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# Experience Life

**LIFETIME**

July/August 2023

# Explore!

## FITNESS AROUND THE WORLD

HOW PEOPLE  
ACROSS THE GLOBE  
MOVE THEIR BODIES

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## THE THOUGHTFUL TRAVELER

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# + 35 WAYS

TO MAKE THE  
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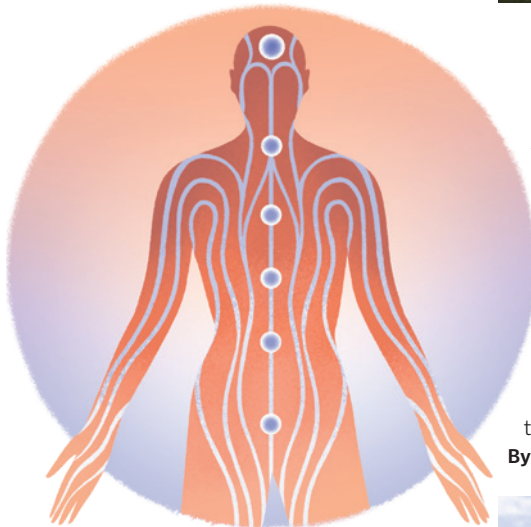
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# Experience Life Digital

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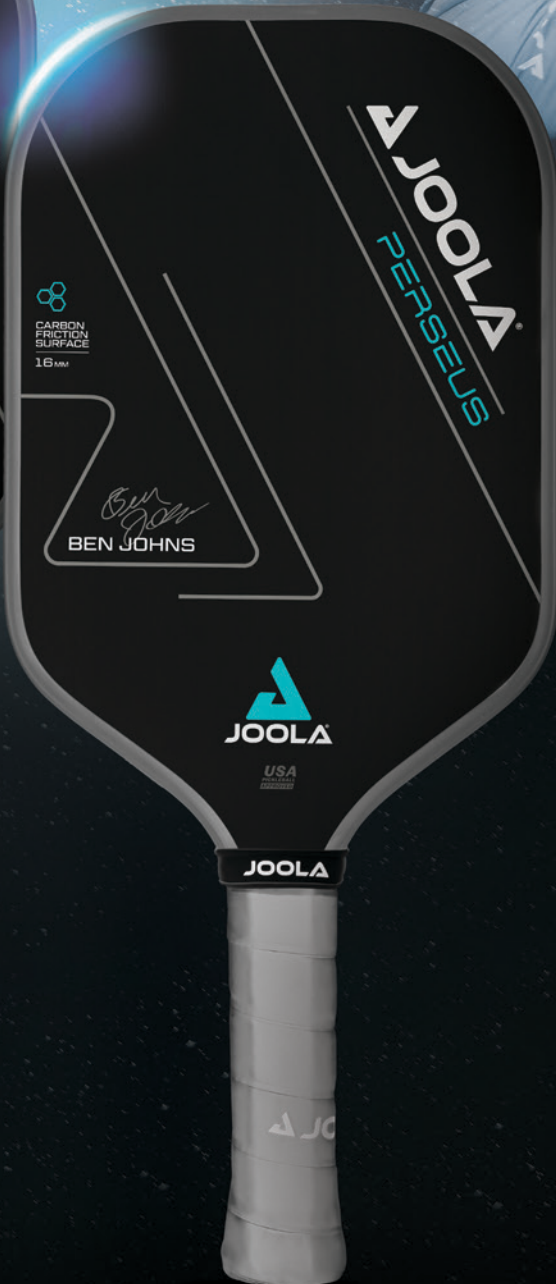
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**LIFE TIME**  
HEALTHY WAY OF LIFE

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





Sea kayaking in Monterey Bay, Calif., in April 2023.

## Expanded Horizons

It occurred to me as I was scrambling up what seemed like the hundredth incline on Bear Mountain Trail: I wasn't scared. Rather, I was exhilarated, focused, determined, confident. I was loving the entire experience of that challenging 2,000-plus-foot ascent. Everywhere I looked, there was another stunning view of the red rocks surrounding Sedona, Ariz. — the effort was worth it.

Twenty years ago on that trail though? I know I would have been terrified; in fact, I probably would have turned around at the first pass along a steep drop-off.

At that point in my life, I had done little, if any, true hiking, not to mention other adventure sports. I was risk averse, hesitant to engage in just about anything that presented the possibility of bodily harm.

That began to change when I met my husband and especially once we had kids. Our relationship has always involved creating and participating in as many experiences as we can together, and we've embraced this philosophy as a family as well. Living it out loud has often required stepping beyond my comfort zone

and into the unknown, the unfamiliar, and, often, the uncomfortable.

Wet climbing a fast-moving Dunn's River Falls after days of rain in Jamaica on our honeymoon: check. Climbing via ferrata, then rappelling in the Laurentian Mountains near Charlevoix, Quebec, on assignment for work: check. Whitewater rafting, then hiking in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Asheville, N.C., during a family road trip: check. Sea kayaking with sea otters: check.

Over time, I've found that the more excursions like this I do, the more comfortable, enjoyable, and even appealing they are. I don't hem and haw to the point of nearly talking myself out of partaking; I don't zero in as sharply on the "what ifs" pertaining to the risks.

Instead, I think about the sights we'll see (expected and not) and what we'll each discover about our physical and mental capacities. Ultimately, these are explorations not just of nature and the surrounding cultures, but of our own internal landscapes.

They're an opportunity to get curious about who we are and what we can accomplish in this great big world — to dig in to and hone new ways of thinking and feeling, which influence our ways of being.

"When we become curious about something that makes us uncomfortable, we might notice things we didn't see before. This can cause us



These are explorations not just of nature and the surrounding cultures, but of our own internal landscapes."

to shift our thinking. . . . It's that very discomfort that can create new neurological connections," write Henry Emmons, MD, and Aimee Prasek, PhD, in "How Curiosity Changes Your Mind" (page 73).

Throughout this issue, you'll find many examples of ways to get curious — in your workouts (pages 26 and 50), in your day-to-day experiences (page 78), and in your travels (page 62), as well as about your health and well-being (pages 16 and 56).

Exploring can take many forms, yet it always influences and changes us — hopefully for the better — and that's what this summertime edition of *Experience Life* is all about.

As for me, my next adventure is getting on a mountain bike. I gotta say I'm a little scared . . . and a lot intrigued. What are you exploring?

**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.

### YOUR THOUGHTS?

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# Talk to Us



## FOR THE LOVE OF COOKBOOKS

[On “Why We Still Need Cookbooks,” March 2023]

**f** I love my mom’s and grandmother’s cookbooks and recipes with their personal notes in the margins. I also love school and charity cookbooks in which people only contribute their own favorites — and usually good cultural ones.

**Dorene S.**

**u** I grew up loving the *Better Homes & Gardens* oatmeal raisin cookies — it’s the molasses. There’s also a great ginger cookie recipe that I now adapt by adding chopped candied ginger. I am looking forward to checking out the books you recommended.

**Betsy A.**

**f** I have all my mom’s cookbooks. Some are from the 1940s, during WWII, and show how to substitute ingredients that were rationed.

**Helen S.**

**f** I own a lot of cookbooks and just love to read them. Plus, I love to try out new recipes or learn new ways to cook and bake. I also have family recipes of my and my husband’s folks dating way back, including one on how to make lye soap.

**Rod C.**

**f** I love my cookbooks. I have one that was my father’s and originally belonged to his mom. It’s handwritten with a lot of different recipes. There are instructions for making soap, mayonnaise, homemade mincemeat, and many others.

One is an eggless, butterless, and sugarless cake. I’ve made that many times for my dad — it’s his favorite cake — with no frosting.

**Josephine W.**

## REFLUX REMEDIES

**u** This article (“7 Gut-Healing Foods,” July/August 2020) and your article on GERD (“5 Ways to Manage Acid Reflux Without Medication,” March 2023) are the best articles I’ve ever read on gut health. They offer the level of information I have been looking for and not finding. I am a 50-year-old nurse who suffers from GERD and reluctantly takes over-the-counter medication daily to avoid discomfort. My primary-care doctor has no suggestions and my gastrointestinal consult and endoscopy with a Vanderbilt specialist who still practices at Cleveland Clinic answered none of my questions. Physicians look for already-developing disease while patients seek prevention. I will be looking for a nutritionist guide to seek

better digestive healing and disease prevention.

**Margie G., RN, MSN, CEAP**

## A LIFESAVING DIAGNOSIS

**✉** This is an excellent article on the dysregulation of the autonomic nervous system (“What Is Autonomic Nervous System [ANS] Testing?,” March 2023), a widely ignored and misdiagnosed condition. As a sufferer of dysautonomia who was shuffled from doctor to doctor for years and eventually wrongly treated for “atypical depression,” I stumbled upon the Dysautonomia-MVP Center in Birmingham, Ala., where I was immediately diagnosed and successfully treated — quite literally giving me my life back. It’s encouraging to hear that more MDs, such as Gregory Plotnikoff, are recognizing this widespread disorder.

**Susan W.**

## LEARNING FROM PAIN

**u** I love that quote from Rumi in “Pain: A Positive Perspective” (March 2023). It invites us to not take ourselves so seriously. I very much agree with Bahram Akradi’s perspective that hardships are lessons and opportunities to grow, and pain is the simplest of lessons — teaching us to be grateful for our healthy, joyous moments.

**Erika P.**

## READER TAKEAWAYS

**✉** Courtney Helgoe did a beautiful job with her article “What Is Energy Medicine?” (January/February 2023). Reading the magazine, one comes away with so much fascinating knowledge, and Courtney’s recent article is truly just that too. Keep up the commendable job.

**Carolyn H.**

**✉** I want to thank you for including climate information in your magazine (“How to Talk With Kids About Climate Change,” January/February 2023). It’s a topic I am personally very focused on every day, and I’m dismayed that too few people are thinking about it, talking about it, or acting on solutions at this stage. We have a very small window for a major change in the next 10 years to avoid blowing past 1.5 degrees C, and it’s imperative for future generations that we all take action now.

**Heather O.**



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# Cutting Through Brain Fog

**H**aving trouble concentrating? Feeling confused and forgetful? You may be the victim of what's become known as brain fog.

It's a well-documented symptom of chronic conditions such as fibromyalgia and Lyme disease, and of cancer treatments — it often appears after chemotherapy, previously earning it the nickname “chemo brain.” Yet brain fog has never been formally deemed a medical condition.

That may be due to how difficult it is to diagnose: There's no official testing protocol for brain fog, and those struggling with it may appear perfectly healthy. So, healthcare practitioners have often failed to identify — or worse, have dismissed — the condition.

That all changed in the wake of COVID-19 and, more specifically, the mysterious illness known as long COVID.

## Silver Lining?

Long COVID is characterized in part by cognitive impairments that linger months after the most acute viral symptoms subside. Estimates of its prevalence vary, but a recent systematic review indicated that nearly half

of those who contracted the virus continued experiencing symptoms for at least four months.

One of the most common of these symptoms is brain fog. Those who've suffered it have likened the experience to feeling lost, hazy, or caught in the space between sleep and waking. In some severe cases, sufferers have been forced to stop driving, reduce work responsibilities, or even halt working entirely.

If there's a silver lining to the prevalence of cases, it's that researchers now have a more robust dataset with which to understand how brain fog works and how it can be treated.

## Causes and Treatments

Inflammation — the body's natural, protective response to infection — was connected to brain fog prior to the pandemic, and it appears to be a crucial link between COVID's initial respiratory symptoms and the longer-lasting cognitive impairments. Recent studies suggest that inflammation may spread from the lungs to other parts of the body, including the brain.

The resulting dysregulation of brain cells looks a lot like so-called chemo brain, in which damage to myelin, the fatty insulation that helps

neurons efficiently transmit signals, contributes to slower processing. Accordingly, some researchers believe that treatments currently in development for use among chemotherapy patients experiencing brain fog may also help those with long COVID.

Brain fog also resembles post-concussive syndrome, common among individuals who have experienced a traumatic brain injury (TBI). A preliminary study in which long-COVID patients were administered a combination of N-acetylcysteine, an antioxidant being tested for TBI treatment, and guanfacine, known to strengthen the prefrontal cortical circuits responsible for memory and attention, showed promise.

Because the brain communicates with all our bodily systems, conditions affecting it are notoriously difficult to understand or treat. Myriad causes may contribute to brain fog, including psychological ones.

“Things like sleep and exhaustion, pain and stress and depression — all of these nonneurological issues also play a role in our cognitive functioning,” explains Renee Madathil, PhD, a rehabilitation neuropsychologist at the University of Rochester Medical Center, in a 2021 *Science* magazine interview.

As we learn more about brain fog and its causes, treatment may comprise a mix-and-match approach, with pharmaceuticals, cognitive rehabilitation, and even “brain-training” games all part of the clinical toolkit.

— ALEXANDRA SMITH, MA, LPCC

There's no official testing protocol for brain fog, and those struggling with it may appear perfectly healthy. **So, healthcare practitioners have often failed to identify — or worse, have dismissed — the condition.**

# New Research: No Amount of Alcohol Is Healthy

**For decades**, researchers and public-health officials have struggled to reach some consensus on how much alcohol is too much, agreeing that excessive imbibing is harmful but often suggesting that moderate consumption of certain beverages may offer some health benefits. Recent research, however, argues that the only truly healthy approach is to abstain.

“Risk starts to go up well below levels where people would think, *Oh, that person has an alcohol problem*,” Tim Naimi, MD, MPH, tells the *New York Times*. “Alcohol is harmful to the health starting at very low levels.”

Naimi, director of the University of Victoria’s Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research, and other experts now believe that alcohol in any amount damages the body’s DNA, raising the risk of cancer and coronary artery disease. “It fundamentally affects DNA,” Naimi says, “and that’s why it affects so many organ systems.”

Alcohol consumption is linked to more than 75,000 cases of

cancer in the United States each year, according to American Cancer Society (ACS) research. Drinkers run a higher risk of specific cancers, including head and neck, esophageal, liver, breast, and colorectal.

“If somebody drinks less, they are at a lower risk compared to that person who is a heavy drinker,” says Farhad Islami, MD, PhD, a senior scientific director at the ACS. “Even

two drinks per day, one drink per day, may be associated with a small risk of cancer compared to nondrinkers.”

Earlier this year, Canadian health officials released new guidelines for alcoholic consumption, noting that health risks range from “low” for those who consume two drinks or fewer in a week to “increasingly high” for those who have seven or more per week.

U.S. guidelines define “heavy alcohol use” as eclipsing 14 drinks in a week for men or seven for women.

The risk “really accelerates once you’re over a couple of drinks a day,” Naimi notes.

— CRAIG COX

“  
Risk starts to go up well below levels where people would think, *Oh, that person has an alcohol problem.*”



## A Clearer View of Lasik

**In 2008**, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) began researching and drafting a consumer warning about possible complications from Lasik eye surgery. Since then, the procedure has become one of the most common elective surgeries in the United States, with some 600,000 people annually undergoing the operation.

The FDA cites side effects that can include dry-eye syndrome, light sensitivity, blurred vision, and visual disturbances, such as glare, halos, starbursts, and double vision. In rare cases, symptoms can become severe and permanent, “leading to loss of vision, interference with your usual activities, and pain.”

In addition, the procedure may not fully correct your vision and you may require further surgery or corrective lenses. Plus, vision correction may not last, requiring more correction over time. And Lasik can’t correct for presbyopia — age-related difficulty with near vision — so patients may need to wear glasses for close work and reading even if they didn’t need them before.

“If put into effect, the agency’s warnings are likely to come as a surprise to many Americans, who view the procedure as safe and commonplace,” the *New York Times* reports.

The draft guidance has garnered praise from groups such as the American Optometric Association, whose members treat and manage ocular disorders and diseases, perform vision tests, and prescribe eyeglasses and contact lenses.

Lasik providers, meanwhile, say the draft “is highly biased and misleading” and request the warning be withdrawn.

(For more on the FDA’s draft guidance, see [bit.ly/40SnE48](http://bit.ly/40SnE48).)

— MICHAEL DREGNI





## Good News on the Cancer Front

**Fewer Americans** are losing their lives to cancer, according to the latest data from the National Center for Health Statistics. A recent analysis, published in the American Cancer Society's *CA: A Cancer Journal for Clinicians*, offers these highlights.

### 33%

Decrease in U.S. cancer deaths from 1991 to 2020, a "truly formidable" change, American Cancer Society CEO Karen Knudsen tells CNN. This amounts to an estimated 3.8 million deaths averted.



"New revelations for prevention, for early detection, and for treatment have resulted in true, meaningful gains in many of the 200 diseases that we call cancer."

— Karen Knudsen, American Cancer Society CEO

### 1,958,310

Projected number of new cancer cases in the United States in 2023. Still, the five-year relative survival rate for all cancers combined has increased from 49 percent for diagnoses in the mid-1970s to 68 percent for diagnoses from 2012 to 2018.



### 12%

Higher risk of fatal cancers among Black people compared with white people as of 2020. "Racial disparities are largely a consequence of less access to high-quality care across the cancer continuum," the report authors note. The Black-white disparity in cancer mortality has declined from a peak of 33 percent in 1993.

— MD

## Heavy Metals in Dark Chocolates

**A December 2022 report** from the nonprofit consumer-advocacy group Consumer Reports renewed worries about heavy metals in dark chocolate. Tests found that 23 of 28 dark chocolate bars from 21 brands contained harmful levels of lead, cadmium, or both.

Such heavy metals are common in the soil of cacao-producing regions. Food scientists have long known about the concentration in dark chocolate as well as cocoa powder, and chocolatiers have wrestled with ways to reduce it.

"Consistent, long-term exposure to even small amounts of heavy metals can lead to a variety of health problems," the report states. The danger is greatest for those who are pregnant and for children, but frequent exposure in adults brings risks of nervous-system problems,

hypertension, immune-system suppression, kidney damage, reproductive issues, and certain types of cancer.

To have your chocolate and eat it too, consider these recommendations.

• **Do your research.** Look online for test reports specifying which dark chocolates have the lowest heavy-metal levels.

And don't assume organic is safer: Consumer Reports' tests found some organic bars were just as likely to contain high levels.

• **Consider milk chocolate.**

Cacao levels are lower, so milk chocolate tends to harbor fewer heavy metals, the report notes. But it also contains more added sugar, so check the label.

• **Treat chocolate as a treat.** Chocolate has long been touted as a healthy superfood in headline-grabbing studies — many of which are funded by candy makers. But chocolate truly is candy and best consumed in moderation. (For more on chocolate's purported health benefits, see [ELmag.com/cacao](http://ELmag.com/cacao).)

— MD

“Consistent, long-term exposure to even small amounts of heavy metals can lead to a variety of health problems.”





# Can Exercise Mitigate the Effects of Parkinson's?

A bicycle trip across Iowa 20 years ago sparked Jay Alberts's interest in the power of exercise to treat Parkinson's disease. After riding a tandem with a Parkinson's patient, he was struck by the improvements in her handwriting after several days of pedaling. "It was a real aha moment," he tells the *Washington Post*. "It got me thinking that maybe something was changing in the brain."

Alberts, a PhD and Cleveland Clinic neuroscientist, has been studying the connection between exercise and Parkinson's ever since. He suspects that a solid fitness regimen ramps up the production of proteins that boost brain-cell growth. "They don't produce dopamine, but they may reduce the effects of whatever is causing the loss of dopamine," he explains.

He points to a recent study involving Parkinson's patients who pedaled stationary bikes at a high intensity three times a week for eight weeks. Researchers tested the participants' ability to react to a timed task prior to the study and again after the two months of workouts. The improvements they noted, Alberts believes, "could aid in the performance of activities of daily living."

Other research suggests that the secretion of the hormone irisin during endurance exercise may reduce the production of alpha-synuclein, a protein associated with the development of Parkinson's. And Caroline Tanner, MD, PhD, a neurology professor at the University

of California San Francisco, argues that regular workouts may ease chronic inflammation, which has been linked to neurological disorders.

Indeed, Tanner predicts that the 90,000 cases of Parkinson's currently diagnosed each year in the United States could fall by almost half by 2030 if we simply exercised more regularly and vigorously. "This could have amazing public-health consequences," she tells the *Post*.

The anecdotal evidence supporting this view is compelling. Take the case of Bob Sevene, 79, who struggled to stand upright and needed a back brace and walker to get around following his 2019 diagnosis. In 2021, Sevene began a noncontact boxing regimen designed for Parkinson's patients, as well as a daily high-intensity fitness routine that includes 25-minute cycling sessions on a stationary bike and brief sprints in the hallway outside his apartment. The results have been transformative: He no longer needs the back brace or walker.

"My doctors have run strength, balance, and gait tests, and everything has improved," Sevene says. "They decided to not up my medicine. I'm convinced exercise is the reason."

Ryan Cotton, DHSc, CEO of Rock Steady Boxing, a program created

for people with Parkinson's, tells the story of a retired military officer who donned the gloves six years ago when he needed a walker to steady himself. "He took out all his frustrations on the bag," Cotton recalls. "Six months later, he was walking independently and later ran a half-marathon. Today, someone seeing him on the street wouldn't even notice he had Parkinson's."

And Sherri Woodbridge, writing in *Parkinson's News Today*, describes how she's benefitted from the LSVT BIG program, a physical therapy regimen designed to enhance movement. "The BIG treatment improved my walking in general, and I gained confidence with 'stairstepping,'" she notes. "I no longer take each stair sideways, with extreme caution, and slower than molasses. The program helped me to be more intentional in my activities and how I carry them out."

More research will certainly be forthcoming, but Tanner and others caution those with Parkinson's against waiting for more evidence before they begin a workout regimen. "There already is enough excellent evidence to suggest this is a very good thing to do if you are a person with Parkinson's," she says. ●

**1 Million**  
Number of Americans  
living with Parkinson's,  
making it the **second-  
most common**  
neurodegenerative  
disease after  
**Alzheimer's.**

— CC





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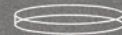
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# HEALTH EXPLORER

After a mysterious illness struck, firefighter and athlete Ryan Sutter took action to find his way back to wellness.

BY COURTNEY LEWIS OPDAHL ● PHOTOS BY ANDY ANDERSON

**R**yan Sutter had a plan — and it meant hiding the map from his two kids. He’s always felt at home in the Colorado wilderness, and on this particular camping trip, Sutter, who’s from Fort Collins, hoped to impart some wisdom to his now teenagers that’s best discovered in the natural world.

After enjoying a nearby lake view, Sutter suggested taking a shortcut back to their campsite. Off the trail. With no guidebook. He challenged them to notice landmarks and objects, and trust that they could reach their destination despite abandoning the beaten path.

“I tried to get them to understand that we’re not lost just because we’re not on the trail,” recalls Sutter — who did, in fact, know the way. “It felt like a metaphor for life, in which, especially for kids, they’re conditioned to go to school and then college and then to get a job. It doesn’t have to be that way. You can have your own life and not be afraid of taking chances and getting off the trail in life, so to speak.”

It’s not the first time Sutter has taken a risk and found reward. The former college and pro football player and current firefighter

appeared on the first season of ABC’s *The Bachelorette* in 2003 after much hesitation, figuring his quieter personality wouldn’t be a fit for television. The producers encouraged him to simply start with an application. “And the next thing you know, I’m on the show, I meet my wife [Trista], and my whole life has changed,” he recalls about establishing Bachelor Nation’s longest married couple.

When Ryan began suffering body-wide pain and debilitating fatigue in March 2020, it was Trista who became his health advocate and researcher. After consulting with his physician and a rheumatologist, his labs indicated high levels of antinuclear antibodies (often associated with autoimmune disease), but the doctors ruled out lupus and cancer.

Then Trista found functional-medicine practitioner Jill Carnahan, MD, and the answers to Ryan’s mysterious illness became clearer. Carnahan sought to find the root cause of his illness, an approach that better suited Ryan too: “You just feel like someone actually is finally listening and finally believes you and that there’s something wrong.”

In May 2021, Carnahan diagnosed Ryan with Lyme disease, which is caused by the spirochete

*Borrelia burgdorferi* (and more rarely, *Borrelia mayonii*). It is transmitted to humans through the bite of an infected blacklegged tick, commonly known as a deer tick. (For more on why tick-borne diseases like Lyme continue to confound the medical community, visit [ELmag.com/chroniclyme](http://ELmag.com/chroniclyme).)

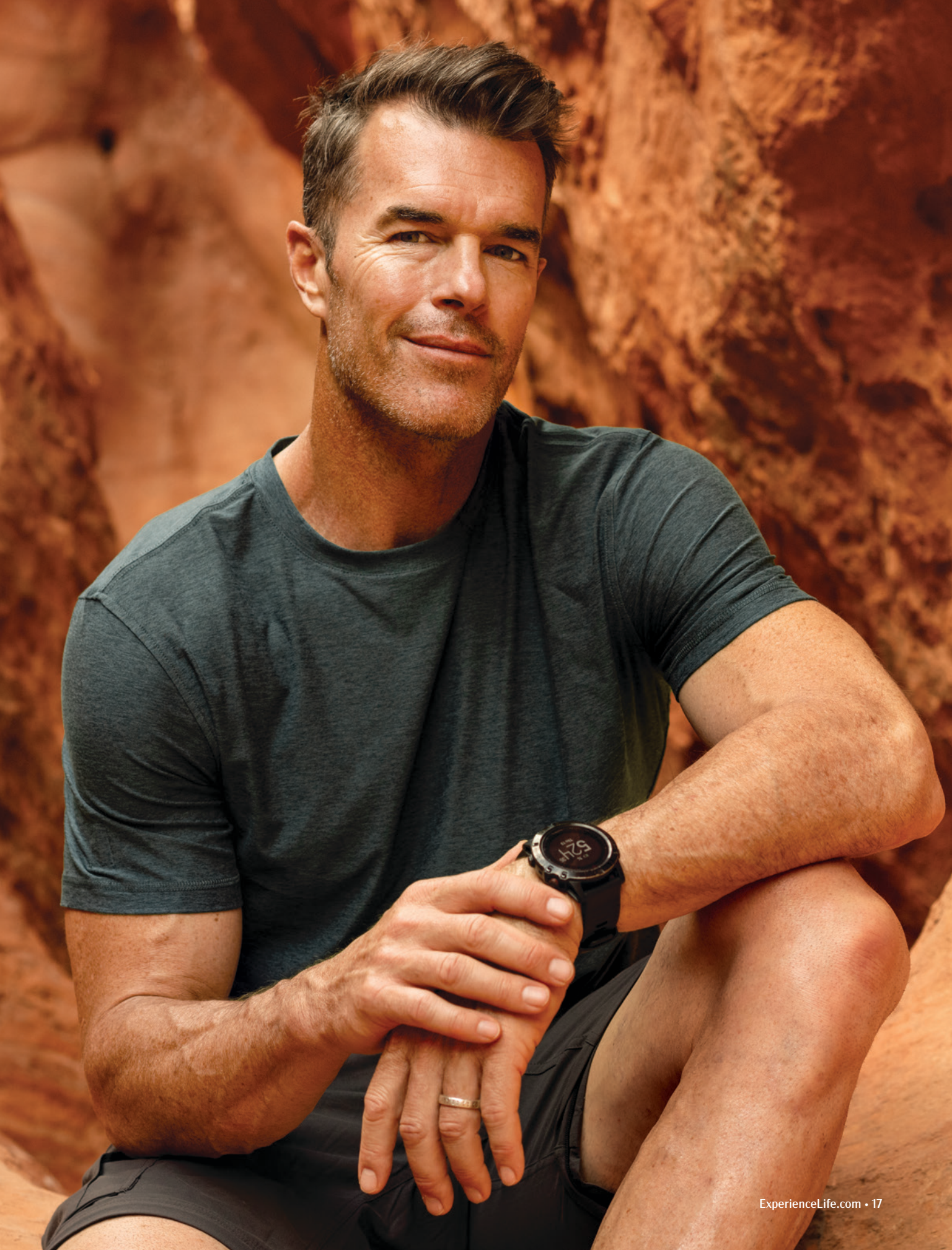
She also detected mold toxicity, most likely due to his work as a firefighter. (For more on mold and your health, see [ELmag.com/mold](http://ELmag.com/mold).)

Ryan declined the anti-inflammatories a rheumatologist prescribed — he felt they would mean “a lifelong commitment to treating symptoms.” The functional-medicine approach, however, included lifestyle changes and a battery of supplements and herbs that required much trial and error (and to his chagrin, excess time and costs).

When Carnahan pinpointed the mold toxicity, she added binders to his treatment plan, along with a focus on detoxification through saunas and support through sleep, and suggested changes to his diet, such as removing gluten and limiting processed foods.

Now, after three years of treatment and experimentation with bee-venom therapy, Ryan, 48, is feeling better and able to envision the second half of his life.







# Q&A

## WITH RYAN SUTTER



**EXPERIENCE LIFE** | The way you've described your illness, it sounds like it really sidelined you. What were those initial symptoms, and how did you ultimately get diagnosed with Lyme disease?

**RYAN SUTTER** | It was March 2020 — all my symptoms started at the same time as COVID. I also went back to the fire academy, and I was exposed to a lot of mold. It was the perfect storm of just really getting tired and weak and then my body being hit by a million different blasts that I just couldn't fight off anymore.

I started seeing doctors and not finding answers, but Trista encouraged me to keep looking. Together, we worked through this. I'm fortunate enough to have that advocacy, where I know other people probably don't.

When we found functional medicine, it seemed like it was going after the root cause, which gives you hope that you're going to find a better way to get through your life and be like yourself again. That's a refreshing thing to hear from a doctor. Dr. Jill Carnahan found the mold toxicity and the Lyme disease.

When I told her something just didn't feel right, she said, "You need to trust yourself, and if it doesn't feel right, then it probably isn't right, and we'll find something that does feel right." And so we did.

**EL** | Is that how you decided to try bee-venom therapy? It's a more unconventional approach — was it part of your treatment plan?

**RS** | No. I asked her, and she was supportive of it, regardless of the fact that it wasn't something in her wheelhouse.

I found quite a bit of relief working with The Heal Hive for testing and lifestyle changes, along with adding

bee-venom therapy. I keep a bee house in my pantry. So, I go in there and feed honey to the bees. This is the hard part because they're eventually going to sacrifice their lives for this therapy. Every time they sting me, I say, "Thank you for the medicine." I do six to eight stings every other day. I've been doing that for over a year now, so it's been pretty consistent and seems to be helping. But I would have never thought that I would be stinging myself with bees every other day.

What I don't want to do is encourage everyone to go to bee venom. What I do want to encourage is everyone to find their unique path and to trust themselves.

**EL** | What were some of the lifestyle and health changes you made that have helped you?

**RS** | I pay attention to recovery far more than I used to, including sleep.

I'm the first one up in my family, so I sit there as the sun comes up and just ease into the day. I usually make a cup of hot water with lemon and honey and sit there for a little while and do some breath work. What's helped me is sleep, recovery, nutrition — and I always try to get outside.

**EL** | Being in nature seems like it's always been integral in your life. Do you feel like that's instinctual as a Coloradan?

**RS** | I've always said that nature is my church. There's a spirituality to it. There's definitely something healing about just breathing natural air and being around natural things. It's always sort of humbling. It's kind of like therapy now.

**EL** | You've been an athlete most of your life, playing football and hockey, and hiking and mountain biking. You're

a firefighter. You even competed on *American Ninja Warrior*. All of that requires a high level of fitness. How has your approach to fitness changed since your Lyme diagnosis?

**RS** | The problem with me wasn't exercising — I was always pushing myself, always seeing what I could do, seeing if I could do more. Pedal to the metal in life, 100 percent of the time. Truthfully, I think I just got to an age where that was too much. My body short-circuited.

Now, I balance my exercise with recovery and don't overexercise. I've taken my foot off the gas.

**EL** | How did the team at the firehouse respond to your health diagnosis and lifestyle changes?

**RS** | No one has ever said one single thing that's negative or derogatory or insulting or in any way offending. They're like a second family.

We all cook and we eat our meals together at the firehouse. On my days to cook, I'll cook things that fit into my diet, and ironically, the crew loves it, and I think that they would eat that way more often if it wasn't so ingrained in our culture to eat differently.

Some of them will do the saunas and nutrition, and they all get more sleep. They can see that I'm healthy, that this is working for me, and it's contagious.

**EL** | How are you feeling these days — and what's next for you?

**RS** | I feel a ton better than I did two years ago. I feel this is the beginning of the second half of my life. I wish I knew exactly what was next, but that's part of the fun, right? 🍷

---

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



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● ONE HEALTHY HABIT

# Eat a Rainbow of Plants

Take advantage of the summer harvest and challenge yourself to eat more colorful plant-based foods each day.

BY **EXPERIENCE LIFE STAFF**

## WHY

Colorful vegetables and fruits are full of phytonutrients, the naturally occurring compounds that often act as antioxidants to reduce inflammation and defend cells from damage.

## HOW

Aim to add two brightly pigmented plant foods to each meal. Visit a local farmers' market to find an abundance of options. Get creative with swaps: Try a sweet potato in place of a white potato, for example.

## TAKE ACTION

Looking for more support and plant-forward inspiration? Find a list of antioxidant-rich foods, smart veggie swaps, and links to recipes at [ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit](https://www.ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit).





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# Taking Flight

Grounded due to his weight, a flying enthusiast responds by taking control of his fitness and diet.

BY **JASON BURNS**



Today, Jason Burns finds joy and satisfaction in performing standup comedy (in March 2023) and prioritizing his health and fitness.

**M**y dad took me on float-plane trips to go fishing every summer in the '90s. Though fishing wasn't my thing, I loved flying. When I was 16, I got the itch to fly a plane myself, so I called the local airport near my house. I was taking lessons and at the controls within hours.

I returned to the air many times over the years, and I was 36 in 2021 when I caught the helicopter bug. This time, I called a flight school, and sure enough, they had a helicopter that could be ready in an hour.

After arriving, the instructor took one look at me and asked how much I weighed. I gave him a low-ball estimate, about 10 or 15 pounds less than the truth. Even so, he shook his

head. Our combined weight exceeded the limit for the aircraft. "We can't go up today," he said. "You'll have to go up with one of our lighter instructors another time."

Was I disappointed? Absolutely. Embarrassed? A little. But had I seriously lied about my weight to avoid exceeding the maximum limit for a helicopter just for fun? Definitely not my safest decision. The Federal Aviation Administration would not have approved. At least people might assume my epitaph was a typo: "He died doing what he loved — LYING."

## Grounded

Through age 10, I was a reasonably athletic kid and played a lot of hockey and baseball. But after my parents' divorce in 1994, I lost interest and stopped playing sports. I was unhappy, and my parents tried to lift my spirits by letting me eat whatever I wanted — and I wanted junk.

I was often bullied about my weight at school. Yet by the time I

graduated from high school in 2004, I'd learned that humor was my best defense mechanism. I had better jokes about myself than anyone else did, and that made high school a little easier.

In 2005, I went to work in promotions at several popular nightclubs in Minneapolis. Promotion involved getting creative with fliers — plus lots of walking: I pounded the pavement every day. It wasn't intentional, but I felt my health transform from all that walking. I lost weight, but I didn't gain muscle mass because I was only doing cardio.

Over the next few years, I changed jobs a handful of times, and few of them supported my health as well as the promotion gig did. In 2009, I began working security at a casino, which involved less physical activity and provided access to some pretty amazing high-calorie foods. Fast food had also become the norm.

I was ready to get healthy again in 2015, so I joined a basic gym and hired a trainer. I worked out a few times per week, but I didn't change my diet. I just went through the motions, which didn't result in lasting change.

Then even that motion came to a halt a year later when I had my wisdom teeth removed. It's best to avoid strenuous exercise for a few days while recovering from the procedure,

Left: Flying has been an integral part of Jason's life since he was young (pictured here with his stepdad, Charlie, in May 2014).

Right: Jason, in 2017, before embracing healthier lifestyle habits.





and it was hard to regain momentum after the break. I went back to being unhealthy. I wanted to change, but I came up with all sorts of excuses not to.

### Course-Correcting

I had a breakthrough in 2018 when I decided to try standup comedy for the first time. Comedy had always been a passion of mine, but public speaking was a fear. When I wasn't terrible, I knew I was on to something. A few months later, I placed eighth out of about 500 comics in a local contest.

The next breakthrough happened in 2019 when I quit smoking. I'd started back in April 2007, and I'd wanted to quit for a while. The breaking point came when I tried to smoke a cigarette while hung-over. It was so gross that I decided it was time to get serious about quitting.

I learned a new habit takes 22 days to form, which didn't seem so daunting. If I could abstain from smoking for 22 days, I could keep it going — and it worked.

Unfortunately, then the COVID-19 pandemic grounded me in terms of standup comedy. I kept the no-smoking thing going, though, and I haven't lit up since.

At a routine physical exam in 2021, my doctor expressed concern over my elevated cholesterol levels, which was new. He said diet and exercise should solve the issue. I started using my rowing machine and eliminated fast food, but I wasn't motivated to do more.

That is, until my weight kept me from going up in that helicopter around the time a tumultuous relationship ended. It seemed to be the perfect storm to bring change, so I embraced it.

When I thought about getting healthier, I didn't know where to start. What I did know was that if I could go to the gym for 22 days, I could keep going. I visited a nearby Life Time to take a look, and I was impressed. The facility was great, but its amenities came with a price tag.

Then I thought, *If I can spend \$600 to fly a helicopter for an hour, I can afford a personal trainer and a health-club membership.* I began working with a personal trainer right away.

I also wanted to eat healthier. Changing my diet seemed easier when I ate at the LifeCafe after workouts. On the way home, I'd stop at the grocery store for whole foods like chicken, steak, or a stuffed pork chop for dinner.

I saw results pretty quickly once I settled into my new habits. By day 100, I felt great. By January 2022, I was able to do a pull-up. I couldn't remember a time in my life when I could do one of those. It felt amazing.

The more I went to the club, the better I felt — not just physically, but mentally and emotionally too. I realized I didn't just want to lose weight: I wanted a new life.

In March 2022, my trainer updated my strength program to shock my muscles and increase muscle growth. Almost immediately I noticed a positive change and progress toward that goal. We updated the workout program again a few months later with the same results.

### Happy Landings

My daily workout is ingrained in me now. My top priority is to move every day. I alternate a push/pull/legs routine with sessions on the elliptical or stair-climber, which provide active recovery.

I've achieved my initial goal, and I know that I'll continue to see results as long as I keep this up. That knowledge gives me room to breathe on the diet side, but I'm still careful. I know from experience that a visit to the bakery can be a slippery slope.

When I started my health journey in September 2021, I didn't feel great about or confident in my body. Now, I look in the mirror and see a completely different person. My confidence has improved; my social circle has grown with it. Becoming healthy changed the whole dynamic of my life. I don't even know what it's like not to have fitness in my routine anymore.

I still love flying, but these days I'm spending my money on fitness instead. I returned to standup comedy, though, and last year I placed eighth — again — in the same contest.

I worked my butt off to become a fit guy, but apparently I didn't get any funnier. 🍌

## Jason's Top 3 Success Strategies

1

### CREATE GOOD HABITS.

Embrace the 22-day rule.

"This is how I am transforming myself," Jason says. "What's 22 days? Keep chipping away and eventually it becomes your life."

2

**MAKE FITNESS A PRIORITY EVERY DAY.** "People often set up mental blocks: *I can't. This is too hard. Maybe tomorrow.* If you make fitness a priority, almost any obstacle can be overcome."

3

**LIVE A LITTLE.** Grace goes a long way, especially when you're committed to fitness. "I still hit up my favorite restaurant for a double bacon cheeseburger once a week and go out to a bar to have fun with friends," Jason notes.

### TELL US YOUR STORY!

Have a transformational healthy-living tale of your own? Share it with us at [ELmag.com/myturnaround](https://ELmag.com/myturnaround).







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# Real Fitness

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— Mechelle Lewis Freeman

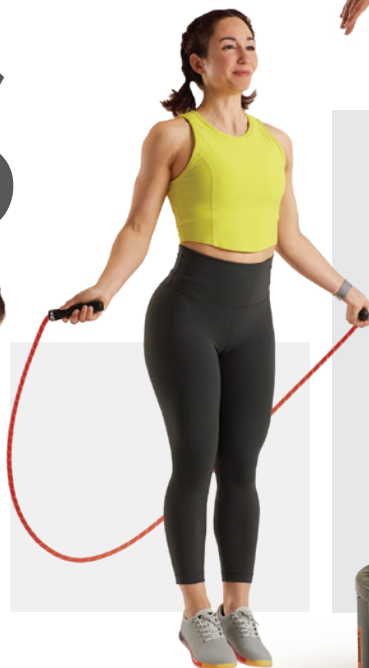
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**When it comes to interval training, sprint interval training — or SIT — delivers the biggest bang for your buck in the least amount of time.**



# Play Plus

Playtime isn't just for kids. Pair joy-infused cardio with body-weight strength moves in this all-ages interval workout.



BY **NICOLE RADZISZEWSKI**

For many adults, play and exercise are diametrically opposed. For a workout to “count,” they might say, it must be arduous — straining you to the point of exhaustion in order to help you reach your fitness goals.

Play, on the other hand, is the literal embodiment of fun. Undeniably valuable for kids, sure — but little more than a distraction from the serious job of getting fit for adults. If a workout veers too close to play, too close to the throw-caution-to-the-wind fun we experienced as children, some might ask whether it's a workout at all.

These beliefs couldn't be further from a primal truth that kids know subconsciously and too many of us adults have long forgotten: Fun fosters fitness.

“Joyful movement emphasizes finding pleasure in the way we move our bodies,” says Jasmine de LaCruz, AFAA, NASM, an all-ages personal trainer and content creator for Life Time's Kids Studio classes. “It is well known that physical activity provides many mental and physical health benefits, and by focusing on movement we enjoy, we are more likely to move our bodies regularly.”

Incorporating play into a workout routine doesn't diminish the positive effects of exercise, just as making a workout extra long and grueling doesn't make it more effective.

“Many of us have been taught that exercise is about punishment. But exercise can also be a celebration of what our bodies can do,” says de

LaCruz. “It's time to break the stigma that every workout session requires a ‘no pain, no gain’ mentality.”

If anything, the activities that many might dismiss as child's play — hopping, jumping, and skipping, to name a few — build key elements of fitness, such as strength, mobility, and especially cardio.

De LaCruz designed the following workout as an invitation to rediscover what play looks like. Each circuit combines two body-weight strength moves with a play-inspired cardio activity of your choice. (For ideas, see “Joyful Cardio” on the next page.)

To boost the joy factor even more, try this workout outside with your favorite music in the background, perhaps with a workout buddy.



# THE WORKOUT

**Begin with a full-body warm-up.** (Find our favorite at [ELmag.com/perfectwarmup](http://ELmag.com/perfectwarmup).) Then choose a circuit, set a timer for 30 to 60 seconds, and perform the first strength exercise (A) in the circuit. Reset the timer, again for 30 to 60 seconds, and perform the second strength exercise (B). To finish the circuit, reset the timer once more — this time for two minutes — and perform a joyful cardio activity of your choice (C). Feel free to change your activity at any time during the cardio interval.

Perform two or three rounds of the circuit, resting for 30 seconds between rounds. If you do more than one circuit, rest for a full minute between each.

A note on the strength exercises: The “A” moves in each circuit are lower-body exercises. The “B” moves are plank variations that challenge your upper-body and core muscles. To progress the B moves, elevate your hands on a firm surface, such as a bench or box.

## CIRCUIT 1

- A. Alternating Reverse Lunge With Kick
- B. Pushup
- C. Joyful Cardio

## CIRCUIT 2

- A. Squat With Alternating Toe Position
- B. Plank-Up
- C. Joyful Cardio

## CIRCUIT 3

- A. Cossack Lunge
- B. Plank With Shoulder Tap
- C. Joyful Cardio

## CIRCUIT 4

- A. Marching Glute Bridge
- B. Cross-Body Mountain Climber
- C. Joyful Cardio



## JOYFUL CARDIO

**The following list** is far from exhaustive but offers a variety of options for plugging play into your workout. And the best part of all? There are no hard-and-fast rules.

Feel free to choose one movement for the entire workout, try a different movement for each circuit, switch moves for each round of a circuit, or even switch moves randomly in the middle of a circuit. If you start the workout loving jump rope and later find yourself dreading another round of it, don't hesitate to try something new. If you love something that's not on the list, go for it!

Just remember: You'll know you've made a good choice if it feels good and you're having fun.

- Dance break
- Shadowboxing
- Jumping-jack variations
- Rockette kicks
- Bear crawl
- Inchworm
- Skipping or galloping
- Carioca (lateral grapevine)
- Tag
- Crab walk
- Speed skaters
- Bunny hops
- High-knee march
- Jumping rope
- Jumping on a trampoline
- Dribbling a soccer ball or basketball
- Hula-Hoop



Many of us have been taught that exercise is about punishment. **But exercise can also be a celebration of what our bodies can do.**

## GET THE SPECIFICS

For full exercise descriptions, visit [ELmag.com/joyfulmovement](http://ELmag.com/joyfulmovement).



Circuit

1



**A.**  
**ALTERNATING REVERSE LUNGE WITH KICK**

Step back with your right foot and lower into a lunge position. Press through your front foot to stand. As you rise, kick your right foot straight in front of you to about hip height. Return to the start position and switch legs.

Alternate sides for the desired time interval (30 to 60 seconds).



**B.**  
**PUSHUP**

Begin in a high plank position. Bend your elbows and lower yourself until your triceps are about parallel to the floor. Press back up into a high plank position.

Repeat for the desired time interval (30 to 60 seconds).

**C.**  
**JOYFUL CARDIO**

Jumping jacks are a great cardio option. Modify this playful move by doing legs-only jacks (keeping your hands on your hips) or stepping side to side instead of jumping.

Repeat for two minutes.



Circuit

2



**A.**  
**SQUAT WITH ALTERNATING TOE POSITION**

Perform a squat with your toes facing forward, then one with toes turned out, then toes facing forward again, and so on.

Continue squatting, alternating toe position, for the desired time interval (30 to 60 seconds).



**B.**  
**PLANK-UP**

Begin in a low plank, on your forearms. Transition to a high plank, planting one hand at a time while maintaining a neutral spine and braced core.

Repeat for the desired time interval (30 to 60 seconds).

**C.**  
**JOYFUL CARDIO**

Shadowboxing typically consists of three parts: a jab, a hook, and a cross. (For a form refresher, visit [ELmag.com/shadowboxing](http://ELmag.com/shadowboxing).)

Repeat the sequence for two minutes.





## Circuit

# 3



A.

### COSSACK LUNGE

Stand with feet wider than your shoulders and toes pointed slightly out. Bend one knee to lunge down; allow the toes of the straight leg to point toward the ceiling. Return to standing.

Alternate sides for the desired time interval (30 to 60 seconds).



B.

### PLANK WITH SHOULDER TAP

Start in a high plank with feet at least hip width apart. Lift one hand and tap the opposite shoulder. Replace that hand on the floor and repeat with the opposite side.

Continue for the desired time interval (30 to 60 seconds).

C.

### JOYFUL CARDIO

To do a high-knee march, powerfully raise one knee at a time, aiming for chest height. Move at a brisk pace.

Repeat for two minutes.



## Circuit

# 4



A.

### MARCHING GLUTE BRIDGE

Begin at the top of a glute bridge position. Keeping your hips elevated and level, lift one foot off the floor at a time as if marching in place.

Repeat for the desired time interval (30 to 60 seconds).



B.

### CROSS-BODY MOUNTAIN CLIMBER

Start in a high plank. Draw one knee in toward the opposite elbow, then return it to the start position. Repeat, this time drawing your other knee toward the opposite elbow.

Continue for the desired time interval (30 to 60 seconds).

C.

### JOYFUL CARDIO

To do inchworms, bend forward to plant your hands on the floor. Walk your hands forward one at a time until you are in plank position. Reverse the motion and return to standing.

Repeat for two minutes. ➡





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# Backward Walking

Shift into reverse to boost stability, balance, coordination, and cognitive function.

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

Going for a walk is one of the most powerful things you can do for your physical and mental health, but walking forward isn't the only way to get its benefits. Backward walking, also known as retro walking, is an underrated way to mix up a simple activity many of us do every day.

The difference between walking forward and walking backward probably seems obvious: Instead of planting one foot in front of the other and leading with the heel, backward walking involves reaching your leg behind you and stepping down toe-first.

This isn't only a shift in direction. Stepping backward changes how the muscles of the legs and core engage, providing a different set of benefits than forward walking offers.

Walking backward engages the glutes and anterior tibiales, or shins, as well as muscles in the feet and ankles. It also mitigates the impact of

Turn your head from side to side, as needed, to maintain a view of where you are walking (and what you might be walking toward).

Maintain an upright posture throughout the movement.

Allow your arms to swing naturally, and use them for balance.

Initiate the step backward with your big toe.

Land on the ball of your foot, then roll through the foot toward your heel.



each step, reducing the sheer force exerted on the knees and lower back.

Reversing your stride demands a more erect posture than the slight frontward lean of forward walking, which creates a new challenge for muscles in the abdomen and back while also stretching the hip flexors. One study even found that backward walking down a steep slope can alleviate symptoms of plantar fasciitis.

In addition to offering these stability-building perks, backward walking has been shown to improve balance, coordination, and gait. This is due in part to the fact that the visual cues we are accustomed to (and often take for granted) when walking forward are removed. Our brains have to work harder to keep us upright and safe, a boon to cognitive function.

That said, lacking a clear view of where you're stepping or headed is also the greatest pitfall of this walking variation. Beginners are advised to start slow, moving in a space with few

hazards or obstacles. A clear hallway, a treadmill with handrails (and set to a slow speed), or a soft patch of grass are great places to start.

With practice, your balance and overall proprioception — your sense of your spatial orientation — will improve. You can then walk backward for longer distances or add retro-walk intervals to your regular walk.

To progress the challenge, try walking backward uphill or on a treadmill set at an incline. (If you need to go downhill, forward walking is the safer option, at least until you are very comfortable walking backward on a flat surface and on an incline. Even then, make sure your surroundings are safe and clear.)

A more advanced progression would include jogging or running backward for short stretches. This might be especially useful training for football, soccer, and rugby players who routinely run backward during games.

(For a backward jogging demo, visit [ELmag.com/backwardwalking](http://ELmag.com/backwardwalking).)

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



Ready,  
Set,

SIT!

BY JULIE DULUDE

Sprint interval training (a.k.a. SIT) can boost your fitness and transform your body at the cellular level.

**M**oving your body daily is a great way to improve overall health. But to get the biggest bang for your buck, interval training is most often the way to go, and there's one type that consistently delivers more results in less time: sprint interval training (SIT).

Chances are, you're already familiar with interval-style training, likely in the form of high-intensity interval training. HIIT is characterized by short, fast bursts of intense activity interspersed with brief periods of rest. One popular form, known as Tabata, calls for eight 20-second rounds of high-effort work interspersed with 10 seconds of rest between rounds.

As the name implies, HIIT is high intensity, but it's not an all-out effort. You push yourself to 80 to 85 percent of your maximum heart rate and then engage in rest intervals that are too brief to provide anything near a full recovery.

This is where SIT differs. Unlike HIIT, sprint intervals require an effort that approaches 100 percent, and the rest intervals are significantly longer than the bouts of work — think two to three minutes of easy recovery following a 10-second all-out sprint.

While this may sound like a luxurious amount of rest, it's a fair match

to the level of effort required. A true all-out sprint pushes you so hard that even a seconds-long burst leaves you needing the longer recovery.

If this sounds hard, that's because it is. SIT is advanced, says Abrea Wooten, national education manager at Life Time. "It's no joke. Sprinting is nature's way of telling your body to toughen up and to rise to the occasion."

### The Science of Sprinting

There are several good reasons to sprint. It's been shown to build muscle, improve hormone profiles, balance blood sugar, lower blood pressure, improve bone density, boost cognition, and reduce body fat. Data has even linked it to improved VO<sub>2</sub> max and aerobic capacity, which translates to better performance during the longer, slower efforts required for endurance sports.

Research has also credited sprinting with increasing human growth hormone, which promotes cell regeneration and fat burning. Plus, sprinting bolsters testosterone, which supports metabolic health, contributes to muscle gain, supports cognition, and more.

Additionally, a regular SIT practice can improve mitochondrial biogenesis. Mitochondria, the microscopic power plants in your cells, convert



food and body fat into energy, among numerous other functions.

Because of its intensity, SIT can supercharge mitochondrial production by creating more demand for energy inside your cells. Large numbers of well-functioning mitochondria are associated with positive health outcomes as well as improved athletic performance.

### Is SIT Right for You?

This all-out approach is a good match for a variety of people, says Wooten, including those who are training for athletic events, those who are short on time, and those who thrive on friendly competition.

For long-time exercisers stuck in a rut, sprints are a great way to mix up workouts by challenging the body and mind.

You can make significant strides with SIT, even if you're new to

sprinting. But if you're a beginner with little to no training under your belt — and especially if you are just emerging from a more sedentary lifestyle — it's best to sit this modality out until you build up your fitness level. (Those with health conditions will want to consult their healthcare providers to ensure that SIT is appropriate for them.)

Overall, SIT is best suited for the intermediate or advanced exerciser with at least two months of functional-training experience; this ensures their body can withstand the rigors of all-out sprints.

## Getting Started

You can sprint on a track, on a bike, in the pool, on a rowing machine, and even by doing fast-paced squats. The key is to go as fast as you can, without sacrificing form, and to rest properly.

For most people, sprinting is synonymous with running — but don't make the mistake of assuming that it is simply a matter of running fast, explains Mechelle Lewis Freeman, a 2008 track-and-field Olympian, USA Track and Field women's relay coach, and the founder and codirector of TrackGirlz, a nonprofit organization that provides women and girls with

access to track-and-field programs and a community of empowerment.

"With sprinting, your goal is to apply maximal force to the ground with every step to move energy as efficiently as possible," she says. "Proper speed mechanics are essential to generating this force, as well as for avoiding injury, especially if you're new to sprinting."

To that end, a thorough warm-up and a sprint-specific training plan are imperative to make progress and avoid injury or burnout. Freeman designed the following eight-week plan for beginning sprinters.



## THE WARM-UP

This seven-minute warm-up can help you develop proper sprint form. For full warm-up instructions, visit [ELmag.com/sprintworkouts](http://ELmag.com/sprintworkouts).

MOVEMENT	MOVEMENT DURATION	REST DURATION	SETS
Tall Kneeling Hip Thrust	30 seconds	15 seconds	2
Body Walkout to Pushup	30 seconds	15 seconds	2
Toe and Heel Walks	30 seconds, split	15 seconds	2
A-March and A-Skip	30 seconds	15 seconds	2
Pogo Jumps	30 seconds	15 seconds	2
Short Sprints	5 seconds	15 seconds	2

## THE WORKOUT

WEEK	WORKOUTS PER WEEK	SPRINTS PER WORKOUT	SPRINT DURATION	WALKING REST DURATION
1	2	4	10 seconds	3 minutes
2	2	4	10 seconds	2 minutes
3	2	4	15 seconds	3 minutes
4	2	4	15 seconds	2 minutes
5	2	4	20 seconds	3 minutes
6	2	4	20 seconds	2 minutes
7	2	4	25 seconds	3 minutes
8	2	4	25 seconds	2 minutes

## THE COOL-DOWN

Finish your workout with an easy, three-minute jog followed by static stretches. Find a four-move cool-down sequence to jump-start your post-workout recovery at [ELmag.com/cooldown](http://ELmag.com/cooldown).



**It's no joke.**  
Sprinting is nature's way of telling your body to toughen up and to rise to the occasion."

### FOCUS ON FORM

For tips to check your sprinting form and make the most of your training, visit [ELmag.com/sprintworkouts](http://ELmag.com/sprintworkouts).

**JULIE DULUDE** is a Life Time senior copywriter.



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# Build Your Own Birthday Workout

Our fitness editor celebrates her 40th with a high-energy interval routine.

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

I love a good theme workout, and there's no theme I love more than my birthday. As I prepare to turn 40 on July 1, I thought I'd share my celebratory circuit in case you, dear reader, might like to join me — or bookmark it for your own solar return.

This workout is inspired by the number 40 and some of my favorite moves of the moment. It includes three sections (lower body, upper body, and core) featuring 40-second work intervals and totaling 40 minutes — plus one additional minute of star jumps for a heart-bursting measure of good luck in the coming year.

Now, not everyone in my life understands why I make a point of working out on my birthday. Some people believe it's to "earn" (or burn off) a slice of birthday cake or some other decadent delight. Others assume it's a test to prove to myself that I'm still young and fit, even as I get older. And many insist that a birthday is a great excuse to take the day "off" and luxuriate in rest.

None of these scenarios captures my birthday workout wish. I don't subscribe to the earn-and-burn mindset of offsetting my food intake with exercise. I have no desire to hold on to my youth or compete with a younger,

though not necessarily fitter, version of myself. And I have no qualms about making time for both movement and relaxation in a single day.

No, I love birthday workouts because they combine two of my favorite things: celebrating my birthday and moving my body. These aren't universally popular opinions; many of us have been conditioned to resist aging, to view exercise as punishment, to mistrust our bodies. I've made strides in my mindset over the years, but I still regularly remind myself: Growing older is the goal, and every day with my body is a gift. I treasure every opportunity to celebrate both with as much joy as possible.

This isn't a workout I plan to do regularly, or even annually. As I said, it's not a test, but a collection of some of my favorite things — a snapshot of my current fitness moment.

Whether you join my party or feel inspired to design your own birthday workout (or both!), my birthday wish is for everyone to make space for joy in whatever movement practice you choose.

And if I get a second wish, it's that we don't forget our warm-ups and cool-downs. (My almost-40-year-old body thanks me every time I remember to stretch.)

## My 40th Birthday Workout

After a dynamic warm-up, perform the following circuits. Finish with one full minute of star jumps (or another joyful movement of your choice), followed by a five- to 10-minute cool-down.

### LOWER-BODY CIRCUIT

#### 4 rounds = 16 minutes

Deadlift x 40 seconds  
Rest x 20 seconds  
Clean-and-squat x 40 seconds  
Rest x 20 seconds  
Reverse lunge x 40 seconds, alternating  
Rest x 80 seconds

### UPPER-BODY CIRCUIT

#### 3 rounds = 12 minutes

Gorilla row x 40 seconds, alternating  
Rest x 20 seconds  
Pushup x 40 seconds  
Rest x 20 seconds  
Plank-to-pike with reach x 40 seconds, alternating  
Rest x 80 seconds

### CORE CIRCUIT

#### 4 rounds = 12 minutes

Single-leg V-up x 40 seconds, alternating  
Rest x 20 seconds  
Side-lying clamshell bridge (L) x 40 seconds  
Rest x 20 seconds  
Side-lying clamshell bridge (R) x 40 seconds  
Rest x 20 seconds

### BONUS JUMP-FOR-JOY ROUND

#### 1 round = 1 minute

Star jump x 60 seconds



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



# A Lifestyle of Health

Living a healthy way of life means considering and addressing all the aspects that influence your health and well-being: the ways you move your body, the food you use to fuel it, your stress response, your community, and the environments you spend time in. This is why Life Time has expanded its offerings over the years to include Life Time Living and Life Time Work.

Together, these integrated spaces empower members to prioritize the various factors of their health throughout their days — and in ways that are convenient. “There are varying facets of health, and it’s important to understand that our health is a spectrum,” says Brian Gaeta, the Pacific Coast area director for Life Time. “It’s about more than the physical and nutritional components, but also stress management, recovery, and mental and social wellness.

At Life Time, we strive to serve members in all the core areas of a healthy way of life. When you think of our village concept — which includes a Life Time Athletic Country Club, Life Time Living, and Life Time Work — it’s designed to be a one-stop destination, which makes well-being across those areas more accessible.”

In all of Life Time’s spaces, there are healthy-way-of-life communities that foster connections with like-minded people. Other common threads are the premium spaces, healthy-living amenities, and next-level support that each offers. Discover them here.



Scan the QR code to learn more about all of Life Time’s places.



## LIFE TIME LIVING

Life Time Living offers luxury apartment homes designed with your health in mind. “These homes are filled with natural light, fresh air, pure drinking water, and spaces for residents who want to take advantage of healthy amenities,” says Mary Zedella, resident concierge leader at Life Time Living.

- **Premium spaces:** High-end finishes, elegant comfort, and thoughtful touches abound, including gourmet kitchens, floor-to-ceiling windows, black-out shades, and soundproofing.
- **Healthy-living amenities:** LifeCafe meals delivered to your door, a pantry stocked by a registered dietitian, and access to on-demand and livestreamed classes from the comfort of home.
- **Next-level support:** Dedicated Resident Concierges make life easier, connecting you with fitness professionals and services, assisting with LifeSpa and fitness class reservations, and more.

Life Time Living locations are adjacent to Life Time Athletic Country Clubs; rent includes a Signature Membership.

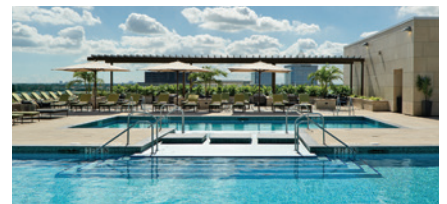


## LIFE TIME WORK

Life Time Work is the only place that combines workspaces with a health-club experience. “Given Life Time’s DNA in the health-club world, we bring a lot of that into the workplace,” says James O’Reilly, president of Life Time Work. “It results in our members feeling more productive, engaged, and fulfilled while they’re at work.”

- **Premium spaces:** A variety of working areas, including private and open-plan spaces, conference rooms, soundproof phone booths, and outdoor terraces.
- **Healthy-living amenities:** Ergonomic furnishings and sit-stand desks, healthy snacks, filtered water, and plant life and greenery.
- **Next-level support:** Responsive tech support and networking opportunities such as roundtables, member-only workouts, and happy hours.

Life Time Work members have access to the nearest Life Time Athletic Country Club, often located within a short walk or drive.



## ATHLETIC COUNTRY CLUBS

With more than 160 athletic country clubs, Life Time has something for everyone. “We believe you can do it all at Life Time,” says Kesha Sproles, vice president of Life Time club operations. “There’s an array of programming and activities for all ages, fitness levels, and interests.”

- **Premium spaces:** Clubs with plenty of thoughtfully designed spaces, including areas for fitness, recovery and self-care, family fun, healthy eating, and more.
- **Healthy-living amenities:** Expansive workout floors and studio rooms; healthy-aging classes and social activities; pickleball, tennis, and basketball courts; child centers and kids programming; leisure and lap pools; and steam rooms, saunas, and whirlpools.
- **Next-level support:** Dynamic Personal Trainers, small-group coaches, studio performers, kids’ instructors, membership concierge — team members are partners on your healthy-living journey.

“At Life Time, you’re part of a community that prioritizes their health,” says Sproles. “That can go a long way toward helping you achieve your own healthy-living goals.”

# Real Food



When the tomatoes start ripening on the vine, it's time to eat. Celebrate the summer's harvest with our bounty of fresh recipes.

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Find our recipe for this Pasta Trapanese with tomatoes, almonds, and garlic at [ELmag.com/tomatoes](http://ELmag.com/tomatoes).



# The Beauty of Berries

They're not just for breakfast! Enjoy these nutrient-dense fruits as often as you like.

BY CATHERINE GUTHRIE





**N**othing heralds the height of summer like a dizzying array of perfectly ripe produce. And one of the best ways to maximize the nutritional rewards of the season's embarrassment of riches? Two words: Eat berries.

You can't swing a reusable tote in summertime without hitting a pint of fresh berries, whether you're at a grocery store, farmers' market, or u-pick patch. Yet berries are estimated to make up less than 10 percent of the average American's fresh fruit intake.

Berries are a treasure-trove of vitamins, minerals, and fiber. Plus, each one offers a host of phytonutrients, plant compounds that can fortify the body against conditions such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and cancer.

Bite for bite, berries may bestow more nutritional oomph and health bona fides than any other food, says functional nutritionist Jesse Haas, CNS, LN. "Berries are concentrated nuggets of goodness that have a profound impact on the body," she says.

There are some fruits that are technically berries (bananas and avocados) and some berries that are not true berries (raspberries, blackberries, and strawberries consist of clusters of smaller fruits and are therefore "aggregate fruits"). Yet any small, fleshy fruit that's popularly known as a berry generally deserves the praise heaped upon it — and here are just some of the reasons why.

### The Power of Phytonutrients

All berries began as wild plants. To thrive in nature, plants infuse their tender, fragile, fleshy fruit with substances to guard against such dangers as bacteria, viruses, and fungi. These protective compounds, including carotenoids and polyphenols, are a berry's immune system.

"A raspberry's concentrated magic is part of how it was able to survive in the wild," explains Haas.

Phytonutrients don't just make for healthy plants; they support healthy human bodies too. They act as antioxidants, protecting cells from free-radical damage. Polyphenols improve heart health by lowering blood pressure and trimming levels of bad cholesterol. They can also help stabilize blood sugar and guard against neurodegenerative diseases.

The queens of phytonutrients are anthocyanins. These are the natural plant pigments responsible for berries' signature bright reds, deep purples, and blueish blacks. Plenty of fruits and vegetables contain anthocyanins, but berries boast extraordinarily high concentrations, which is why they often pop up on lists of superfoods.

"The term 'superfood' kind of makes me roll my eyes," says Haas, "but I also love it because no matter how much [a superfood list] evolves, there is always a berry — or two or three — on it."

A handful of fresh berries delivers a wealth of anthocyanins, anywhere from 30 mg in a cup of strawberries to a whopping 735 mg per cup of blueberries. In general, the darker and richer the berry's color — looking at you, blueberries, cranberries, bilberries, and black currants — the more anthocyanins.

Berries deliver the most benefit when they're part of a diverse, healthy diet, which is the best way to support a thriving gut microbiome. The body can't fully digest anthocyanins and other polyphenols without help from gut microbes. Polyphenols act as prebiotics, meaning they feed good bacteria in the gut.

"Up to 95 percent of polyphenols are metabolized into smaller beneficial compounds by colonic bacteria," says Deanna Minich, PhD, FACN, author of *The Rainbow Diet: A Holistic Approach to Radiant Health Through Foods and Supplements*.

Still, a less-than-perfect microbiome doesn't mean you have to avoid berries; it's just a good reason to consume them with other foods that support the flora, like probiotic yogurt.



# Meet the Berries

Learn the many reasons it's worth including more berries in your diet — not only for noshing, but also for treating common ailments.

## Fresh Berries

Thanks to imported produce, most Americans have access to fresh berries year-round. But long-distance travel can be hard on berries, especially on the more smoochable varieties, such as raspberries. Even slightly crushed berries are quicker to attract bacteria and mold.

Sturdier berries, like strawberries, are hardy travelers but are often picked prior to peak ripeness to lengthen shelf life. If a strawberry is white around the stem, it could mean that it was picked too soon and, therefore, will have less flavor and fewer phytonutrients than a fully red berry.

Fresh berries are best enjoyed locally and seasonally, purchased at their peak of ripeness. Depending on the region, berry season roughly begins with strawberries in late spring and ends with cranberries in autumn. Local strawberries, raspberries, and blueberries are the wealth of summer across much of the middle and eastern United States. Many Californians, meanwhile, have access to fresh, locally grown berries year-round.

### BLUEBERRIES

With their tight blue jackets, blueberries are sturdy and self-contained, making them one of the most mess-free and versatile of edible berries. Sweet and juicy with a signature spicy scent, wild blueberries grow on bushes native to North America, and farmers have been carefully cultivating domesticated blueberries for more than a century.

Blueberries have anthocyanins to thank for their hue. Because they have such potent anti-inflammatory properties, eating just a third of a cup of blueberries a day may lower the risk of several diseases. These berries improve blood-vessel function, making arteries more flexible and less likely to stiffen with corrosive plaque.

A six-month study, the longest of its kind, published in 2019 in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, found that eating a cup of blueberries a day lowered the risk of heart disease by up to 15 percent for people with metabolic syndrome, a cluster of conditions (including high blood pressure) that besets up to a third of American adults.

In the kitchen, blueberries freeze well. They hold their shape when tossed into pancake or muffin batter. Surprisingly, cooked blueberries may be even better for you than fresh ones: According to some sources, heat makes their phytonutrients more bioavailable. And if you've ever noticed a greenish tint to cooked blueberries (say, in blueberry muffins), that's a harmless side effect of the berry's delicate pH moshing with the recipe's more alkaline ingredients, such as baking soda.



### RASPBERRIES AND BLACKBERRIES

These two berries are often found at the top of superfood lists; their resplendent colors signal that they are chock-full of anthocyanins.

Raspberries and blackberries, as well as their many hybrids — including loganberries, boysenberries, and marionberries — are aggregate fruits: Each individual berry is composed of dozens of teeny fruits, called drupelets, held together by a snare of tiny hairs.

Each drupelet contains its own miniature seed, making it a complete fruit. Because of their complex aggregate structure, raspberries and blackberries top the berry charts for fiber content with roughly 8 grams per cup. And they're low on the glycemic index, making them a solid choice for anyone keeping an eye on blood sugar.

### STRAWBERRIES

America's favorite berry by far is the strawberry. The average American eats about 7 pounds of strawberries each year.

Wild strawberries grow in many regions, but the larger, cultivated varieties that most people are used to eating come mainly — more than 90 percent — from coastal California.

In the taming of wild strawberries, some flavor and nutrients were lost, but cultivated strawberries still contain plenty of anthocyanins and more vitamin C than most other fruits or berries. And, in a shout-out to strawberries, a study published in 2022 found that a compound they contain, pelargonidin, may lower the risk of Alzheimer's disease; though pelargonidin is present in most berries, strawberries contain the highest levels.





## Medicinal Berries

### CRANBERRIES

Grown on vines in large, sandy bogs, cranberries are another fan favorite. The typical American consumes 2.3 pounds of cranberries each year, most of it in juice form. Only about 5 percent of cranberries produced in the United States are sold fresh; the remaining 95 percent are processed, mostly into drinks.

The cranberry's mouth-puckering acidity rivals that of a lemon or lime, and it's one reason they're rarely eaten fresh and often sweetened with sugar or honey.

The gelatinous canned cranberry sauce served on millions of Thanksgiving tables was invented early in the 20th century by a cranberry farmer desperate to salvage his damaged crop. He puréed the berries, canned them, and voilà! The rest is culinary history.

Cranberries straddle two berry worlds — edible and medicinal. Along with anthocyanins, cranberries contain an antimicrobial agent called benzoic acid. In the wild, benzoic acid may protect cranberries from the moisture in their growing environment. In humans, the acid is thought to help keep bacteria from attaching to delicate tissue linings inside the human body, such as in the urinary tract.

Urinary tract infection (UTI) is among the most common types of bacterial infections. In 2021, the authors of a large meta-analysis on cranberries and UTIs concluded that regular cranberry consumption lowered UTI risk by 30 percent in people prone to the infections. And cranberry juice was 35 percent more protective against UTI than cranberry capsules or tablets.

### ELDERBERRIES

The purple-black fruit of the elder tree, elderberries are tart and sour, flavors that lend themselves more readily to syrups than to snacking. Generations of Western herbalists have used the black elderberry for its immune-enhancing properties, says Haas. And the berry's reputation stands up to scientific inquiry.

A review of clinical evidence in 2021 showed that elderberry extracts may be capable of shortening the duration of some cold and flu symptoms. Again, the secret powers are likely anthocyanins, which are abundant in these dark berries. According to the review authors, "Anthocyanins can attach to (and render ineffective) viral glycoproteins that enable viruses to enter host cells."



## Lesser-Known Berries

### BLACK CURRANTS

Commonly found in preserves because they contain so much pectin, as well as in syrups and liqueurs (think cassis), fresh black currants are not to be confused with more familiar Zante currants, which are not berries but a tiny grape varietal.

Due to their deeply dark skin, black currants score high on the anthocyanin scale — higher than conventionally grown blueberries. They also have four times the vitamin C of oranges.

Native to Europe and Asia, black currants are especially popular in Britain, where even purple Skittles are black-currant flavored, not grape flavored as they are in the United States.

### GOJI BERRIES

Also known as wolfberries, these bright red members of the nightshade family are typically eaten dried, and they taste like a raisin-cranberry mash-up. Long popular in China, goji berries earn their reputation as a superfood by packing high quantities of antioxidants, carotenoids, vitamins, and minerals.

These berries are particularly high in lutein and zeaxanthin, both beneficial for the eyes. In one small but promising study, published in 2021 in the journal

*Nutrients*, healthy adults who ate a handful of goji berries five times a week for roughly 13 weeks significantly boosted the protective pigments in their eyes, the same pigments capable of preventing age-related macular degeneration.

### GOLDEN BERRIES

Packaged in a papery husk, similar to tomatillo, golden berries deliver a bevy of vitamins and nutrients just like their



counterparts, but they outperform most other berries when it comes to carotenoids and phytosterols. Carotenoids, particularly lutein and zeaxanthin, help ward off chronic eye disease. Phytosterols may help lower LDL cholesterol.

### SERVICEBERRIES

Also called saskatoon or shadblow or juneberries, serviceberries are a member of the rose family. Plentiful in U.S. parks and landscaping, serviceberries most resemble blueberries. They ripen to a deep purple and taste like a blend of mild blueberries and almonds.

Like many of their berry brethren, serviceberries are rich in anthocyanins and vitamin C.

### MULBERRIES

Mulberry trees are common in backyards and parks throughout the United States and Asia, where these sweet-tart fruits are an important food source for birds and other wildlife. They contain resveratrol and plenty of vitamin C. Mulberries can be white, red, or dark purple, and they look like long-ish blackberries. They're often consumed dried because they're too delicate for travel. 🍷

### CATHERINE GUTHRIE

is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

## GET MORE!

For a berry-foraging guide, visit [ELmag.com/berries](https://www.experiencelife.com/berries).







# A serious workout deserves a smooth recovery.

Reward yourself with a creamy smoothie or shake from the LifeCafe, blended fresh with Silk Almondmilk or Oatmilk.





# Cucumber-Mint Agua Fresca

This refreshing beverage can keep you cool when the weather heats up.

BY **MADDIE AUGUSTIN**

Makes about 5 cups  
Prep time: 10 minutes



3 cups cold water



3 cups chopped cucumber



¼ cup packed fresh mint



3 tbs. honey



¾ cup lime juice



1 tsp. lime zest



1-inch piece fresh ginger, chopped



Ice for serving

## COOL CUKES

Popular throughout Mexico and Central America, aguas frescas are typically made by blending fruit, water, and a bit of sweetener. This version uses cucumbers for an extra-hydrating, ultra-refreshing summer drink.

Place the water, cucumber, mint, honey, lime juice, lime zest, and ginger in a blender and blend until smooth. Pour the mixture through cheesecloth or a fine mesh strainer to strain the solids. Compost the scraps.

Serve the strained agua fresca over ice, with a sprig of mint or a lime wheel if desired.

**MADDIE AUGUSTIN** is a Minneapolis-based recipe developer.



# 8

## Tips for Healthy Grilling

Take your cooking outdoors this summer and grill delicious meals with fewer health risks.



BY CAMILLE BERRY

As soon as it is warm enough for shorts and sandals, I'm firing up the grill. I love to hear the sweet song of sizzling brats and burgers, to smell the air rich with hickory, and to watch the licks of flame leap up. Sure, it makes a hot day even hotter, but that's part of the fun of this time-honored summer tradition.

Maybe you can't get enough carne asada, you boast of your barbecue skills, or you're committed to an annual Fourth of July cookout. Whatever your menu, a summertime grill session is a glorious way to celebrate the season.

But it's not all sunshine and fun when it comes to barbecued goodies: Grilling can pose real health risks.

Epidemiologic studies have linked cooking meats at high temperatures with an increased risk of pancreatic, prostate, stomach, and colorectal cancers. The culprits associated with this risk include heterocyclic amines (HCAs) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs).

HCAs form when animal proteins are cooked with high heat, typically above 428 degrees F; they can also occur when roasting meat for a long time or pan-frying at elevated temperatures.

PAHs are created when fat and juices from meats drip onto charcoal or open flames, causing smoke and flares. They can also appear when smoking, frying, or deep-frying.

Various factors, including cooking temperatures, cooking method, type of protein, and duration of cooking time, create different types of HCAs. But this doesn't mean you need to ditch the grill or that the occasional burger will put you into an early grave. Try these grilling tips to help reduce the risks of carcinogens in your food at your next cookout.

### 1. GRILL WITH GAS

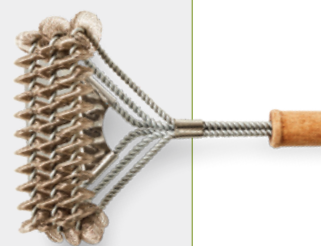
The smoky flavors that charcoal infuses into grilled meats are undeniably delicious, but cooking with gas is the healthier option. The simple reason? Charcoal burns hotter, and cooking with high heat is where the danger lies. Gas grills are also easier to control, so you can fret less about over- or undercooking your meat.

### 2. KEEP IT CLEAN

Proper care of your grill extends its life and ensures you'll be happily grilling away for years to come. But there are also health benefits to keeping your grill and tools clean.

Charred pieces of food build up on grill grates, drip pans, and burners. Cleaning every part as thoroughly as you can helps remove food debris and prevent smoke, ash, and flare-ups — all of which can cause carcinogens to wind up on your food.

Another benefit of a clean grill? A lower risk of foodborne illnesses. No one wants steak with a side of salmonella.



### 3. GRILL MORE PLANTS

Satisfy your cravings for char-grilled eats by tossing a handful of mushrooms, peppers, and zucchini onto the grill. HCAs and PAHs don't form when grilling vegetables.

You can swap out a T-bone for a cauliflower steak. Or thread segments of corn on the cob, eggplant, and onions (or anything you like) onto a skewer with chunks of tenderloin or chicken for a clever way to grill more vegetables without forgoing your favorite cuts of meat.

You can also mix things up by grilling fruits. The sugars in fruit caramelize beautifully on the grill, providing a rich counterpoint that elevates the flavors on your plate — especially when paired with spice. Grilled fruits make for gourmet ingredients in summery cocktails and mocktails too.

Eating more plants in general is ideal for supporting a healthy diet. (For more plant-based grilling inspiration, see [ELmag.com/vegangrilling](http://ELmag.com/vegangrilling).)

### 4. PICK THE RIGHT PROTEIN

We'd all do better to limit our intake of processed meats. While staples like hot dogs and sausages often lead the lineup at backyard barbecues, some researchers have linked processed meats with an increased risk of cancer.

The solution? Stick with fresh cuts of red meat, like steaks and ribs, or opt for poultry or seafood. Grilling poultry and fish at high temperatures can create some carcinogens, but the harmful toxins don't form to the same degree as in red meat. Heart-healthy salmon, trout, mackerel, and other fatty fish are excellent choices for the grill.

### 5. TRIM THE FAT

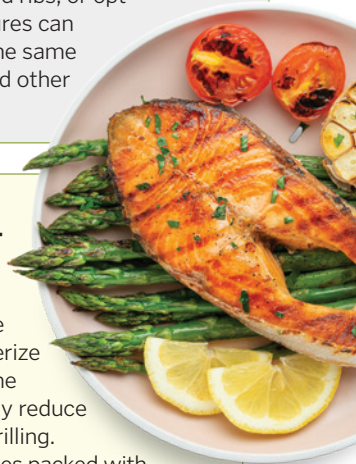
Slicing excess fat from meat means there's less fat to drip down onto coals or open flames, resulting in less smoke and flares — and, in turn, fewer carcinogens.

Choosing lean proteins is another simple, smart trick for avoiding carcinogen formation.

### 6. MARINATE THE MEAT

Allowing proteins to marinate infuses them with flavor; acids and enzymes in ingredients like yogurt, citrus, and ginger tenderize the meat. More important, some marinades can help significantly reduce the formation of HCAs when grilling.

Experimenting with marinades packed with herbs and spices is a marvelous way to flex your culinary creativity while reaping the benefits of the antioxidants and polyphenols found in fragrant ingredients like rosemary, sage, clove, and cinnamon.



### 7. TRY A NEW TOOL

Instead of laying proteins directly on the grill grate, cook them in a cast-iron skillet on your grill top. Using cast-iron cookware boasts a trove of benefits: A properly seasoned cast-iron skillet is essentially nonstick and free from dubious chemicals and coatings, and it's a great vessel for cooking smaller cuts of meat, delicate fish, and chopped veggies.

On the grill, the skillet forms a barrier between your food and the rising smoke, potentially lowering the carcinogenic risk. (Need some tips for seasoning your cast-iron skillet? Check out our maintenance guide at [ELmag.com/castironskillet](http://ELmag.com/castironskillet).)

Stainless steel flattop grills are another option. Because they're flame-free, you needn't worry about flares and fat dripping onto the coals. Flattop grills have the added benefit of heating food evenly and offering foolproof temperature control. Just mind the amount of oil you use — you won't need nearly as much with a flattop as you would with a grated grill.



### 8. AVOID CHARRING

Charring causes HCAs to form on animal proteins, whether you're barbecuing, grilling, or flame broiling. So, think twice before grilling that rib-eye until it's blackened or well-done. A general rule of thumb: Cook low and slow.

## See the Big Picture

Summertime cookouts are more than merely a means to stack your plate with irresistible eats. They're also a fun opportunity to mix up your mealtime routine and enjoy the outdoors, perhaps surrounded by loved ones, fostering family and community ties while relaxing and taking in the sights and sounds of the season.

Viewed this way — and keeping these tips in mind — cooking outdoors can support your health. And while you might want to avoid eating a charred steak every night, you can eat well while still giving your grill some love and embracing one of the great joys of summer. 🍷

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



# TOMATO TIME

Ripe tomatoes may be one of the sweetest parts of summer. Eat them up with these fresh recipes.

BY **ROBIN ASBELL**

**W**hen tomato season finally arrives, it's time to fill your basket. Until this point, you've made do with tasteless, pale imitations of the real thing, so once locally grown, vine-ripened tomatoes are ready at the farmers' market or in your backyard, you just have to celebrate.

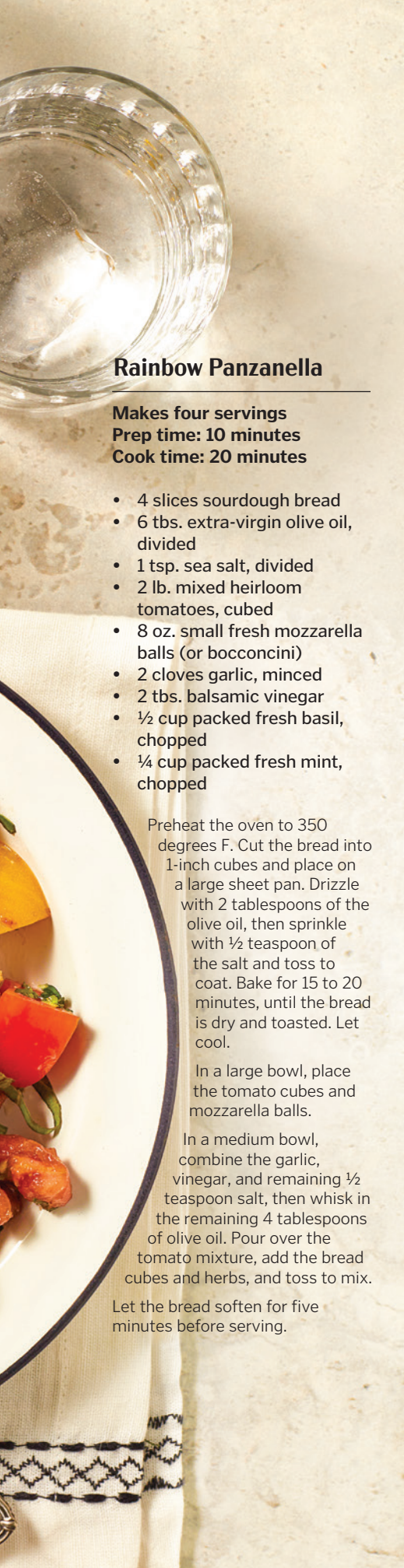
When selecting tomatoes, the first rule is to choose the ripest, most flavorful ones you can find. Yes, some types of tomatoes are better raw and others cooked, but why bother with any of it if they don't taste great?

In general, Roma (or plum) tomatoes are considered best for making sauces, because they have a thick, meaty wall of flesh and contain less water. If you don't have Romas, use the best tomatoes available and cook the sauce a little longer to thicken.

Big beefsteak tomatoes are good for sandwiches and juicy salads and salsas. Grape and cherry tomatoes are usually sweeter than other varieties, and they taste great cooked or raw. Heirloom tomatoes come in a wide range of colors and sizes; they're perfect for salads or as a grilled or roasted side dish.

When the tomatoes are this good, they make the meal!





## Rainbow Panzanella

**Makes four servings**  
**Prep time: 10 minutes**  
**Cook time: 20 minutes**

- 4 slices sourdough bread
- 6 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 tsp. sea salt, divided
- 2 lb. mixed heirloom tomatoes, cubed
- 8 oz. small fresh mozzarella balls (or bocconcini)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tbs. balsamic vinegar
- ½ cup packed fresh basil, chopped
- ¼ cup packed fresh mint, chopped

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Cut the bread into 1-inch cubes and place on a large sheet pan. Drizzle with 2 tablespoons of the olive oil, then sprinkle with ½ teaspoon of the salt and toss to coat. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, until the bread is dry and toasted. Let cool.

In a large bowl, place the tomato cubes and mozzarella balls.

In a medium bowl, combine the garlic, vinegar, and remaining ½ teaspoon salt, then whisk in the remaining 4 tablespoons of olive oil. Pour over the tomato mixture, add the bread cubes and herbs, and toss to mix.

Let the bread soften for five minutes before serving.



## Fresh Salsa With Avocado

**Makes about 3 cups • Prep time: 15 minutes**

- 1 lb. Roma tomatoes
- 2 scallions, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1 clove garlic, chopped
- 1 large jalapeño, stem and seeds removed
- ¼ cup fresh cilantro, torn
- 1 tbs. fresh lime juice
- 1 tsp. ground cumin
- 1 tsp. sea salt
- 1 large avocado

Slice each tomato in half vertically, cut out the stem, and squeeze out the seeds and pulp. Place the tomato halves in a food-processor bowl. Add the scallions, garlic, and jalapeño, and pulse a few times to chop everything finely, but don't purée the mixture. Add the cilantro, lime juice, cumin, and salt, and pulse to mix. Transfer to a large bowl.

Just before serving, cut the avocado in half lengthwise and remove the pit. Use a paring knife to cut the flesh into cubes in the shell, then scoop out with a spoon into the bowl. Toss gently to mix and serve immediately.



## Tomato and Sweet Corn Salad

**Makes four servings**

**Prep time: 10 minutes**

**Cook time: two minutes**

- 2 medium ears of corn, kernels cut from cobs
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- ½ tsp. sea salt
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 lb. cherry or grape tomatoes, halved
- 1 15-oz. can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- ½ cup packed fresh parsley, chopped

Set up a steamer and steam the corn kernels over simmering water for about two minutes. The corn should be crisp-tender. Spread the kernels on a clean kitchen towel to dry and cool.

In a large bowl, combine the garlic, lemon juice, and salt, then gradually whisk in the olive oil.

Add the tomatoes, chickpeas, parsley, and corn kernels, and toss to coat. Serve immediately.



## Fresh Tomato Chutney

**Makes about 1½ cups**

**Prep time: 10 minutes**

**Cook time: 20 minutes**

- 2 tsp. avocado oil
- 1 tsp. whole cumin seeds
- 1 tsp. whole brown mustard seeds
- ½ tsp. red-pepper flakes
- 1 tbs. minced fresh ginger
- 1 lb. Roma tomatoes, chopped
- ½ cup raisins
- 1 tbs. apple-cider vinegar
- 3 tbs. coconut sugar
- ½ tsp. sea salt

Place a medium pot over medium-high heat and add the avocado oil. Heat the oil until shimmering, then add the cumin seeds, mustard seeds, and red-pepper flakes. Cook, stirring frequently, until the seeds are sizzling, then add the ginger and cook for another minute. Add the tomatoes, raisins, vinegar, coconut sugar, and salt, and stir to combine.

Bring the mixture to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer uncovered until thickened, about 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and let cool. Transfer to a serving bowl or refrigerate for up to two weeks.





## Grilled Sesame-Soy Green Tomatoes

**Makes four servings**

**Prep time: 10 minutes active, plus**

**30 minutes inactive for marinating**

**Cook time: 10 minutes**

- 1 lb. green globe or beefsteak tomatoes
- 2 tbs. rice vinegar
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. honey
- 1 tbs. toasted sesame oil
- 1 tbs. avocado oil
- 2 tsp. soy sauce, tamari, or coconut aminos
- 2 tbs. toasted sesame seeds
- 2 scallions, thinly sliced

Slice the tomatoes into  $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick rounds. Place in a large bowl.

In a small bowl, combine the rice vinegar, garlic, honey, sesame oil, avocado oil, and soy sauce. Whisk to mix well, then pour over the tomatoes, turning gently to coat. Marinate for half an hour at room temperature, or refrigerate for up to two hours.

Preheat the grill on high. If using charcoal, light the coals and wait until they're coated with white ash, then cover the grill and preheat for 15 minutes.

Use tongs to lift the tomato slices out of the marinade, shaking off excess and reserving the marinade. Place the tomato slices on the hot grate and cook for about two to three minutes per side until softened but not falling apart. Transfer to a platter, top with the remaining marinade, sesame seeds, and scallions, then serve. 🍴

### ENJOY MORE!

Find our recipe for Pasta Trapanese at [ELmag.com/tomatoes](https://ELmag.com/tomatoes).

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



# Fitness

# Around the World



Infuse your active endeavors with renewed energy, courtesy of the inspired movement habits of other cultures.





BY **ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS**

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



**M**artial arts in Brazil, salsa dancing in Cuba, stone lifting in Iceland, sport climbing in Sardinia, gardening in Okinawa, mace swinging in India: The ways in which people the world over move their bodies are varied, full of health benefits, and pretty darn delightful.

Learning about other cultures often brings unexpected gifts. Whether you travel to far-flung

locales or embark on an international journey through a recipe or book, each voyage is an opportunity to get out of your comfort zone, discover hidden skills and interests, and build awareness and empathy, both for yourself and the world around you.

On any trip, there are many cultural elements to behold: language, food, art, literature, music, architec-

ture, religion, government, and even local perspectives on timeliness, to name just a few. We invite you to join us in considering an oft-overlooked element of culture — *how people move*.

These ideas only scratch the surface of the sports and activities that humans engage in. Some may be familiar — and even part of your current fitness regimen. Others might be totally new to you. (Bossaball, anyone?)

If nothing else, we hope these ideas broaden your notion of what counts as exercise and the possibilities for what your body can do, wherever you are.

Your fitness journey awaits.



## Up Your NEAT

One of the things that the most active people in the world share is that they typically don't work out for the sake of working out. Movement is an intrinsic part of their everyday, built into their lives as a mode of transportation, an occupation, a source of joy.

Take **Uganda**. To most world travelers, the East African nation is famous for nature and wildlife reserves. To healthy-living advocates, though, it's a country that's doing a lot right: A recently released survey found that the most physically active people in the world live in this landlocked nation of 49 million. Compared with a whopping 40 percent of Americans, just 5.5 percent of Ugandans are classified as inactive.

These numbers have profound implications. The World Health Organization predicts that, in the 2020s, high-income nations, like the United States, will see a 26 percent jump in maladies like cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes. For emergent nations, including Uganda, that number is estimated to be just 5 percent.

Ugandans love sports like boxing, cricket, and soccer, and the country is a hot spot for world-class long-distance runners. But this doesn't completely explain why this nation outpaces others in measures of physical fitness.

One likely reason is that the gym is almost a redundancy in Uganda. Movement is baked into daily life: Eighty percent of the workforce

labors in agriculture, and cars are a less prevalent form of transportation, making walking much more common.

Exercise scientists call such movement NEAT, or nonexercise activity thermogenesis: daily, incidental movement that includes everything from fidgeting at your desk to chopping wood. NEAT can produce many of the effects of exercise even though it doesn't occur in a gym.

The prevalence of NEAT in Uganda and other emergent nations may help explain their impressively low rates of preventable, noncommunicable diseases.

Indeed, research suggests that staying active throughout your day — rather than only via exercise — may be one of the most important things you can do for your health. (For more on NEAT, visit [ELmag.com/neat](http://ELmag.com/neat).)

Uganda isn't the only place that exemplifies this phenomenon. Daily movement is also foundational to life in the Blue Zones — geographical areas where inhabitants tend to live exceptionally long, vigorous lives. In **Sardinia, Italy**, and **Okinawa, Japan**, for example, citizens garden, fish, walk, cook, and perform low-intensity indoor and outdoor chores for hours every day.

"None of [the Blue Zone residents] exercise, at least the way we think of exercise," says Dan Buettner, researcher and author of the Blue Zones book series. But the centenarians he studied move in other ways: "These hundred-year-old Okinawan

women are getting up and down off the ground — they sit on the floor — 30 or 40 times a day. Sardinians live in vertical houses [and move] up and down the stairs. Every trip to the store or to church or to the friend's house occasions a walk." (Learn more about the Blue Zones at [ELmag.com/bluezonespodcast](http://ELmag.com/bluezonespodcast).)

Fishing on a far-off island or farming on a lush African plain may not be in the cards for some of us, but we can all take steps to get more NEAT into our lives.

## Test Your Strength

In 1860, strongman Donald Dinnie discovered a pair of massive granite stones, each with an iron ring attached; they had been used 30 years earlier as counterweights for a maintenance project on the Potarch Bridge in Aberdeenshire, Scotland. Combined, they weigh 733 pounds.

Spying a chance to showcase his astonishing strength, Dinnie grabbed the rings, stood up, and walked the width of the bridge — a distance just over 17 feet.

It was perhaps the most iconic moment in the ritual of stone lifting, long a rite of passage for young men from **Iceland**, **Wales**, and **Scotland** who would heft their local clan's *clach cuid fir* (Gaelic for "manhood stones") to prove their worthiness as laborers or warriors.

Many of these stones still exist today, including the *Y Garreg Orchest*

One of the things that the most active people in the world share is that they typically don't work out for the sake of working out. Movement is an intrinsic part of their everyday.







Often described as “meditation in motion,” tai chi offers a host of benefits for mind, body, and soul: better balance, lower blood pressure, stronger joints, and reduced stress.

in Northwest Wales and the *Húsafell* stone in Iceland. The Dinnie Stones are still viewable — and liftable, by an elite few — at the Potarch Café and Restaurant.

Some of these stones are more manageable than others. In Iceland, the lightest of the centuries-old *Dritvík* stones — a group of four progressively heavier stones once used to determine the lifter’s eligibility for employment on a fishing boat — weighs 50 pounds. But even the small stones can be tough.

“I recently got to try some stone loading in Iceland that was a fishing-village tradition,” says Danny King, a Life Time master trainer who has competed in strongman competitions in which lifting (and carrying and throwing) stones is central. “It was awesome — except I wasn’t very good.”

It’s not just the weight of the stones that makes lifting them difficult. “Grip is probably the hardest part of the lift,” explains pro strongman Matt Mills, CSCS.

That’s what makes stone lifting such a fun challenge. Visiting these towns and marveling at their famous stones (an extensive list of which can be found at [LiftingStones.org](http://LiftingStones.org)) can be a great way to connect with a vivid slice of lifting history, and inspiration to heft a few nearby stones yourself.

If a trip abroad isn’t in the cards, take heart: Strongperson training (this style of workout isn’t limited to strong men) is becoming more commonplace in U.S. gyms and fitness centers. Some clubs even boast atlas stones of various sizes for training

and competition. (For a strongperson-inspired workout, visit [ELmag.com/strongpersonworkout](http://ELmag.com/strongpersonworkout).)

## Feel the Beat

Dance is a celebrated cultural tradition around the world, with styles originating on every continent except Antarctica. Classical and folk dances, in particular, capture the stories of a people while also promoting community and connection.

Dancing is also a workout for the body and mind. It can improve heart and lung function; enhance balance, agility, and coordination; and build muscle and bone strength.

It induces your body to release serotonin and other feel-good hormones. And multiple studies have found that dance provides cognitive, antiaging, and social boons as well.

Dancing doesn’t have to be simply about working out; practicing could help you connect to your own heritage or family history. Among myriad dances worldwide, there’s step dance in **Ireland**. Salsa in **Cuba**. Tango in **Argentina**. Samba in **Brazil**. Raqs sharqi in **Egypt**. Zeybek in **Turkey**. Bhangra in **Pakistan** and **India**. Hopak in **Ukraine**. Hasapiko in **Greece**. Dabke in **Syria, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon**. Buchaechum in **Korea**. Dragon and lion dances in **China**. Apsara in **Cambodia**. Halparke in **Kurdistan**.

While you can sign up for dance classes or attend a local dance club during your travels, you don’t need to go abroad to learn. Styles like Irish

step, salsa, belly dance, and bhangra have become popular in the United States; many American cities have dance studios devoted to culture-based forms.

And thanks to Zoom, TikTok, and YouTube, it’s easier than ever to find virtual teachers. (Learn more about the benefits of dance and find tips on getting started at [ELmag.com/dancing](http://ELmag.com/dancing).)

## Strike a Pose

There are dozens of martial-art styles worldwide. While the physical practices may differ in form and intensity, most martial arts emphasize discipline of the body and mind.

One example is the practice of tai chi, originally developed hundreds of years ago in **China** as a martial-arts practice that harnesses internal energy. It emphasizes slow, deliberate movements, deep breathing, postural alignment, and the integration of mind and body.

Often described as “meditation in motion,” tai chi offers a host of benefits for mind, body, and soul: better balance, lower blood pressure, stronger joints, reduced stress, and possibly even a stronger immune system and improved moods. The smooth, simple movements make it especially attractive to those with fitness barriers, such as older people and those with orthopedic or neurological conditions.

Tai chi consists of sequences of moves known as forms — requiring presence of mind and attention to the body. Timing, breath, and placement



of the limbs, hands, and feet are all practiced in coordination. And not all the moves are slow and easy: “Originally, the Chen tai chi style consisted of both fast and slow movements — jumping, kicking, and so forth,” says tai chi teacher Paul Lam, MBBS.

Physically and mentally, tai chi is engaging, but the meditative calm the moves elicit is palpable — and almost immediate. Over time, says Lam, “the practice integrates the internal and external” — the body and mind, the spirit, and the breath.

This singularity of purpose appears to have measurable health benefits as well: “There have been [hundreds of] medical studies showing tai chi is really effective for almost every aspect of health,” he says.

While there is value in a solo practice, practicing the art in a group has even more benefits. “Humans are made to communicate with one another,” Lam explains. “Sharing of energy is very much a part of tai chi.” (Learn more about tai chi’s benefits at [ELmag.com/taichi](http://ELmag.com/taichi).)

Other forms of martial arts are more dynamic. Take the Afro-Brazilian art of capoeira, which combines the striking power and athleticism of martial arts, the beauty and expressiveness of dance, and the rigor, precision, and intensity of calisthenics.

Conceived in the 16th century by Africans enslaved by Portuguese sugar traders in **Brazil**, capoeira was simultaneously a means of developing combat skills, refining fitness,

strengthening spiritual faith, and reinforcing communal bonds. Its tribal roots remain strong in modern studios, where classes take on the feel of a break-dancing jam set to the twanging sounds of the berimbau.

Surrounded by a ring of mentors and other students who sing, hoot, and play musical instruments, *capoeiristas* engage, two at a time, in a unique form of “fighting” that starts from a low crouch and evolves into kicks, inversions, all-fours scurrying, and, at advanced levels, handstands, flips, and handsprings.

Classes have a do-what-you-can feel, with advanced students practicing eye-popping leaps, twists, and spins, and beginners working on fundamental kicks, simple ground movements, and strikes.

“Is it a martial art? A ritual? A dance?” asks Michael Gonçalves Davis (who goes by Contramestre Guatambu), owner of United Capoeira Association Los Angeles and a 20-plus-year veteran of the art. “You can’t really answer that. It’s all those things and more.”

Capoeira’s effects on the body, however, are clear: “You miss out on nothing,” says Guatambu. “You’ll build agility, flexibility, strength, explosiveness, cardiovascular fitness. You’re always in motion.”

At the same time, he adds, “you learn how to play musical instruments and develop yourself as a human being on many levels at once. It’s a one-stop shop analog solution to a digital lifestyle.”

If you’re interested in a fighting style that’s even more martial, Krav Maga may be a good fit. What would eventually become Krav Maga began in then **Czechoslovakia** in the 1930s as a way for Jewish people to defend themselves against invading Nazis. The discipline was adopted by the **Israel** Defense Forces in the late 1940s and spread to the United States 40 years later. You won’t see a lot of bowing, ritual, music, or incense: The focus is on self-defense through real-life training scenarios.

Krav Maga’s self-defense strategies are based on the body’s natural reactions under stress. Students are trained to avoid conflict as much as possible, and to end confrontation quickly with fast, simple strikes and kicks. (For tips on choosing the right martial-arts style for you, visit [ELmag.com/martialarts](http://ELmag.com/martialarts).)

## Find Inspiration in the Ancient

If swinging makes you think of Russian kettlebells, meet two other implements made to be swung: the Indian mace, or *gada*, and Indian club.

The *gada* is an ancient weapon used over 2,000 years ago by Hindu warriors (and, according to legend, Hindu gods). The *gada* was used both on and off the battlefield as a weapon and training tool. The club, meanwhile, features a tapered shape like a bowling pin.

Capoeira’s effects on the body are clear: “You miss out on nothing. You’ll build agility, flexibility, strength, explosiveness, cardiovascular fitness. You’re always in motion.”







**“Bossaball is about being able to follow a bit of fantasy. I want people to feel free, use their body, and with the music we put on, have a dance when they score. It’s a mind–body game.”**



## Play a Game

(It’s worth noting that similar tools were developed in other parts of the world: The mace has roots in **Europe**, too. Samurai warriors in **Japan** used a mace-like weapon called a *kanabō*. The Persian *meel*, or club, remains a popular training tool in the *varzesh-e bastani* athletic tradition in **Iran** and among men and women in the Iranian diaspora.)

Both the Indian mace and club are still common training implements for Pehlwani wrestlers in northern **India** — and are seeing a worldwide renaissance in full-body, functional-fitness training circles. Steel clubs and maces are available for home and gym use and can be purchased in a range of weight options for pullover and swing movements.

While not interchangeable, both the mace and club can build rotational power and improve core and shoulder stability, as well as enhance balance and coordination. Lighter, smaller steel clubs are a good choice for pre-hab and rehab. It’s common to train with two clubs at once, moving them in unison or in alternating patterns.

Maces are longer, often heavier, and have a more awkward, offset weight distribution, making them especially useful for multiplanar movements and conditioning work.

Start with light weights and seek out a coach — either in person or virtual — who can show you the ropes.

One of the most underrated aspects of fitness is play. As we grow older, we often avoid “childish” games that can produce moments of unencumbered joy. If you fall into this camp, let us introduce you to Bossaball.

The love child of volleyball, soccer, gymnastics, and capoeira, Bossaball was created in **Spain** by former tennis pro Filip Eyckmans in 2005. As in volleyball, two teams face off across a net, knocking the ball back and forth until one of them misses it. The wrinkle: The field of play is inflatable — think of a bouncy house for adults — and at the center of each team’s playing area is a trampoline, the better to gain height for dramatic spikes and kicks.

In addition to keeping score and issuing penalties, the referee also serves as DJ, blasting bossa nova music to give tournaments a beach-party vibe.

“Bossaball is about being able to follow a bit of fantasy,” says Eyckmans. “I want people to feel free, use their body, and with the music we put on, have a dance when they score. It’s a mind–body game.”

At present, you can find Bossaball in Europe, South America, and the Middle East; interested Americans will need to travel in search of a game.

That said, play and its myriad benefits are accessible anywhere, even in your own backyard. 🌐

## Sign Up for a Competition

Take your fitness — and your world travels — to the next level by entering a competition.

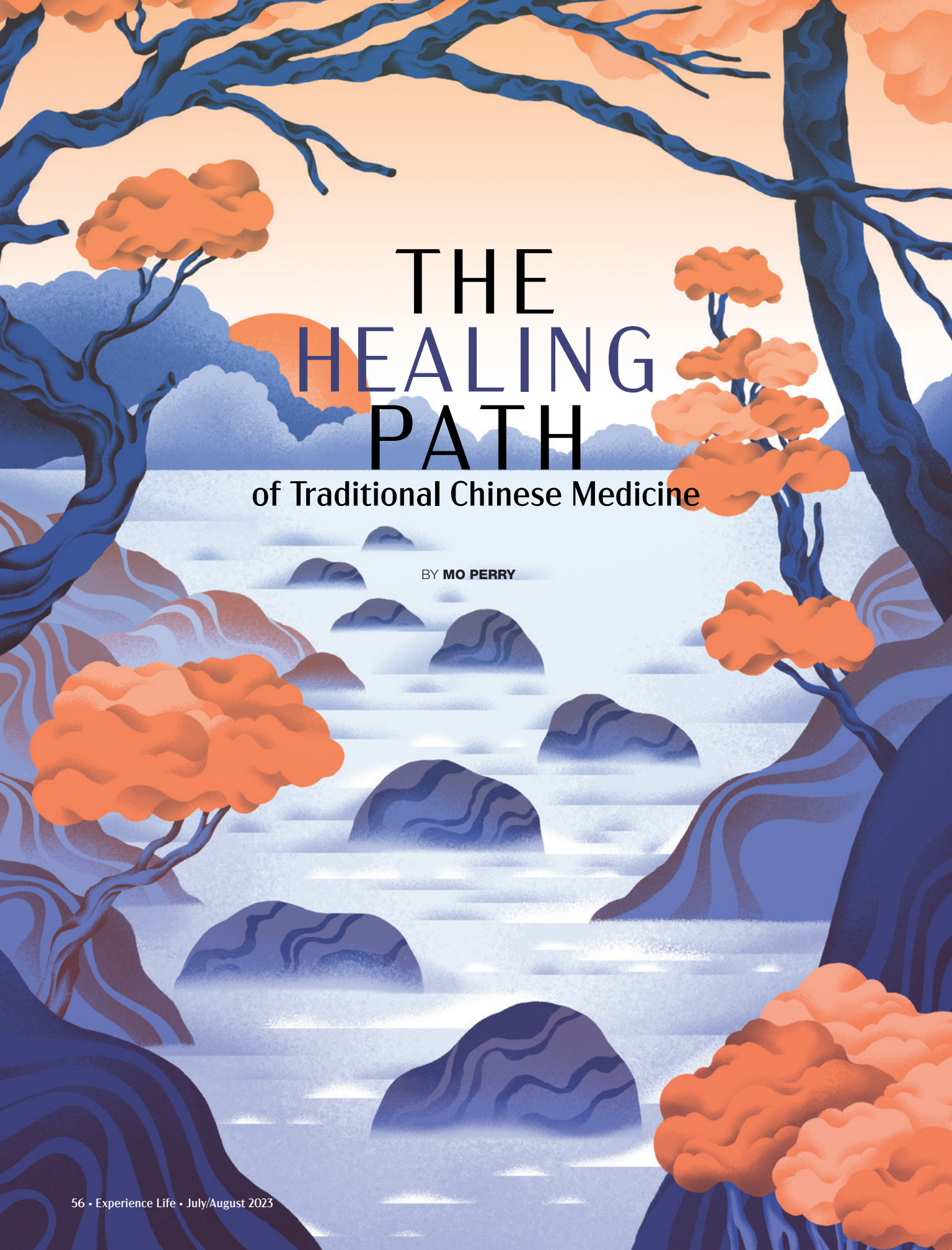
Whether you choose to run a marathon in **Dubai**, thru-hike in **Peru**, pursue a personal best at a powerlifting meet in **Malaysia**, or sign up for a multipart fitness event like HYROX (which was born in **Germany** and holds events throughout Europe and the United States), combining your passions for movement and travel can bolster both experiences.

“It’s a great way to find new spots and create really cool memories,” says Life Time master trainer Danny King, who offers up a critical piece of advice: Plan wisely.

“Schedule the event for early enough in the travel so that you aren’t too worried about being on your feet sightseeing too much or eating incorrectly for the event,” he says. But don’t arrange to compete as soon as you arrive, either. You’ll want to leave room for travel delays and an acclimation period, particularly if you’re dealing with jet lag or a change in climate or altitude.

King also suggests deciding in advance if you’re competing “for performance or if it’s about the experience.”





# THE HEALING PATH

of Traditional Chinese Medicine

BY **MO PERRY**



This system of healing incorporates 3,000 years of knowledge focused on a holistic approach to health.

Learn how it can help support your well-being.

When Sandra Struthers was in her 30s, she suffered from chronic urinary-tract infections (UTIs). She saw a string of doctors and specialists who performed numerous tests, yet the problem persisted: No amount of cranberry juice, supplements, or behavior modification helped. “They told me it was likely a persistent, low-grade infection that never cleared and was becoming resistant to antibiotics, and that I’d probably be incontinent by the time I was 50,” she recalls.

That’s when she decided to try acupuncture, a key modality of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). “I went every week for two to three months, and it just . . . fixed it,” says Struthers, now 49 and a clinical intern in marriage and family therapy in St. Paul, Minn. “I haven’t had that kind of chronic UTI issue since.”

She also turned to acupuncture to address her insomnia and poor temperature regulation, and credits her acupuncturist with helping her identify her specific constitution.

“A lot of Western-medicine doctors are quick to offer prescriptions for drugs, but my Chinese-medicine doctor

was the first one to explain to me, ‘This is how your body is built, and this is what it needs to function optimally.’ She was able to help me understand and accept the body I was given instead of fighting against it.”

Western medicine is ideal for acute health issues, such as a heart attack, infection, or injury. “But a lot of chronic disorders are really disorders of poor communication, coordination, and synchronization,” says Jill Blakeway, DACM, LAc, founder and director of the Yinoa Center in New York City and the author of *Energy Medicine: The Science and Mystery of Healing*. “Chinese medicine lives in that area.”

Complex conditions such as chronic pain, hormonal imbalances, reproductive health issues, autoimmune disorders, digestive problems, migraines, and mood disorders are all good candidates for TCM.

“If someone feels that something’s not right within their body, mind, emotions, or spirit, I would recommend they give TCM a shot and see if this is something that can help,” says Megan Odell, LAc, MS, acupuncture lead at the Penny George Institute for Health and Healing.

## What Is Traditional Chinese Medicine?

A system of thought and practice that originated in China, TCM has evolved over at least 3,000 years. Acupuncture may be its best-known element, but TCM also encompasses medicinal herbs, dietary and lifestyle recommendations, bodywork, and movement modalities such as tai chi.

Some of the earliest writings on medicinal herbs appeared in a classical poetry text called *Shi Jing*, from the Western Zhou dynasty period of roughly 1,046–771 BCE. Later, around 300 BCE, accumulated knowledge of diagnostic practices and treatments, including acupuncture, was recorded in foundational texts such as the *Huangdi Neijing (The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine)*.

Today, TCM and Western medicine are practiced alongside each other in many hospitals and primary-care settings in China. There are also TCM-specific medical schools and hospitals where illness is treated with herbs, acupuncture, diet, massage, and mind-body practices.

In the United States, acupuncture and tai chi are now recognized by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) as effective complementary modalities. The Cleveland Clinic, Minnesota’s Allina Health System, and other medical centers have incorporated elements of TCM into their services.

Between 2002 and 2012, the number of acupuncture users in the United States increased by 50 percent. In 2012 (the most recent year for which data is available), 6.4 percent of American adults said they had used acupuncture, and 1.7 percent had used it in the past year.

TCM’s principles can sound pseudo-scientific to someone accustomed to a Western medical approach. But TCM has undergone some of the most thorough testing of all complementary and alternative therapies, and a large and growing evidence base supports its efficacy.

In 1997, the NIH acknowledged acupuncture for its value in relieving pain and for providing relief from nausea after surgery or chemotherapy. It also noted that it “may be useful

as an adjunct treatment” for addiction, stroke rehabilitation, headache, menstrual cramps, pain, osteoarthritis, and asthma.

Acupuncture can support mental health as well. A 2013 study found that electroacupuncture (in which mild electric currents are transferred through the needles) was as effective as the antidepressant medication Prozac in easing symptoms of depression and that it acted more quickly. MRIs have shown that acupuncture can lead to observable changes in the brain, with certain acupuncture points correlating with specific cerebral areas.

And Odell often cares for patients who are undergoing cancer treatment. She describes this work as complementing the protocols used by her oncology colleagues.

The choice between Western medicine and TCM is not a binary one; these two approaches can be potent in combination. “TCM doctors aren’t competition for Western doctors,” Blakeway notes. “We’re both part of the jigsaw puzzle of healing.”



## Treat the Whole Person

Western medicine often trains its sights on agents of disease that need to be vanquished, such as viruses or cancer cells, while TCM considers the entirety of a person's body, mind, and spirit. "Doctors of Chinese medicine look at illness and disharmony in the context of the whole body," Blakeway says.

Conventional Western medicine offers a reductive way of thinking about the body, Odell notes, which can be helpful in a crisis like a rampant infection or stroke. "Western medicine says, 'We're going to wean out all this stuff we don't care about and winnow down to clarity on this specific thing that's going on.'"

Yet a narrow focus isn't as effective for health conditions involving multiple bodily systems, which make up the majority of what ails us.

"Chinese medicine tips the conventional Western approach on its head," says Odell. "We look at everything that's going on with someone — their mood, digestion, sleep, and symptoms — and say, 'What's the pattern?'"

Blakeway describes a plane flying toward its destination: "It doesn't fly in a straight line. The pilot course-corrects to respond to wind and weather. Your body course-corrects like that all the time, and for the most part, it does an excellent job."

Still, the body may need guidance to get back on track. That's where TCM comes in.

Chinese-medicine practitioners frame imbalances in the body using eight principles: hot and cold; internal and external; deficient and excessive; and yin and yang.

Yin, for instance, describes all the body's qualities that are receptive, cooling, and nourishing, Blakeway explains, while yang is all the ways the body is active, warming, and able to create change. If yin is deficient, one might get overheated and dry. Deficient yang might manifest as poor circulation and excessive cold.

"You want to have yin and yang in a dynamic balance — that's the aircraft course-correcting as it flies toward the airport. It's what your body is doing all day," says Blakeway.

# THE BODY

## According to TCM

These are other key concepts that inform the TCM understanding of the body.

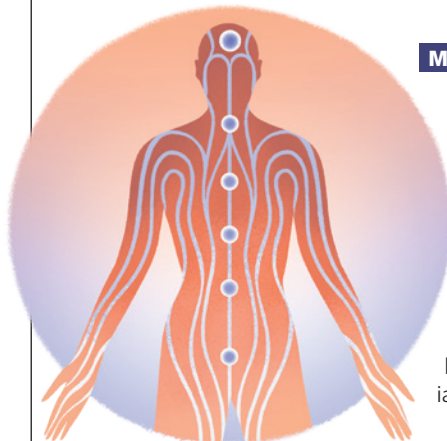
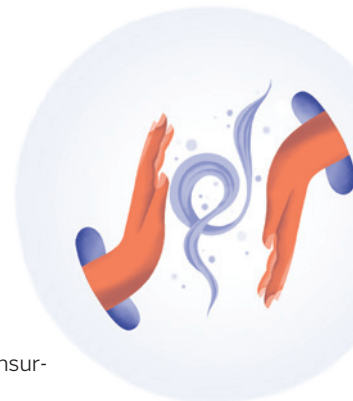
### QI

Some have speculated that the concept of the Force in *Star Wars* is based on qi (pronounced "chee"). Qi is a life force — the intelligent consciousness of the cosmos itself. "Mountains, plants, and human emotions all have qi," explains Ted Kaptchuk, OMD, author of *The Web That Has No Weaver: Understanding Chinese Medicine*.

"Qi is the basic building block of existence," Odell adds. Many TCM practices focus on "building qi" and ensuring it behaves properly to support overall health.

Qi initiates and accompanies all movement, protects and warms the body, and ensures stability. A healthy body has not only enough qi but qi that flows in the right direction. "It needs to be flowing smoothly through the body in the directions it's supposed to be moving," says Odell. Nausea might represent rebellious stomach qi, for instance — energy moving up when it's supposed to move down.

"Qi can get stuck, stagnated, or weak," adds Di Guan, LAc, DAOM, who practices acupuncture and Chinese medicine at Shén Acupuncture and Meditation Studio in Minneapolis. "Qi stagnation can lead to pain, irritability, anxiety, depression, or poor sleep. Qi weakness or deficiency might show up as heart palpitations, shortness of breath, poor digestion, or fatigue."



### MERIDIANS

During an acupuncture treatment, a practitioner places needles in the body along energetic channels called meridians. They form an invisible lattice that links all the organs and parts of the body; qi and blood travel through these channels.

"You can understand meridians as highways inside our body," Guan explains. "We have more than 400 acupoints on our body, including acupoints that are on meridians and some extra points that are not."

When the notion of meridians was introduced to the West, people thought they were a kind of imaginary construct, says Blakeway. "But these days, we know that the body communicates electromagnetically internally. And in fact, meridians follow the path of the fascia plains."

Fascia is the connective tissue that surrounds all the body's vital organs, muscles, bones, and nerve fibers; researchers have explored this network as the anatomical basis of meridians. "Fascia has a high water content, so it's electroconductive, and it can create charge too. This is one of the ways the body communicates internally," she explains.

Blakeway notes that embryos form through electromagnetic communication — even before the formation of the nervous system. "While the embryo is constructing itself, it forms these little nodes that are more electroconductive than the tissue around it. It turns out the major acupoints are in the same places as these embryological nodes. This slightly more electromagnetic tissue that was used to create us can also be used to maintain us."

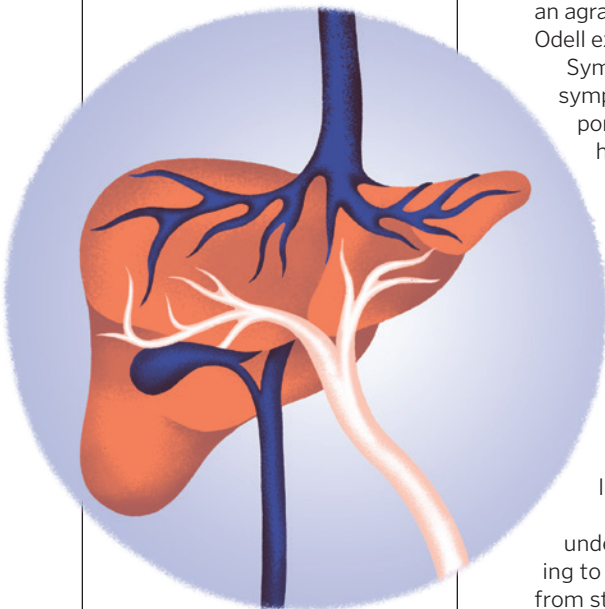


## ORGANS

TCM takes a broad view of the body's organs. Rather than considering the liver a fixed mechanical structure, for instance, TCM defines it by the activities and qualities associated with it as well as by the way it interacts with other organs, such as the spleen, kidneys, lungs, and heart.

TCM sees the liver as responsible for the smooth flow of all the emotions, qi, and blood, and holds that it suffers under excessive mental stress. When the energy of the liver is stagnated, it causes downstream problems for digestion, among other things.

It can also correspond to excessive anger, which is the emotion associated with the liver in TCM. A treatment plan for digestive issues accompanied by irritability might consist of stimulating the liver with herbs and diet as well as encouraging the healthy expression of anger.



## BLOOD AND OTHER FLUIDS

As with the organs, TCM understands blood differently from Western medicine. Blood is the nurturing yin counterpart to qi's motivating yang; it's the fluid that moistens and maintains the body.

"TCM pays a lot of attention to the quality of the blood because it's what nourishes all the other tissues. Diet is a big factor in the quality of the blood, and we have a whole category of herbs called blood tonics," Blakeway says.

TCM also categorizes lymph, phlegm, mucus, saliva, and sweat as fluids that, like blood, help keep tissues flexible and balanced. They can also become stuck or stagnated.

Along with *jing*, or essence (the subtle substance responsible for our growth and development), and *shen* (our consciousness or spirit), blood, fluids, and qi represent the "five substances" in TCM.

"The five vital substances contribute to each other, and they can actuate or transform into each other," Guan notes. "By regulating qi, we can regulate the others as well."

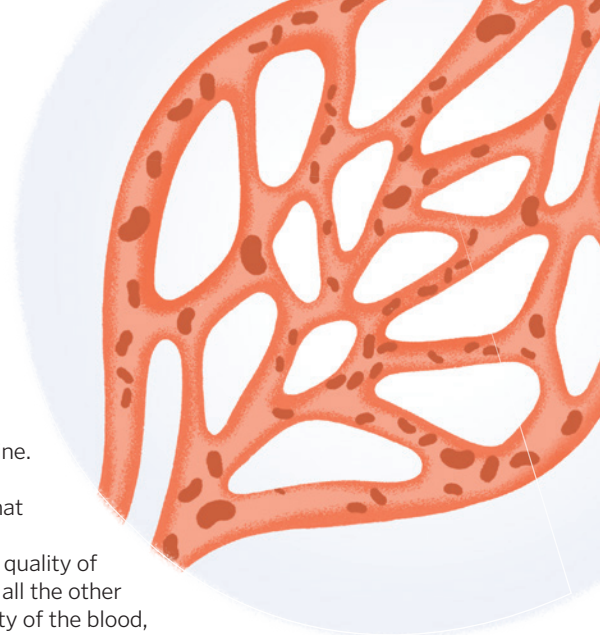
## TEMPERATURE

"Ancient Chinese culture was largely agrarian, so they used a lot of words and concepts that were important to an agrarian society, like cold, dampness, wind, and heat," Odell explains.

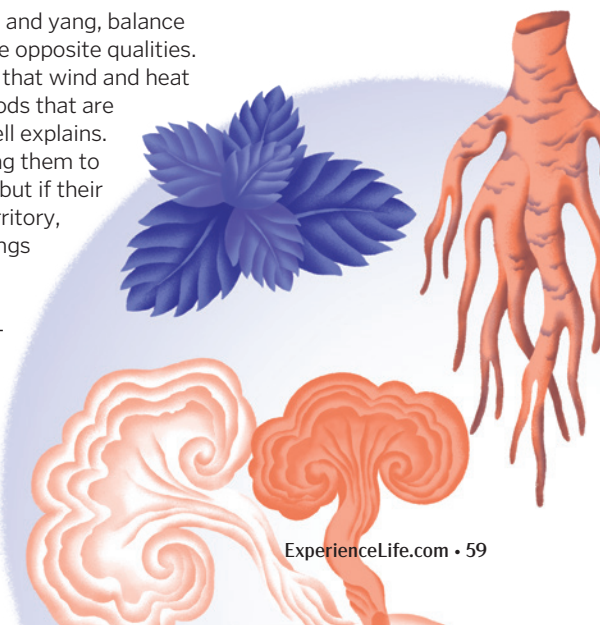
Symptoms of a common cold might translate to symptoms of wind and heat in TCM. Wind opens the pores of the body, allowing a pathogen to enter. And heat might express itself as yellow phlegm that looks like it's been cooked down or as a burning sensation in the throat.

Using the principles of yin and yang, balance is restored by introducing the opposite qualities. "If someone is presenting in that wind and heat way, we'd have them eat foods that are more cooling in nature," Odell explains. "Their friends might be telling them to eat chili peppers and ginger, but if their cold is actually in the heat territory, they should be having cool things like peppermint."

There are also colds that fall under the "cold" category, according to TCM, and those do benefit from stimulating spices. (For more about treating colds with TCM, see [www.ELmag.com/feedacold](http://www.ELmag.com/feedacold).)



Doctors of Chinese medicine look at illness and disharmony in the context of the whole body."





# THE TOOLS of TCM

TCM practitioners use a range of tools to remove obstacles and help reestablish balance in the body.

## ACUPUNCTURE

If the meridians are the body's high-ways, Guan says, then acupuncture needles are like traffic conductors. Acupuncturists insert thin needles (usually painlessly) into specific points to help direct blood, fluids, and energy where they need to go.

"We want to keep traffic flowing smoothly and evenly," she explains. "Whenever we feel there's a qi deficiency, we use needles to direct qi toward that area to 'tonify' it. Where there's a stagnation, we use needles to disperse it."

Acupuncture treatments are highly customized and are tailored to the patient's pattern of imbalance. Still, not every pattern is unique, and some are especially common. As a student, Odell observed a professor from China sigh deeply after a busy day of seeing patients. "Why does everyone here in the United States have the same pattern?" he asked.

"He was describing liver-spleen disharmony, which is what we often see when people have poor diets, stress, and repressed emotions," Odell says. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this pattern often exists alongside symptoms of depression and poor digestion.

In TCM, there's no distinction between the mind and body, and practitioners don't perceive thoughts or emotions as causing physical symptoms, or vice versa. Instead, mental, emotional, and physical symptoms arise together, like a traffic jam, and acupuncture helps get things moving again.

## DIET

As a baseline, TCM generally recommends a "clear, bland diet" to facilitate digestion. "Think of the stomach as a stew pot," Odell says. Easily digested foods can be "metabolized and transformed into qi, and the waste easily removed."

TCM mostly eschews cold, raw, processed, fried, and oily foods as too much work for the digestive system. "You want to emphasize broth-based soups, stews, cooked vegetables, a little bit of meat — things that are going to be warm and nourishing," she notes.

And depending on a person's specific pattern of imbalance — whether an excess or deficiency of heat or cold — a practitioner may make dietary recommendations for counterbalance. Onion, garlic, ginger, chilies, red meat, coffee, and spices such as cumin, turmeric, cayenne, and coriander are considered warming in TCM. Sweet fruits, bitter greens, leafy vegetables, raw foods, and peppermint are considered cooling.

## HERBS

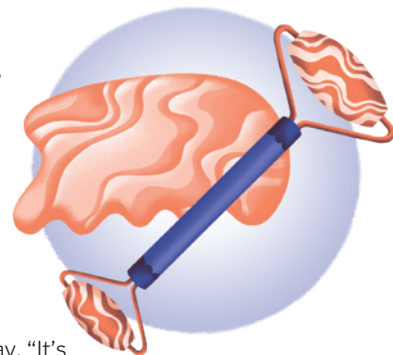
A key component of medicine, herbs are often prescribed in combination with acupuncture to correct imbalances. "We have more than 300 herbs we can use, and each one has its own properties or characteristics, from cold to cool to warm to hot," Guan says.

Notably, in the TCM context, "herbs" describes more than plants. Herbal formulas may also come from stones, minerals, or animal products, and they typically contain multiple ingredients in synergistic combinations. "We have a thick book of formulas that go back 2,000 years," Odell says. Practitioners who make their own herbal formulas may tweak them to address the needs of a particular patient.

## BODYWORK

TCM uses a variety of movement and massage modalities to facilitate the smooth flow of qi, blood, and fluids:

- **Qigong** integrates posture, movement, breath, and self-massage to promote qi generation and circulation.
- **Tai chi** incorporates fluid movements to move qi along the meridians.
- **Acupressure** involves applying manual pressure, instead of acupuncture needles, to acupoints.
- **Cupping** applies cups to the skin to create suction. It's like "massage in reverse," says Blakeway. "It's pulling up instead of pushing down, lifting the fascia to create more space so fluids can run through and clean out debris."
- **Moxibustion** involves heating a sage-like herb called mugwort and holding it above an area of the body to warm it. "Moxa has a very penetrating infrared heat that goes into the muscle and can be particularly relieving," she explains.
- **Gua sha** involves rubbing a spoon or specialized stone repeatedly against the skin. The goal is to reduce stagnation and increase circulation of qi, promoting the body's ability to remove debris and restore tissue.







**Combining all the information we get subjectively and objectively from these methods, we diagnose you with your pattern and decide what acupoints and herbal treatments will address that imbalance.”**

## Give It a Try

A first appointment with a TCM practitioner will have some notable differences from a standard medical visit. You'll likely be asked to fill out an extensive questionnaire and health history in advance, with questions about your primary complaint, what makes it better or worse, your diet, exercise habits, sleep, stress level, mood, family history, and any other symptoms. The provider will then target specific areas for follow-up questions.

At the appointment, the practitioner will likely observe your complexion, body composition, and the color and coating of your tongue. They may also pay attention to the smell of your breath and the sound of your voice — whether it's shouty or singsong, forceful or whispery. All these observations offer information on your qi and the balance of yin and yang.

They will also likely feel your pulse. “Each wrist has three sections, and each section has three layers. Every section represents a different organ system,” Guan says. There are 28 pulse types, according to Shicai Li, a Chinese-medicine doctor who lived about 350 years ago; each provides insight into possible excesses or stagnation in the body.

“Combining all the information we get subjectively and objectively from these methods, we diagnose you with your pattern and decide what acupoints and herbal treatments will address that imbalance,” Guan adds.

Many treatment plans call for one to three visits per week for several weeks. Depending on the circumstances, you may notice an improvement in symptoms soon after the first visit, or it may take a few treatments before you feel better. Healing with TCM is like so many things: Slow and steady wins the race. 🏆





# THE THOUGHTFUL TRAVELER

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**FIVE  
STRATEGIES  
FOR  
BECOMING  
A MORE  
CONSCIOUS  
TRAVELER.**





BY LAUREL KALLENBACH

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit and most travel screeched to a halt, I began reflecting on my favorite travel memories: snorkeling in the Galápagos Islands as penguins and sea lions streaked past; eating *yusheng*, a Singaporean fish specialty served during Lunar New Year; watching citizens of Antigua, Guatemala, carry vast floats through the streets on Palm Sunday.

This was more than just nostalgia: These memories are part of who I am.

“Our desire to explore will never cease,” says Jeff Greenwald, cofounder and director of EthicalTraveler.org.

“We earthlings have unquenchable curiosity about how other humans work, eat, play, and live.”

Before the pandemic, 10.3 percent of jobs worldwide were in tourism, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council. As they waited out the pandemic, millions of unemployed taxi drivers, restaurant employees, diving instructors, tour guides, hotel housekeepers, flight attendants, and shopkeepers worried whether travelers like me would ever return.

Now that many of us are spreading our wings again, most, but not all, tourism jobs are returning — along with their benefits and consequences.

When utilities, water supplies,

roads, and railways are developed or improved for visiting tourists, local people benefit.

Yet tourism can also contribute to increased crime, drive up costs of food and housing, and sometimes result in overtourism — the point at which unsustainable numbers of visitors harm local ecosystems and deplete local resources.

Tourism produces an estimated 8 percent of global greenhouse-gas emissions, mainly from cruise ships, airplanes, tour buses, and cars. Hotels, swimming pools, and golf courses use substantial amounts of water (in short supply in many places) and generate garbage and sewage.



The balance between supporting tourism economies and preserving local cultures and environments is tricky to navigate. Whether we're camping in the backcountry, staying in a Croatian hostel, or attending a meeting at a five-star Tokyo hotel, our presence affects the environment, including its people, plants, and animals. Still, we can moderate how much

of an impact we make on our chosen destinations. We can become more aware of how our behavior, attitudes, and decisions affect our hosts — some of whom may lack our economic, cultural, or environmental advantages.

“Might we engage more honestly with a challenging and unequal world, realizing that it existed long before we arrived at our destination, and that

it's likely to persist long after we go home?” asks Anu Taranath, PhD. It's a question she explores in her book *Beyond Guilt Trips: Mindful Travel in an Unequal World* and in her work as an educator and facilitator.

Instead of trying to be “good” travelers, Taranath suggests we strive to be *better* travelers. These five suggestions can help with that.

# 1 SELECT A DESTINATION THAT REFLECTS YOUR VALUES



**Leading with your values needn't ruin the joy of travel. In fact, it may have the opposite effect — by deepening your engagement with a place.**

**Who hasn't been tempted to hop on a plane** after seeing photos of a dreamy destination? Before buying a ticket, however, look beyond what's visible in pretty Instagram pictures, and consider the effect that your visit might have.

“There's no simple definition for what makes a travel destination ‘ethical,’” says Jonathon Day, PhD, associate professor of tourism at Purdue University. Yet he believes we can still make ethical choices: “Examine your values and make your vacation reflect them.”

This involves opening our eyes to some features of travel we might rather avoid thinking about. Tourism often damages fragile ecosystems. Some hotels and resorts pay employees less than a living wage. A

gorgeous region may have a terrible human-rights record, and overtourism (which would include you, if you go) may be destroying a place's unique character or culture.

Still, leading with your values needn't ruin the joy of travel. In fact, it may have the opposite effect — by deepening your engagement with a place.

Day recommends deciding what kind of trip you want to take (whether that's a camping trip, a beach vacation, or a visit to a far-flung capital). Be concrete about what you care about (sustainability, human rights, supporting the local economy), and be flexible about where — and sometimes when — you go.

This approach allows you to plan an itinerary that satisfies both your personal ethics and your wanderlust.

Keep in mind that almost no destination will check every box, and the concept of sustainability in

travel involves a complex mix of cultural, social, and environmental responsibility, says Day. “A hotel may be doing 10 environmental things really well, but it might not be paying its workers a living wage. So, is that hotel sustainable? It's a tough issue because even the best hotel isn't perfect. I think of it as a journey toward sustainability.”

This is why tuning in to your own values is so important. If environmental soundness is a top priority, you might choose that energy-efficient hotel — and then do your best to compensate for the low wages it pays by leaving large tips for workers. It won't solve the structural problem, but it will mean you're not contributing to it quite so much.

Sometimes timing makes a difference. Visiting popular places during the off-season helps ease the stress on natural resources. You're also likely to encounter

fewer crowds, enjoy more flexibility with travel dates, and find lower prices and better availability.

Off-season tourism has advantages for locals too: It offers steady employment year-round rather than just a few months a year.

There are plenty of resources to help you make more informed choices about potential destinations. Green Destinations uses a set of 30 criteria to evaluate the sustainability performance of destinations around the world. For instance, if Aspen, Colo., is on your itinerary, you'll read that the town is predominantly “sufficient” for human rights, water stewardship, and natural-heritage conservation, with “partially sufficient” scores for climate action and equity for all.

EthicalTraveler.org creates an annual list of its top 10 best ethical destinations. The 2023 list includes Costa Rica, Chile, and Botswana.



## CONSIDER YOUR TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

**When my husband and I visited Fiji in 1994**, we rode a chicken bus to a remote beach with our luggage strapped to the roof. We shared the ride with local workers whose ancestors were brought to the island because of British colonialism. That bus ride was an illuminating experience, and more climate-friendly than taking a propeller plane, but the choking gas fumes were still bad for Fiji's air quality.

In short, travel always produces a carbon footprint, though today we have a few more options to help control our footprint's size.

Traveling by train produces about half the carbon dioxide of air travel. At your destination, you can always walk, rent a bike, or use public transportation rather than rent a car.

And if you do fly or drive, you can purchase carbon offsets. These credits provide financial support to environmental projects, such as tree planting, that help compensate for a trip's emissions.

Until aviation and other forms of transportation get off fossil fuels, says Day, carbon offsets are an important tool. He recommends the nonprofit

organization Cool Effect; Terrapass is another.

Whatever carbon-offsetting program you use, be sure it's certified by an independent auditor.

"In an ideal world, there would be other, cleaner ways of getting around," says Greenwald. "But right now, [planes are] how most people prefer to travel. Luckily, technologies like Zoom have made high-impact transportation less essential. But there's never going to be a substitute for people meeting face-to-face or being in each other's presence."



Travel always produces a carbon footprint, though today we have a few more options to help control our footprint's size.

### TRAVEL IN PLACE

Given the economic and environmental costs of travel, sometimes the most ethical choice is to stay home. That doesn't mean you can't expand your horizons.

- **Explore your own community** through the eyes of a tourist. Check out museums, parks, or other local landmarks that you've wondered about but never visited.
- **Go to a local ethnic market** or restaurant and sample some new-to-you foods.
- **Take a daylong walk** without a destination. See what you find.
- **Sign up for a language class** at a community center. Join a conversation group to practice.
- **Invite friends over** to cook Chinese, French, or Indian food, and watch a subtitled film from that country.
- **Stream traditional music** from around the world.
- **Read** some great travel memoirs.
- **Watch** movies about characters on a journey. Stunning cinematography is a bonus: *The Lord of the Rings* (New Zealand), *Eat Pray Love* (Italy, India, Bali), *The Way* (Spain), *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (the multiverse).



# 3. BE A RESPECTFUL GUEST

**Visiting wildlife in the Galápagos Islands** taught me a lot of things, including how to be a courteous guest. On our first day, our guide explained that we would be able to observe blue-footed boobies, giant tortoises, Sally Lightfoot crabs, and marine iguanas up close in their natural habitats — but only because these creatures have evolved without predators and didn't fear humans.

There was a strict code of conduct: No food was allowed, and we had to stay at least six feet away from all wildlife, even when a curious sea lion pup chased us on the beach.

Using the principles of “leave no trace” can be another useful code of conduct: Don't litter. Carry a reusable water bottle. Show consideration to others, whether they're locals, wildlife, or fellow travelers. Be sure to learn some basic phrases in the local language (especially “please” and “thank you”), and familiarize yourself with local customs.

A little self-awareness goes a long way too. Travel is inherently unpredictable, and it helps to cultivate some patience and flexibility on the road. Greenwald emphasizes the importance of curbing anger and cultivating a sense of humor.

“Anger is a real issue for Westerners,” he notes.

“And it never earns the respect of locals or defuses a bad situation.”

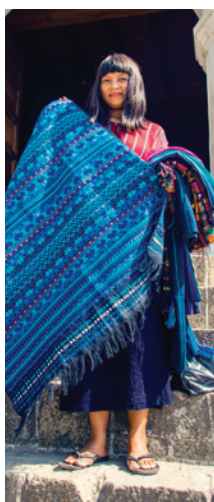
He recommends practicing humility. When you're a guest in someone else's home, listen to what others have to say before you speak. If you do express an opinion, resist the temptation to present it as the absolute truth. Phrases like “I believe” or “my view is” show respect for the other person's point of view, which may be very different from yours.

A good guest also respects the dignity of those they encounter. Travel can often bring us eye to eye with the world's inequities, and witnessing unfamiliar levels of poverty can be uncomfortable. But rather than reacting with guilt or pity, Taranath suggests focusing on what we all have in common.

“We live in an individualized culture that doesn't teach us to pay close attention to other people's lives. Conscious travel is about unraveling some of that individualism,” she says. “Take a pause to notice: *I'm not the only one whose life might be challenging.*”

“When meeting people who seem unlike you, try moving toward the notion that *My life and your life might not overlap often, but we're actually connected in some surprising ways.*”

# 4. SUPPORT THE LOCAL ECONOMY



**Bargaining is best done with maximum respect for the seller as well as for the region's economic realities.**

**I'm not usually a big shopper**, but I found the handcrafted textiles in the Santiago Atitlán market in Guatemala breathtaking, and I loved meeting the women who made them. One did her weaving on a portable backstrap loom just as her foremothers did for 2,500 years. Bargaining is customary in Guatemala, and the occasional haggle gave me a chance to practice my rusty Spanish — but I wasn't a hard sell. Compared with most Guatemalans, I was wealthy; paying their asking price showed the women that I valued their artistry.

Money is always part of the travel equation, and Greenwald notes that bargaining is best done with maximum respect for the seller as well as for the region's economic realities. “The final transaction should leave both buyer and seller satisfied and pleased,” he says. “It's not a bargain if either person feels exploited, diminished, or ripped off.”

Greenwald advises familiarizing yourself with the local currency and the current exchange rate before

you visit. (And if there's wireless service at your destination, you can check daily exchange rates on your phone.)

Often, what sounds like a giant sum in another currency may not be all that much in dollars. Think twice before haggling over an amount that won't make a difference in your life but might make a difference in someone else's.



# 5. THINK LIKE A TRAVELER AT HOME

Show your support by choosing locally owned hotels, shops, and restaurants. Direct your tourist dollars into the community rather than into an international bank account; you'll be more likely to meet, converse with, and possibly befriend a local person than you would be at a chain hotel or restaurant. Locals tend to have better suggestions for things to see, eat, and do as well.

If you do stay at a chain hotel, you can help sustain local economies by choosing one that plays a positive role in its community. Look for a statement of corporate social responsibility on the website, or ask a manager how the company gives back. If its efforts sound legitimate (such as hosting programs that support local schools or conservation efforts), affirm the company and encourage it to do more. Customer feedback lets companies know their commitments — or lack of them — are being noticed.

The question of whether to stay at a short-term rental, like an Airbnb, is a tricky one. An abundance of short-term rentals in one location can drive up housing costs by depleting the amount of housing available to locals. Many people who live in popular destinations also balk at having a rotating cast of visitors next door instead of a reliable set of neighbors. This changes the character of a community.

On the flip side, vacation rentals offer landowning locals a chance to profit from the tourist economy, and they can be more affordable than hotels. If you end up at a short-term rental, direct some of your tourist dollars into other local businesses.



**In the end, we're always on some kind of journey, and what matters is that we truly inhabit the place we're in — even if we're there for only a half-hour.**

**After Hurricane Ian, I** donated to the Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum on Sanibel Island, Fla., because I remembered gathering seashells on those pretty beaches as a kid. This is just one example of how travel makes us part of a larger global community; we continue to feel connected to places we visited and the people who live there.

This shift in perspective can change the way we relate to our own neighbors.

“The power of travel is meeting people unlike you,” says Taranath. “Yet I know many who reserve meeting different people only for when they're abroad.”

Mindful travel, she adds, is about removing barriers between here and there. We can ask ourselves, *Why would I think about inequity when I'm in Kenya but not when I'm home in Seattle?*

Guilt and shame aren't helpful when acknowledging that we enjoy more opportunities, money,

or privileges than some others, Taranath says. But being aware of our advantages is useful.

“Awareness means having the resilience to be conscious of our privileges without sinking into a pit of guilt,” she says. “Instead of assuming we've done something wrong, we acknowledge that we live in an unequal world.”

This allows us to see other people as equals, even if our circumstances are different.

In the end, we're always on some kind of journey, and what matters is that we truly inhabit the place we're in — even if we're there for only a half-hour.

When I was able to tour the Anne Frank house in Amsterdam, I spent about 30 minutes in the Secret Annex. I saw the swinging bookcase that disguises the entrance; Anne's postcards of movie stars; the penciled height markings on the walls. People from all over the globe come to witness the universe of human life in that one tiny space.

That is why we travel: It reminds us how connected we are to everyone, and to everything. 🌍

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**LAUREL KALLENBACH** is a Boulder, Colo.-based travel writer and editor.

## SHOULD I STAY, OR SHOULD I GO?

Part of ethical travel requires thinking carefully about when, where, and whether you go. Ask yourself these questions before you book:

- **Does this experience require physical travel?** If traveling for work, could I accomplish these goals by teleconferencing?
- **Am I visiting at a time of year when my presence will least disrupt wildlife and ecosystems?** It's best to avoid camping or hiking in areas where animals are mating, nesting, or raising young.
- **Will the destination benefit from my presence as much as I'll benefit from traveling there?** Some places are strained by overtourism; others might need tourism dollars during low seasons.





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# Rearranging Life



Do you sometimes feel caught in negative thoughts, unable to find your way back to a positive, optimistic path?

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**73**

**One of the best tools for redirecting ourselves away from negativity is not something rare or abstract. It's curiosity — and we all have access to it.**



# Embrace CHAOS

Let go of plans and the comfort of to-do lists. Instead, cultivate the habit of learning how to detach from things beyond your control.

BY JESSIE SHOLL

**S**tacy Igel, founder and creative director of the fashion brand Boy Meets Girl, was backstage at a Manhattan fashion show she'd produced for her *Just Dance* collaboration when she got the news that her first in vitro fertilization (IVF) treatment had failed. "I just dropped to my knees," she recalls.

Igel had already spent more than a year trying to get pregnant, and she was starting to fear it might never happen. All the while, her business was booming, and her stress levels were at an all-time high.

"I was doing these big New York fashion-week shows. I was traveling the world," she explains. "I still had to be a face of my brand, be present, and be an employer to my employees, but I was also getting hormone shots every morning."

In that moment backstage, Igel knew that she could let the panic and uncer-

tainty take control — or she could make another choice: prevent the stress from becoming despair, and instead, lean into the chaos and use it as fuel.

The strategy proved powerful. As she writes in *Embracing the Calm in the Chaos*, it benefited Igel in both her business and personal life. As she experienced the challenges of her pregnancy journey and continued to grow as an entrepreneur, Igel found support and a new sense of confidence.

"What really helped me were the partnerships and collaborations and friendships I already had," she says.

## Let Go of Control

With the pandemic upending lives and plans in recent years, many of us have been forced to confront uncertain futures. That not-knowing can be stressful. Seeking wisdom from others, as Igel did, can help us face such uncertainties.

It's also helpful to recognize that we actually don't have that much power over what happens to us in the first place. In 1975, Harvard psychologist Ellen Langer, PhD, first studied the "illusion of control."

Since then, Langer and others have found that "people trying to obtain a desired outcome that occurred independently of their behavior tended to believe that they were controlling it."

This occurs even when people have no actual influence over the outcome, because we all have a human tendency to overestimate our ability to control what's going on around us.

But acknowledging our lack of influence over chaotic events — whether it's an unsuccessful IVF treatment, career plans that go off track, or finding out your kid's favorite summer camp is no longer taking applications — can actually be liberating.



When we cede control, we may become less attached to the outcome. When we're less attached to an outcome, we're more accepting of what happens. (For more suggestions on finding calm in a frantic world, see [ELmag.com/findcalm](http://ELmag.com/findcalm).)

Each of us defines chaos — a disordered state that appears out of control — in our own way. But for all of us, becoming comfortable with the fact that we actually exert much less control over events than we think we do could allow us to cope more effectively with life's many messes.

With that in mind, we've gathered advice from experts on more ways to navigate chaos and how to find your own moments of calm.

### Practice Emotional Agility

Life happens, and sometimes the chips fall in ways we don't want, like, or expect. But what often matters more than the events themselves is our reaction to them, explains Harvard Medical School psychologist Susan David, PhD, in her book *Emotional Agility*.

"Our life satisfaction in the face of inevitable worries, regrets, and sad experiences depends not so much on how many of these things we experience, or even their intensity, but on the way we deal with them," she writes.

Practicing "emotional agility" can help us handle chaos in productive ways. There are four main steps to developing that kind of flexibility.

**1. SHOW UP.** Instead of ignoring challenging emotions or forcing yourself to "think positive," learn to approach your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors with curiosity and kindness. David also suggests broadening your emotional vocabulary: "Once you've identified your feeling, come up with two more words that describe how you are feeling. You might be surprised at the breadth of your emotions — or that you've unearthed a deeper emotion buried beneath the more obvious one."

**2. STEP OUT.** Create distance between yourself and your thoughts, and understand that emotions are data, not directives. Your feelings, in other words, are not facts. Step out of the struggle against your emotions and, instead, notice how processing them as they are can be empowering.

One way to add distance linguistically is to focus on the feeling: Rather than saying, "I am angry, sad, etc.," say, "I am feeling angry, sad, etc." That way, you are not the emotion; rather, you are experiencing it.

**3. WALK YOUR WHY.** Core values can serve as a compass to keep you moving in the right direction. Journaling is a good way to discover your core values.

In his book *Chaotic Happiness: The Psychology of Finding Yourself in a World That's Lost*, therapist T. J. Hoegh, MS, LPC, suggests writing about times in your life when you've been disappointed or proud of yourself. "It's likely that your feelings of pride or disappointment in the past are closely linked to things you value," he writes.

**4. MOVE ON.** You're the agent of your own life, David notes, and while you can't control what's happening around you, you are in charge of your reaction to it. Breathing exercises can help put some space between an action and your response to it, and they can help you be mindful in your exchanges with others.

### Ditch the Perfectionism

Perfectionists often judge themselves harshly, which can spike anxiety and make any chaotic situation even worse. Vijayeta Sinh, PhD, a clinical psychologist at Mount Sinai in New York City, writes in a blog on [PsychologyToday.com](http://PsychologyToday.com) that the prob-

lem of perfectionism is further compounded by isolation. "Others may assume based on appearances that we are OK and doing just fine," Sinh states. "So there are fewer opportunities to receive help or support."

And, she adds, it's possible to even fool yourself: "We may work so hard at creating the illusion of OK-ness that we may actually buy it ourselves from time to time. As a precaution, it's important to take our emotional temperature and ask how we are doing, if we are feeling overwhelmed."

Instead, practice being imperfect. You can start with a small step, like leaving your bed unmade for a day. What would happen?

Or at dinnertime, how about serving a nutritious meal that isn't the most Instagrammable?

That's what Sinh did. "For me as a working mom, the food I serve may not always look and taste fantastic, but it's healthy. I may not always be able to spend

quality time with my family, but when I do, I stay away from my phone and other distractions. I no longer take pride in saying, 'I can do this and this and this all at the same time.'"

Sinh worried that her kids may resent the store-bought birthday cake and wish for a homemade one, for example, or that her family would be annoyed by an occasional mess in the house. "But," she writes, "I am always surprised that no one really seems to care about those things. That acknowledging my vulnerability, facing my insecurities, and knowing my priorities — most days — helps me feel more human and less like a robot."

And it sounds a lot less chaotic. 🌟

When we cede control, we may become less attached to the outcome. When we're less attached to an outcome, we're more accepting of what happens.

**JESSIE SHOLL** is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.





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# How Curiosity Changes Your Mind

Thinking in different ways can help us forge new neurological pathways.

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

Imagine walking across a grassy meadow; when you look back, you can see the faint path you've left behind. A similar pathway is laid down in your brain every time you have a novel thought or attempt a new and complex movement. And just like an imprint on fresh grass, if you never take that route again, it simply disappears.

Now imagine that you walk on this path every day, maybe multiple times a day. You will create an unmistakable pathway. It's likely so obvious that anyone else who crosses this meadow will follow that route themselves.

The same thing happens in our brains when we repeat the same thoughts about ourselves and the world, and then follow those up with reinforcing news or images. And once a pathway has been trampled into place, a different experience — even if it's completely unrelated — can direct us to follow it again.

This often happens with negative thoughts, which can create entrenched negativity and even depression when they become a pattern.

Still, we're not helpless in this scenario. Once we're aware of what we're doing, we can choose to resist familiar paths of negativity. If we can resist them long enough, we will notice how they eventually disappear — leaving us space and energy to create more positive pathways.

The best tool for helping us redirect our thoughts is not something rare or abstract — we all have access to it. It's called curiosity.

## A New Path

In the world of mental health, we view the mind as a spectrum. Our thoughts

and emotions range from rigidity to chaos, but we don't want to live at either extreme. A healthy approach means spending as much time as possible somewhere in the middle.

In cognitive behavioral therapy, we often see that a rigid, fixed pattern of thinking is linked with depression. We might feel a need for the world to be black and white, for things to be either right or wrong. Curiosity helps us escape the either-or thinking that characterizes our negative thoughts. It helps us lubricate stuck mental gears and become open to more flexible ways of thinking and feeling.

## Two Dimensions of Curiosity

Still, we want to be thoughtful in our pursuit of curiosity, which has two dimensions based on how it's generated: either externally or internally. It's important to cultivate — and strike a balance between — both.

The external dimension essentially relies on our environment to entertain us. Being open to and interested in the world is nourishing, but it can be overdone when we start compulsively seeking novelty — especially if we're seeking distraction or escape.

This can lead to a kind of perpetual discontent that feels a little like depression; it can be a sign of an unsettled mind and push us toward the chaotic end of the spectrum.

The internal dimension of curiosity can help us find balance: We want to spark curiosity from within ourselves. We want to recognize new or uncomfortable experiences for what they might teach us, and approach them with an open mind and a broader perspective. We want to be

genuinely interested in what happens.

Instead of thinking that we already know how an experience is going to go or fearing how it might turn out, we let go of expectation and become curious about what we might learn. This approach to life becomes a training ground for being in the moment.

## Learning Opportunities

That's where the learning — and change — happens. When we become curious about something that makes us uncomfortable, we might notice things we didn't see before. This can cause us to shift our thinking.

We might realize that we don't know what we thought we knew. Or that a person or situation is completely different from what we assumed. Or that we still don't understand someone or something, but at least we know we don't understand, and we accept it.

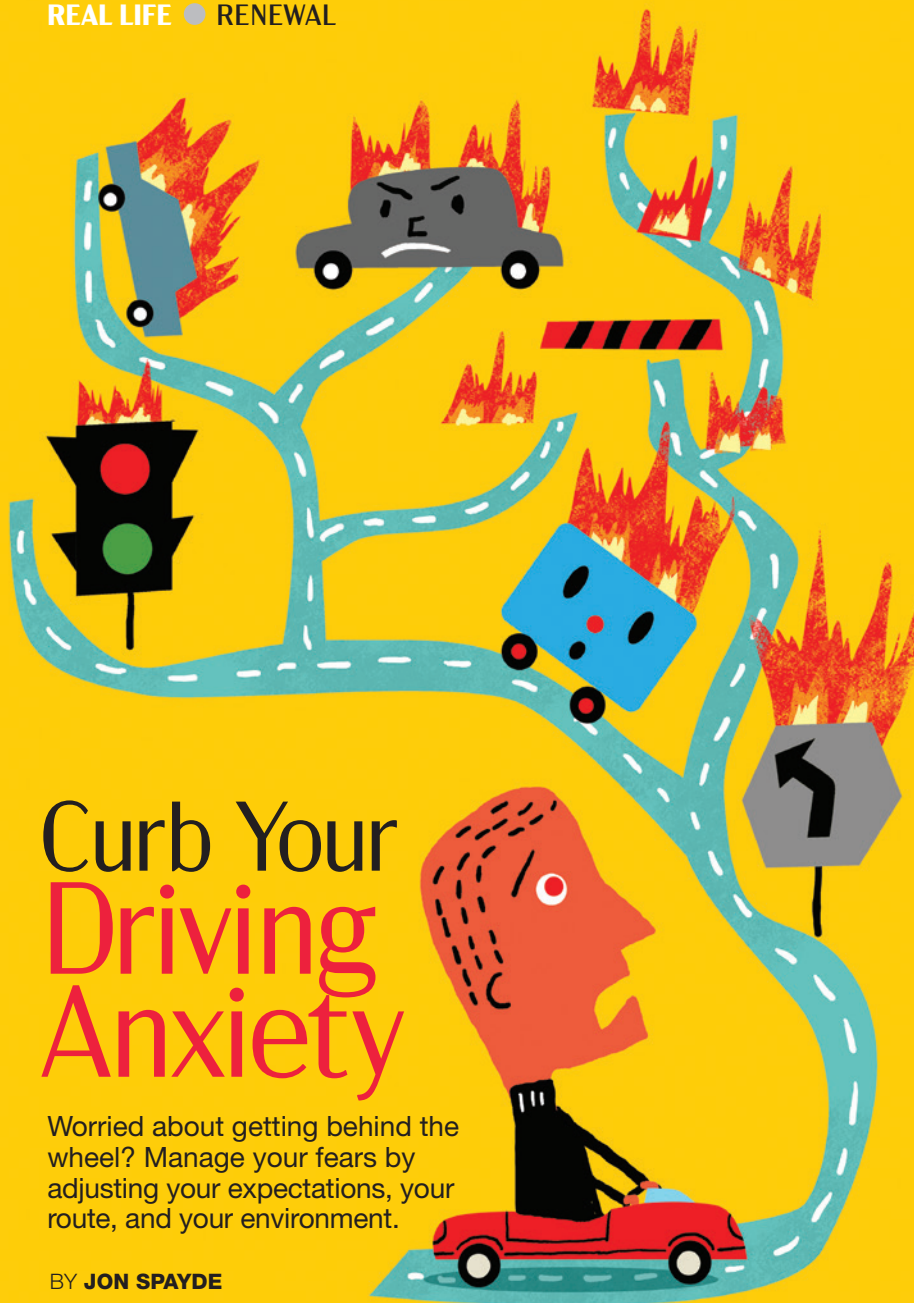
This broader perspective might feel uncomfortable at first, but it's that very discomfort that can create new neurological connections. Think of this as trampling a new path through unbroken snow instead of grass. It's hard work, but it makes a big difference in the landscape. The effort might raise your stress level temporarily, but it's a good stress. That stress gets quickly resolved and the new pathway can start to be reinforced.

Pretty soon, you can walk that way with ease — and your mind can go places you never knew it could.

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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.





# Curb Your Driving Anxiety

Worried about getting behind the wheel? Manage your fears by adjusting your expectations, your route, and your environment.

BY JON SPAYDE

Let's admit it: Driving is stressful for many of us, and it seems to be getting more so. When we pull out onto the road, we may run into a host of things that can get on our nerves — bad road conditions, lanes narrowed or obliterated by construction, aggressive or inept drivers, detours, traffic jams, and more.

To make matters worse, every day seems to bring new stories of road rage: drivers taking out their frustrations by tailgating, shouting, making rude gestures, and, in the scariest cases, physically attacking other drivers, with or without weapons. And some of us are freaked out by freeways, with their merging challenges and high speeds. No wonder the prospect of getting on the road can get our hearts pounding.

So, how to chill out in our vehicles? Psychologist Robert Nemerovski, PsyD, who specializes in anxiety and anger issues and blogs about road rage and driving anxiety, has some suggestions to make our trips feel a whole lot better.

## Stress Sources

**You expect that your trip will go perfectly.** According to Nemerovski, a significant source of stress kicks in even before we get behind the wheel. "As with many things in life," he says, "there's an expectation, or a plan, that things are going to work out the way we want, or that they should." These expectations can set us up to be extra anxious or angry when they aren't met.

"After all, we are out there on the road with many other people with similar expectations, and things don't always go the way we want, whether that's because of weather or traffic or other people's driving behavior."

**You're not sure how to react when you encounter bad drivers.**

Encountering reckless or inattentive driving is a major source of stress, Nemerovski says. "A ton of research indicates that observing another person being oblivious and driving poorly makes us feel both vulnerable and threatened — as well as angry."

**You worry about becoming a target of road rage.**

"It's also in the scientific literature that there is a priming factor in road rage," he notes. "People are hearing about it in the news, and they're concerned that someone out there will be aggressive toward them. So they wind up feeling anticipatory energy about that, whether it's stress, anxiety, or even some defensive aggression."

**Driving seems to have become more difficult.**

You may be concerned that your reaction time has slowed, which leads to fears that you won't be able to respond quickly to a hazardous situation. Or perhaps a pinched nerve or other injury makes it hard to turn your head and check your blind spots.

**You spot an accident on the road.**

A crashed car, a semi on its side, a vehicle that has spun out into the ditch, or an animal that has been hit and killed is unsettling to witness. "It's an example of somebody or something in trouble, and it can jolt us, waking us up to our own vulnerability," says Nemerovski.



## Strategies for Success

**Adjust your expectations.** It's likely that you will meet some big or small driving challenge on your trip, Nemerovski points out. This is part of driving — and life — and it's probably not as big of a deal as it feels in the moment. Of course, serious accidents and other major troubles are always a possibility, but driving with a reasonably peaceful attitude can help reduce the likelihood that they'll occur.

**Be aware of your early warning signs of stress and anxiety.** Driving may aggravate our stress, but it may not be the ultimate source of it. "We're all living in a stew of sources of anxiety and stress, whether it's because of challenges we face in life or information that we pick up from the news and the internet," Nemerovski says. "So it's important for us to understand where our baseline level of stress and anxiety is."

He advises us to become conscious of how and where these feelings show up, before and after we get in the car. Note where in your body you tend to feel stress: Does your chest tighten? Does your breathing become shallower, or more rapid or irregular? Do you feel your temperature change? Do you clench your jaw or make a fist?

**Pause and breathe before you drive.**

"I think it's a good idea, before we turn on the vehicle, to just give ourselves a minute to check in with ourselves," he suggests. Check yourself for signs of anxiety and stress. If you find that you're wound up, do a little deep breathing — perhaps this classic exercise: Inhale for five seconds, hold for four seconds, then exhale for seven seconds. Repeat a few times. You can deep-breathe like this while you're on the road too.

**Create a calm environment in your vehicle.** "What are you listening to as you drive?" asks Nemerovski. "Is it some peaceful music that puts you in the right mood, or is it a podcast or talk-radio show that's winding you up about politics or the latest pandemic or climate disaster?" A clean and tidy interior can help you stay calm as well.

**Think and plan ahead.** A little forethought can make your trip a lot calmer. If you're worried about your reaction time or visibility, for example, you can plan a slower but less stressful route, then leave early to give yourself time to take it — and to allow for possible detours or traffic slowdowns.

**Navigate intentionally.** GPS apps can be helpful, but keeping an eye on their instructions diverts your eyes from the road, and the directions can be hard to follow. If you're using a navigation app, familiarize yourself with the directions before departing. Consider plotting your route on a physical map to get a good sense of where you're going.

piece and in a time-efficient manner," he says. "By realizing that everybody is in the same boat, we will be less prone to frustration, stress, and anger."

**Put the best possible interpretation on driving you don't like.** As part of driving within a community, you can give seemingly bad or aggressive drivers the benefit of the doubt. That speedster may be rushing to an important doctor's appointment. That nervous lane changer may be a brand-new driver. This generous act of personalization can make you less likely to have a strong negative reaction to poor driving choices, which reduces the risk of catalyzing or aggravating an incident of road rage.



**Stay out of the left lane.** If you are freeway-averse but have to take one, Nemerovski says, there's no reason to use the left lane unless you need to pass. "In the middle or right lane there's less happening that we have to adapt to, and we have more time and opportunity to monitor our feelings and reactions," he says.

**Think of others.** Drivers on the road form a community, explains Nemerovski. "Everybody is trying to accomplish one thing: get from point A to point B in one

**Practice the FIDO principle.** In Nemerovski's lexicon, FIDO stands for "forget it and drive on." He says this is the best way to react to stressful driving moments that have passed: a speed demon who cut you off, a troublesome detour, a driver who seemed incompetent and dangerous. Ruminating about what you've experienced could take your attention off the road. 🚗

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





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# What Is Forest Bathing?

Spending mindful time among trees offers a surprising wealth of health benefits.

BY COURTNEY HELGOE

**D**uring the depths of the pandemic lockdown, one of our neighbors wrapped a string of felt letters around a gnarled bur oak reading “HUG ME.” Who could resist?

Not me, and not Ludwig van Beethoven, who reportedly hugged a linden tree in his backyard routinely. “The woods, the trees, and the rocks give man the resonance he needs,” he wrote.

In 1982, the resonance provided by trees inspired the Japanese government to begin endorsing the practice of *shinrin-yoku*, or forest bathing. People have been retreating to the woods for millennia to reflect and restore, but the government saw *shinrin-yoku* as a chance to promote a centuries-old Japanese practice as a form of ecotourism.

It quickly became popular among the country’s exhausted tech workers, who discovered that spending time in a forest helped them recover in ways nothing else could. Turns out, it can help the rest of us too.

## Plant Medicine

Forest bathing (also called forest therapy) involves more than just a walk in the woods. Professional guides lead excursions where participants spend hours in forest environments — listening, observing, touching, and smelling their surroundings. The point is to reconnect with nature in a deliberate way.

“We walk slowly so we can focus our senses on the myriad ways the living forest surrounds and touches us,” explains M. Amos Clifford in his book *Your Guide to Forest Bathing*. Clifford founded the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs.

While spending time in nature is abundantly beneficial without a guide, Clifford believes that some direction can help us overcome the innate busyness that prevents us from immersing ourselves. “Most of us have never learned the art of stillness in nature,” he notes.

Learning how to practice deep engagement with trees — studying root systems, smelling pine bark, listening to rain on leaves — allows us to enjoy forest bathing’s full range of health benefits.

That said, the research would suggest that forest bathing’s deepest healing effects are provided not by a guide but by the forest itself.



These are some of the ways forest bathing can support our mental and physical health.

### IT REDUCES STRESS.

Surprising no one, research indicates that time spent in a forest setting relaxes us. Specifically, studies gathered by Japanese researchers show that it reduces levels of salivary cortisol (a key stress hormone) by about 15 percent, and can lower blood pressure. Even looking at images of forests can produce positive emotional effects.

### IT SUPPORTS MOOD AND RELIEVES DEPRESSION.

Not only does time among trees relieve everyday stress, but it also may help treat more-tenacious mental health issues. One study found that patients diagnosed with major depressive disorder who received cognitive behavioral therapy in a forest setting experienced substantially greater symptom relief than patients treated in a hospital.

### IT INCREASES IMMUNE FUNCTION.

Trees and plants emit airborne chemicals called phytoncides. These volatile organic compounds help protect the plants from insects and rot, and when humans inhale phytoncides, they protect our health too.

Japanese researchers observing a dozen men found that after three two-hour hikes in a forest, the subjects showed a 50 percent increase

in natural killer cells — key players in the immune system that help fight viruses and tumors. Additional studies have shown that these benefits may last up to a month after exposure.

### IT IMPROVES FOCUS AND CREATIVITY.

Focusing the mind requires energy and effort. Accordingly, trying to focus on one task while we’re distracted by a variety of competing stimuli (as most of us do on most days) can produce “directed attention fatigue” — the sense of feeling cognitively drained.

Spending time in nature allows our attention to wander, giving it a break. This helps renew our cognitive capacity. One 2012 study found that participants in an Outward Bound program who spent four days in nature improved their performance on creative problem-solving tasks by 50 percent.

### IT RESTORES OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH NATURE.

Clifford believes that forest bathing does not simply provide a connection to nature; it helps us *remember* our connection to it. And an awareness of our innate place in nature can help sustain us.

“When the forest is allowed its place within you, it supports your body’s natural capacity for wellness and healing.”

COURTNEY HELGOE is the *Experience Life* features editor.



# 35 Ways to Make the Most of Summer

Remember when summer used to be fun? Discover the joys of the season all over again.



BY LAINE BERGESON BECCO

When you were a kid, summer activities were a great escape. The only goal each day was to figure out the bigger thrill: hide-and-seek with the neighbor kids, a game of catch with your brother, or rereading *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole, Aged 13¾*. You were completely free. Fun was your only endgame.

You're an adult now, and that comes with its own benefits: You can stay up as late as you like playing penny poker with your neighbors, rent a camper and tour Yellowstone, swim in the deep end.

But when was the last time you actually did any of that? When was the last time you spent a whole after-

noon on an inflatable raft, sipping sun tea and reading a great mystery?

If your answer is "Gosh, I just took a day off last week," but all you did was run errands, that doesn't count. Crossing things off your to-do list might feel satisfying, but it rarely feels joyful. And joy is the name of the game this summer.

Has it been so long since you planned for summer fun that you're not even sure what it looks like?

To help you kick things off, we gathered our top suggestions for making the most of the season. Use this list as a jumping-off point for your own brainstorming. And whatever you decide to do, have fun! Summer's best days will be here (and gone) before you know it.



## BE A TOURIST IN YOUR OWN TOWN.

When you live somewhere long enough, it can lose its allure as a destination and simply become a place where you buy groceries and get your car serviced. This summer, treat your hometown like a new-to-you destination.

**(1) Tour your city's local landmarks.** Is your city known for its fountains? Parks? Boardwalks? Early American architecture? Take some time to tour your area's attractions.

If you've already seen them all, **(2) design a custom tour** based on your own personal interests. Love local food? Visit your city's farmers' markets. Coffee enthusiast? Check out artisan coffeehouses. Enjoy biking? Tour the local parks and byways on two wheels.

Or head inside and **(3) explore local art museums.**

You can also **(4) explore other types of museums.** Most cities host a variety — history museums, science museums, children's museums, transportation museums — and many feature obscure collections that will make for a memorable trip.

Or **(5) peruse outdoor collections** and other unique sites, such as plant conservatories, arboretums, and sculpture parks. Or take a day trip to see a quirky landmark, like the world's largest ball of twine.

**(6) Find a schedule of special summer events,** such as art fairs, block parties, neighborhood garage sales, concerts or movies in the park, food fairs, guided nature hikes in city parks, or stargazing meetups.

Or be spontaneous; **(7) see a matinee in the middle of the week.**



### MAKE A SPLASH.

Water and summer go together like vanilla ice cream and chocolate sauce. The most obvious way to get off dry land is to **(8) go swimming**. Choose whatever body of water feels most inviting — a lake, river, or pool. **(9) Learn a new swim stroke**.

Spend quality time just **(10) floating and staring at the sky**. **(11) Go tubing down the nearest river**, or **(12) rent a stand-up paddleboard at a nearby lake**.

When you're done, **(13) skip stones along the shore**.

### LEARN SOMETHING NEW.

Treat the summer like a free semester — but not the daunting and dull I-have-to-take-this-class-to-graduate kind. Make it a semester filled with learning all the things you've wanted to try but have never gotten around to.

**(14) Learn another language** with an app. You can listen on your commute or while you work out or walk the dog.

**(15) Study the constellations**; lying outside under the stars is half the fun. So is sharing the knowledge with your family or friends.

**(16) Join or start a summer book club**.

**(17) Try out a new fitness or dance class** and discover a type of movement you really love.



### REDISCOVER YOUR OWN BACKYARD.

What do you do most often in your backyard? Pick up dog poop? Traverse it to take out the garbage? Enough!

**(18) Have a family picnic in your backyard**, followed by a game of catch. You'll feel like you've been on a mini vacation.

**(19) Set up camp in your backyard**. Pitch a tent, build a fire, roast some kebabs, watch the stars. In the morning, make coffee over an open fire.

**(20) Start a garden or tend your existing one**. When it's harvest time, **(21) grill the veggies**: Just toss or brush them with olive oil, salt, and pepper prior to grilling, then squeeze on a little lemon once you've pulled them off the fire.

For dessert, **(22) fire roast some peaches**, and enjoy the enticing aroma wafting across your yard.

If you have a deck and a lawn chair, or a shared courtyard, or even just a small stretch of earth and the ability to sit cross-legged, use it to **(23) spend five minutes outside before work**. Bring a cup of coffee and the newspaper, or just sit in silence.

At sunset, **(24) spend a few minutes in the front yard** enjoying the evening light and waving to your neighbors.



### CHANNEL YOUR INNER CHILD.

Your interests have probably evolved since you were a youngster, but that doesn't mean what you did as a kid isn't still a blast. So, invoke your inner 11-year-old, and **(25) play Frisbee with your best friend**.

**(26) Hit the nearest water park**. Try out the biggest slide at least once. Next time it's your turn to handle the yard work, **(27) mow your name into the lawn** or **(28) mow in a maze** for your kids and then chase them through it.

Grab a ball and your neighbor and **(29) play a pickup basketball game** at the park, or invite your cousins over to **(30) play bocce ball**.

In the evening, invite friends over to **(31) play board games**. Include a few that you played as a kid — Monopoly? Battleship? The Game of Life?

**(32) Re-create summer camp**: Gather some adult friends and organize a day of crafting and outdoor activities, like canoeing. Build a fire in the evening and roast marshmallows.

Engage in the youthful art of "ditching" and **(33) take the morning off** to treat your significant other, a buddy, or yourself to a leisurely breakfast at home or at your favorite eatery.

### BE LAZY.

Last but not least, be sure to carve out some quality time to **(34) do absolutely nothing**.

And if that nothing can be done while **(35) hanging in a hammock**, so much the better. ☺



LAINA BERGESON BECCO is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.



YOUR GUIDE TO

# BACK TO SCHOOL

SNACKS

Finding grab-and-go snacks that are both nutritious and yummy is not a parent's easiest task. Save time and mental anguish this back-to-school season by picking up these snacks from your favorite local market.



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GoGo squeeZ recently added these latest innovations, which provide a comprehensive offering of nutritional benefits for children, including helping keep their immune systems strong, supporting their brains, and boosting gut health.





# Of Peril and Possibility

BY **BAHRAM AKRADI**

**In many ways**, this is just the next chapter in the fascinating story of human existence — the ongoing mystery of who we are and how we're wired. A drama of human versus machine, light versus dark, good versus evil.

The story starts in caves with hunters and gatherers, our existence today thanks to the survival of the strongest and fittest. Over time, our brains evolved, and we began making tools out of stone, wood, and bone. Then plows from forked sticks. Hoes of stone. Things started to move with gears and pulleys.

The advantage shifted from muscle and speed to invention and efficacy: Who could harness the power of water, fire, and steam? The transition from “simple” to “self-acting” machines accelerated quickly, driven by the desire for better productivity.

We entered an age of intelligence, a time for our more developed brains to think and solve problems. The need for skilled labor faded. Mechanization turned to computation, and through iteration, we made more and more impressive calculations. It was initially slow as we were limited by bytes and bandwidth, waiting long minutes for dial-ups and downloads.

But we kept moving forward and found ourselves in a web where information was as available as oxygen. Once again, the paradigm shifted: With so much data at our fingertips, we faced the real test of figuring out what we could do with all of it.

Many of us have experienced the evolution from clunky desktop computers to supercomputers smaller than a credit card. Our contemporaries have launched rockets, experimented with self-driving cars, and photographed black

holes. Yet this pales in comparison with what we're now facing.

The age of artificial intelligence (AI) is here — it's actually been here for a while. The concept gained traction early in the 20th century through science fiction, inspiring the scientists and innovators of the next generations. Hollywood, too, became consumed with the idea: Movies like *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* stoked our imaginations.

In some ways, it's already working for us: unlocking phones through facial recognition, helping Alexa gather the current weather, providing personalized recommendations from Netflix and Nordstrom. Yet in just the last few months, AI has dominated headlines and conversations all around us.

**Our responsibility?  
To understand AI and  
engage with it —  
and fast.**

The definition of AI is intelligence demonstrated by machines — a catch-all term for applications that perform complex tasks quickly, mimicking intelligent human behavior, all with considerably less human input.

The operative word here is *quickly*: AI is expanding logarithmically, at a rate unlike any past progression.

And many aren't wasting time adopting it. In November 2022, the natural-language processing tool ChatGPT was launched. It answers questions, composes emails, and writes essays with human-like characteristics. Built for persuasion and seemingly equipped with emotion, it offers help to those who need it,

assistance to the busy, friendship to the lonely. With one million users in its first five days, it has the fastest-growing user base of all time.

ChatGPT is only one in a great big sea of new tools and applications. They're being used to improve and advance a variety of industries, objectives, and efforts.

Some experts predict AI's computing abilities may exceed the processing power of the most intelligent human brain on earth by midcentury. Futurist Ray Kurzweil, for instance, says that “2029 is the consistent date I have predicted for when an AI will pass a valid Turing test and therefore achieve human levels of intelligence. I have set the date 2045 for the ‘Singularity,’ which is when we will multiply our effective intelligence a billionfold by merging with the intelligence we have created.”

Based on the current rapid pace of development, this is highly probable — and offers excitement and anticipation, uncertainty and fear, concern and optimism.

“AI is probably the most important thing humanity has ever worked on. I think of it as something more profound than electricity or fire,” says Google CEO Sundar Pichai.

Meanwhile, Tesla's Elon Musk has cautioned, “I think we should be very careful about artificial intelligence. If I were to guess at what our biggest existential threat is, it's probably that. . . . With artificial intelligence, we are summoning the demon.”

Whether your reaction is “This is exciting” or “This is the end,” AI is permeating our lives — and it's unlike anything we've experienced. Yet we can approach it the same way we approach the many things in life that

challenge and change us: That is, to look at it from multiple perspectives, including both peril and possibility.

From a positive angle, design, manufacturing, marketing, distribution, and more can all be accomplished more efficiently with AI. Routine work is more easily completed by a workforce that doesn't call in sick, take vacations, or need benefits. It can take care of the dull and laborious, liberating us to focus on what intrigues us. It can give time back to us.

Health, wellness, and healthcare are already experiencing the effects of AI. Many of us monitor our own health with smart devices that provide smarter data. Doctors — given access to this wealth of information — can detect and protect with greater speed and accuracy, potentially avoiding and curing disease, and increasing lifespans.

Metropolitan areas are on their way to becoming “smart cities,” in which technology will assist in environmental planning, resource management, and energy utilization.

On the economic front, some estimates say AI could increase global GDP by \$15.7 trillion by 2030. In education, using AI as an instructional aid has the potential to yield better test scores and overall performance.

There's more to this glass-half-full perspective. But now, a few things that scare us.

With many day-to-day tasks already being automated with AI, our cognitive, social, and survival skills may diminish. This reliance could lessen human agency and autonomy, depleting control over attitudes, behaviors, and decisions.

Humans are wired to need other humans, and we're already experiencing the effects of less of each other. There's more depression, anxiety, and anger in a society that's restless, irritated, and isolated. Many face life-threatening loneliness.

We used to primarily interact at work, school, clubs, and churches. Now, through social media, our contact is continuous, though the concept of community has eroded; even our sense of time has shifted.

We're confused with fake videos, photos, and content. We don't know what is real and what is misinformation. Data can be incorrect or biased. AI can't read between lines, inject wit, or understand context.

Will we surpass our ability to use technology wisely? Morally? Humanely?

By whom, and how, are these tools, platforms, and networks engineered, controlled, and distributed? If only a few decide how AI is used, will everyone else be dependent on their decisions? Should AI be regulated here and abroad — and to what extent?

**Intelligence is only one aspect of being human.**

Information is power, and entities big and small — including governments and organizations — gather and leverage data to affect communications, finance, transportation, power grids, and weapon systems. Who decides how they use AI to put it to work?

AI automation of skills and tasks could further exacerbate social and economic disparities, leaving more people — including more in the middle class — without jobs. Goldman Sachs economists predict that some 300 million full-time jobs could be automated at least partly in the coming years.

Whatever the risks and however societies and governments move to address them, AI will transform us.

Our abilities to communicate, write, and remember — all faculties that make us human — may weaken. We may forget we're already equipped with an advanced operating system.

As linguists Noam Chomsky and Ian Roberts, along with philosopher and AI expert Jeffrey Watumull, note in a recent *New York Times* opinion piece, intelligence is not just extrapolating answers. The deepest flaw of machine learning is “the absence of the most critical capacity of any intelligence: to say not only what is the case, what was the case, and what will be the

case — that's description and prediction — but also what is not the case and what could and could not be the case. Those are the ingredients of explanation, the mark of true intelligence.”

Albert Einstein once said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge.” And in *Letters to a Young Poet*, Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke reminds us: “I want to beg you . . . to be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and to try to love the *questions themselves* like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. *Live* the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

AI is here — there's no denying or stopping it. So, our responsibility? Understand it and engage with it — and fast. Study the development. Keep up and use it where it is beneficial.

At the same time, continue to welcome unexpected insights and each light-bulb moment. Find the fun in forming and testing a hypothesis. Don't be afraid to follow gut feelings. Get into debates, incite discussions. Ask for — and get — a good explanation.

Intelligence is only one aspect of being human. We are brilliant, complicated constellations — an accumulation of histories, idiosyncrasies, memories, sensations; an array of atoms assembled for just one finite experience.

Which takes us back to the beginning and to the twists and turns of our story. The pages are turning faster than ever as we face peril and possibility beyond our wildest imagination. True to our species, we must make the best of it and keep moving forward: The next chapter is as much about our humanity as it is about AI and technology. ☺



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We travel, some of us  
forever, **to seek other  
states, other lives,  
other souls.**

— ANAÏS NIN



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