, Gaudreau says. “They may be aware that their cycle affects how they feel outside the gym, but when it comes to training, they assume that they should just be able to power through no matter

what. Learning that the fluctuation of estrogen and progesterone may influence their training is often eye-opening. There's a newfound sense of validation (*It's not just all in my head*) or empowerment (*I have permission to adjust my workouts based on how I feel*). That kind of agency and self-efficacy can be very impactful.”

Cycle syncing can also add variety to your training, Gaudreau notes. “Training according to your cycle may help you include elements of training that you might otherwise avoid, such as heavier lifting days, more mobility work, technique sessions, etc.”

Finally, the awareness-building that results from cycle syncing means that “I often see people more willing to give themselves the recovery they need when they're training according to their cycle,” she says. “Instead of pushing through and going hard no matter what, they're often more open to the idea that going to failure every day isn't necessary for getting results — and is often counterproductive.”

### Ready to Give It a Try?

The first step is to understand your unique menstrual cycle.

People taking hormonal birth control or oral contraceptives, people in perimenopause, and folks experiencing some other disruption to their “normal” cycle may find it difficult or impossible to follow this approach. (Not to worry if you

don't make it past this step! There are other ways to personalize your training according to your body's signals. Learn more about intuitive training at [ELmag.com/intuitivetraining](http://ELmag.com/intuitivetraining).)

The next step is to begin tracking your cycle; there are many apps available to help. Start noticing how you feel in each phase and how your energy, perceived strength, sleep quality, mood, and motivation change over the course of the cycle.

Once you've compiled this information, you can begin prioritizing different modalities and intensities in your exercise routine. The most important elements in this method are assessing and adapting — notice how you feel, assess it honestly, and be willing to adapt to your present reality, without guilt or shame.

Gaudreau has found that mindset is a critical piece of the puzzle with cycle syncing — which is not meant to be prescriptive or rigid. Because it's common for menstrual cycles to vary from month to month and over the years, cycle syncing calls for flexibility.

People who prefer not to deviate from a training plan, who aren't accustomed to listening to their body's signals or intuition, or who tend to form unhealthy attachments to tracking might have difficulty with this approach. “Paying attention to your body's signals is very powerful, but it's not something everyone is used to doing,” says Gaudreau.

Give yourself time to adjust and embrace the getting-to-know-yourself aspect of this training approach. Remember that there's no way to do it wrong — it's just one more tool to help you get the most out of your workouts. 🧘



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



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# PROTEIN FOOD



Our healthy, protein-rich snacks are ideal for powering you through work, school, sports — whatever the day holds for you.

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Find our recipe for the Chocolate Frozen Yogurt Bark seen here at [ELmag.com/proteinsnacks](http://ELmag.com/proteinsnacks).



# Quercetin:

## A Seasonal-Allergy Remedy

Learn how this common nutrient can provide relief.

BY JILL PATTON, FMCHC

**A**h, spring! Time to open the windows and welcome in the fresh air.

Well, maybe.

If you're among the more than 50 million people in the United States with allergic rhinitis, better known as allergies, spring can be a miserable time. Pollen from trees, grasses, and weeds can trigger itchy eyes, nasal congestion, and other indignities. Spring's arrival may make you more likely to close up the house and submit to a groggy few months of allergy medication.

Yet many integrative- and functional-medicine practitioners believe there are better — and safer — options. “Inhaled, nasal, and topical steroids are very handy and effective, but they're not without adverse effects,” says functional-medicine physician Gregory Plotnikoff, MD, MTS, FACP.

The occasional use of anticholinergic, antihistamine drugs isn't

likely to lead to problems aside from drowsiness, but long-term use may be another story. “Anticholinergic drugs such as Benadryl act by blocking a neurotransmitter in our brains called acetylcholine, which is involved in allergic reactions — as well as learning and memory,” explains naturopathic practitioner Kara Fitzgerald, ND, IFMCP.

She points to a study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine* in 2015 indicating drugs with anticholinergic effects may increase the risk of dementia. Other studies also suggest there may be a connection between long-term use of these medications and cognitive decline.

Further, says Fitzgerald, “antihistamine medications don't address

the root cause of immune dysfunction, which, if left unaddressed, can promote further immune dysregulation and development of other sensitivities.” (Learn more about the functional-medicine approach to treating allergies at [ELmag.com/allergy](https://www.ELmag.com/allergy).)

Fortunately, drugs are not your only option. You can support your immune system and relieve the misery of seasonal-allergy symptoms through targeted nutrition.

One especially useful nutrient to consider is quercetin. This natural antihistamine can provide drug-free relief, both from seasonal-allergy symptoms and from allergic reactivity to perennial triggers, such as dust and dander.

If you're among the more than 50 million people in the United States with allergic rhinitis, better known as allergies, **spring can be a miserable time.**





## The Allergic Alarm

Nutritionally, quercetin is classified as a flavonoid — a group of naturally occurring compounds that give vegetables, fruits, and flowers their colorful hues. Flavonoids also act as antioxidants, which neutralize the oxidative stress behind virtually all chronic disease.

To understand how quercetin reduces allergic reactivity, consider how allergens activate our immune systems. In sensitized people, pollen and other substances in our environment trigger the production of IgE antibodies. These immune molecules cause mast cells and basophils to release histamine and other allergy-mediating molecules.

Mast cells are in all parts of the body that come into contact, directly or indirectly, with the outside world — eyes, ears, sinuses, mouth, throat, gastrointestinal tract, and skin. Imagine these as sentinels on a ship scanning the horizon for icebergs, or in a tower scouting for forest fires, Plotnikoff suggests. “If they detect something, they sound the alarm.”

This alarm leads to inflammation of nasal passages and eyes, as well as itching, swelling, and mucus production. But the response doesn’t end here.

Histamine molecules dock at receptor sites in these affected areas, triggering mast cells to keep releasing histamine and other chemicals. “This is where people get stuck in a nonresolving, detrimental, proinflammatory loop,” Plotnikoff says.

Quercetin helps relieve these symptoms by stabilizing the mast-cell membranes, which inhibits histamine release. “It interrupts the loop,” he adds. “It raises the threshold by which mast cells would release more histamines and other chemicals.”

This nonsteroidal way of moderating histamine response takes a

while to get up to speed, he adds. It can be several weeks before the effects kick in. “So, it’s not going to be nearly as quick as taking a Zyrtec or a Benadryl, which actually block the histamine receptor.”

While a lot of research has been done on quercetin, it’s mostly been in lab environments rather than clinical ones. But Plotnikoff and other practitioners consider this research in the context of clinical observation and patient reporting as well.

“Quercetin is well known and overall safe,” he says. “It represents a logical option for those who would prefer not to take medications.”

## Where to Find Quercetin

If you’re already eating a plant-forward, rainbow-colored diet, you’re likely getting quercetin nearly every day. It’s found in colorful produce, including red onions, dark cherries, cranberries, blueberries, blackberries, and grapes. Apples (with the skin), citrus fruits, and yellow onions are also good sources of quercetin, as are broccoli, spinach, kale, asparagus, peppers, scallions, and fennel.

“Capers, in particular, are off the charts compared with other foods for their quercetin content — they are a quercetin superfood!” says Fitzgerald.

You can find the nutrient in your morning tea — especially green, black, and oolong — and in your evening red wine as well.

Herbs (including parsley, sage, thyme, oregano, chives, and dill) are good sources, too.

Still, the bioavailability of quercetin varies widely among foods, says Plotnikoff. Onions deliver more bioavailable quercetin than apples, for example. Because quercetin is a lipophilic compound (meaning

**Drugs are not your only option. You can support your immune system and relieve the misery of seasonal-allergy symptoms through targeted nutrition.**

## Beyond Allergies: Other Benefits of Quercetin

### In addition to helping tame

the allergy response, quercetin has anti-inflammatory, antiviral, and anticancer properties, and it provides mitochondrial protection, says Gregory Plotnikoff, MD, MTS, FACP. Its protective and therapeutic potential keeps researchers busy investigating its ability to support a range of health conditions.

• **Brain health:** Several studies have identified quercetin’s neuro-protective benefits. As an antioxidant, it may mitigate age-related degenerative processes, for example, and its anti-inflammatory properties may protect against the progression of inflammation-mediated neurodegenerative disorders.

• **Heart health:** Along with other flavonoids, such as resveratrol and catechins, quercetin may help reduce the risk of atherosclerosis, the plaque accumulation in arteries that can lead to heart attack and stroke. It may also prevent damage from LDL cholesterol and reduce blood pressure in people with hypertension.

• **Cancer:** In lab studies, quercetin has inhibited many types of cancer cells. Plotnikoff cautions, however: “In some types of cancers, quercetin enhances the activity of chemotherapy, and in others it actually blocks the effectiveness of chemotherapy.”

• **COVID-19:** The Institute for Functional Medicine notes that “quercetin has been shown to have antiviral effects against both RNA viruses (e.g., influenza and coronavirus) and DNA viruses (e.g., herpes).” Although clinical evidence is limited, says Plotnikoff, “for some people, quercetin has been helpful for both acute and long COVID.”

it dissolves more easily in fat than water), pairing these foods with dietary fat — think cooking onions in olive oil — may improve absorption. “A salad with olive oil would also be ideal,” he says.

“I always encourage people to focus on food first for quercetin absorption,” adds functional dietitian Cindi Lockhart, RDN, LD, IFNCP, but she notes that “there’s a lower potency. When you talk about therapeutic doses, you almost have to supplement.”

If you’re trying to reduce your dependence on allergy medication, Lockhart says, try synergistic quercetin supplements that include nutrients such as bromelain, an enzyme mixture found in pineapples that can enhance the body’s ability to absorb quercetin.

She explains that many supplements have a “loading dose,” to be taken initially. As you notice a dampening of symptoms, you can reduce to a lower “maintenance dose.” (Turn to a healthcare provider for dosage guidance. Also, some providers recommend starting supplements well before pollen season begins, to prevent symptoms.)

You may even be able to wean yourself from pharmaceutical support altogether.

“It usually takes a few weeks before you notice improvements, during which time you may still need to use antihistamine medications if your symptoms are severe enough to impede your daily activities,” says Fitzgerald. “However, after that time you may start to notice reduced symptoms and have less or no need for medication.” 🌱

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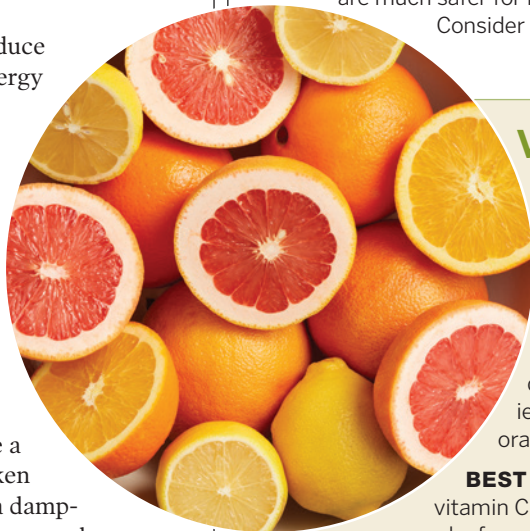
**JILL PATTON, FMCHC**, is an *Experience Life* contributing editor and certified functional-medicine health coach.

## More Sources of Allergy Relief

**To address allergies**, “one of the most powerful leverage points we have is diet,” says Kara Fitzgerald, ND, IFMCP, who recommends a whole-foods diet with plenty of colorful vegetables and fruits, herbs and spices, nuts and seeds, and fish rich in omega-3 fatty acids. She also suggests avoiding inflammatory foods that can drive allergy symptoms, including sugars, refined grains, vegetable oils, trans fats, and processed foods.

Several botanicals may support you during allergy season. “They usually take a little longer to act than medications, and you must be consistent about taking them before and during allergy seasons, but they are much safer for long-term use,” she says.

Consider adding these to your antiallergy arsenal.



### Vitamin C

With its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties, vitamin C supports immune function and has also been shown to reduce the amount of histamine your body produces in response to allergen exposure. “Since allergies are an immune-system response, it makes sense that adequate vitamin C is important,” says Life Time master trainer and dietitian Samantha McKinney, RDN, LD. “Most studies are done on intravenous vitamin C, but taking it orally can still help boost your vitamin C status.”

**BEST FOOD SOURCES:** Humans don’t make or store vitamin C, so eat plenty of your favorite citrus fruits, peppers, green leafy vegetables, and berries.

**HOW TO SUPPLEMENT:** For extra support during allergy season, Cindi Lockhart, RDN, LD, IFNCP, recommends a liposomal form of vitamin C for optimal absorption. Try 500 mg twice a day “up to bowel tolerance,” she says. If you’re still having allergy symptoms and your stools are fine, increase gradually to as much as 2,000 mg a day.

### Stinging Nettle

A long-revered herbal remedy, stinging nettle contains quercetin and other flavonoids as well as a host of vitamins, including vitamin C. Research is limited, but studies suggest it may reduce seasonal-allergy symptoms by acting as an anti-inflammatory and antihistamine. More long-term human studies are needed to confirm efficacy and safety.

**BEST FOOD SOURCES:** You can find stinging-nettle tinctures and capsules at most natural grocery stores and pharmacies. Some people make a tea or tincture from dried leaves or flowers, or add roots to soups. “I would not recommend making a tincture on your own unless you’re an experienced herbalist or professional,” cautions McKinney.

**HOW TO SUPPLEMENT:** “The most common dose for allergies is 300 mg twice daily for a total of 600 mg of a supplement from the stinging-nettle leaf, not the root,” says McKinney.



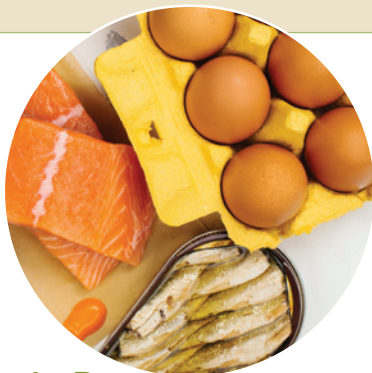


## Bromelain

This enzyme mixture is known for its support of digestion as well as its inflammation-fighting properties. Research suggests bromelain may shorten the duration of acute-sinusitis symptoms, improve breathing, and reduce nasal inflammation. It's also used with supplemental quercetin to increase absorption.

**BEST FOOD SOURCES:** Bromelain is found in fresh pineapple, but not in therapeutic doses. Still, the fruit is rich in antioxidants and immune-boosting nutrients, including vitamin C, which support allergy-symptom relief.

**HOW TO SUPPLEMENT:** "Bromelain is typically taken as a capsule or tablet, but it's also available as a powder," says McKinney. She notes that it can cross-react with certain medications, so check with your physician if you're taking prescriptions, especially antibiotics, blood thinners, sleep aids, or antidepressants.



## Vitamin D

Researchers have long recognized vitamin D's role in supporting immune health, and more recent studies suggest that people with low serum vitamin D levels may have an increased risk of allergic rhinitis.

A small 2015 placebo-controlled trial of vitamin D supplementation found that allergic-rhinitis patients who took vitamin D had significantly improved nasal symptoms after supplementation.

**BEST FOOD SOURCES:** Eggs and fatty fish, such as salmon, sardines, and mackerel (with bones for the most nutritional benefit), are excellent sources of vitamin D.

Still, "the average person is not going to see a big bump in their vitamin D levels from food alone, especially if they're deficient," says McKinney, who recommends some common-sense exposure to the sun, as well as supplementation.

**HOW TO SUPPLEMENT:** Look for vitamin D3, which is more bioavailable than D2. Taking vitamin K2 with your D3 provides synergistic benefits. (Find out more about vitamin D supplementation at [ELmag.com/vitaminD](http://ELmag.com/vitaminD).)

## Probiotics and Prebiotics

With 70 to 80 percent of our immune cells living in the gut — and an increasing understanding of how the gut microbiome affects systemic immunity — it makes sense to feed and repopulate our microbiota to reduce allergic reactivity. Several studies have shown that probiotic support can improve symptoms of allergic rhinitis.

**BEST FOOD SOURCES:** "Food is how you really shift things in the microbiome," says Lockhart, noting that "a supplement is more like a placeholder." Probiotic foods that populate your gut with healthy bacteria are fermented fare, such as natural sauerkraut, kimchi, yogurt, miso, and kombucha. Prebiotic foods — which feed the bacteria in your gut — include asparagus, cabbage, garlic, Jerusalem artichokes, and onions. (Learn more at [ELmag.com/probiotics](http://ELmag.com/probiotics) and [ELmag.com/prebiotics](http://ELmag.com/prebiotics).)

**HOW TO SUPPLEMENT:** McKinney suggests that a broad-spectrum probiotic supplement may be helpful for allergies. "I typically recommend both food-based strategies and periodic probiotic supplementation. Look for options that have at least 30 billion CFU (colony-forming units) that include both *Lactobacillus* and *Bifidobacterium* species."

## Black Cumin Seed

*Nigella sativa* (*N. sativa*), also known as black cumin seed, has a long history as a traditional food and folk medicine. Limited but promising research suggests the seed's antihistamine, anti-inflammatory, and immune-boosting properties may reduce respiratory allergy symptoms.

**BEST FOOD SOURCES:** Black cumin seeds are commonly used throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. They're often added to bread, yogurt, pickles, sauces, and salads.

**HOW TO SUPPLEMENT:** Many studies used 500 mg of black-cumin-seed oil taken three times daily. Fitzgerald recommends looking for formulations with 0.7 percent or greater thymoquinone (TQ) content.





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# Spicy Braised Tofu

This protein-rich main is ready in 15 minutes or less.

BY **MADDIE AUGUSTIN**

Makes three servings  
Prep time: five minutes  
Cook time: 10 minutes



1 12-oz. block firm tofu, drained



1 tsp. sea salt, plus more to taste



1 green onion, sliced and divided by color



1 clove garlic, minced



1 tbs. honey



1 tbs. soy sauce



½ tbs. chili-garlic paste or sauce



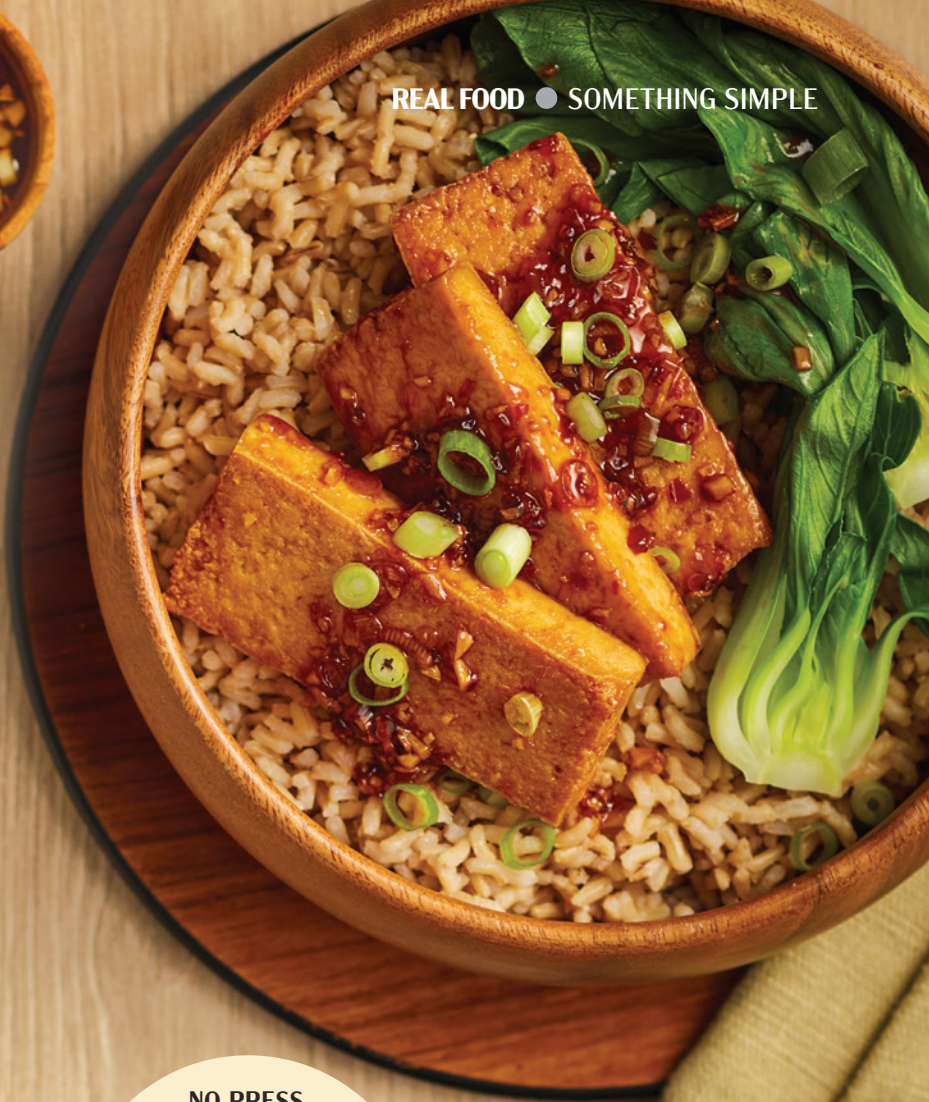
½ tsp. minced fresh ginger



½ tsp. sesame oil or chili-sesame oil



2 tbs. avocado or peanut oil



## NO-PRESS PROTEIN

Because it's made from soybeans, tofu is a plant-based complete protein. Here, you'll salt the surface to draw out moisture so you can get crispy tofu without the need to press it.

Slice the tofu into ½-inch slabs and sprinkle the cut sides with sea salt. Set aside to prep the remaining ingredients.

In a small bowl, place the whites of the green onion, garlic, honey, soy sauce, chili-garlic paste or sauce, ginger, and sesame oil. Whisk until combined.

Preheat a wok or nonstick skillet with the avocado oil to medium-high heat. Pat the tofu dry with a clean kitchen towel and place in a

single layer in the preheated pan. Sear on both sides until golden brown, three to four minutes.

Reduce the heat to medium-low, add the sauce, and simmer until the onions are tender and the sauce thickens slightly, about three to four minutes.

Remove the tofu to a plate, pour the sauce over it, and top with the remaining sliced green onion. Serve with rice and steamed vegetables if desired.



# Pick the Best Produce

Spring is prime time for some of your favorite veggies and fruits. Select the freshest options with these tips.

BY CAMILLE BERRY

**W**e've all been there: Looking forward to some healthy snacking, you empty a container of blueberries to wash them — only to discover mold on the fruit you purchased just hours ago. It's frustrating, a bit infuriating, and oh so disappointing.

Fortunately, there are tips and tricks to employ the next time you're shopping for produce to help you avoid future fiascoes.

Because produce is a living thing, knowing what to buy often comes down to recognizing where the veggie or fruit is in its life cycle — as well as where it's from and how it was harvested. With practice, you'll be able to select the freshest picks, confident your produce will be at its most nutritious, flavor-rich best.

## ● USE YOUR SENSES.

Sight, smell, touch, and taste (if you're allowed a sample) are your most important tools when shopping for succulent, flavorful vegetables and fruits.

Vegetables are picked ripe and don't ripen further after harvest, so many tend to have a longer shelf life compared with more fragile fruits, which can be sold at any stage of their life cycle. That's one reason it's essential to know the indicators of ripeness.

As a general rule, produce should feel heavier when ripe, thanks to its high water content. As they begin to degrade, vegetables and fruits lose weight, so avoid any that feel lightweight for their size, especially if they're bruised or mushy.

You can usually also tell by sight whether items are in good shape. Take an extra moment to glance at the cut stem, advises Cynthia Sandberg, owner of Love Apple Farms, a biodynamic farm in Santa Cruz, Calif. "If the cut stem is brown or wrinkled, the produce is older than you may want."

Aroma is another good indicator of ripeness. Berries should smell fresh and sweet, with no moldy whiffs. Pineapples and stone fruits, such as peaches and nectarines, should have a rich, fruity aroma. Ripe tomatoes yield a pleasant earthy smell, familiar to anyone who's plucked a sun-drenched tomato right off the vine.

## ● DON'T FORGET COMMON SENSE.

Your own judgment will typically lead you in the right direction. Sprouting potatoes and wrinkled apples have seen better days. Soft, mushy tomatoes shouldn't make their way into your shopping basket, either.

Produce is often waxed before it hits the supermarket shelves, so the shiniest, most tempting-looking veggies and fruits won't necessarily be the tastiest. This is true even of some organic produce.

Though the Food and Drug Administration says the wax is safe to eat, you might prefer to remove it (and the bacteria and microorganisms that could be clinging to it) before using the produce. Most coatings can be scrubbed off with a brush under hot water, but you can also add a tablespoon of a household acid (like lemon juice) to a basin of hot water to help do the job.



● **THINK AHEAD.**

Before shopping for produce, it's worthwhile to consider when and how you want to use it, as both have a bearing on the preferred stage of ripeness.

Tomatoes are a good example, Sandberg says, because they have a fleeting window of perfect ripeness — though you can use them earlier. “Tomatoes should be picked when they yield to gentle pressure,” she says, “unless you're making fried green tomatoes. Or if you want to take tomatoes to your friend's house for them to enjoy over the next week.” In both cases, slightly underripe tomatoes are the perfect pick.

If you're growing a garden, keep a close eye on your veggies and fruits so you can harvest and enjoy them when they're at their peak.

● **STORE STRATEGICALLY.**

Fruits that continue ripening after harvest are called climacteric, a category that includes mangoes, bananas, avocados, pears, nectarines, peaches, and apricots. If you buy them before they're ripe, you can leave them on your countertop until their aromas and texture let you know they're ready to be eaten or refrigerated, which will slow the ripening process.

Some fruits do well when stored at room temperature; most can be refrigerated for a short time to keep them from rotting — and whether you choose to do so is a matter of personal preference. For example, we're often told to never refrigerate tomatoes because it can affect their texture. But putting those almost-too-ripe tomatoes in the fridge can buy you an extra day or two if you're not planning on using them right away. (For a full list of temperature-storage tips for some of your favorite produce, see [ELmag.com/fruitsandveggies](http://ELmag.com/fruitsandveggies).)

● **SHOP WITH THE SEASONS.**

“It goes without saying that fresh, seasonal fruits and vegetables provide the foundation for delicious, nourishing dishes,” writes chef Bryant Terry in his book *Afro-Vegan*. Shopping for what's in season allows you to get your hands on the freshest, most nutritious produce, and it's a great excuse to try out new foods and recipes.

This time of year, look for spring favorites like asparagus, artichokes, radishes, and rhubarb. We're accustomed to buying these items at any time, but eating them in springtime aligns our diets with corresponding seasonal shifts in our bodies, according to health traditions like Indian Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine. (For more on the many ways eating with the seasons can support your health, see [ELmag.com/seasonaleating](http://ELmag.com/seasonaleating).)

● **KEEP IT LOCAL.**

Local farmers' markets are some of the best places to find the freshest produce. Often, the merchandise has just been picked that morning and is more nutrient-dense than anything you can buy at the supermarket. That's because produce starts losing nutrients once it's harvested: A University of California, Davis, study found that vegetables lost between 15 and 77 percent of their vitamin C during seven days of storage.

Farmers' markets are also a great source of unusual cultivars and heirloom varieties that can transform your cooking.

Wine connoisseurs may be familiar with the concept of terroir, or sense of place. A marriage of elements — climate, soil, elevation, farming methods — gives the wine a distinctive identity that speaks to its origins: the land where the grapes were grown.

Terroir also applies to vegetables and fruits. Greens, spring onions, and strawberries purchased from a farm in your area will have a similarly unique character, particular to your locale. (For more on the benefits of supporting your local food community, see [ELmag.com/csa](http://ELmag.com/csa).)

● **KNOW YOUR ETIQUETTE.**

It's perfectly acceptable to pick up one or two pieces of produce as you shop to check if they're in good condition, but it's considered bad form to paw through crates, squeezing each avocado in search of the ideal one.

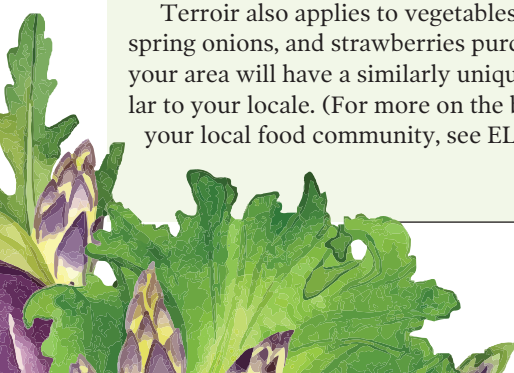
This is especially true at farmers' markets, Sandberg notes. “Ask the farmer before handling the produce. They may want to select and bag for you,” she says, adding that protocol can differ by location. “In European farmers' markets, it is absolutely forbidden to touch the produce if you're a customer.”

● **SWAP AWAY.**

If, while perusing the produce aisle, you find shallots that don't look their best, scoop up a bunch of leeks to take their place. Mealy looking apples? Choose pears instead. No kale in sight? Try Swiss chard, collard greens, or spinach.

Such flexibility ensures you get the freshest veggies and fruits while diversifying your diet — and you may discover your original recipes become even tastier with the alternative. ♻️

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





# Protein on the Go

These protein-packed recipes are ideal to-go snacks for work, school, sports, or wherever the day takes you.

BY **ROBIN ASBELL**



## GRAB AND GO

Keep some of these whole-food options on hand for when you need a high-protein snack.

● **HUMMUS AND VEGGIE STICKS.**

Get a few of our favorite hummus recipes at [ELmag.com/hummus](https://www.ELmag.com/hummus). Slice up carrots, celery, or bell peppers for grab-and-go dippers.

● **NUTS AND SEEDS.**

A fistful of nuts or seeds provides protein and healthy fats, plus a variety of vitamins and minerals.

● **NUT BUTTER AND FRUIT.**

Try apple slices with cashew butter, pear slices with almond butter, or berries with hazelnut butter.

● **BOILED EGGS.**

Portable by nature, a boiled egg is a great option for quick protein while on the move. Get our tips for making the perfect egg every time at [ELmag.com/boiledeggs](https://www.ELmag.com/boiledeggs).

● **CHEESE OR MEAT STICKS.**

When possible, pick organic brands with few ingredients. Choose a full-fat cheese for the best nutrient absorption, and avoid meat products with sweeteners, nitrates, nitrites, or preservatives.

● **COTTAGE CHEESE WITH BERRIES.**

If you think of cottage cheese as a bland, watery mess, you need to know about the new, upgraded cottage cheese. Newer organic brands are available with live cultures and probiotics. They're tastier than the conventional stuff — and healthier, too.

● **BONE BROTH.**

Rich in restorative, anti-inflammatory collagen, bone broth can be poured into a to-go mug and sipped at your leisure. Get our recipe for making your own at [ELmag.com/bonebroth](https://www.ELmag.com/bonebroth).

Whether you need a midday snack or a postworkout boost, protein is a good pick. This macronutrient satisfies hunger while keeping blood sugar steady, and it's vital for building and repairing muscle. You might even have a jug of protein or collagen powder in your pantry to help support your health and fitness goals.


These days, there are plenty of protein powders to choose from, including dairy-derived whey powder and plant-based options, such as pea, hemp, and soy. Whichever you choose, be sure you like the way it tastes before using it in your kitchen. (Not sure where to start? Get advice on choosing the right protein powder — plus some collagen guidance — at [ELmag.com/proteinpowder](https://www.ELmag.com/proteinpowder).)

While protein and collagen powders can't fully replace the nutrients in whole-food sources, they can be a fine supplement. These recipes combine the best of both types of powders for portable, protein-packed snacks to keep you going when you're on the move.

PHOTOS: TERRY BRENNAN; FOOD STYLING: BETSY NELSON







## Mango Cheesecake Smoothie

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**Makes two servings**  
**Prep time: 10 minutes**

- 1 cup milk of choice
- 1 cup organic, full-fat cottage cheese (with live cultures, if possible)
- 1 tsp. grated fresh ginger
- ¼ tsp. ground turmeric
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 scoops vanilla protein powder of choice
- 2 cups frozen mango cubes
- 1 cup ice cubes

Place all ingredients in a blender in the order listed above. Secure the lid; if you have a tamper, insert it in the lid.

Blend, starting on a low speed and increasing to high until the mixture is smooth. Pause as necessary to scrape down the pitcher.

Serve immediately, or transfer to portable containers. Keep refrigerated or frozen until serving.

## Purple Collagen Smoothie

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**Makes two servings**  
**Prep time: 10 minutes**

- 1 cup milk of choice
- ½ large avocado
- 2 cups baby spinach
- ¼ cup vanilla collagen powder of choice
- 2 cups frozen blueberries
- 1 tsp. lemon juice

Place all ingredients in a blender in the order listed above. Secure the lid; if you have a tamper, insert it in the lid.

Blend, starting on a low speed and increasing to high until the mixture is smooth. Pause as necessary to scrape down the pitcher.

Serve immediately, or transfer to portable containers. Keep refrigerated or frozen until serving.



## Almond Oat Protein Cookies

Makes 18 cookies

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cook time: 16 to 20 minutes

- ½ cup avocado oil or coconut oil
- ½ cup almond butter
- ½ cup pure maple syrup
- 1 tbs. ground flaxseed
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- ¼ tsp. almond extract, optional
- 1 cup rolled oats
- ½ cup vanilla protein powder of choice
- ¼ cup flour of choice
- ½ tsp. baking soda
- ¼ tsp. sea salt
- ½ cup sliced almonds

Arrange baking racks in the center and top positions in the oven. Preheat oven to 350 degrees F and line two sheet pans with parchment paper.

In a large bowl, stir together the avocado oil, almond butter, maple syrup, flaxseed, and extracts. In a small bowl, mix the oats, protein powder, flour, baking soda, and salt. Stir the dry mixture into the wet mixture until well combined. Stir in the sliced almonds.

Scoop dough in 2-tablespoon portions and place on the prepared sheet pans with 2 inches between them.

Place one pan on each oven rack. Bake for eight minutes, then rotate the pans and bake for eight minutes more. The edges of the cookies will be golden and the tops pale.

Cool on the pans for five minutes, then transfer to racks to cool completely. Store in an airtight container for up to a week, or freeze for up to two months. Pack individual portions in smaller containers to take on the go.

### ENJOY MORE!

Find our recipe for Chocolate Frozen Yogurt Bark at [ELmag.com/proteinsnacks](https://ELmag.com/proteinsnacks).







## Chocolate Pecan Pie Energy Bites

**Makes 12 servings**  
**Prep time: 10 to 15 minutes, plus 30 minutes of refrigeration**

- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup pecans
- 1 tbs. pure maple syrup
- 1 cup pitted dates
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup chocolate collagen powder of choice
- $\frac{1}{8}$  tsp. sea salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup cocoa powder, divided

Place the pecans in a food processor or blender and grind to a fine mince. Add the maple syrup, dates, collagen powder, salt, and half of the cocoa powder, and process until the mixture forms a dough.

Place the remaining cocoa powder in a medium bowl. Scoop level tablespoonfuls of the mixture, drop into the cocoa powder, and roll into balls as you coat. Place on a plate or sheet pan.

Refrigerate until firm, about 30 minutes, then transfer the bites to airtight containers. Keep refrigerated for up to one month. Pack individual portions in smaller containers to take on the go. 🍷

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



# Hard Feelings

We often resist challenging emotions, like anger and sadness, but embracing and accepting them is a key step toward wholeness.

BY JESSIE SHOLL

**H**elen Russell's earliest memory is of the day her baby sister died. Helen was 3 years old.

"We weren't permitted to talk about it," she recalls. "It wasn't acceptable. We were supposed to be cheerful and carry on."

Her parents split up soon afterward. Then, her father largely disappeared from her life.

Russell, now a journalist, would eventually focus her research on happiness and write two books on the topic. In 2019, during the tour for her book *The Atlas of Happiness*, she began to notice how many members of the audience would ask her the same question: "How can I be happy?"

This isn't a strange question in itself, but Russell noticed that

it was often coming from people who had recently lost a loved one, or been laid off, or faced health issues. In other words, she says, people who had very good reasons to feel unhappy.

So Russell started asking a different question: "Why is it so difficult to feel so-called negative feelings?"

She shares her findings in her 2021 book, *How to Be Sad*, where she openly discusses the grief of losing her sister and father, which she'd suppressed for 40 years.

"Many of us have been raised with the assumption that what we don't talk about can't hurt us," Russell says. "For a long time, not talking about being sad was seen as a sign of strength. But really, the opposite is true."

## The Art of Avoidance

Sadness is just one challenging emotion that we might try to avoid. Others include anger, fear, guilt, and shame.

Susan David, PhD, author of *Emotional Agility* and a psychologist at Harvard Medical School, says "display rules" are one common obstacle standing between us and certain emotions. "Display rules are the implicit rules that exist in a family or in a culture," she explains. "They basically say either you shouldn't feel emotions, or that some emotions are OK and some aren't."

Display rules also help enforce the idea that certain emotions are acceptable for one group but not another. For example, in some cultures, girls can cry but not show anger; boys can get angry but not





cry. Yet she notes that “boys feel emotions the same way as girls. It’s not that they feel more or less.”

If we display emotions that break our culture’s rules, others may judge or even reject us. And if we see others breaking the rules, we might feel repelled without fully understanding why.

Feelings don’t particularly care about the rules, of course — they arise even if we do our best to push them back. And all feelings, including difficult ones, have a constructive function, explains Marc Brackett, PhD, founding director of the Yale Center

for Emotional Intelligence and author of *Permission to Feel*.

“Negative emotions have a constructive function: They help narrow and focus our attention,” he writes.

Sadness, anger, and guilt can alert us to what we really care about, reveal when we’re being mistreated, or jolt us into recognizing a mistake.

When we deny, suppress, or avoid emotions, they don’t go away, Brackett adds. “The irony . . . is that when we ignore our feelings or suppress them, they only become stronger,” he notes. “They

pile up like a debt that will eventually come due.”

Denying difficult feelings costs us in other ways, too, says Russell. If we attempt to shut down one emotion, we end up stifling them all. “Then we’re not open to joy in the same way, and life in general in the same way.”

Finally, denying difficult feelings means we miss what they’re trying to tell us. “Emotions are data,” David explains. “They are signposts pointing to things that are important to us, to our values.”

In other words, feelings are directions, not directives. Feeling our feelings isn’t the same as acting on them, and becoming more aware of feelings allows us to *choose* how to respond. Learn what experts have to say about how to cultivate this awareness and make those choices.



When we ignore our feelings or suppress them, they only become stronger.”





### Accepting Anger

Because of display rules, many of us have internalized the idea that any show of anger is unacceptable. In the United States, this holds true especially for women and people of color. Yet unexpressed anger often turns into resentment, which is a quick route to soured connections.

Resentment increases the risk of what David calls “emotional leakage,” such as smothered anger that comes out in a snide comment; this is one way repressed anger harms relationships.

“Love, connection, vulnerability, and emotions are the relational glue,” she says. “If you start thinking, *I’m angry with this person, but I’m just not going to say anything because I’m not allowed to feel this*, then you’re still feeling angry but you’re not bringing that anger in a constructive and effective way to the relationship.”

When we shrink our anger to fit what we think a relationship can

handle, what we think we deserve, or what we think we’re allowed to feel, we’re cutting ourselves off from the chance to repair issues that need attention.

But when we accept and express anger constructively, it becomes a tool that allows us to address injustices and attend to unmet needs. (For more on the power of anger, see [ELmag.com/anger](http://ELmag.com/anger).)

For many of us, learning to express anger can be scary: We might fear that once we open the floodgates, everything will come tumbling out and we’ll lose control. Yet consciously choosing to accept our anger gives us other choices. We can decide when, how, and to whom we will express it.

(See “Healthy Emotional Expression” on page 53.)

When you notice you’re feeling anger, David says, first create some distance between yourself

and the feeling, which is different from burying or denying it. She recommends these steps:

- **Name your anger precisely,** even if you’re speaking only to yourself. Other feelings can fall under the umbrella of anger, she says: You might observe that you’re frustrated, grumpy, annoyed, defensive, irritated, disgusted, offended, or spiteful.

“When you take the time to accurately name your emotion, you reduce it to a finite experience with boundaries.”

- **Put space between yourself and your anger linguistically,** shifting from “I am angry” to “I *feel* angry” (or frustrated, irritated, or defensive). “When you say, ‘I am angry,’ what you’re saying is that all of me, 100 percent of me, is defined by anger,” David explains. But we are always more than just one feeling.

- **Take a break** — even if it’s just three deep breaths — to witness your angry feelings before you express or act on them. This allows you to shift from feeling flooded by anger to observing it. “You open the door to it and to what it suggests,” she says. “But you’re not letting the emotion run the show.”



When you take the time to accurately name your emotion, **you reduce it to a finite experience with boundaries.**”



## Allowing Sadness

Not all cultures have prohibitions on sadness. “I think we all assume that what we grew up with is the only way,” says Russell. “But actually, I think the U.K. and the United States are outliers in the desire to avoid sadness.”

For example, she notes that there’s no equivalent English term for the Chinese idea of *xingfu*, which expresses the notion that a good life may contain pain and difficulty as well as happiness and joy. And Russell found that displaying sadness is considered OK in East Asian cultures.

Similarly, there’s no English equivalent of the Portuguese word *saudade* — the bliss of melancholy, where one savors the memory of bygone happiness or feels nostalgic for something that never happened.

Periods of sadness can even improve our emotional and relational health. University of New South Wales researchers discovered that study participants in negative mood states displayed improved memory and greater motivation. Other studies have found that sadness may improve judgment and, in some cases, make us more generous and enhance our communication.

When Russell was finally ready to explore her decades-

buried grief with a therapist, she felt freed. “I had to sit with that sadness,” she recalls. “It was painful, and it was uncomfortable, but riding that wave is hugely liberating.”

In the United States, expressing sadness can cause others to shy away. Americans prize optimism, so most of us don’t learn how to be comfortable with sadness in others or in ourselves. But no one is immune to loss and difficulty. Being able to face sadness and grief can help us learn to live with those experiences, and then we don’t have to spend our lives running from them.

Russell suggests the following practices:

- **Permit yourself to feel sadness.** This can be the hardest part, so ease into this by first admitting your feelings to yourself. “I feel sad” is a good place to start.
- **Make time for sadness.** This emotion asks us to slow down. You may be less productive and feel less social for a time. That’s OK.
- **Seek comfort but try to avoid deprivation and excess.** Offer yourself small comforts; this can make it easier to resist impulsive choices.
- **Talk to someone.** Be it a therapist, friend, mentor, or faith leader, seek out someone who can listen without judgment and without interrupting.

Being able to face sadness and grief can help us learn to live with those experiences, and then we don’t have to spend our lives running from them.



## HEALTHY EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

Emotional honesty is not the same as being run by your emotions.

In his book *Permission to Feel*, Marc Brackett, PhD, founding director of the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, notes that many people believe that “‘permission to feel’ means license to let it all hang out, to whine, yell, act on every emotional impulse, and behave as though we have no control over what we feel.”

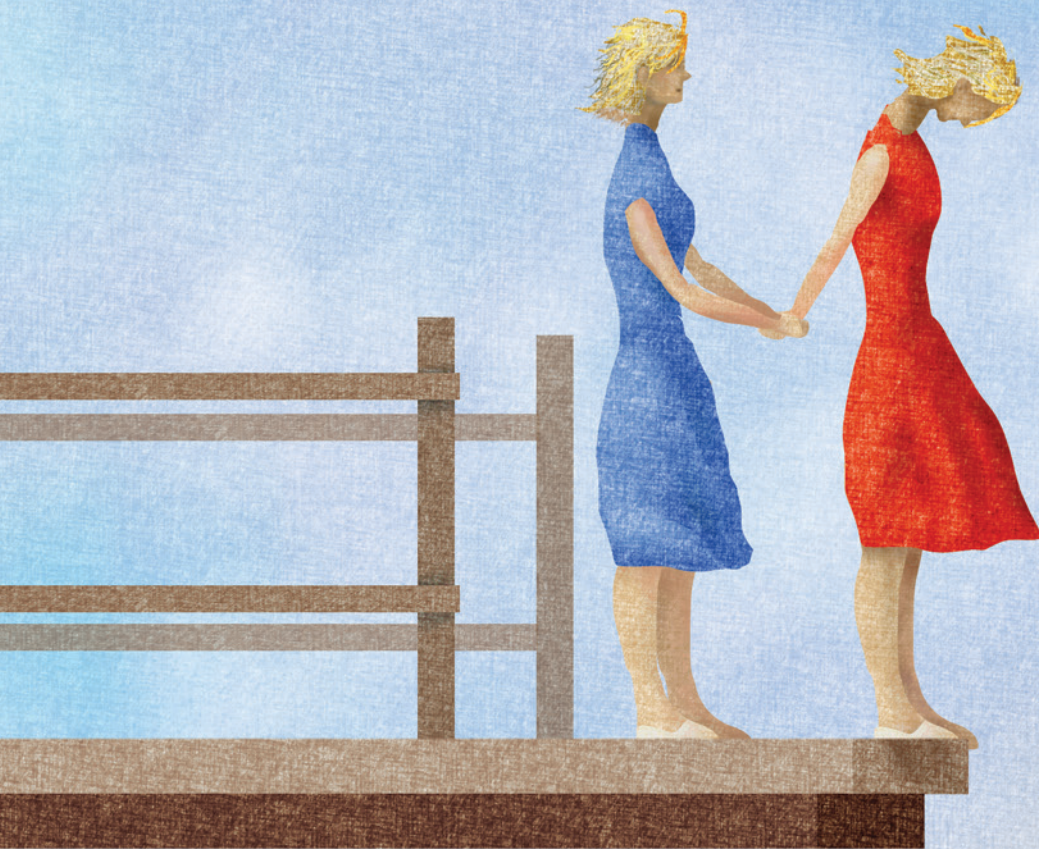
Yet healthy emotional expression relies on regulation — feeling emotions without allowing them to take us over.

It also means we assume responsibility for our emotions rather than blasting them at others. Attacking other people or dumping feelings on them in the name of emotional honesty is harmful.

Responsibly expressing our feelings is not the same as stifling them, Brackett emphasizes. Rather, it’s choosing “the right expression with the right audience, in the right place, and at the right time.” He suggests asking yourself these questions to determine how best to express your feelings in the moment:

- **Where am I?** Am I at home, where it’s safe to be vulnerable? At work, where I have professional boundaries to consider? At a party? At a funeral?
- **Who am I with?** Friends? Loved ones? Colleagues? Acquaintances? Strangers?
- **What’s my goal in this situation?** To get support? To express a grievance? To offer an honest reaction?
- **With this knowledge, what’s the most helpful way to show my emotions?** Specifically, how much of this feeling do I want to share, and how much do I want to withhold?





## Facing Fear

Fear can connect us to our vulnerabilities, which can be deeply uncomfortable — especially if you're someone who thinks of yourself as strong, says clinical psychologist Molly Howes, PhD. Fear can make us feel weaker or smaller than somebody else.

To defend ourselves, Howes notes, we may react with anger instead, “even when what [we] initially felt was a more vulnerable feeling, like fear or hurt.” In many cultures, anger is simply a more acceptable emotion than fear — especially for men.

Still, as in many myths and stories, naming a monster reduces its power. And naming fear, Howes says, reduces its power in a specific way.

“Words are formed in the neo-cortex,” she explains. This part of

the brain houses executive functions — conscious, complex decisions. Fear, meanwhile, springs from the amygdala, located in our deep, reptilian brain, which is involved in the processing of threatening stimuli.

Identifying a feeling can build a connection between the two areas, which allows us to have more choices about how to respond when we're afraid.

Howes says that naming fear can give us more flexibility and make us more relational.

“It lessens the control that the feeling can exert over you.”

Sharing fears with others does involve vulnerability and openness, but that is partly the point, she suggests. Expressing fear to someone builds trust and creates and fosters a greater intimacy.

These are some ways to face your fear more directly:

- **Name the feeling.** As with anger, you can start by naming it to yourself. This can prevent you from quelling vulnerable feelings. Potential starter phrases include “I'm feeling afraid right now. I'm feeling scared of \_\_\_\_.”

Or, if you're speaking to another person, you could say, “This situation scares me. Can I discuss it with you?”

- **Review your situation.** Fear is an important survival impulse. Are you in actual danger? If so, how can you respond? Fear is like a fire alarm: There's not always fire when it goes off, but when there is, the alarm may help save you.

- **Practice sharing your fears with someone close to you.** Choose a few trusted confidants with whom you can discuss what feels scary. As you get used to talking about your fears, you may find they have less of a hold on you. If you're in an intimate relationship where you don't feel comfortable sharing your fears, counseling might be another solution.

Expressing fear to someone builds trust and creates and fosters a greater intimacy.



## Making Peace With Guilt and Shame

While guilt and shame may appear similar, there are important distinctions between them. “Guilt can be feeling bad about something you’ve done, and shame is feeling bad about who you are,” says Howes.

Guilt can be productive, she adds. “It can drive people to take constructive and corrective action.”

If we are relatively secure, we feel guilt when it’s appropriate. This feeling enables us to identify our mistakes, take ownership of them, and let them go.

But if we feel too insecure to admit mistakes and take responsibility for them, this insecurity can lead directly to shame — and this feeling can be paralyzing.

Renowned author and researcher Brené Brown, PhD, notes that shame signals “the fear of disconnection.” When we feel shame, we often believe that we’ve done or failed to do something so important that it’s made us unworthy of connecting with others; we don’t belong — and don’t deserve to.

Shame may also signal that we’re placing an excessive value on our performance — a key sign of perfectionism. In her 2021 book, *Atlas of the Heart*, Brown calls shame “the birthplace of perfectionism.”

“Healthy striving is internally driven,” she explains. “Perfectionism is externally driven by a simple but potentially all-

consuming question: *What will people think?*”

Because shame is so painful, it may be the emotion we’re most likely to avoid. Yet when we run from or bury feelings of shame, we’re likely to act out in other ways — often by aggressively trying to gain power over others or, conversely, by people-pleasing and approval-seeking.

The solution, Brown suggests, is to embrace vulnerability, which can help us develop “shame resilience.” She identifies these steps:

- **Recognize**, name, and understand your shame triggers.
- **Identify** the messages and expectations that stimulate a shame response in you, and ask yourself whether they are realistic and attainable.
- **Connect** with others to receive and offer empathy.
- **Share** openly about feelings of shame with people you trust.

One thing all difficult emotions have in common is that they are unavoidable. Sooner or later, we’re going to get angry, feel sad, or make a mistake and feel guilt — or even shame.

Yet another thing these emotions share is that they can all help us grow.

So don’t worry too much about being perfect with them. Just start where you are, feeling what you feel and doing the best you can to accept it. That will always be good enough. 🌟



## EMOTIONAL LITERACY FOR KIDS

We aren’t born knowing how to manage our emotions; it’s a skill we develop throughout life. And today many educators — from preschool to high school — have begun to create curriculum to teach students how to recognize and regulate their feelings.

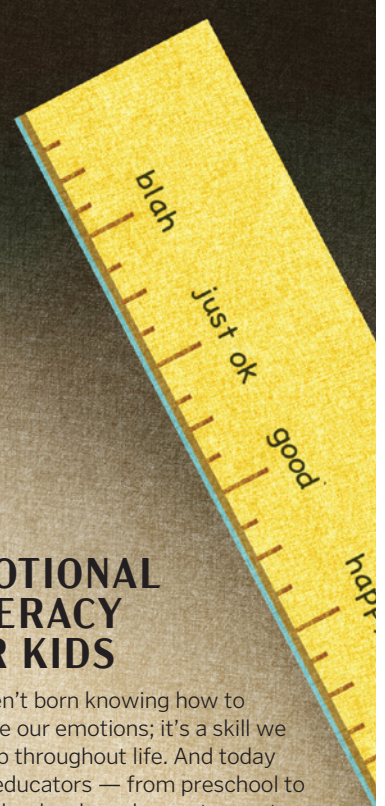
One such program was created by Marc Brackett, PhD — a professor at Yale University’s Child Study Center — and a team at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence. It’s called **RULER**, which stands for the following:

- **Recognizing** emotions in oneself and others
- **Understanding** the causes and consequences of emotions
- **Labeling** emotions with nuanced vocabulary
- **Expressing** emotions in accordance with cultural norms and social context
- **Regulating** emotions with helpful strategies

Students can use it as shorthand when they’re flooded by feelings at school.

The success of the program reveals the value of early education in emotional literacy. Over the past two decades, Brackett has observed RULER’s positive impact on students’ “emotional-intelligence skills, social problem-solving ability, work habits, and grades; on classroom and school climate, including fewer instances of bullying; and on teacher stress, burnout, and instructional support for students.”

And if the effects of developing emotional literacy are that positive for children, it’s safe to assume the practice is good for adults, too.





# BORN TO

Going for a walk — though often underrated and underappreciated — is one of the most powerful things you can do for your health. Reap the benefits, **one step at a time.**

BY NICOLE RADZISZEWSKI

**J**eanette Madock signed up for an eight-day walking tour of the south of Ireland last summer, hoping to see some new places, meet some nice people, and get some exercise. She got so much more.

“I was dramatically reminded by the outdoor beauty and scenery that there is always a massive world out there outside of our daily lives,” says Madock, 65, of Oak Park, Ill.

She thought she’d be one of the oldest people on the trip, which entailed five to seven miles of walking and hiking each day. “What I didn’t expect was a huge influx of inspiration from my fellow hikers, five of whom were in their 70s, and one fierce inspiration of a woman of 80. The message was clear to me: This is how I want to travel — and this is how I want to age.”

If walking were a drug, it would be flying off the shelves. Hot-wire your health! Boost your brain power! Improve sleep! Extend your life! The purported benefits are so great that we’d all be clamoring to get our hands on some perambulation.

Yet most of us don’t see walking as an inspiring feat. It’s so ordinary, so quotidian.

Walking doesn’t make you “swole,” nor does it deliver the endorphin rush of a run. It’s not especially efficient exercise compared with, say, riding a bike or swimming laps.

For many people, though, walking is a sustainable and beneficial way to get moving. Research shows it improves heart and lung function, enhances metabolism, and builds bone density. It keeps the brain healthy and maintains everyday strength and mobility.

Going for a walk can boost mood and support better sleep. It can be a form of transportation as well as an avenue to explore new places, to bond with friends, and even to meditate.

As with many forms of exercise, walking has its limits — specifically, it is not available to every body. But if walking is accessible to you, we encourage you to consider the following reasons for taking regular walks.



# WALK







# 6 WAYS

## Walking Works for You

### 1. Walking keeps your body balanced.

**We spend much** of our lives these days seated. Our sedentary, forward-leaning daily routines contribute to muscle and joint restrictions, including in the hip flexors, chest, and upper back.

Over time, these areas of limited mobility create musculoskeletal imbalances: This can ultimately reduce your mobility and increase your risk of injury.

Walking is the antidote.

“Biomechanically, walking is the reverse of sitting at a computer, leaning forward over children, hovering over our phones in a rounded, slumping position,” explains Jessica McManus, PT, FAAOMPT, a physical therapist at Full Circle Wellness in Newbury, Mass.

“When walking is done at its finest, it allows the spine and arms to extend and rotate, and the hips to extend; it activates muscles on the back of the body,” she adds. “It is really a whole-body activity.”

McManus recommends desk workers get up and walk for five minutes at least every hour. “There is evidence that supports this for health — and even for better efficiency of focus and concentration. Another great option is a standing workstation that you can spend part of your day at, and even better, treadmill workstations for set periods of time, based on your fitness level, to break up your sitting,” she says.

Any time you can go for a longer, dedicated walk — before, during, or after your workday — you’ll reap benefits, so aim for whatever you can do most consistently.

### 2. Walking supports mental health.

**Our brains** are barraged by the world around us, which can make us distracted, agitated, even anxious.

“Walking is a reset,” says psychotherapist Jennifer Udler, LCSW-C, of Positive Strides Therapy in Potomac, Md. “It’s a chance to take a break and let your thoughts simmer down and settle so you’re able to see things more clearly. Walking is a preventive measure that helps restore your nervous system to a calmer state.”

Udler even uses walking in her therapy: She meets clients for walk-and-talk sessions, which she says offer them the calming benefits of a walk while encouraging them to let down their guard and speak more openly than they might in a traditional office setting.

One reason walking is so powerful is that it involves bilateral stimulation, or rhythmic movement on alternating sides of the body, she explains. “When you walk, you’re integrating emotion and logic by activating both sides of your body.”

Even walking on a treadmill can offer mental-health benefits, though studies have found that going for a stroll in nature is especially effective. A 2015 study

found that people who walked for 90 minutes in a natural area, as opposed to those who walked in a high-traffic urban setting, showed decreased activity in a region of the brain associated with depression.

Another study, published in 2019, indicates that walking (or sitting) in nature can significantly lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol. “Research shows that breathing fresh air and seeing green space while walking is calming, energizing, and a mood lifter,” says Udler. “If you’re suffering from ruminating thoughts, walking takes you out of your head and into the world. Having moments that interrupt your usual thought pattern allows you to remember that you’re part of the bigger picture.”

Carlos Reynes, MD, a functional-medicine specialist in Oak Park, Ill., believes so strongly in the value of walking that he commutes the two miles to and from his office each day on foot. “The morning walk gets my blood circulating, and it helps my mind get into the zone so that by the time I get to my office, I’m ready to work. Walking home allows me to get over the stress of work and transition so that I’m ready to be home.”





“Research shows that breathing fresh air and seeing green space while walking is calming, energizing, and a mood lifter. **If you're suffering from ruminating thoughts, walking takes you out of your head and into the world.**”

### 3. Walking strengthens your heart and lungs.

**Walking** isn't the most intense form of aerobic exercise, yet it still checks all the boxes for promoting cardiovascular health. In fact, a 2013 study of 49,005 participants published in an American Heart Association journal reported that equivalent doses of walking and running led to “largely equivalent” risk reductions for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and type 2 diabetes.

“By walking, a person is deliberately increasing their heart rate and engaging their cardiovascular system in a meaningful and purposeful way,” says Eli Friedman, MD, medical director of sports cardiology at Baptist Health Miami Cardiac & Vascular Institute.

To increase the cardiovascular challenge, increase your pace, walk up and down hills, or set your treadmill at an incline, advises Jason Stella, NASM, PES, CES, Life Time national education manager.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), a brisk walking pace for most people is 3 miles per hour. But what

matters more is how hard you're working: For exercise to be considered moderate intensity, the CDC says your heart rate should be between 64 and 76 percent of your maximum heart rate.

If you don't have a heart-rate monitor, aim for a pace that feels quicker than normal or more challenging for you. On a rate of perceived exertion scale (1 corresponding to *very easy* and 10 to *very difficult*), aim for a 3 or 4. At this effort level, you'll still be able to engage in conversation but your breathing will be slightly labored, making it more difficult than chatting over a cup of tea.

“If you feel good, it's working. This can be followed more closely by watching trends for heart rate, blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood-sugar readings over time,” says Friedman.

“Simply getting up and moving the body with purpose will have health benefits. Yes, the more someone does, the better. But we should not let that be a barrier to beginning. Ultimately, we want to try to get to 150 minutes of walking or more per week.”

### 4. Walking boosts your metabolism.

**Metabolism** is the body's ability to take in fuel and process it to support life. To optimize your metabolism, aim for basic healthy habits, explains Life Time master trainer and dietitian Samantha McKinney, RDN, LD: Get good nutrition, ample sleep, and exercise. The easiest way to support your metabolism is to up your NEAT.

NEAT, or nonexercise activity thermogenesis, is all the movement you do as part of your everyday life — everything from household chores and playing with your kids to basic things like eating and sleeping.

One of the simplest ways to increase your NEAT is by walking. Whether it's walking the dog, walking with your kids to the playground, parking farther away from the office or grocery store, or taking the stairs, increasing the number of total steps — even at short distances and a lower intensity — can increase your NEAT.

Walking can also support your metabolism by helping to regulate your appetite. One 2015 study shows it can control cravings for sugary snacks among those who regularly consume them. And research has shown that walking does not cause a significant increase in your appetite.

These benefits might be especially welcome news for folks who want to reduce body fat. But even if you are not seeking body-composition changes, a healthy metabolism supports your body's ability to survive *and* thrive.





## 5. Walking aids digestion.

When we're sedentary, our digestion and motility can become sluggish. Walking encourages peristalsis — the constriction and relaxation of the intestinal muscles that push the contents forward.

In Italy, an evening walk — *la passeggiata* — for better digestion is a cultural tradition. And it doesn't "involve pedometers or spandex; these walks are purely for pleasure," explains endocrinologist David Ludwig, MD, PhD.

This walk can also help lower insulin levels, he adds. A 2013 study in *Diabetes Care* found that three 15-minute walks daily helped older people at risk for impaired glucose tolerance increase their ability to regulate blood sugar for the following 24 hours.

And a 2022 meta-analysis of seven studies in *Sports Medicine* discovered that a light walk after lunch or dinner — even as little as two to five minutes — significantly moderated blood-sugar levels in participants with or without type 2 diabetes.

## 6. Walking enhances healthy aging.

Walking is directly linked to increased longevity, and it's a common method of exercise for the longest-living people. "If you look at the longevity of people who consistently incorporate walking into their routines, even without strength training, it's a lot better than those who don't walk," says Stella.

In fact, Reynes contracts with a company for genetic testing to make recommendations for his patients and says exercise influences how we age at the genetic level.

"Walking should be 'prescribed' by every doctor for the primary and secondary prevention of cardiovascular disease and dementia," Reynes says. He notes that a 2011 study from *SAGE Journals* points out that "Studies on people with moderate dementia have described numerous positive effects of physical exercise and walking programs: improvement in walking endurance, better urinary continence, enhanced communication, reduced depression, and an increase in activities of daily living."

The brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) protein is called a "brain fertilizer" because it helps your brain make neural connections. Low levels of BDNF have been associated with depression, anxiety, poor memory, and brain degeneration.

"We now know people can be strong or weak at making these connections," explains Reynes. "We also know that exercise increases BDNF, and walking actually works better to create

this chemical than some supplements out there."

Research remains inconclusive on just how fast and how much you need to walk for your brain to benefit, but some studies have shown that pace and quantity influence aging. A 2019 Mayo Clinic study of 474,919 participants found a brisker walking pace to be associated with longer life expectancy.

A 2022 meta-analysis of 15 studies involving nearly 50,000 people on four continents found that taking more steps per day helps lower the risk of premature death. For adults 60 and older, however, this risk levels off at about 6,000 to 8,000 steps per day, meaning that more than that provides no additional benefit for longevity.

For adults younger than 60, the risk of premature death stabilized at about 8,000 to 10,000 steps per day. This study found no association of premature death with walking speed, however.

Reynes stresses that the most important thing is to make walking a consistent habit. "A lot of people get caught up in the idea of getting 10,000 steps and think, *I can't make it happen*, so they give up. But even 4,000 steps a day has benefits. I tell people that whether they walk, lift weights, or do other exercises, the answer is always improving on your abilities — that's what makes us optimal human beings.

"Once people start doing anything consistently, they'll start feeling better and are going to want to do more of it." 🗨️

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



# ON YOUR FEET

**While it's true** that walking is a low-impact activity compared with running, it's still a force-producing, repetitive movement. "Most people don't think about the ground-reaction force of walking. When you walk, the amount of force through your body is one and a half to two times your body weight per step," explains Jason Stella, NASM, PES, CES, Life Time national education manager.

Footwear matters. "I like a running shoe for walking because it's meant to take on three to five times your body weight. It gives you a nice cushion to minimize the force through your body," he says.

For someone who may overpronate, physical therapist Jessica McManus, PT, FAAOMPT, recommends a motion-control shoe. If you have more-rigid feet and high arches, she suggests a softer, more flexible shoe. You also want to make sure you can spread your toes and wiggle them in the toe box.

She encourages walkers to shop in the running-shoe section of the store, where the most-cushioned shoes can be found. Your local running store can help you determine the most appropriate shoe for your foot.

What about barefoot or minimalist shoes? McManus says there is a place for them. "If you're intrigued by the idea of making your feet stronger, I recommend a gradual progression to zero-drop shoes with a wide toe box," she says. "They allow you to use your intrinsic foot muscles and get the support from within. There just needs to be a slower, strategic shift to wearing these shoes. Most athletic shoes have a 5- to 7-millimeter heel drop, so switching to zero drop can open you up to overuse injuries if you jump into them too quickly."

If you're interested in moving to barefoot or minimalist shoes, McManus recommends working with a healthcare provider who understands foot mechanics. "One step you can make right away is spending more time barefoot, as long as this is comfortable for you," she says.

# WALK THIS WAY



**Though it's a natural movement**, walking is not a simple one. It's a full-body action that integrates hundreds of muscles and movement at the hips, knees, ankles, shoulders, arms, and torso. All these moving parts make for variation in gait patterns and differences in how you feel during and after a walk. Try these tips for making the most of your walking — and for staying injury-free.

## Prewalk

"Before you go for a walk, you're looking to prepare your body for what you're about to do," says physical therapist Jessica McManus, PT, FAAOMPT. She recommends doing some type of dynamic mobility exercise for both the upper and lower body. Marching in place, leg and arm swings, butt kicks, and squats are all great options, or you can start your walk at a slower pace and gradually increase the tempo as your body gets used to the movement.

Jason Stella, NASM, PES, CES, Life Time national education manager, recommends using a lacrosse or massage ball to roll out the arches of your feet. "This helps mobilize the fascia, so your foot is ready to absorb the force of every step."

## Walk

Walk with an upright posture. "Imagine a string pulling from the top center of your head, straight up toward the sky, making you as tall as possible, while you maintain your gaze straight ahead," says McManus.

Let your arms swing to open your chest. "Think of your sternum as a headlight that gets movement from side to side. This allows you rotation and extension through your midback and thoracic spine," she explains.

Instead of focusing on reaching one foot out in front of the other, which can lead to overstriding, she suggests you focus on hip extension of your push-off leg. "Imagine you are on a moving walkway, as if you are pushing the belt away behind you as you walk."

Visualize pushing off through the center of the bottom of your big toe. This keeps your foot in a neutral position and activates the gluteus maximus and the posterior chain muscles of your leg.

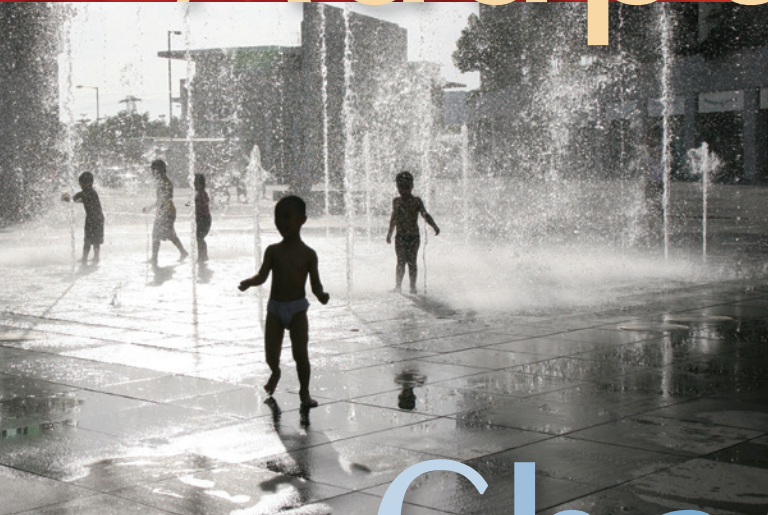
## Postwalk

"After you walk, you have the benefit of being able to get the most out of sustained-hold stretching, now that your muscles are warm," says McManus. Focus on static stretches for your calves, hip flexors, quads, and hamstrings, holding each for 30 seconds or more.






# Adapt



# to



# Change



**EXTREME WEATHER  
AND OTHER CLIMATE  
CONDITIONS ARE  
AFFECTING OUR BODIES  
AND MINDS. DISCOVER HOW  
TO BUILD RESILIENCE.**





BY MO PERRY

In 2015, the *Lancet* Commission on Health and Climate Change declared that tackling the climate crisis could be the greatest global-health opportunity of the 21st century. That's because unchecked climate change and associated trends, such as waning biodiversity, represent some of the greatest known threats to human health.

"We generally characterize four main environmental drivers from which adverse health effects might originate: rising temperature, extreme weather events, rising sea level, and increased atmospheric carbon dioxide," says professor of emergency medicine Jay Lemery, MD, FACEP, FAWM, codirector of the Climate and Health Program at the University of Colorado School of Medicine and coauthor of *Enviromedics: The Impact of Climate Change on Human Health*.

Some experts predict that for the next few decades, the main health effect of climate change will be the worsening of preexisting health conditions. For instance, people suffering from asthma may be susceptible to more frequent or more severe attacks. Increased heat and humidity causes air to stagnate, which increases our exposure to particle pollution that irritates the lungs.

As time goes on, though, these experts expect climate change will result in more unhealthy people overall, because of more extreme temperatures, harmful exposures, and environmental degradation.

There are some hopeful developments. The Inflation Reduction Act, signed into law by President Biden in August 2022, is expected to cut roughly a billion tons of greenhouse-gas emissions a year by 2030. It allocates funds for soil-enrichment programs and other efforts to increase climate-friendly agriculture, and it boosts tax credits for capturing and storing carbon dioxide.

"All of us in the climate-and-health world are very pleased that something's being done," says Lemery. "It feels like a multipronged approach that I'm hopeful we can continue to build on."

Still, we have a long way to go to protect the planet and ourselves. It's worthwhile to take stock of the health challenges the changing climate will present — and learn how to build more resilience for ourselves and our communities. Here are some of those challenges and ways to address them.

## AIR POLLUTION

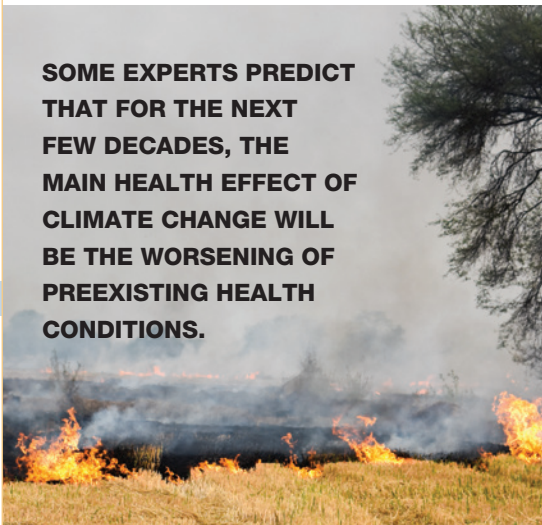
The average person inhales roughly 20,000 times each day, making breathing the most fundamental way we interact with our environment. Today, many of those breaths include pollutants, such as particulates, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and sulfur dioxides, created by human industrial activities as well as by wildfires and volcanoes. These compounds can cause acute respiratory symptoms and heart disease, among other problems.

The American Lung Association stated in its 2022 *State of the Air* report that more than 40 percent of Americans, some 137 million people, live in places with unhealthy levels of ozone or particle pollution.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 8 percent of the U.S. population has been diagnosed with asthma. Between 1980 and 2002, the total number of cases more than doubled.

Wildfires, which are increasing in frequency and severity and often exacerbated by drought, are one of the leading causes of worsening air quality. "Wildfires don't need to be that big to degrade air quality over huge swaths of land," Lemery notes.

Poor air quality affects not only the physiologically vulnerable but



**SOME EXPERTS PREDICT THAT FOR THE NEXT FEW DECADES, THE MAIN HEALTH EFFECT OF CLIMATE CHANGE WILL BE THE WORSENING OF PREEXISTING HEALTH CONDITIONS.**

also the young and healthy. "Here in Denver, we have triathletes coming in after working out, thinking they have asthma, but it's actually reactive-airway disease from smoke from wildfires," he says. "It affects everybody."

Increased heat and atmospheric temperatures worsen the effects of air pollution, he adds. A recent University of Southern California study



assessed the correlation between air quality, temperature, and mortality in Southern California. It found that extreme-heat days carried a 6.1 percent increase in overall mortality risk. On extreme-air-pollution days, the risk increased by 5 percent. On days with both extreme heat and extreme air pollution, deaths were 21 percent more likely. Those over age 75 faced the greatest increase in risk.

## How to Build Resilience

Those who live in areas prone to drifting smoke from wildfires (that's almost all of us) should be familiar with the daily air-quality index, Lemery says. Before heading out for a jog, assess whether it's going to be a healthy day to exercise outside. If not, find a way to keep your workout indoors, preferably somewhere with an air filter.

"Having a good HEPA air filter that filters out very small particles is becoming a requirement for people who live in areas impacted by forest fires. For extra-fine smoke particles, it may be necessary to combine the HEPA filter with one that has a chemical absorbent, such as activated charcoal," says integrative practitioner Robert Rountree, MD.

In addition to filtering out the bad stuff, it's important to nurture healthy lungs from the inside out by spending time in nature — when air quality allows, he says. "We used to think that outside of the skin, nose, and gastrointestinal tract, the body was pretty sterile. Now we know that we also have a lung microbiome with its own unique community of healthy bacteria."

A healthy lung microbiome is crucial to avoid "leaky-lung syndrome," a loosening of the tight junctions in the lining of the lungs, which occurs when they're chronically irritated by smoke or other particulate matter. Leaky lungs allow bacteria and other substances to get into the space beneath the surface of the lung, activating the immune cells there. This triggers a chronic inflammatory response — the first stage of autoimmunity.

Rountree recommends walking regularly in green and blue spaces to support a healthy lung microbiome. "When you walk by the ocean or a

lake where the air is full of moisture, you're breathing in tens of thousands of viruses and bacteria — all that wet air is replenishing your lung microbiome."

And walking in the woods or practicing *shinrin-yoku* (forest bathing) exposes your lungs to phytoncides, beneficial volatile organic compounds that have been shown to offer anti-inflammatory, mood-supporting, and immune-enhancing benefits. "Even if you just go for a 30-minute hike in a



**THE ALLERGIC RESPONSE IN HUMANS IS AN IMMUNE-SYSTEM RESPONSE. IT CAN OFTEN BE A RESULT OF THE IMMUNE SYSTEM BEING ON SOME KIND OF HIGH-ALERT STATUS."**

wooded area and breathe deeply, that helps restore the lung microbiome," Rountree says. (Learn more about lung health at [ELmag.com/lunghealth](https://ELmag.com/lunghealth).)

## ALLERGENS AND POLLEN

Allergies are among the most common medical conditions in the world. In the United States alone, more than 50 million people suffer from allergies each year.

Seasonal-allergy symptoms — such as red, itchy eyes; runny nose; sneezing; and cough — are rarely life threatening, but they can cause plenty of suffering. "Pollen is one of the things that isn't going to kill you, but it has tremendous health consequences in terms of lost days at work or people buying cold medicines because they're so miserable," Lemery says.

The growing amount of carbon dioxide in the air, combined with warmer temperatures and longer growing seasons, means we can expect a greater burden of seasonal allergies in many parts of the world.

"Remember, carbon dioxide is like plant food," Lemery notes. "We're already seeing increases in ragweed and pollen and a longer pollen season in northern latitudes."

## How to Build Resilience

Although allergies may seem like a seasonal inevitability, there are non-pharmaceutical tools that can help us manage their effects.

"The allergic response in humans



is an immune-system response," says Mary Purdy, MS, RDN, an integrative nutritionist and eco-dietitian in Seattle. "It can often be a result of the immune system being on some kind of high-alert status."

She suggests addressing the health of the gut as one avenue for calming this state of alarm. The immune response is usually "directly related to the status of the gut microbiome; approximately 70 percent of the immune system resides there," she says.

Reducing the body's inflammatory response is also key. "Brightly colored fruits and vegetables, herbs, and spices all contain compounds that reduce inflammation and help the body's immune response be less reactive," Purdy says.

A plant-heavy diet, rich in diverse fiber and phytochemicals from a wide variety of foods, can also help nurture the gut microbiome in an immune-supporting way.

When allergies do strike, Purdy says, try supplements with plant-derived anti-





**THE RISK OF LYME DISEASE IS GOING TO GO HIGHER AND HIGHER BECAUSE OF DEGRADED HABITATS.”**

histamine combinations, such as quercetin (also found in apples and onions), stinging nettle, bromelain (found in pineapple), and vitamin C (found in citrus, red peppers, and broccoli). (Read more about quercetin and other sources of allergy relief on page 38.)

And although the research is mixed, some studies suggest that eating raw, local honey can benefit people with seasonal allergies, because it's likely to contain pollen from the same area. The idea is that regularly exposing the body to small amounts of an allergen can help desensitize the immune system.

Increasing your body's production of the antioxidant glutathione might also mitigate reactions that affect the lungs, including asthma. Sulfur-rich foods, such as garlic, onion, and broccoli, boost glutathione production in the body, or you can take a glutathione-supporting supplement, such as N-acetylcysteine. (Find out more about allergies at [ELmag.com/allergy](http://ELmag.com/allergy).)

## VECTOR-BORNE DISEASES

Ticks, mosquitoes, and fleas have long served as vectors that can transmit pathogens to humans. Some of the best-known vector-borne diseases around the world include malaria, dengue, chikungunya, yellow fever, and Zika. (Evidence suggests the virus causing COVID-19 likely jumped to humans from an animal host.)

In the United States, the list also includes Lyme disease (caused by *Borrelia burgdorferi* or *Borrelia mayonii*, types of bacteria carried by black-legged ticks) and West Nile virus (transmitted by mosquitoes).

“According to the CDC, more than half of all the infections that people can get are zoonotic, meaning they go from animals to people,” says Rountree. Changing weather patterns, expanding human development, and waning biodiversity all increase the odds that more of us will encounter these kinds of infections more often.

“The risk of Lyme disease is going to go higher and higher because of degraded habitats,” he explains. “In a healthy habitat, you have a lot of natural predators that feed on the mice that carry the ticks that transmit Lyme. When you fragment the forest, you lose those predators and the mice become more prevalent. Then you go for a fun hike and *boom*, you get exposed to Lyme and other tick-borne diseases.”

Higher temperatures are expanding the range where disease-carrying mosquitoes and ticks can live and reproduce. “Where winters have historically been protective, vectors are now able to hang around longer, reproduce longer, and spread disease longer,” Lemery says. “Diseases that have long been the domain of tropical and subtropical areas are moving slowly into higher latitudes and altitudes.”

## How to Build Resilience

Prevention is the best strategy when addressing vector-borne diseases. “Since black-legged ticks are the main carriers of the bacteria that cause Lyme and related diseases, the best way to prevent Lyme is not to get bitten in the first place,” says Rountree.

He notes that this can be challenging: The biggest offenders are small, immature ticks called nymphs, less than 2 millimeters in size and hard to see. He emphasizes the importance of using good bug repellents and conducting a thorough skin check after hiking. When you're in tick-friendly habitats, such as dense woods, forests, and prairies with tall grass, wear some tick-protective clothing. (For more tips on avoiding ticks, see [ELmag.com/lymetips](http://ELmag.com/lymetips).)

Vaccines may also play an increasing role in fighting zoonotic infections. A new malaria vaccine, developed by scientists at the University of Oxford, was recently found to be up to 80 percent effective in clinical trials; it is expected to be rolled out across sub-Saharan Africa this year.

A vaccine against Lyme disease is currently in stage 3 clinical trials, and a monoclonal-antibody treatment for the disease is also in the works.

Still, the growing range of Lyme-prone areas means that more health-care providers need to learn how to recognize and treat it, Lemery says. “Lyme is an insidious disease — a great mimicker that can hide below the surface. We'll need to recalibrate our healthcare systems to be ready to treat these types of diseases that maybe historically haven't been an issue.” (Learn more about new treatments for Lyme at [ELmag.com/chroniclyme](http://ELmag.com/chroniclyme).)

Following an overall immune-supportive diet and lifestyle remains important on the individual level, too. Maintain a vitamin D status in a functional range (50–80 ng/mL) and ensure you're getting enough zinc,



“ IN A HEAT WAVE, IT'S ABOUT NOT GOING OUT AND DOING YARD WORK OR EXERCISING IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DAY; IT'S ABOUT DRINKING A LOT MORE WATER AND STAYING COOL.”



omega-3 fatty acids, and vitamins A and C. These help the body fight infections and, crucially, resolve them, Purdy says. (To learn how to make your meals more immune supportive and climate friendly, see “Eat a Climate-Friendly Diet” on page 67.)

“Your body needs the team of soldiers to fight the infection, but also the team of architects and construction workers to rebuild and maintain the integrity of the immune system so it’s ready for the next infection it comes across,” Purdy says. “So often we’re stuck with this immune system on high alert, and we need some of those food compounds to help calm it down again.” (Find out how to support the immune system at [ELmag.com/inflammationfaq](https://www.ELmag.com/inflammationfaq).)

## TEMPERATURE EXTREMES

Think of the range of normal temperatures in any given region as a bell curve. Most weather events happen within the big part of the bell, and rare events (extreme temperatures, droughts, heavy rain, etc.) fall at the tail ends. Or they used to.

As the climate changes, the curve is shifting to the right (toward higher temperatures) and flattening, meaning that extreme events are becoming more common.

“Heat is energy. We’re adding energy to our weather system, so the range of crazy weather is increasing,” Lemery explains. There might be brief periods of extreme cold in places that haven’t seen it before, as with the polar vortex that pushed frigid air into Texas in February 2021.

But the general trend is toward heat. “We’re energizing our weather

systems in a way that makes everything more unpredictable,” he says. “And on average, it’s warmer.”

Heat is a stressor for the human body, particularly for the very old, the very young, and those without access to heat-diffusing green spaces or air conditioning. It can exacerbate existing health issues, such as cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. Studies have shown that for every incremental increase in heat (about 1.8 degrees F), the death rate for people with comorbidities, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart disease, and diabetes, also goes up.

“If you’re walking across a big parking lot on a hot summer day, your pulse will go up by 20 beats per minute and you’ll start sweating,” Lemery says. “Your body has this compensatory mechanism to cool you off, but that physiologic stress alone can be enough to push somebody who’s medically vulnerable into crisis.”

Yet it’s not solely vulnerable groups who are affected by extreme heat. Anybody can experience the muscle cramps, swelling, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke that hot temperatures can cause. High temperatures have also been linked to poor mental health and higher rates of aggression.

## How to Build Resilience

When extreme heat strikes, Lemery says, it’s important to slow down and be mindful of the risks. “In a heat wave, it’s about not going out and doing yard work or exercising in the middle of the day; it’s about drinking a lot more water and staying cool.”

Hydration is critically important in high temperatures or at high altitudes,

and Rountree says that water is usually your best option. “Something I’ve learned from 40 years of hiking in Colorado is that it is better to hydrate long before you get thirsty.”

Countertop water filters are inexpensive and effective at removing unwanted toxins and chemicals from tap water. They can also help improve taste, so hydrating is more appealing.

Electrolyte drinks with added sodium, potassium, and magnesium (all minerals we lose through sweat) can be helpful after an intense workout on a hot day, or if you notice symptoms of an electrolyte imbalance, such as muscle twitching and cramps, increased thirst, poor endurance, salt cravings, and irritability.

Unsweetened coconut water is naturally rich in electrolytes and low in sugar. Rountree also likes watermelon juice: “It’s a great source of lots of nutrients and is an excellent way to get hydrated since it is rich in potassium.”

One of the most important things to do during a heat wave is to check in on your neighbors, Lemery says. “It’s the elderly who you really need to look out for, especially those who live by themselves.”

He suggests learning to think of ourselves as community-safety officers. Learn the locations of the closest cooling centers and public areas with air conditioning, such as libraries or shopping malls — and make sure your neighbors know about them. “This is where social interaction is really important to keep people safe,” Lemery adds.



## FOCUS ON WHAT YOU CAN DO

The reality of a changing climate can be overwhelming. To sustain your mental health in the face of climate stress, Lemery says, consider reducing news consumption. “Staring at the TV or doomscrolling on Twitter doesn’t help. Those are just anxiety machines.”

Instead, he suggests viewing our present climate situation through the lens of history, noting that we have been able to address many horrible diseases and health crises thanks to medical innovations like the polio vaccine and the development of antibiotics. “If we can look back and borrow the confidence of our forebears, we can say, ‘They did it, and we can do it, too.’”

Finally, action is the best antidote to despair. Rountree suggests looking for ways to make a difference in your own life, community, and profession. Identify waste or environmental harm occurring in your sphere of influence, and work to change it. Vote for politicians who support sound climate policies. Join or donate to organizations working to address climate change.

And, most important, cultivate your own relationship with the planet. “Get out into nature and appreciate what we have now,” he says. “Take time to connect with nature and then find ways to become an advocate.” 🌱

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**MO PERRY** is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.



**A MORE DIVERSE GUT MICROBIOME HAS BEEN CORRELATED WITH HEALTH BENEFITS, A MORE RESILIENT IMMUNE SYSTEM, AND A BETTER ABILITY TO DIGEST AND ABSORB NUTRIENTS.”**



# Eat

## A CLIMATE-FRIENDLY DIET

### We know that our food

choices affect our individual health; they also matter to the health of the planet.

Happily, an immune-supportive diet shares many features with a climate-friendly one: They’re both plant-heavy and diverse, with an emphasis on local, seasonal, sustainably produced foods. “A climate-friendly diet involves foods that have a lower environmental footprint, use fewer resources, create fewer greenhouse-gas emissions, and help build health back into the ecosystem,” says integrative nutritionist Mary Purdy, MS, RDN.

Growing plants requires fewer resources, including land and water, than raising farm animals. Red meat and dairy are the biggest culprits in terms of greenhouse-gas emissions, Purdy says.

Meat eaters can make environmentally sound choices by emphasizing lower-impact animal-protein sources — eggs, chicken, fish — in addition to upping their quantity of plants.

Opting for regeneratively raised meat can also have a net benefit for soil health, because these systems incorporate animals into farming practices in a symbiotic way. (Find out more about regenerative farming at [ELmag.com/farming](http://ELmag.com/farming).)

Variety is also key. “The more diverse a diet is, the more we’re supporting biodiversity, which is what creates more resilience in the face of climate change,” Purdy notes. “When we’re faced with drought, floods, or extreme weather patterns, our food system is more resilient if there are numerous crops being grown, numerous microorganisms in the soil, and numerous plants and animals in existence.”

The variety of foods we consume also has a direct impact on the ecosystem of the gut microbiome, she notes. “A more diverse gut microbiome has been correlated with health benefits, a more resilient immune system, and a better ability to digest and absorb nutrients.”







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# Real Life



Living with pets brings myriad health benefits. Their companionship can reduce stress, anxiety, and loneliness and also provide opportunities to socialize, exercise, and spend time outside.

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Caring for aging pets can be challenging, though. Find expert-sourced tips that help you support your pets through their senior years.





# Caring for an Aging Pet

Animal friends are good for our health — but caring for senior pets comes with challenges. Experts share tips for supporting your best pals through their golden years.

BY KATHERINE REYNOLDS LEWIS

Anne Diffily's closest relationship during the pandemic — aside from the one with her partner — was with Yogi, her 15-year-old pit-bull mix. So as Yogi faced health issues, the Warwick, R.I., retiree took each new stage in stride.

Yogi's needs included teeth extraction, anal-gland removal, and painkillers for arthritis — which had to be increased in dosage three times. Today, Yogi is nearly deaf, partially blind, and occasionally incontinent.

"It's expensive to have an older pet," says Diffily. But Yogi was there for her when she needed him, and she wants to be there for Yogi.

Research shows that living with pets conveys a number of health benefits. Their companionship helps reduce stress, anxiety, and loneliness, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Pets offer more opportunities to socialize, exercise, and spend time outside —

all of which lowers our cholesterol, triglyceride levels, and blood pressure.

Perhaps because animals can add so much meaning to our lives, many people dread the prospect of watching their furry friends age. Yet veterinarians and experienced senior-pet companions say this stage of life offers its own kind of joy and opportunity for fulfillment.

If you tune in to your pet's changing needs and seek out the appropriate resources, you can extend their life — and improve their quality of life — more than you might imagine. "We can do so much for pain and anxiety management, and there are lots of practical steps you can take in the home to keep them safe," says Mary Gardner, DVM, a hospice veterinarian based in South Florida and author of *It's Never Long Enough: A Practical Guide to Caring for Your Geriatric Dog*.

Proper treatment can relieve pain and even improve your pet's arthritis

or tricky hip. Moreover, preventive steps can slow the aging process by months or years, giving you precious additional time with your best pal.

## Keeping Pets Healthy

Even before your pets reach their geriatric years, you can do a lot to keep them healthy and happy.

**Activity.** Like humans, pets need regular exercise to maintain muscle mass and a healthy weight. Play with your adult cats just as you would when they were kittens, for movement and cognitive stimulation. Let your dog walk until they signal that they're ready to go home, says Nicholas Dodman, DVM, president of the Center for Canine Behavior Studies and editor of *Good Old Dog: Expert Advice for Keeping Your Aging Dog Happy, Healthy, and Comfortable*.

"Swimming is one of the best exercises for senior dogs with arthritis," notes Ursula Liv, owner



of Liv Love Dogs, a canine health and wellness consultancy based in Southern California — though she advises not to let dogs swim alone.

**Diet and Supplements.** Consult your veterinarian to be sure you're feeding your pets the optimal diets for their age and condition. Ask about supplements, such as omega-3 fats, vitamin D, antioxidants, digestive enzymes, and probiotics. Don't overfeed them or give them too many treats — carrying too much weight can worsen many ailments, including joint pain and heart disease.

**Brain Games.** Pets also need mental stimulation. For dogs, this means varying walk routes, letting them off-leash when it's safe, and allowing them to linger and sniff every bush or post they desire. "He's checking his pee-email," Dodman explains. "He's doing something interesting that stimulates his brain."

For cats and indoor pets, consider using various tools to keep them engaged, such as wobble bowls, lick mats, and food puzzles.

### Signs of Change

As your pet ages, pay close attention to changes in their activity level, appetite, general attitude, and continence. Gardner recommends taking regular photos and videos so you can track subtle differences.

For example, a cat relinquishing the sunny window seat may be signaling that she feels pain when climbing up to that spot. A dog who stops and stares during a walk could be experiencing cloudy vision or confusion.

Ask your vet whether checkups should be more frequent than once per year so any new conditions that require treatment can be caught more quickly. "Sadly, 50 percent of pets who are euthanized were not seen by a vet in the previous year," Gardner says, adding that this figure does not include shelter animals.

To cover the costs of your pet's medical emergencies, consider pet insurance or simply start saving in a separate account.

### Adjusting to Older Pets

You may need to adapt your lifestyle to accommodate your pet's needs and to keep them safe, clean, and active. Observe your home with an eye out for slipping and falling hazards. "Make sure the pet has secure footing all around where they want to be," Gardner says.

If the cat likes to sit beside you on the couch or the dog wants to stand next to you at the sink, lay a path of yoga mats or bathmats so they can easily get that companionship that sustains them.

Keep in mind that many old-age illnesses in pets cause incontinence, so you may need to avoid leaving them alone indoors for long periods. Be sure they

can access a litter box or area to relieve themselves.

Adaptive harnesses, toe grips, and booties can encourage older pets to move more often. Consider raising or tilting food and water bowls if your pet has trouble leaning down to eat or drink.

### When Is It Time?

It's what all pet owners dread: making the decision to euthanize a pet. Take the time to consider the pet's quality of life and prognosis, as well as your own resources, Gardner advises.

The Pawspice (pronounced like "hospice") quality-of-life program for terminal pets suggests assessing seven areas: hurt, hunger, hydration, hygiene, happiness, mobility, and whether there are more good days than bad.

Dodman recommends convening a committee to discuss the situation. This could include the veterinarian, family members (including children no longer living at home), and a friend who can offer an impartial opinion.

There's no reason to feel guilt or shame about reaching the decision to say goodbye to your pet, says Gardner. "It's not about giving up," she explains. "Euthanasia is very peaceful and can be an end to suffering."

Diffily believes our pets let us know when they're ready. Before Yogi arrived, she had an 85-pound dog named Bonnie who couldn't walk after an amputation, but at age 12 still loved being carried onto the porch to sit with Diffily and her husband. One day, Bonnie just looked up at them pleadingly. "We both said, 'She can't do this anymore,'" she recalls.

### Saying Goodbye With Intention

Once you've made the decision that it's time, don't rush. Give yourself a day or two to prepare and make memorial items. Maybe you want a paw print, photos, or a clipping of fur. Take your pet to their favorite spot for one last outing, and make sure everyone gets to say goodbye.

Try to avoid crying or moping, which our pets can easily sense. "Make sure their last days aren't stressful," Liv says. "Spoil them, brush them, do all the things they love."

Make an appointment at the vet or with a service that can come to your home, which may be a less anxiety-provoking option for many pets and their people. "We hold them, we tell them it's OK to leave, we pet them," Liv notes. "Be there in the last moments and let them see *your* face last rather than a vet's."

Recognize that you may grieve more than you expected. "Some people have a harder time losing their pet than a human family member," Liv says. "They're with you all day, every day." When you're ready, seek out resources: Many organizations, such as Lap of Love and Rainbows Bridge, offer support for pet-loss grief.

Above all, find comfort in knowing that you gave your pet a good life and a loving home — and that the grief you feel is an echo of the joy they brought you. 🐾

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**KATHERINE REYNOLDS LEWIS** is a writer in Washington, D.C.

If you tune in to your pet's changing needs and seek out the appropriate resources, you can extend their life — and improve their quality of life — more than you might imagine.



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# The Illusion of Separation

When we begin to understand our interconnectedness to everything, our natural powers of healing thrive.

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

**A**t Joy Lab, we believe that joy is natural and accessible to everyone — but that sometimes it's just not easy to access. This may happen when we're struggling with what we call the enemies of joy: brain imbalance or toxicity, an unsettled mind, and the illusion of separation.

The last one — the illusion of separation — is the belief that we are separate beings, cut off from others and from the world around us. We may even get snagged by the feeling that there are parts of ourselves at war with one another.

There are four myths at the heart of this confusion: the separations of mind and body, head and heart, inside and outside, and nature and nurture. Let's take a closer look.

## ● MYTH NO. 1: MIND AND BODY

Seventeenth-century philosopher René Descartes popularized the notion that the mind and body are distinct things — an idea now known as mind-body dualism. His aim was to prove that the soul exists separate from the body, which then enabled him to explain the soul's existence mathematically.

But his thesis was flawed. It was used to prove that health was limited to the physical body, specifically what was observable and measurable, and that it was mostly uninfluenced by outside factors, including our thoughts. For centuries, this idea of mind-body separation dominated science and medicine.

Recently, abundant research has shown just how much our thoughts — as well as environmental factors — impact our health, suggesting we are much more interconnected than we believed.

## ● MYTH NO. 2: HEAD AND HEART

One of the best ways to keep your heart alive is to be moved by people's stories. When we're under constant time pressure, it's hard to even listen to someone's tale, much less be affected by it.

But when we take the time to really hear what someone has to say, the whole brain lights up. Telling and receiving stories are among the only human activities that consistently excite the entire brain. With presence and attention, we can have the experience of feeling fully alive, which is what happens when head and heart come together.

## ● MYTH NO. 3: INSIDE AND OUTSIDE WORLDS

Most of us are seeking greater openness and connection, whether we know it or not. When we feel separated, it's easy to become discouraged, stressed out, and unmoored.

Joining our inside and outside worlds requires that we be more permeable. This means becoming vulnerable enough to allow things in, and mindful enough to not be overwhelmed by them.

Doing this requires acknowledging the part of ourselves that wants to be open, connected, and engaged in the world, and not be dominated by the part that feels afraid to do so. We can survive and even thrive in a difficult world when we learn how to intentionally turn toward openness and permeability. (To learn more about creating healthy boundaries, see [ELmag.com/boundaries](http://ELmag.com/boundaries).)

## ● MYTH NO. 4: NATURE AND NURTURE

We may wonder which is dominant, but nature and nurture appear to work together in roughly equal measure. According to numerous studies of twins, including the famous Minnesota Twin Family Study, the root of most mental illnesses is between 30 and 50 percent genetic. There may not be anything we can do about our genetics, but we can affect other factors.

DNA is a blueprint: It provides instructions the cells need to produce the enzymes and proteins they require. How well cells read and implement those instructions depends on the DNA's surrounding environment, which contains gateways that can be opened and shut, admitting or barring the instructions before they're implemented.

Many factors influence genetic expression. Our genes might make us vulnerable to depression, anxiety, or other mental illness. Yet those genes may never be activated because their environment hasn't enabled their activation.

Our nutritional status, stress level, and the quality of our relationships all might create an environment in which those genes don't get switched on. This is why one identical twin may have an illness while the other one doesn't.

When we tend to our environments, ensuring that we feel connected to ourselves, to others, to what we eat, and to how we live, we give our bodies the best chance of expressing the genes that allow us to thrive.

Even if we've been sick or lonely for a long time, it's never too late to tend to these connections. The opportunity to turn toward connection is always there for us.

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**HENRY EMMONS, MD**, is an integrative psychiatrist and cofounder of Natural Mental Health. He is the author of *The Chemistry of Joy*, *The Chemistry of Calm*, and *Staying Sharp*. **AIMEE PRASEK, PHD**, is an integrative-therapies researcher and CEO of Natural Mental Health.





# Grand Disagreements

Supportive grandparents can be a godsend for you and your kids — but disagreements about parenting may create tension. Setting healthy boundaries can help you find a balance.

BY **JON SPAYDE**

**A**s the adage goes, it takes a village to raise a child. If your village includes grandparents, children can have loving elders who enrich their lives — and you can get some support for and respite from childcare at the hands of family members you trust.

But what happens when you discover Grandpa Joe’s or Abuelita Maria’s parenting rules, expectations, and styles are different from yours?

Personal and generational differences on discipline, safety, the psychological health of kids, and other factors may open a gulf between you and your parents or in-laws. How do you make sure your kids reap the rewards of a close relationship with their grandparents while standing by your own parenting values?

## How do you make sure your kids reap the rewards of a close relationship with their grandparents **while standing by your own parenting values?**

The topic inspired questions in a major study by University of Michigan Health. The C. S. Mott Children’s Hospital National Poll on Children’s Health sends out survey questions on aspects of child health about three times a year. In 2020 the survey asked 2,016 parents, whose children ranged in age from newborn

to 18, about parental–grandparental tensions — and their responses show that if you’re struggling with these issues, you’re not alone.

For the 43 percent of parents who reported having disagreements with grandparents, the most common source of friction was discipline: 57 percent of this group noted that grandparents are too lenient, too tough, or both. Other bones of contention included meals and snacks, screen time, manners, and health and safety.

It’s important to work out these differences, says Sarah Clark, MPH, a research scientist at the University of Michigan and codirector of the Mott poll. When there’s unresolved parent–grandparent tension, she says, “nobody wins.” These common-sense principles can ease the strain.



## Stress Sources

**You and the grandparents have different parenting norms.** Your parents or in-laws may not agree with — or even know about — some of the parenting norms that you embrace. Maybe they're stricter than you would prefer, or less aware of current food issues, safety concerns, or changing ideas about how kids dress and behave.

"But it isn't that the grandparents are always more conservative or traditional," Clark points out. "Sometimes they have more of a casual, 'this too shall pass' attitude toward childcare than you might be comfortable with." In any case, you may feel that the grandparents' approach is undermining your hard-won parenting efforts.

**You're hesitant to address any issues because the grandparents are helping with childcare.** "For a lot of parents, it's fabulous that they can have a family member rather than someone they don't know in that caregiving position," Clark notes. "They don't want to lose that, and so they tread carefully."

For this and other reasons, it may seem better to avoid bringing up a problem.

**You're afraid the grandparents will take criticism of their habits with your kids as veiled criticism of how they raised you.** This might be especially true if the grandparents are sensitive to criticism. But even if they're not, they could take umbrage if it becomes apparent that you see your own approach as "fixing" their mistakes.

## Strategies for Success

**Keep the kids out of it.** "Just as you don't involve your kids in your disagreements with your partner," says Clark, "don't enlist them into disputes with grandparents."

**Get on the same team.** The point of these approaches isn't to persuade the grandparents of your point of view, she emphasizes, but to enlist them in a loving and cooperative enterprise: supporting the child. That means speaking — and thinking — in a way that assumes they want the best for the kids, too.

**Understand the distinction between a well-being issue and a style difference.** This is one of the main ways that parents can determine whether an issue is really important or whether they can let it go, Clark explains. "If the grandparent gives the child a snack food that you just don't happen to like, or if you simply prefer to limit screen time more strictly than the grandparents do, that's a style difference. There are a lot of areas where disagreements can and do occur, and you can't play hardball on every single one of them."

**Stand your ground on well-being and safety.** If, on the other hand, your child is really sensitive or allergic to a food the grandparent offers or has shown signs of an unhealthy dependence on electronic media, that's a well-being difference.

Don't compromise on well-being, Clark advises, whether it's food, an appropriate car seat, or gun safety. It might feel awkward to talk about, but unsecured firearms in the home are dangerous for children, and a child's protection must be the top priority. "Grandpa John locks up his guns when the kids come to visit," she says. "Make it clear you're not being anti-gun or anti-Grandpa; it's a safety issue."

**Realize that kids can be flexible.** If there are style differences between your parenting techniques and those of the grandparents, you may find your children are more adaptable than you expected. "I don't think we give kids enough credit for being able to understand that they can do something at home but not with the grandparents, or vice versa, without being confused or hurt," Clark explains. "Any kid who goes to daycare

or preschool figures out the difference between home rules and other rules."

**Provide reasons and context.** "The most important thing to avoid is digging into entrenched, angry positions so that disagreements become a long-term thing," Clark notes.

And that goes for nonnegotiable issues like safety and well-being as well as less crucial ones. When you are making your case, she suggests, come to the table with good reasons and resources, such as articles and web pages, rather than peevish insistence.

"Instead of issuing an order — 'Make sure that he's down for a nap at 2' — you can say, 'We've been noticing that he's having a lot of trouble sleeping through the night. We've been trying to do nap time a little earlier so he'll be more tired at bedtime. We're shooting for somewhere between 2 and 3, OK?'"

If you get insistent pushback on a well-being issue, she adds, you can, as a last resort, bring the grandparents with you to a meeting with a pediatrician.

**Show respect for the grandparents' needs and values.** "You can have a phone call with the grandparents a few days before you visit — 'We're going to be talking with the kids about the visit, and we wanted to go over a couple things with them,'" Clark suggests.

Ask whether the kids should take their shoes off before walking into the house, or where they can put their toys so that they won't be underfoot. "You're doing two things here: getting information about what's acceptable, and sending a strong message to Grandma that 'Hey, I want to work with you,'" she says. "And this opens up a nice two-way street."

**Remember that time with the grandparents might be different — but should be special.** "A thoughtful parent wants their kids to have some special experiences with grandparents, and those experiences aren't the same ones he or she will have at home," she says. "If the children are safe, you generally don't have to make a big deal about the differences." 🧡

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**JON SPAYDE** is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.



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# What Is Feldenkrais?

This form of somatic education can help you heal injuries and improve your game.

BY **COURTNEY HELGOE**

**M**ost children sit in chairs only when they must. They're typically inclined to use their bodies in other ways: to stand, sprawl, sprint. If their mobility is limited, they still find ways to move — using their feet as hands or blazing around a playground on crutches.

As adults, we often forget that our bodies have so many movable parts. We fall into a few patterns: walking, working, texting. Even if we like to dance, run, or play a sport, our athletic movements can also be repetitive, leading to unconscious choices, a general shrinking of mobility, and eventual injury.

One way around this trajectory is to take a cue from children and relearn how to move our bodies in diverse ways. That is what the Feldenkrais Method is all about.

“It’s a method of movement re-education,” explains practitioner Krista Langberg, GCFP.

People often seek out Feldenkrais for rehab, but it’s more than physical therapy. Practitioners help teach students’ nervous systems new ways of doing and being. They believe that by revising old, stuck habits, we can eliminate the root cause of many types of pain.

Moshe Feldenkrais, a physicist and engineer born in present-day Ukraine, developed the method in the mid-20th century. He was an avid martial artist, and a chronic knee injury prompted him to devise a system for healing based on tiny, nuanced movements performed with heightened self-awareness. “If you know what you’re doing,” he famously said, “you can do what you want.”



Some things to know if you'd like to try Feldenkrais:

- 1. YOU CAN TAKE A CLASS.** Feldenkrais is taught in group classes, called Awareness Through Movement (ATM). Most of an ATM class takes place on a mat, where you perform small, subtle movements with the guidance of a teacher — learning to notice and value the impact of tiny adjustments. “There’s a strong emphasis on moving slowly and easily, and staying within the range of personal comfort so you can refine what you’re doing and how you’re doing it,” explains Jeffrey Wells, GCFP, who instructs Feldenkrais classes with Langberg in Minneapolis.
- 2. YOU CAN WORK WITH A PRACTITIONER.** The method is also practiced in individual sessions, called Functional Integration (FI). These hands-on sessions involve lying on a table, fully clothed, while the practitioner uses gentle touch and movement to help reintegrate your body and nervous system. The approach is holistic, so you’ll work on rebalancing the entire body even as FI sessions often focus on a specific issue, whether it’s pain, restriction, or an emotional blockage. During a session to address pain in your right hip, for example, much of the practitioner’s attention might focus on your right foot.
- 3. IT STARTS WITH THE BRAIN.** Most people start Feldenkrais with a specific outcome in mind, but the general goal is to facilitate better communication between the brain and the body. Becoming more conscious of your habits allows you to expand your movement choices. When Langberg began studying Feldenkrais, she was recovering from a series of personal tragedies, including treatment and surgery for breast cancer. She wasn’t sleeping or eating well. She knew her nervous system was stuck in hypervigilance, but it wasn’t until she was lying on a mat in class that she could become aware of a new habit: How she was holding herself was contributing to her tension. “I started to feel like I was wearing armor,” she recalls. On the mat, Langberg could slow her attention enough to notice this feeling. This awareness allowed her to shift it. “I had the experience of my chest breaking open, like something hard broke open,” she says. “Then I would get up and walk and feel like a different person.”
- 4. IT’S ABOUT MORE THAN REHAB.** Feldenkrais is great for healing from injury, but it’s just as useful for refining everyday movements or improving your game. Langberg and Wells recently observed an ATM session involving professional hockey players. Athletes can be particularly motivated to understand their movement patterns at a subtle level, both to avoid injury and to improve their performance.
- 5. IT’S ABOUT CHOICES.** Ultimately, Feldenkrais works by teaching us how to adapt to change. This capacity makes us more graceful both physically and emotionally. Wells recalls a client whose frozen shoulder he helped free: “It was great that she could connect and bring her shoulder up to her ear, but I think what she was feeling was, *Oh, I am not fated to be in this body the way that it is for the rest of my life.* This gave her an opportunity to see that there’s a way forward.”

**COURTNEY HELGOE** is the *Experience Life* features editor.



# Plant a Tree!



Trees clean the air, battle the climate crisis, and do so much more for the planet. Planting one is a simple way to take action.

BY **MICHAEL DREGNI**

**W**ant to do something to make the world a better place? Plant a tree.

It's actually not about saving *trees*; it's about how trees might save *us*, explains ecologist Suzanne Simard, PhD, author of the bestseller *Finding the Mother Tree*. Simply put, trees are “necessary for healing the earth,” she states.

Trees and forests have been hailed as the lungs of the planet. Thanks to their exhalations, we can inhale: Trees breathe in carbon dioxide, sequester and convert it, and breathe out oxygen.

In one year, a mature tree absorbs more than 48 pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and releases 260 pounds of oxygen in exchange. Globally, forests remove or process about a third of the emissions we create as we burn fossil fuels.

This simple-yet-near-magical act has inspired us to put our faith in trees for our future. So if a tree falls in a forest and no one's around, we may not hear it — but we do *feel* it.



Yet trees do so much more than clean our air: They prevent soil erosion and rainwater runoff. They cleanse our drinking water. They fertilize our soil.

Trees help keep us cool in summer, and they cut winds and storms to keep us warmer in winter, trimming cooling *and* heating costs. And when water in trees evaporates, it both humidifies and cools the air we breathe.

Trees are a vital part of the ecosystem. They provide food and habitat for pollinators and other birds and animals. And, as Simard details in her book, they communicate with one another as well as with other plants through vast underground mycorrhizal fungal networks, which we're only beginning to comprehend.

Trees' natural charm adds curb appeal and boosts real-estate value.

And trees contribute to our health in other ways as well. They add much-needed "nature" to our lives, which benefits our mental health. As Joe Fargione, PhD, ecologist and science director for the Nature Conservancy's North America region, says, "Trees give people a sense of well-being."

It's little surprise, then, that some retail companies promise to plant a tree for every swipe of your credit card, for every product you buy, for donations to a cause. Countries commit to planting trees to meet global eco-pledges; corporations do so to offset their carbon emissions and bolster their sustainability records.

Still, it's an oversimplification to think that the act of planting a tree — or even a billion or trillion trees, as popular eco-campaigns vow — is the silver bullet that will reverse climate change. There are many more complex factors involved, and many, much larger polluters than each individual.

"Planting a tree is a positive, meaningful action," Fargione says. But he also points out that it's not possible to plant *enough* trees to solve the climate crisis: "The majority of the solution to climate change will need to come from reducing our emissions."

So, planting a tree isn't the only way you can help make the world a better place. On the environmental front, you can cut back on airplane travel, which is far and away the largest part of most people's individual carbon footprint. You can ride your bicycle whenever possible instead of driving your car.

You can insulate your home to save energy. Grow native plants to provide sustenance for pollinators. Buy local. Turn off the lights. The list goes on and on.

All of these examples pale by comparison to the climate impact

of corporations and governments. But your climate impact is something you can control. Reversing the climate crisis is complex; planting a tree is simple.

And from small acorns and seedlings comes big change. "There is no moment too small in the world," Simard says. "Nothing should be lost. Everything has a purpose, and everything is in need of care. . . . It's up to each and every one of us."

More than anything, planting a tree is planting hope for the future. It's a vision, a dream. You may never sit under its shade, but the children of the future will. 🌱

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**MICHAEL DREGNI** is an *Experience Life* deputy editor.

## HOW TO PLANT A TREE

There's a proverb that says, "The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago; the second-best time is today."

All you need is a shovel and a little vision. Many trees grow to be large in both height and breadth, so envision the tree 30 to 50 years in the future. That will help you choose the type of tree you buy and where you plant it. For the best outcomes, consider the following factors.

**GROW NATIVE.** "Many native trees make good shade trees: They are well adapted to your climate and tend to be more disease- and insect-resistant than exotics," explains Lynn Steiner, author of several guides to native plants, including *Grow Native*. "They also provide more habitat for native beneficial insects, birds, and butterflies than nonnative trees do."

**THINK AHEAD.** "The trees you plant will become major elements in your landscape. Keep the mature size in mind and make sure the tree you select will be in scale with your home," she says. "Don't make the mistake of planting a tiny oak seedling 10 feet from your front door or a basswood under a power line."

**PLAN THE LOCATION.** To create shade and cut cooling costs, plant a broad-canopied deciduous tree on the southwest or west side of your house, says Steiner. "The shade of a large tree can reduce the temperature up to 10 degrees, and these effects can be felt inside a house as well. Studies show that a few well-placed shade trees can reduce cooling costs by as much as 35 percent."

For wind protection and to trim heating costs, plant a coniferous tree on the north or northwest side or wherever the prevailing winter wind originates; this can save you up to 30 percent on heating costs.

**START SMALL.** Volunteer to plant trees with an organization, such as the Arbor Day Foundation. If you don't have a yard, start a tree in a container and transplant it.

### DIG DEEPER

For more tree-planting advice from native-plant expert Lynn Steiner, see [ELmag.com/plantatree](http://ELmag.com/plantatree).



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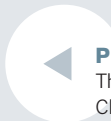


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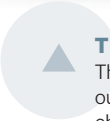






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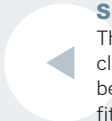


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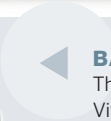


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# Seeking Awe

BY **BAHRAM AKRADI**

**The Pink Moon of April.** A cathedral of pines. Mozart's Symphony No. 41. Michelangelo's *David*. A neon sunrise.

It hits you: that jaw-dropping, goosebumpy feeling when you experience something vast, new, or masterful. That's awe.

Like many of our emotions, awe has evolved as we humans have evolved. Initially, it occurred when something unexpected grabbed our attention. It alerted us to new information or details in our surroundings so we could better navigate what was ahead. (Translation: It helped us survive!)

Goosebumps themselves may have originated as a practical aspect of our preservation. Our ancestors were hairier, a little more covered in fur. The reaction — medically known as “pilo-erection” — protected our forebears not only from the cold, but also from predators; the tiny muscles in the skin flex and cause the hair to stand straight up, helping our predecessors look bigger and scarier. From there, they could decide whether to fight or flee.

Today, we often recognize and welcome that feeling as the physical phenomenon accompanying wonder, a moment that can transcend our understanding. Philosophers in the 18th century called it the sublime, a term reserved for a greatness that exceeds possibility.

The source was often nature: a spectacular display of the northern lights, or the crimson, scarlet, and fuchsia reds of dogwoods in the fall.

Yet over the last century, much has changed. Our attention has shifted, and technology has taken center stage. We've become excited about supercomputers and algorithms. We've started — and continue — to spend more time working and using devices.

We used to walk places; today we drive or take public transportation. Our heads are down. We're *so busy*. Despite all the conveniences, we keep losing time.

Childhood is different. Gone are the days when kids' primary entertainment was to run and laugh through each other's yards. Many kids have disappeared indoors to turn on their screens. For the most part, they've collectively sat down.

Education has changed, too. Art and music — often sources of awe — have become a luxury in many schools, the first things to go as budgets declined.

A hazy sky frequently drapes the cities and suburbs in which many of us live. Sunsets go unnoticed.

We have arrived at a time and place in which wonder is harder to find. This is concerning. Because while a moment of pleasure is a reward in itself, scientific research — much of which has been led by Dacher Keltner, PhD — suggests the effects of awe are much more expansive and long lasting. Marvel can actually improve our long-term health and help us thrive.

Along with compassion and lightheartedness, amazement is a neurobiological recipe for well-being and longevity. As clinical psychologist David Elkins, PhD, states in his 2001 essay, “Awe is a lightning bolt that marks in memory those moments when the doors of perception are cleansed and we see with startling clarity what is truly important in life.”

In an instant, awe allows us to understand how small we are and experience a sense of personal insignificance that can positively shift our perception on numerous things. We feel humility — oh, how minute we really are in the crazy scheme

of things! This might help us think more critically, make better decisions, become more flexible, and develop the ability to see multiple sides of a story.

The ultimate collective emotion, awe encourages us to shift our focus from our personal interests and concerns toward those of the groups to which we belong.

Our generosity increases: Awe can motivate us to do things that enhance the greater good, helping us all become stronger and happier.

It can expand our perception of time and make it feel more abundant when we slow down to notice things. In doing so, we begin to reclaim — and enjoy — the time modern life encourages us to waste away.

The remedy is quite simple: Watch for moments of awe every day. This emotion isn't only associated with rarified events or unbelievable views, and it doesn't need to be reserved for extraordinary moments. You don't have to book a trip to Mount Everest.

You can start small. Perhaps it's as easy as heading outside. Nature is an elixir: Soak in your surroundings as you observe the world.

It won't take long. You might find awe in the V formation of honking geese in the springtime. Or in a wildflower that sneaks up through a sidewalk crack. Or in the patterns of wheat fields you pass on a country drive.

Awe is one of our greatest human experiences. So, get out there. Seek it out. Pay attention. Our big, beautiful world is full of wonder, and it awaits you.

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







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