



HEALTHY. HAPPY. FOR REAL.

Experience Life

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LIFE TIME





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Experience Life DIGITAL



A Mindful New Year

Many people start the year off with resolutions that focus on perfection and hard-hitting goals. Instead, why not set an intention to create a life that's happier and more sustainable? In this collection, we've curated some of our favorite *Experience Life* articles to help you achieve a more authentic and fulfilling life in the year ahead. Scan the QR code below or go to ELmag.com/mindfulnewyear.



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PLANT-BASED COMFORT FOOD

With a few vegan substitutions, your favorite dishes can still be cozy, satisfying, and nutritious.

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Explore the causes of the world's fastest-growing neurological disorder — and discover the new treatments helping patients live longer, more productive lives.

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This wonder ingredient can help soften skin, reduce joint pain, relieve constipation, and more. Find out how at ELmag.com/castoroil.

DIVERSIFY YOUR MOVEMENT

In this podcast episode, biomechanist Katy Bowman, MS, author of *My Perfect Movement Plan*, explains why one-size-fits-all exercise programs don't work — and shares a self-assessment activity to create a purposeful, meaningful, and functional fitness plan. Scan the QR code or visit ELmag.com/movementdietpodcast to listen.

TALKS



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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 experiences. We respect individuals' pronouns and personal descriptors; for this reason, terms may vary from article to article.

5 LESSONS FOR 2025

"ABOUT HALFWAY DONE. I'm really struggling — walking more than I want, but I'm going." This is the voice text I sent to my husband as I approached the halfway point of my first marathon, this past October. At that point, I wasn't confident I could finish; since about mile 10, I'd been struggling to shift my mindset from *I'm not sure I can* to *I can*.

"One step at a time," he quickly responded. "Pick out something and push past it. Eat something. It's going to get easier once you get past the lakes. You've got it."

It turns out, I *did* have it. Five hours and three minutes after starting — and after 18 weeks of training and nearly 80 training runs — I crossed the finish line. Along the way, I learned a ton about myself, about my body's capabilities, and about the role of willingness in the face of challenges.

As I head into a new year, I'm carrying these lessons and reminders from my marathon experience with me:

1. Accomplishments — big and small — are worth celebrating, even if they don't come about or turn out quite as you envisioned. In the first week or so after the marathon, I found myself feeling disappointed with my finish time. I had hoped to complete it in under five hours, and those extra three minutes really bummed me out.

Every time someone asked about the experience, I'd downplay the achievement with a reply like, "It was good, but I was slow" or "I walked too much." It was only after a few people reminded me — each in their own kind way — that finishing a marathon is a big deal that I began shifting my perspective *and* my response: "I'm proud I did it and can say I'm a marathoner." In 2025, I want to view more of my efforts and wins as confetti-worthy.

2. Our support systems and communities matter. The encouragement from my husband, daughters, family, friends, colleagues, and fellow runners got me through the toughest moments in training and the race. Their belief in my ability to do this hard thing helped me believe in myself, too.

3. Strategic nutrition can make all the difference. Knowing how to properly fuel my body so I could meet the demands of my training efforts was critical. It took some trial and error, but by race day I had a plan. Though I made a few pivots — why not drink that pickle juice at mile 13?! — largely sticking with what had already worked proved to be key. For me, that's true when it comes to everyday nutrition as well.

4. Our bodies can be astonishingly resilient. I went from feeling at the halfway point like I might not finish to running my strongest miles over the next hour. I went from hobbling for the first 24 hours after finishing the race to going on a recovery jog four days later. The way our bodies can bounce back after serious physical challenges never ceases to amaze me. They are so much more capable than we often realize.

5. Willingness is essential when pursuing change — or taking on a tough challenge. As Pilar Gerasimo, *Experience Life's* founding editor, once wrote: "Willingness . . . is full of open-minded inquiries, like: . . . What would happen if I tried this? What would be most helpful now? . . . Willingness is continually reborn — and it gets smarter and stronger each time around." I have to remind myself of this whenever doubts creep in; not just during marathon training but in life. It's about being curious and exploring beyond the excuses.

What have *you* learned in the past year? Could you apply that newfound wisdom to hurdles you may face in 2025? It's time to find out.

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.



Along the way, I learned a ton about myself, about my body's capabilities, **and about the role of willingness in the face of challenges.**



YOUR THOUGHTS?

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TALK TO US

INSPIRATION FOR ALL

✉ I've learned so much in your magazine about actual healthy practices that aren't presented anywhere else. Most fitness magazines are geared to fitness models. I'm a regular person with a job, and I really appreciate how your magazine manages to feature elite athletes as well as regular people with challenges, and make it all inspiring for people at any fitness level.

Carrie A.

✉ Thank you for the extended article on pro-aging ("How to Become a Pro-Ager," September/October 2024). I am an 81-year-old woman who wants to stay active but needs some support and incentive. My insurance covers health and gym facilities, but I have yet to find someone who understands, much less works directly with, those of us over 70. Perhaps you might look into providing coaching for the over-70 crowd in each magazine? I still think yours is the best health magazine in circulation.

Jo Ann F.

BALANCING ACTS

📱 I believe my cannabis use with my antidepressant gets me through my adult years ("Can You Use Marijuana While on Antidepressants?," September/October 2024). Both zero in on the dopamine in my brain. It's like they are holding hands going down the same road.

Linda S.

📱 I'm currently in therapy for vestibular rehab ("How to Treat Dizziness and Vertigo," June 2024). It's a challenge, but I'll keep at it. There were times I couldn't walk down a grocery aisle or be in the library without intense dizzy spells.

Doreen

SURVIVAL INSTINCTS

📱 My husband has survived four cancers in five years and is doing remarkably well at 81 ("What Is the



Terrain Theory of Cancer?," September/October 2024). He's improved his diet by mainly controlling his sweet tooth, and he's become a regular exerciser. He watches his sleep and manages stress, and we stay social and active. I have always made our house, food, and lives as natural and organic as possible.

Robin K.

PROS AND CONS OF TATTOOS

📱 I'm 41 years old and heavily tattooed, and I've been getting tattooed for over half of my life ("Are Tattoos Harmful or Helpful to Your Health?," July/August 2024). I'm probably the healthiest I've ever been, but I'm most likely going to die of skin cancer. Although they are very helpful with

self-esteem issues, tattoos are not the healthiest idea for skin.

Billy C.

GRATEFUL FOR GREENERY

📱 I know that green spaces calm me ("Banking on the Bucolic Brain," August 2024). There is less noise, and I am less irritated by neighbors and unwanted visits by folks trying to sell me things. There's less traffic and the associated noise and pollution. This, in turn, gives me a peace I never felt in a busy neighborhood.

I listen to the birds and am more aware of everything around me. I know that I'm less inclined to worry about things and more inclined to live in appreciation of the simple things around me. If it doesn't put off dementia, at least I enjoy what life has to offer.

Letty A.

AN ARTFUL CHANGE

📱 I purchased Samantha Dion Baker's book *Draw Your Day: An Inspiring Guide to Keeping a Sketch Journal* to take on my recent two-week vacation to Rocky Mountain National Park ("Draw Your Day," September 2019). By reading it, I was able to elevate my journals into something fun and interesting — and I am not an accomplished artist.

Meg

HEALTHY HABITS

📱 Walking has been the most consistent part of my exercise routine throughout my life ("Counting Your Steps?," July/August 2024). I just love it. I never ever feel worse after a walk.

@mrsenfield

📱 There's truth in the apple-a-day idea ("How to Eat Fruit Without Spiking Your Blood Sugar," July/August 2024). My husband has diabetes. Since May, he has been eating an apple as his end-of-day snack. We find that his blood sugar remains steady rather than dropping low in the middle of the night.

@2fit2gether_fitness

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MOVE

to Reduce Low-Back Pain

WHEN LOW-BACK PAIN

strikes, you might feel like confining yourself to the couch or spending your days in bed. Yet new research suggests that moving more is a potent remedy.

In a randomized study published in *The Lancet* and funded by the National Health and Medical Research Council in Australia, researchers compared the effectiveness of an individualized, progressive walking treatment for low-back pain with that of a no-treatment protocol.

The 701 participants had a mean age of 54 and had all suffered from low-back pain. Women made up 81 percent of those studied: The researchers note that “low-back pain is more prevalent in females, and the prevalence increases with age.”

The findings show that a walking regimen “substantially reduced low-back pain recurrence compared with a no-treatment control group in adults who were not previously engaging in regular physical activity.”

Walking has long been hailed for its health benefits. Regular walking strengthens muscles that support the spine, promotes blood circulation, and reduces joint and muscle stiffness.

Blood circulation is key: It flushes away waste products from cells and delivers essential oxygen, nutrients, and hormones to all areas of the body. As blood flow increases, it accelerates the healing process.

619 Million

The number of people affected by low-back pain in 2020, according to the World Health Organization.

Low-back pain is the leading cause of disability worldwide, and most people will suffer from it at least once in their life.

The benefits of walking could be attributed to the “gentle movements, loading and strengthening of the spinal structures and muscles, the relaxation and stress relief exercise provides, and the release of feel-good endorphins,” explains the study’s corresponding author, Natasha Pocovi, PhD, a postdoctoral fellow at

the Department of Health Sciences at Macquarie University in Sydney.

Yet many people avoid even this basic movement pattern, hanging on to the long-standing misconception that movement exacerbates low-back pain, says master trainer Danny King, director of performance and recovery at Life Time.

In reality, King says, for those who are injured or in a period of pain, “trying to keep up movement seems to speed up healing and decreases the likelihood of another low-back episode.”

“There is a widespread belief that protecting the back with rest is needed, leading to a belief that movement can cause harm,” says Pocovi. “We now understand this to simply not be true. Instead, keeping sensibly active within the limits of pain and trying to keep to your usual routine as best [as] possible will result in a quicker recovery and reduce the chances of a future episode. Based on our trial findings, walking seems a nice way to achieve this.”

King advises people to try walking for 30 minutes each day. “Use pain as your guide, but general recommendations are to get at least 7,500 steps per day.”

— CLAIRE CARVER

3 NUTRITION TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2025

One thing is certain about the new year: Trends abound. When it comes to what you consume, these are a few worth noting.

1. ESSENTIAL ELECTROLYTES

"Hydration is about much more than water intake — it's impacted by a lot of factors, and how your body retains water (or does not) relies on electrolyte balance," explains Samantha McKinney, RD, CPT, registered dietitian and Life Time's national program manager for nutrition.

"There are a lot of scenarios that change your hydration and electrolyte needs, including ongoing stress, pregnancy, lactation, heat exposure, lower-carbohydrate diets, and more. Using a quality electrolyte blend that does not have added sugar or artificial ingredients and is third-party tested is a great way to stay on top of hydration more effectively.

"And since hydration is tied to appetite regulation, workout performance, digestion, detoxification, and more, using a well-rounded blend is great to do first thing in the morning and anytime you exercise or are going to be sweating."



2. MUSHROOM MAGIC

The nutritional and medicinal power of mushrooms may gain even more understanding and attention in 2025. Some grocery stores now carry — in addition to some better-known varieties — shiitake, chanterelle, oyster, lion's mane, and more, making cooking with a variety of fungi easier. And many medicinal mushrooms are adaptogenic, so they can provide support when you're stressed or anxious. (Read more about the health benefits of medicinal mushrooms at ELmag.com/mushrooms.)

3. CROSS-FUNCTIONAL COLOSTRUM

Colostrum supplementation, originally popularized in the bodybuilding community for muscle growth and performance, has accelerated due to its purported impacts on gut health, immunity, skin health, hair, and more, McKinney reports. "It's often referred to as a superfood [because it contains] bioactive ingredients such as growth factors . . . and antibodies, as it comes from the first milk produced by a cow for her calf."

The health benefits of bioactive compounds include the prevention or treatment of several diseases. (Most reputable colostrum providers are diligent in ensuring that first-milking colostrum is gathered only after newborn calves are fed.)

Adds McKinney: "Colostrum may not be ideal in those who don't tolerate dairy, since it's sourced from milk — though a lot of lactose-sensitive individuals claim they don't experience ill effects from using it. However, it is not appropriate for anyone with a milk allergy."

— EXPERIENCE LIFE STAFF



ASTHMA INHALERS GOING GREEN

The pocket inhalers many people use to aid their breathing may be contributing to the climate crisis — and users' respiratory issues.

Some 940 million inhalers of all types are sold annually worldwide. They're typically prescribed for people with asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and other chronic lung diseases.

Each puff from a metered-dose inhaler emits a hydro-

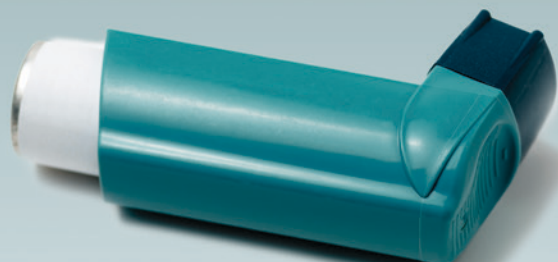
fluorocarbon gas that can be thousands of times more potent than the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, according to the Environmental Protection Agency. This creates a vicious cycle: The gas exacerbates climate change, which results in more forest fires and air pollution, which in turn makes inhalers even more necessary.

In recent years, however, dry-powder inhalers (DPIs) have become popular in Europe for their more eco-

friendly operation — and their adoption is increasing in the United States. Though DPIs can be trickier to use, typically cost more, and are not yet available for all con-

ditions, it's worth exploring a potential shift to this greener option with your healthcare provider — for your health and that of the planet too.

— EXPERIENCE LIFE STAFF



MAPPING THE BRAIN'S MANY MYSTERY CELLS

The brain is the body's most complex organ, according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. And though the average human brain weighs a mere 3 pounds — somewhere in the neighborhood of a pineapple — it contains a labyrinth of 86 billion intricately networked neurons and nonneuronal cells, all with different but essential responsibilities.

In 2017, the National Institutes of Health launched its Brain Research Through Advancing Innovative Neurotechnologies Initiative, or the BRAIN Initiative. The \$375 million project involves an international consortium of research centers focused on exploring and cataloging human, primate, and rodent brain-cell types.

The group's research has currently identified more than 3,300 types of human brain cells — far more than was previously suspected. Yet the function of myriad cells remains mysterious.

The researchers' findings were published in more than 20 papers in 2023. In one of the studies, University of California San Diego researchers analyzed 1.1 million human brain cells to create detailed maps of gene switches in brain-cell types. They discovered links between characteristics of cell types and common neuropsychiatric disorders, including schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, Alzheimer's disease, and major depression.

"The human brain isn't homogenous," explains senior study author Bing Ren, PhD, professor at the University of California San Diego School of Medicine, in a press release. "It's made up of an enormously complex network of neurons and nonneuronal cells, with each serving different functions. Mapping out the different types of cells in the brain and understanding how they work together will ultimately help us discover new therapies that can target individual cell types relevant to specific diseases."

— CLAIRE CARVER

NATURAL REMEDIES FOR PMS

Between menarche and menopause, premenstrual syndrome (PMS) symptoms may affect up to 90 percent of women. The many and varied symptoms include headaches, breast tenderness, bloating, nausea, fatigue, insomnia, acne breakouts, and mood-related symptoms, like depression and irritability.

Ever-changing hormones are to blame.

Hormonal fluctuations throughout monthly cycles are natural. As people weather these changes, a bit of acne or bloating isn't unusual. But if someone is frequently in excessive discomfort, it's likely time to take a closer look.

"If you are experiencing premenstrual mood or physical problems, your body is signaling that something is awry physiologically," says functional-medicine physician Sara Szal Gottfried, MD, author of *The Hormone Cure*. "Potential causes? A hormonal imbalance. Or cellular dysfunction. Or a combination of the two."

Hormonal birth control is an oft-prescribed method for curbing symptoms, but it's not a good fit for everyone.

"The pill masks symptoms by suppressing ovulation with synthetic hormones," Szal Gottfried explains. While she acknowledges that medication can be necessary in certain circumstances — like for patients with endometriosis — it's not always the best option for those with mild to moderate symptoms.

For those individuals, there are nonhormonal ways to manage PMS, including exercise. Research shows it can reduce symptoms like bloating, depression, and irritability.

A diet rich in healthy fats, fiber, and high-quality protein sources may reduce the severity of PMS too. Avocados, dark chocolate, fatty fish, and leafy greens are good choices. It's best to avoid processed foods, sugar, caffeine, and alcohol, which may exacerbate symptoms.

While tweaking your lifestyle can help, you may also find your spice cupboard and herb garden brimming with plant-based remedies that can soothe nausea, bloating, and even those dreaded cramps.

Herbal remedies are widely considered safe by most integrative-medicine practitioners, but always check with your doctor before starting a new regimen, especially if you take any medications or have other health conditions.

"Most herbalists use a mixture of herbs rather than a single one," explains herbalist Catherine Tupper, BM, BS, BSc.

She stresses the importance of working with "an herbalist you trust. They will find the most appropriate herbs from a safe source and monitor your progress." Buy herbs online only from a company you know well, she adds.

If PMS has been disrupting your life, discover 10 plant-based remedies to find relief at [ELmag.com/pms](https://www.ELmag.com/pms).

— CAMILLE BERRY





Should Social Media Carry **WARNING LABELS?**

SOCIAL MEDIA is an integral part of many adolescents' lives today. In response to concerns from parents, educators, and healthcare professionals, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, MD, MBA, is advocating for warning labels on social media platforms. In a mid-2024 guest essay in *The New York Times*, Murthy emphasizes that social media use significantly contributes to the mental health crisis among young people.

"Adolescents who spend more than three hours a day on social media face double the risk of anxiety and depression symptoms, and the average daily use in this age group, as of the summer of 2023, was 4.8 hours," Murthy writes. "Additionally, nearly half of adolescents report that social media makes them feel worse about their bodies."

More than 90 percent of American teens report using at least one social media platform, with some reporting that they use YouTube and TikTok almost constantly, according to recent surveys. While these platforms offer opportunities for social interaction and self-expression, they also pose significant risks to mental and emotional well-being.

Psychologist Jean Twenge, PhD, has long expressed concerns about the impact of screen time on youth. She outlines the issue in her book *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy — and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood — and What That Means for the Rest of Us*. Twenge's research suggests a direct correlation between the rise in social media use and a decline in mental health among adolescents.

Parents often struggle with feelings of helplessness and isolation when contending with the toxic nature and hidden dangers of social media.

A recent study, published in *Pediatric Research*, found that adolescents take cues for social media usage from adults in their lives. High parental screen use and family mealtime screen use were associated with more overall problematic screen use among adolescents.

"It is important that parents act as role models for their children," says study lead author Jason Nagata, MD. "Limiting screen use is a challenge for adults and children alike given notifications, addictive algorithms, and integration with communication and work. I do think it is important for parents to

try to practice what they preach. For instance, if parents make a family rule not to use screens at mealtime, they should try to follow the rules also."

A 2022 article in *American Economic Review* reports that 31 percent of the time people spend on social media is due to self-control problems; a study published in the journal *CyberPsychology & Behavior* compares addictive internet use with gambling disorder, the only formally diagnosable behavioral addiction.

Murthy explains that a surgeon general's warning label "would regularly remind parents and adolescents that social media has not been proven safe."

In his *Times* essay, Murthy argues that legislation should protect young people from various online dangers. He advocates for laws to shield children from online harassment, abuse, and exploitation, and from exposure to extreme violence and sexual content. 📱

— ELLA ROBERTS



LEARN MORE

For tips on how to cope with social media, see [ELmag.com/socialmedia](https://www.ELmag.com/socialmedia).

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ANY WORKOUT"**



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A WHOLE NEW FOCUS

Tennis legend Andre Agassi on his passion for pickleball and the driving motivation behind his philanthropic work.

BY CALLIE FREDRICKSON

PHOTOS BY KWAKU ALSTON



HE'S A MAN of many titles. To name a few: Former world No. 1 tennis player. Eight-time major champion, claiming titles in each of the four major tennis tournaments — Wimbledon, the Australian Open, the French Open, and the U.S. Open — at least once. Olympic gold medalist. Father, husband, philanthropist. And, most recently, pickleball enthusiast. Andre Agassi has accomplished a lot on and off the court.

Since retiring from professional tennis in 2006, Agassi, 54, has kept busy. He published his memoir, *Open*, in 2009; expanded the efforts of his education-focused foundation (more on that in just a bit); and remained involved in the racquet-sports world, discovering the joy of pickleball along the way.

"I have this outlet athletically and physically," Agassi says. "There are so many reasons why I can talk about loving pickleball."

That passion has led to a growing awareness of and participation in the sport. In early 2024, Agassi was appointed the inaugural chair of Life Time's newly formed pickleball and tennis board. Together with cochair Bahram Akradi, the company's founder, chairman, and CEO, they're expanding racquet-sports access, enhancing programming, and building community across the nation.

"It was a no-brainer for me to participate in an organization that is the largest provider of pickleball by far," Agassi explains.

Yet it's playing the game that he enjoys most. "In tennis, I can push myself to extreme movement with the rotational wear

and tear, and that really comes at a higher price for me at this stage. You wake up the next day and sometimes hurt in places that aren't great places to hurt.

"I never feel that way after playing pickleball. If I hurt, it's only muscular and soreness. It's a good kind of pain."

Along with his wife, fellow tennis star Steffi Graf, Agassi will be playing in the Pickleball Slam 3 in Las Vegas in February 2025. "My wife and I will be taking on [tennis stars] Andy Roddick and Genie Bouchard. I think it's going to be an awesome matchup," he says. "Steph and I have been playing a lot more together and have been enjoying pickleball as a couple in this new season of life."

Agassi and Roddick were partners during the first Pickleball Slam, in April 2023. "I have

A man in a dark long-sleeved shirt is shown in profile, looking towards the left. He is holding a red and black pickleball paddle with the word "PICKLEBALL" and a signature on it. He is also holding a bright yellow-green pickleball in his other hand. The background is a solid dark blue.

"I have this outlet athletically and physically.
There are so many reasons why I can talk about loving pickleball."

fond memories of being with him that first year,” Agassi says. “I’m excited for him to be back and also to bring Genie to the event. She’s recognized by tennis athletes for how she’s embraced pickleball, and I have a great deal of appreciation for her.”

BEYOND THE COURT

When he’s not on a pickleball court, Agassi spends time growing the Andre Agassi Foundation for Education. Since 1994, the organization has provided educational opportunities and resources to underserved populations.

“My philanthropic efforts have been focused on education, probably largely due to my own lack of education. With that lack of education, I sort of had a lack of choice in my life. And tennis was never really my choice; I just happened to be good at it. I struggled with my relationship with it for a lot of years,” he acknowledges.

“When I saw kids who didn’t really have a choice in their life, I was compelled to provide that through education,” he explains. “It has been so important to me to provide education in an equitable way to children who otherwise might not have that opportunity.”

With his close friend Bobby Turner, who taught him about navigating the business world, Agassi has opened 130 charter schools across the country.

“When you can find a private-sector solution to a daunting societal issue, you really have scalability and sustainability,” he notes. “And that’s what we’ve done.”

Q & A

WITH ANDRE AGASSI

EXPERIENCE LIFE • You are the inaugural chair of the racquet-sports board at Life Time. Can you explain how that started and what it entails?

ANDRE AGASSI • This started 15 years ago when I met Bahram Akradi, and we grew close with no business overlap or interest together — just a mutual respect for the other one’s world and execution of it.

A few years back, we started chatting about how it would be fun to do some things together that would be mutually beneficial. Bahram then approached me with this idea of the racquet-sports board maybe a year and a half ago and said, “I would love for you to sit on my team and be a voice of experience and direction.”

Bahram and I have talked so passionately about the growth of pickleball specifically, along with all racquet-sport endeavors, which is my background. I took him up on it and said to him, “Let’s see how this goes. If I can provide inspiration and hopefully guidance for how to best grow the things we love as individuals and Life Time as a company, that makes the world a better place.”

EL • Have you been playing more pickleball since taking on a more official role in growing the sport?

AA • My passion for pickleball would have continued regardless, but I have more reason to engage and to understand the sport through different lenses now. I can see the sport through the participation side of it, in some cases the facility side of it, and just the overall business side of it.

As it relates to Life Time, it’s definitely given me the platform to play more pickleball. But most importantly, it’s motivated me to understand the direction that pickleball can go.

EL • Do you prefer to play singles or doubles?

AA • With the right foursome for doubles — meaning an equal level of abilities — I think doubles pickleball is

more enjoyable. Singles is just more straightforward — explosive and shot making — and I always know what I’m going to get. It’s always going to be a great workout and I’m going to get better. If you have the wrong matchup in doubles, you’re not going to get better.

EL • What kind of movement brings you the most joy or satisfaction?

AA • Obviously I play pickleball and tennis, but I also enjoy golf and snowboarding too. When the family gets together, we enjoy snowboarding over certain seasons of the year. I typically need to distract myself with traditional workouts, and playing sports is a great way of doing that. I also prefer playing sports outside; getting vitamin D from the sun is a bonus. ☀

CALLIE FREDRICKSON is a senior content strategy specialist at Life Time.



BEHIND THE SCENES

For a peek at our photo shoot with Andre Agassi visit, ELmag.com/agassivideo.





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What's a nonnegotiable

HEALTHY HABIT

in your routine?

A few members of the *Experience Life* team share theirs.

A daily cup

of tea . . . or two or three! A cup of green tea in the morning has become my favorite ritual. It encourages me to start the day slowly and with gratitude. On a busier day, black tea gives me the energy boost I need to tackle anything. Stomachache? Ginger. Can't sleep? Chamomile. For both my mental and physical health, a cup of tea truly makes everything better.

— **Tatyana McNamara**, senior manager, multimedia

EVERY DAY, I MAKE TIME TO BE OUTSIDE.

The peace that I get from this helps me stay grateful, present, and more connected to my faith.

— **Claire Carver**, editorial intern



Sunscreen.

— **Maggie Fazeli Fard**, senior editor

Everything is negotiable, based on what my aging body tells me in any given moment, but I'm quite dedicated to my **morning reading, zazen, yoga, and strength-training routine.** And I generally feel remiss if I don't pedal my bike somewhere every day.

— **Craig Cox**, deputy editor



I eat, and drink the juice from, half a grapefruit every day.

If my immune system is humming along at a high level, I suspect I have the consistent dose of vitamin C from my favorite citrus to thank. The time I spend meticulously separating the membrane from the fruit with a small serrated knife is therapeutic — and the yield of perfectly sweet-tart juice is a refreshing start to each day.

— **Mike Oakes**, senior copy editor

HYDRATION. HYDRATION. HYDRATION.

Whether it's bike racing or sitting at the computer and working, I can feel (although I don't always immediately recognize) when I'm low on fluids. It's the simplest baseline health essential for me.

— **Michael Dregni**, deputy editor



A nightly walk with my dog,

Archie, while listening to *Death, Sex & Money*, *The New Yorker Radio Hour*, or any of my other favorite podcasts. The walk helps keep both my arthritis and obsessive brain at bay, and I always feel renewed when I return home.

— **Anjula Razdan**, senior director, digital



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Healing Connections

On realizing the importance of social bonds after becoming isolated while recovering from an injury.



BY SUZIE CHANG

LIKE MOST San Franciscans without a car, I'm used to walking everywhere. But that part of my routine came to a screeching halt in June 2017 when I fell while crossing a busy downtown street.

I was hurrying to catch a streetcar when I stumbled, landing on my hands and kneecaps. It didn't hurt much in the moment — the ground didn't even break the skin. Kind strangers rushed over to help me, and I was grateful but embarrassed by the fuss.

Because I was active and in excellent health, I didn't think much of the accident at the time. My knees seemed fine except for some minor swelling.

Four days later, however, massive inflammation and burning pain developed behind my knees, making walking and other everyday movements all but impossible.

For the next seven months, I couldn't walk more than two blocks at a time.

Suddenly homebound and isolated, I became unbearably lonely. I'd never been compelled to seek out friends or connections before, but I felt an aching absence where a larger support network could be. Inexplicably, the emotional pain was even more intolerable than the physical pain —

and I realized that, at 61, it was time to engage with the world in a new way.

ROOTS

When the pain started, the doctors said it was my immune system kicking in to heal the injury; there was nothing to do but wait it out.

Meanwhile, my minor injury had become a major deal. If I tried to walk through the pain, it intensified. I couldn't do any of my normal activities, like hiking, Zumba, or Pilates.

Forging deeper, more meaningful connections with others was integral to my physical recovery, and I'm confident that maintaining these bonds will continue to support my health in the future.

So I sat around the house icing the back of my knees and taking ridiculous amounts of ibuprofen, with little relief.

Anxiety and depression quickly set in. *Is this how the rest of my life will be?* I wondered. I'd never been one to shed tears, but I started crying daily. I felt so alone.

Suzie Chang's active lifestyle was put on hold after a fall in 2017. Since recovering, she's found renewed joy in activities like biking, traveling, and working out.

Before the accident, I'd maintained a small social circle. I didn't really have friends — I'd always been content by myself. When I socialized, it was with family members, coworkers, and my husband, Nicholas.

And this already-limited social network had shrunk just months before I fell. First my mother died, in February 2017, and then I retired a few months later from a very social career in corporate marketing.

Now, thanks to the injury, I had little contact with anyone outside my family. And I didn't want to overburden my loved ones with my problems, which included grief over the loss of my mother and the pains of adjusting to life after retirement. I didn't share the full depths of my depression with anyone.

A NEW LEAF

After what felt like an interminable period of loneliness, I willed myself to get out of the house. I started by hobbling out and catching the bus to a coffee shop. I'd sit alone at a table for hours just to be around other human beings.

Next, I challenged myself to chat with strangers in the coffee shop or on the bus. It felt awkward, but I was so hungry for connection. I didn't make any real friends, but it was a start.

Two months after I fell, Nicholas encouraged me to work with a personal trainer to keep my muscles from atrophying. When I made my way through the gym doors, my eyes welled up with tears. I was happy to be back in a social environment.

At the gym, I became inquisitive about people's lives. The more I conversed with those around me — even superficially — the better I felt. I'd ask, "What sort of work do you do?" or say, "I love what you're wearing." Sometimes I'd chat with others about workouts.

It felt easier to connect with people in this setting, where we were working toward similar goals in a shared space. Even though I'd come to the gym to improve my physical body, it was my social transformation that I came to appreciate the most.

Bit by bit, my efforts to connect with others were helping me become more thoughtful. I started noticing and acknowledging the people around me: the women who tidied the locker room; the barista who made my coffee; the guy who cleaned up trash around our condo. Often their faces lit up at the connection, and we'd both smile.

BRANCHING OUT

In early 2018, the pain behind my knees gradually faded away — as if by magic. At first I feared the pain would return, but weeks passed with no recurrence. After four months, I trusted that I was finally healed.

I believe my efforts to connect with others and find peace within myself may have helped bring me to a place of balance and safety where I could heal.



Suzie vacationing in Maui about 20 years ago.

And with the pain behind me, I had more energy for developing connections, so new friendships flourished. My early coffee-shop visits hadn't yielded lasting relationships, but

I started having better luck through Meetup groups.

Meetup's Shut Up & Write! group introduced me to other passionate writers, and I eventually felt comfortable enough to share a piece I'd written about caring for my mother as she was dying.

Thanks to the Retired Women Who Love to Travel group, I developed a close friendship with a woman whose dream was to go salmon fishing. I researched and arranged a trip for us as a surprise. She was delighted and we had a wonderful time together, even though the rough sea made fishing difficult.

As my social circle widened, I started trying activities further outside my comfort zone. I first assumed I'd hate pickleball, but I was happily proven wrong. Now I play with a lively group of friends.

I also began volunteering for Friendship Line, a 24/7 telephone helpline for older Californians experiencing loneliness and isolation. Initially, I feared the job would be difficult, but I discovered that I'm an empathetic listener. Many people I talk to tell me they have nothing to do all day or that no one else will talk to them. I listen, encourage them, and assure them that things can get better. I've been there myself, and I know it's true.

CONTINUED GROWTH

Today, I'm grateful to be pain-free, and to have the support of my family and a mixture of close and casual friends who call me an outgoing and social person — adjectives I now embrace.

Although recovering from the fall was physically and emotionally difficult, I value the lessons I learned from that experience. They've helped me develop a greater sense of empathy and a stronger desire to support those around me. Forging deeper, more meaningful connections with others was integral to my physical recovery, and I'm confident that maintaining these bonds will continue to support my health in the future.

These days, one of my favorite activities is leading hikes of four to eight miles through San Francisco's fascinating neighborhoods. It's a great way for me to be outside, stay active, and connect with new people — three opportunities I will never again take for granted. ●

Suzie's Top Takeaways

1.

Prevent future falls.

"I practice yoga balancing poses, and I strengthen my core with Pilates and weight-bearing exercises."

2.

Get outside.

Suzie recommends activities such as hiking, gardening, plein air painting, and outdoor tai chi.

3.

Take the initiative to make new friends.

This can be harder to do as we age because people may already have established friendship groups, but it's worth trying. "I keep an open attitude about meeting people."



TELL US YOUR STORY

Have a transformational healthy-living tale of your own? Share it with us at

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REAL FITNESS

WHEN YOU WORK OUT, does the order in which you do your exercises matter? Yes: Exercise order can affect efficiency, focus, fatigue, and the overall efficacy of a workout. There is no one perfect sequence to follow, but some guidelines can help you maximize your results and performance — and decrease your risk of injury. Turn to **page 32** to learn where mobility, strength, cardio, skills practice, and core work fit in.

Feel the *Zoom*

Build explosive power at any age
with this speed- and strength-
boosting workout.



BY **ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS**

WHEN WAS the last time you moved as fast as you could — and not just on a brisk walk or a jog around the block?

We're talking explosive, fast-twitch, blink-and-you'll-miss-it fast — like with the power of a boxer's jab, a pickleball player's overhead slam, or a bicyclist's all-out sprint.

For many people, the answer is "So long ago I don't remember it."

That's a shame, because the ability to move quickly is important — not just in sports but in daily life as well.

"The rotation in a golf swing, jumping for a rebound — those are aspects of power," says USA Weightlifting senior international coach Wil Fleming. "Catching your balance when you stumble — that's your body expressing power too."

In sports science, this is called the rate of force development: the ability to go from stillness to top speed in an instant.

"A car's zero-to-60 rating is a good analogy," Fleming explains. "It's one thing if a sports car can go really fast, but it's no fun if it takes forever to go really fast. You want to zoom off. You want to feel that zoom."

And to feel the zoom, you'll need to build power — the combination of speed and strength working in tandem.

Fortunately, you don't need to train hard or long to improve your power. You do, however, have to train consistently to avoid losing the gains you make along the way. Being able to apply those gains when it counts can make a world of difference in your overall health and well-being as you age. In fact, research shows that power training can be effective for fall prevention later in life.

So how do you train for power?

Move as fast as you can for short periods, using jumps, throws, and other explosive moves — ideally with something that feels relatively heavy — and stop each set before your movements slow down.

This approach will feel unfamiliar to people used to seeking a burn in their muscles or training to failure. But moving fast is the best way to train for power, and you can't do that when you are exhausted.

The following full-body workout, designed by Fleming, can help you feel the zoom again.

The Workout

Do this workout once a week in lieu of a regular strength or cardio routine — after a light warm-up but before any other type of exercise. Rest about 60 seconds between sets and exercises.

POGO JUMP



Assume an athletic stance with your feet roughly hip width apart and knees slightly bent.

Keeping your body rigid, jump repeatedly, thinking fast and high.

Continue jumping for 10 seconds, minimizing your time on the ground.

Perform five or six sets of 10 seconds.



DUMBBELL ONE-ARM HANG POWER SNATCH

Stand holding a dumbbell in one hand in front of your thighs.

Bend your knees and hinge slightly at the hips, allowing the weight to hang down to about knee height.

As fast as you can, extend your hips, legs, and ankles while pulling the dumbbell up, allowing momentum to carry the weight overhead.

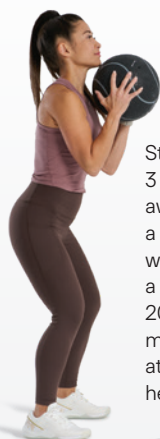


"Catch" the weight overhead with a straight arm, then lower the weight with control.

Perform two or three sets of three to five reps per arm.

MED BALL SQUAT TO CHEST PASS

Standing 3 to 4 feet away from a sturdy wall, hold a 10- to 20-pound med ball at chest height.



Lower into a full-depth squat. Then reverse the move to stand while you simultaneously thrust the ball against the wall as quickly and powerfully as you can.



Catch the ball on the rebound.

Perform two or three sets of five reps.



GET THE SPECIFICS

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



LATERAL BOUND

Begin in a shoulder-width stance. Keeping your feet parallel and swinging your arms for momentum, leap to your left as far as you can, landing as softly as you can on your left foot.

Without placing your right foot down, leap directly to your right as far as you can, landing softly on your right foot.



Perform two or three sets of five reps in each direction.

BARBELL PUSH PRESS



Take a wide, overhand grip on a barbell at shoulder height.

Keeping your chest up, bend your knees and hips slightly.

Explode upward and drive the barbell overhead as fast as you can.

Pause briefly with arms fully extended, then lower the bar to the starting position with control.

Perform two or three sets of five reps. 🔄

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The Wood Chop

This rotational movement builds core strength, power, and coordination.

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

A FUNCTIONAL core exercise, the wood chop can build strength and power while also training spinal rotation — an essential movement pattern for sports like golf, pickleball, tennis, and baseball as well as everyday tasks like shoveling, raking, and lifting a child or pet.

The fact that it can be done standing or kneeling makes it an accessible alternative to crunches and other floor exercises.

While this dynamic move boasts many benefits, it can be tricky to get right. Common pitfalls typically fall into one of two categories: doing too little or doing too much.

Under the doing-too-little umbrella, you'll find these issues: using only your arms to lift and lower the weight; keeping your shoulders and hips squared to the front; failing to use your legs to help power the movement; and keeping your heels glued to the floor.

Examples of doing too much include twisting through your lower back; arching your back as you raise the weight; hunching over as you lower the weight; and lifting more weight than you can control.

A just-right wood chop is powerful yet controlled, with your hips and thoracic spine rotating, your legs transferring power to your upper body, and your torso remaining stable as your shoulders and hips turn from side to side in tandem.

Be patient and start with a light weight. Visualization can be a helpful tool, too, so channel your inner lumberjack as you “chop wood.”



Use power from your lower body to raise the weight.

Keep a slight bend in your elbows.

Rotate through your hips and thoracic spine.



Keep your knees soft, extending them as you raise the weight and bending them as you lower it.

Use a dumbbell, kettlebell, medicine ball, weight plate, cable pulley machine, or resistance band.

Allow your feet to pivot and your heels to rise as you rotate from side to side.

INSTRUCTIONS

1.

Stand tall with your feet about shoulder width apart. Grasp a light to medium weight with both hands.

2.

Quickly and with control, rotate your hips and shoulders to the right, then rotate left and raise the weight up and over your left shoulder.

3.

Powerfully reverse the motion: Lower the dumbbell down and across your body as you rotate to the right and bring the weight to the outside of your right hip.

4.

Perform 10 to 15 reps, then switch sides and repeat.



MIX IT UP

For two wood chop variations, visit ELmag.com/woodchop.

Built to Order

Expert insights on how to sequence your workouts to match your goals and make the most of your efforts.

BY JESSICA MIGALA

THERE'S MORE to designing a workout than exercise selection. Often overlooked by exercisers who create their own programs is the matter of exercise order, which can impact fatigue, focus, efficiency, and the overall efficacy of a workout.

Some parts of a workout have their clear place in any session. For instance, a warm-up and cool-down are obvious bookends to a longer routine. But what about mobility, strength, cardio, skills practice, and core work? Where — or, rather, when — do they fit in?

Like so many things in fitness, there is no one perfect sequence to follow. Rather, there are guidelines that can help maximize your results — and decrease your risk of injury.

“When you have a workout structure — even if it’s a loose one — it’s easier to adhere to that plan and track your program so you can see your progress,” says Lee Boyce, CPT, a strength coach based in Toronto.

The following sequence is a jumping-off point for building your own workouts. Depending on your goals and schedule, some days might include all the listed components, while other sessions may include only a nonnegotiable few.

“Identify what is most important for the day, and structure your workout to support that priority,” says Mike Thomson, CPT, a Life Time run and strength coach.

Exercise Order Cheat Sheet:

- Warm-Up
- Mobility
- Skill and Power Work
- Strength or Cardio — or Both
- Core Training
- Cool-Down

WARM-UP

The purpose of a warm-up is to “lubricate your joints, get muscle temperature and heart rate up, practice the movement patterns you’ll be doing in the workout, and get the nervous system ready to go,” Boyce says.

No matter the focus of your training session — cardio or strength — experts generally agree that warming up is a must.

Devote the first five to 10 minutes of any session to zones 1 and 2 cardio and to dynamic stretches. This can include light cardio to raise your heart rate, like walking, jogging, cycling, or rowing, as well as dynamic movements, like walking

knee hugs, leg swings, arm circles, and hip openers.

“This [effort] should not fatigue you but warm up your body to sweat. It’s like the tin man getting lubed up,” explains Thomson. (For a dynamic, full-body warm-up routine, check out ELmag.com/perfectwarmup.)

MOBILITY

Targeted mobility work that focuses on further lubricating the joints and fascia is not always required, but it’s a powerful way to extend your warm-up and help you target body parts that need extra attention or will be the focus of the day’s main work.

Even five minutes of mobility exercises can significantly relieve tightness and prepare you to move with more load or intensity.

Some favorites include the seated 90/90 stretch, a hip opener that calls for sitting on the floor with the knees forming 90-degree angles, and shoulder controlled articular rotations (also known as CAR), which improve the functional range of the shoulder joint. (Find these and other exercises to improve mobility in your hips, ankles, shoulders, and elsewhere at ELmag.com/mobility.)

“When you have a workout structure — even if it’s a loose one — it’s easier to adhere to that plan and track your program **so you can see your progress.**”



SKILL AND POWER WORK

Are you working to improve specific skills or power movements? These might include double-unders, box jumps, Turkish get-ups, handstands, Olympic lifts (barbell snatches and clean and jerks), or other movements that require a blend of mental focus and physical precision. If so, the best time to practice these, Thomson says, is early in the training session when you’re warmed up and still mentally and physically fresh and focused.

Most people will want to incorporate skill and power work after their warm-up/mobility exercises and before commencing a strength session. “This is when your muscles are fresh and your nervous system is at its most capable,” he explains.

How long you spend on this portion of your workout depends on the particular skill you’re working on; Thomson says it might take anywhere from five to 20 minutes. While there are no hard and fast rules, unloaded skills like double-unders and other jump-rope tricks may require less time per session; movements that call for progressively adding weight, like Olympic lifts, can take more time.

STRENGTH OR CARDIO — OR BOTH

Strength and cardio can be (but don’t need to be) done during the same session on the same day. In fact, Boyce often advises clients to split up these modalities because doing both effectively can be overwhelming; they take up a lot of time and can unnecessarily drain energy.

He finds that most people with general health and longevity goals benefit most from strength training three times a week and doing a form



of cardio they enjoy twice a week. Dedicate 40 to 45 minutes to this work per training session. Even with the addition of a warm-up and cool-down, “you’ll be in and out of the gym inside an hour,” Boyce says.

If you’re planning to combine cardio and strength in one session, prioritize your goal. If you’re aiming to build strength, start with strength. If you’re training for an endurance event, like a marathon, start with your cardio routine. “Whatever is most important to you should be done first,” says Thomson.

If you’re not training for a specific goal or event — say, your goal is to improve both strength and endurance, or you’re trying to increase muscle mass or change your body composition — lifting first maximizes your efforts and manages fatigue.

“You want to do strength when your system hasn’t been compromised or fatigued by anything else,” says Boyce. This helps ensure that you maintain your intensity and good form.

CORE TRAINING

The sequencing of core exercises depends on the broader context of your workout. Core work can be grouped with strength moves as

accessory exercises: biceps curls paired with side planks, for example, or a circuit of step-ups, lunges, and plank shoulder taps.

Many core exercises can fatigue the abdominal, hip, and pelvic muscles to the point of compromising stability for heavier lifting and endurance efforts. With that in mind, exercises like hanging leg raises, plank variations, Pallof presses, dead bugs, and bird dogs are a great way to finish your workout.

Alternatively, you can do a stand-alone core workout on a day separate from your main strength and cardio. (For a standing ab workout that’s designed to build a strong, functional core, head to ELmag.com/abworkout.)

COOL-DOWN

Just as a warm-up is important for gradually increasing blood flow and activating the nervous system, a cool-down can help you return to a resting state. If you’re tempted to skip it, don’t. All it takes is five minutes to begin integrating your hard work and start the recovery process, says Boyce.

Thomson agrees: “Your best recovery begins with a cool-down.”

Begin with light cardio to lower an elevated heart rate. Do some long-hold static stretches. If you like foam rolling, this is a good time to do it. Close out with a short meditation to further slow down your breathing and calm your nervous system.

“Gentle cardio, static stretching, and deep breathing is the recipe for optimizing recovery,” Thomson says. (Find a four-move cool-down flow at ELmag.com/cooldown.) 🌿

JESSICA MIGALA is a writer who specializes in health, nutrition, fitness, and beauty.

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A wooden clock with black hands and numbers is positioned in the upper left. To its right is a calendar with dates 12 through 30 visible. Several pushpins are pinned to the calendar: a white one on the 13th, a green one on the 14th, a blue one on the 21st, and a yellow one on the 28th. A row of five colored sticky notes (orange, pink, blue, yellow, green) is placed horizontally below the calendar. The background is a solid teal color.

Cheat Codes for Consistency

Three tips — and a mindfulness challenge — for creating consistency in your fitness routine.

BY BARBARA POWELL, MA

LITTLE BY LITTLE, *a little becomes a lot*. This mantra runs through me, an ultrarunner, as fluidly as blood flows. Step by step, those steps make a mile. Mile by mile, those miles make a marathon. Event by event, opportunity by opportunity, choice by choice — these little things combine to make a lifestyle that matters to me.

As a holistic performance coach, I work with all kinds of clients. Every one of them wants to build, grow, or deepen something important in their life. Many times, it's a well-being goal that is new to them — or one they've attempted time and time again. And so often I hear, "I just want to be consistent." Sound familiar?

3 STEPS TO CULTIVATE CONSISTENCY

1. Practice deliberately. Make your goal matter. Be intentional about what you are doing and focus on how you are doing it. Training for a marathon? Establish the purpose of each run — easy run, speed workout, or endurance effort. Strength training during the week? Establish why each session matters.

Do what you can to create a ritual instead of just moving through a routine. And consider taking on that ritual with others who share your values, to deepen your relationship to your goals. This might be a group run with like-minded friends to tackle the most difficult workout of the week.

2. Mix it up. Boredom can kill consistency. I've seen it in my own training and in the lives of my clients. Variety helps us move forward in a stimulated, enjoyable way.

You don't have to do the same thing every day, in the same place, to remain consistent. Consider exploring a new environment, taking a different class, or connecting with new people. Take up a form of cross-training, walk on a trail, do a home workout, or join a group class.

A stimulated mind helps us feel connected to the process. Humans are creative beings. Purposefully creating variety helps us feel more alive.

Consistency is the act of showing up again and again. I like to think of it as an ongoing choice to not give up on ourselves, to keep moving forward, even if we have to walk or take a good long pause to look around or catch our breath. Consistency is like laying bricks, one by one, to build the version of ourselves that we envision.

This doesn't just happen. To help my clients — and myself — stick with what matters, I've adapted the following strategies from Addie Bracy, CMPC, a seasoned ultrarunner and certified mental-performance consultant. These are your cheat codes; know them, apply them, and watch your current self align with who you really are.

3. Get strategic. This is your chance to be real with yourself and consider how things like your training cadence, your work and play, and your movement rituals might be integrated into your life in a way that makes sense.

Consistency for you may be doing something once a week, or it may be a daily practice.

A good strategy is solution-oriented. It also allows you to challenge all-or-nothing or black-and-white thinking.

Identify your biggest challenges — what gets in the way of movement — and be willing to creatively work with and through those.

MINDFULNESS CHALLENGE

My high school creative-writing teacher used to say, "Nothing changes if nothing changes." She also taught me to think in the third person to bypass creative barriers. Let's use both of those concepts to creatively shape how we want to show up.

Consider the following questions as you create consistency in your fitness life.

- Who is the person I desire to become?
- What is that person regularly doing?
- What can that person do right now in a small yet meaningful way?
- What might get in that person's way?
- How does that person work with that challenge?
- Who can help that person with that challenge?

Make a small commitment for the upcoming month that is deliberate and strategic, and that offers room for variety. And then watch your version of consistency come alive.

BARBARA POWELL, MA, is a board-certified health and well-being coach, an ultramarathon runner, and a holistic performance coach for Life Time Mind.

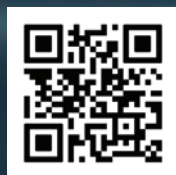


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Mourning Movement

How physical movement can transform grief.

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

MY GUESS is that no one reading these words is a stranger to grief. It visits us for many reasons — the loss of a loved one, say, or a breakup, a job change, a scary health diagnosis, or a cross-country move. It can take many forms: A shape-shifting force, grief may show up as anxiety, anger, irritability, numbness, sadness, fatigue, detachment.

In the winter of 2023, grief came to me in the form of a deep, dark pit.

I'd been in the grief pit before, and it was no surprise to find myself there again. My beloved cat and companion, Ursula, had just died. I was trying, and failing, to sell the manuscript of my novel. From afar, I witnessed humanitarian atrocities in my familial homeland of Iran, in Gaza, in Sudan, and beyond; at home, I witnessed the continued erosion of civil and reproductive rights.

On macro and micro levels, all I could see was loss. I felt helpless and so very tired.

The grief pit, dark and cool and comfortable in its own way, was a respite from it all. I could cry, and I could sleep. I could let the soft dirt and loam enslave me until I felt better. Every day, I couldn't wait to get home and close my eyes and return to this liminal space.

From past experience, I knew that eventually I'd feel rested enough to get up, reach for any number of handholds — my family, my friends, my therapist, my gym, my creative work — and pull my head back up into the light, ready to offer care to myself and my communities.

Except this time, once I finally stood up in the grief pit, I couldn't find purchase. I couldn't find my usual handholds. I couldn't make out any trace of light. The more I clambered, the more the wall around me crumbled.

At the same time, the dark of my pit didn't hold the same comfort it once had. I felt stuck. Unable to move, yet unwilling to stay.

For some time afterward, I walked through life as if walking along a hedgerow: one foot planted in the "real" world, functioning well enough to avoid drawing the concern of those close to me; the other foot sunk into the muck of the grief pit.

One day, on a whim, I googled the phrase "mourning movement." I don't know where this came from, but I suspect my training in trauma-informed movement practices and sacred death-care struck an unconscious trigger.

The search yielded a particularly compelling result: grief-movement training, a multiweek course offered by yoga instructor and grief coach Paul Denniston, founder of Grief Yoga and author of *Healing Through Yoga*.

It was billed as a program that uses movement, breath, and sound to help transform grief, no matter its reason or expression, into love and empowerment. I promptly signed up.

The course proved to be a new handhold — another tool in my self-care kit when it feels like the only option is despair.

"We're not denying the struggle and the pain [of grief and loss]," Denniston said in one of my first classes. "The mission is to use movement, breath, and sound not to run away from the pain, but to take the pain and release it. We are intentionally grieving and healing."

This intention was front of mind as I went through my training to become a certified grief-movement guide. And it's front of mind now as I set out to share some of what I've learned with you, dear reader, in hopes that you might also find the healing you seek.

GRIEF MOVEMENT SEATED FLOW

The following seated flow is an invitation to get curious. Before you begin, take a comfortable seat and notice your breath. Notice your feet on the ground and your sit bones on your chair.

Place your hands on your belly. Take a deep breath in. Sigh it out. Place your hands on your chest. Reflect on someone your heart loves and misses, or maybe this practice is just for you today. Speak their name (or your own) out loud. Breathe.

Spend one to three minutes on each of the following movements. Find step-by-step instructions and intentions at ELmag.com/seatedflow.

SEATED GROUNDED BREATH

From a comfortable seated position, breathe deeply. Notice any thoughts or sensations that arise.



WINDMILL

Inhale as you lift your hands overhead. Exhale to swing them down and back.



STREAM OF LIFE

Cup your hands in front of you. Inhale through your nose. Exhale through your mouth to fill your hands with air.



SPINAL FLOW

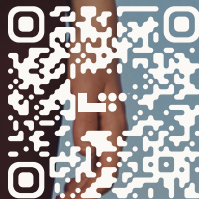
Inhale to extend your chest forward; exhale to round your spine, chin to chest.



A low-angle photograph of two women against a clear blue sky. The woman on the right is taller, with curly hair, wearing a light purple sports bra and dark leggings. The woman on the left is shorter, with straight hair, wearing a brown sports bra and matching shorts. Both are looking towards the camera with serious expressions.

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REAL FOOD

JUST ABOUT EVERY CULTURE has its own favored way to cook and serve eggs. From the simplest scramble to the loftiest soufflé, eggs are a popular staple, and their near-universal adoration is well deserved. They offer vital nutrients and add flavor and texture to a variety of dishes — all in their own natural packaging.

Find four globetrotting recipes starting on **page 50**, and get the bonus recipe for this Stovetop Shakshuka With Pistachios and Mint at ELmag.com/eggrecipes.



12 Questions About Sugar, Answered

BY CATHERINE GUTHRIE

SUGAR IS NEARLY everywhere in the typical American diet — and not just in cupcakes and cookies but condiments and beverages too. The average American consumes about 34 teaspoons of sugar every day (17 of which are added). This amounts to more than 100 pounds of sugar per person, per year.

Perhaps it's not so surprising then that 93 percent of Americans also struggle with some aspect of metabolic health, whether it's obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, or insulin resistance. Sugar alone is not to blame, but it is one of the main ingredients in the ultraprocessed foods that make up nearly 60 percent of the average person's daily calories.

"We know something is going on with the food supply because this

massive increase in obesity, diabetes, and cardiometabolic disease tracks so closely to the introduction of ultra-processed foods," says Laura Schmidt, PhD, MSW, MPH, a professor of health policy in the School of Medicine at the University of California, San Francisco. "The American public is pretty clear now that sugar is not something you should eat in excess."

Yet despite what we know, scaling back our sugar intake can be surprisingly difficult.

Reducing sugar starts with recognizing where it's hiding. And understanding its potential health consequences — while a little depressing — can give us additional inspiration to kick excess sugar to the curb. To that end, here are some answers to common questions about sugar and health.



1 WHAT IS SUGAR?
Sugar is a carbohydrate, one of the three major dietary nutrients called macronutrients (the other two being fat and protein). Sugar is easy to vilify, but it's a macronutrient for a reason — and our biological requirement for it demands nuanced understanding and respect.

Sugar is either a monosaccharide or a disaccharide. A monosaccharide, such as glucose, is the smallest unit of sugar. A disaccharide is a combination of two monosaccharides. Sucrose, commonly known as table sugar, is a disaccharide made up of glucose and fructose. It's typically refined from sugarcane or sugar beets.

Glucose fuels each one of the body's approximately 30 trillion cells. "Glucose is so essential that if you don't eat it, your body turns other things into glucose just so you have it," says pediatric endocrinologist Robert Lustig, MD, MSL, author of *Metabolic: The Lure and the Lies of Processed Food, Nutrition, and Modern Medicine*.

Still, when it comes to table sugar, glucose is only half of the picture. The other half is fructose.

Until the 1960s, most of the fructose in the American diet came from fruit, which is why fructose is also called "fruit sugar." Yet as the price of refining sugar rose, food makers turned to corn for a cheaper, sweeter alternative, and high-fructose corn syrup entered the marketplace for use mostly in sodas and ultraprocessed foods.

Unlike glucose, fructose plays no essential role in the body, Lustig says. And in high quantities, it can be addictive, contribute to cellular aging, and damage the liver. (More on fructose and the liver in question No. 3.)

2 HOW DOES SUGAR AFFECT INSULIN?
Like glucose, insulin is essential to life. This hormone acts like a key, unlocking cells so glucose — their main source of fuel — can enter.

Insulin is effectively an energy-storage hormone. Because glucose fuels cellular energy, the body is wired to detect sweetness. When sensors in the tongue taste something sweet, they signal the pancreas to release insulin. That insulin spritz relocates sugar from the blood to the cells in anticipation of incoming nutrients, including more sugar.

Called anticipatory insulin response, this process is critical for our health, says Paul Breslin, PhD, a nutritional sciences professor at Rutgers University and researcher at Monell Chemical Senses Center. He likens it to how an airport prepares for a plane's arrival.

"Imagine what air travel would be like if every time a plane landed at the airport, it was a big surprise. It would be total chaos," he says. "The same is true for human physiology. If you wait for nutrients to show up in your blood, it's too late — you would have sky-high blood sugar that requires a huge amount of insulin to move out of the blood."

The body keeps blood-sugar levels within a narrow range, says integrative psychiatrist Henry Emmons, MD, author of *The Chemistry of Calm*. "If blood sugar is consistently elevated, even by a slight amount, it can create long-term problems."

Consistently elevated blood sugar can weaken the ability of cells to respond to insulin in the bloodstream. This is known as insulin resistance, a hallmark of most metabolic disorders. If cell doors stay closed when insulin knocks, glucose builds up in the bloodstream. This is what spurs type 2 diabetes: The body loses its ability to regulate blood-sugar levels without supplemental insulin.

3 WHAT'S THE IMPACT OF SUGAR ON THE LIVER?
Maintaining liver health may be among the best reasons to avoid excess fructose. Glucose can be metabolized by every cell, while fructose is processed only by the small intestine and the liver. So when large quantities of fructose hit the system, especially in the form of soda or energy drinks, the liver bears much of the burden.

In the short term, fructose depletes cellular energy and triggers the production of uric acid, a waste product that, in excess, can damage the kidneys and the heart. (For more on uric acid, visit ELmag.com/uricacid.)

Over the long term, a diet high in fructose can contribute to liver complications. That's because the liver turns excess fructose into fat, explains Lustig. Visceral liver fat may be exported to other parts of the body, where it can contribute to obesity, heart disease, and other metabolic conditions; it can also stay in the liver and contribute to a condition called nonalcoholic fatty liver disease. NAFLD can lead to an inflammatory condition called nonalcoholic steatohepatitis, which can culminate in cirrhosis and even liver failure.

Experts predict that more than half of all adults worldwide will have NAFLD by 2040 — and many believe this is at least partly due to the current high consumption of fructose. (For more on NAFLD, see ELmag.com/liverhealth.)

4 DOES SUGAR IMPACT THE MICROBIOME?
In a broad sense, unhealthy microflora are most likely to thrive when our diet is high in sugar. But again, it matters where that sugar is sourced.

In a small but rigorous study published in 2020, scientists examined the impact of a high-fructose diet on the microbiome. They enrolled 12 healthy women and fed them variations of high- and low-fructose diets for one week each, comparing the effects of 100 grams of daily fructose from fruit to the equivalent — 100 grams of fructose — sourced from high-fructose corn syrup.

The researchers analyzed the subjects' microbiomes each week. On the high-fructose corn syrup diet, the subjects' microbiomes experienced a notable drop in helpful bacteria and a surge of harmful bacteria. On the fruit-based fructose diet, however, their microbiomes shifted toward a healthier balance.



5 HOW DOES SUGAR INFLUENCE MOOD?

To understand the impact of sugar on the brain, consider that the organ constitutes 2 percent of the body's weight but burns 20 percent of its glucose.

"The brain takes up a huge percentage of blood sugar," says Emmons. He adds that it relies so heavily on glucose because it can't make energy from other sources, unlike other parts of the body.

Excess sugar consumption can lead to systemic inflammation anywhere in the body, which also affects how we feel. Inside the brain, systemic inflammation disrupts the ability of neurotransmitters to balance mood, he explains.

Especially important is the balance between glutamate, an activating neurotransmitter, and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), a calming neurotransmitter. One reason people with sugar-fueled mood disorders often have too much brain activity — a cardinal sign of anxiety — may be because glutamate is driving the bus.

People also crave simple sugars when they are anxious, says nutritional psychiatrist Drew Ramsey, MD. "It's easy to get into a maladaptive pattern with sugar because it's so very pleasurable, and in nature, when something tastes sweet, it's ripe and it's usually safe," he says. "And more than anything, our brain wants to feel safe."

Numerous studies show a connection between high-sugar diets and depression risk. One of the most significant correlations was seen in a 2017 scientific trial. Researchers found that men who ate more than 67 grams of sugar a day were 23 percent more likely to be diagnosed with depression and other mental health challenges after five years than those who ate less than 40 grams a day. The authors suspected inflammation.

Growing evidence points to depression as an inflammatory disease, says Emmons. "That may be one of the reasons why antidepressants offer relief to so many people — they are in part anti-inflammatory."

6 WHAT MAKES SUGAR SO HARD TO RESIST?

Blame human biology: We're drawn to sweets because the body recognizes glucose as a rich source of energy. Sugar was a rare treat for our early ancestors. When they did find a tree of ripe fruit or a beehive full of honey, they indulged without reservation. Who knew when they'd get their next opportunity?



7 SO, CAN I EAT FRUIT?

Fruit contains fructose as well as fiber — and fiber is the game-changer. An essential nutrient, fiber moves food through the gut, signals feelings of fullness, and slows the body's absorption of sugars.

Apples, for instance, have two kinds of fiber: soluble, which is jelly-like, and insoluble, which has more structure. Both types are important.

Lustig compares insoluble fiber to a fishing net and soluble fiber to a coating of slippery kelp plugging the holes. "Together they form a barrier that prevents the fructose from touching the intestinal walls and being transported into the bloodstream."

Fruit inches closer to the danger zone when it's turned into fruit juice, which includes no fiber to slow the impact of its sugars. (Learn more about the importance of fiber at ELmag.com/fiber.)



8 DOES FOOD COMBINING REDUCE SUGAR'S IMPACT?

The short answer is yes. Embracing a wide variety of foods at mealtime, including foods across the glycemic index, helps moderate the blood-sugar impact of the entire meal. Authors of a study published in 2019 found that combining rice (a high-glycemic-index food) with egg, bean sprouts, and sesame or olive oils lowered the overall glycemic index of the meal.

Uma Naidoo, MD, director of nutritional, lifestyle, and metabolic psychiatry at Massachusetts General Hospital and author of *Calm Your Mind With Food*, explains how simple this can be. "Adding a healthy protein and lots of vegetables to your favorite starches, like rice, can cause less of a spike in your blood sugar."

9 WHERE DOES ADDED SUGAR HIDE?

Whole foods, like vegetables and fruits, are a balanced package of micro- and macronutrients. The fiber in whole foods slows the absorption of their sugars, so generally speaking, whole foods on the sweeter end of the spectrum are not the problem.

Added sugars, on the other hand, most definitely are — in part because it's not always easy to know where to find them, which makes it hard to know how much of them you're eating.

Up to 75 percent of packaged foods contain sugars added during processing. For food manufacturers, these added sugars are a veritable Swiss Army knife. They create volume, retain moisture, extend shelf life, and enhance texture.

"Without added sugars, most processed foods would taste like cardboard," says Schmidt.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration mandated in 2016 that

nutrition-facts labels show added sugars. But because food makers now employ 262 names for sugar, those added sugars are harder than ever to detect.

If a food manufacturer embeds a variety of sugars into foods as the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth ingredients, for example, sugar can easily add up to be the dominant ingredient without topping the list, Lustig says. Even savory foods like salsa, tomato sauce, and salad dressings often contain sugars (though often it's to balance sour, salty, and spicy flavors).

And then there are the beverages: Nearly half of the added sugars in the American diet are sipped, slurped, and gulped in the form of soft drinks, fruit drinks, sports drinks, and sweetened coffee and tea.

A meta-analysis published in 2023 looked at 85 studies on children and adults and found sugary beverages lead to weight gain. Researchers suspect it has to do with how the liver turns fructose into visceral fat. Soda sales are decreasing, but well over half of Americans still drink at least one a day.

"We, and especially our kids, are eating and drinking dessert all day long," says Lustig.

10 ARE HONEY AND MAPLE SYRUP ANY DIFFERENT?

On the list of sugars to avoid, honey and maple syrup are comfortably at the bottom. Both are lower on the glycemic index than table sugar, meaning they won't send blood-sugar levels soaring as quickly.

They also contain other nutrients. Quality honey contains more than 200 components, many of which have antibacterial, antimicrobial, and anti-inflammatory properties. Pure maple syrup contains potassium, calcium, magnesium, and iron.

So, a drizzle of honey in a cup of tea or maple syrup on yogurt can satisfy a sweet tooth, says Naidoo, but moderation is still key. "Although healthier for you, at the end of the day it's still sugar."

11 ARE ARTIFICIAL SWEETENERS BETTER?

Though sugar alternatives might seem a safer bet, the research on their health implications suggests otherwise.

In 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO) released guidelines advising against using nonsugar sweeteners for weight control or to lower disease risk. The recommendation was based on a review of 283 studies showing that short-term use of the sweeteners could lead to a small reduction in body weight but have no benefit with regard to other sugar-induced health issues, such as elevated blood-glucose levels.

In July 2023, the WHO labeled aspartame a possible carcinogen. And in June 2024, xylitol, a rising star among sugar substitutes, made headlines when scientists discovered that people with the highest levels of xylitol in their blood plasma had a roughly 50 percent higher risk of experiencing a cardiovascular event over three years than people with the lowest levels.

Other studies have detected links between sugar alternatives and metabolic obesity, heart disease, and cancer.

12 HOW CAN I HAVE A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP TO SUGAR?

As with so many of life's pleasures, moderation is your best bet.

It's impractical to quit sugar cold turkey, says Emmons. "Unlike other addictions, you can't avoid food. It's better to find ways to moderate how much [sugar] you eat and soften the blow with other foods that slow digestion."

Multiple studies suggest the body is better able to maintain insulin balance when encountering all three macronutrients together. This can be as straightforward as including protein, fat, and carbohydrates in every meal and snack.

This doesn't mean you can never have a cookie or a piece of cake. Just eat them after meals to moderate their impact. "If you want to eat a comfort food, go ahead, but make sure you are also eating it with a decent amount of protein and healthy fats," says Emmons.

Ramsey also recommends taking a cue from nature and pairing sugar with fiber — satisfying a sweet tooth with whole fruits or accompanying a sweet treat with a handful of nuts.

If you tend to eat emotionally, work with, instead of against, that urge, Ramsey suggests. He sees food as a useful tool for combating anxiety, especially if you use it to slow down. "You can chop vegetables, blend some homemade pesto, sit with a cup of tea, or make a little pasta that you then eat slowly and savor."

Emmons suggests extending the window between your last meal and the first one the next day to help stabilize blood sugar. "It doesn't have to be dramatic," he says. "Just 11 or 12 hours, which is pretty easy for most of us, can help the system recalibrate and reset insulin levels."

A healthy relationship to sugar might boil down to this simple advice from Emmons: "Have modest portions of sugar, not too many times a day, and not all by itself." 🍌



Grapefruit Brûlée

With Pistachio-Coconut Yogurt

Even the darkest winter morning can include a bit of sunshine when you reach for citrus fruit.

BY KAELYN RILEY

MY FAVORITE FOOD is an ephemeral thing; it changes with the seasons. In spring, I'm a tender-herb girl, sprinkling a torn handful of fresh basil or dill into most every meal. Come July, there is no greater delight in my mind than standing over the kitchen sink, eating a drippy sun-ripened peach, hoping no one walks in to see the juice running down to my elbow. Once fall arrives, you can find me at my butcher block, chopping up yet another butternut squash to roast with garlic, olive oil, and warm spices.

And in January? It's the grapefruit for me, baby.

Every winter, I take the arrival of seasonal citrus at my local grocery co-op as proof that Mother Nature has got my back. When the days in Minnesota have grown impossibly short and dark, when the glare ice at the end of my driveway has melted and refrozen into an impenetrable glassy danger sheet, when the air is so frigid that my garage door opener has simply ceased to function — when we've all arrived together at the apotheosis of winter, wondering how we've weathered it in the past and if we can manage to do so again: That's citrus season.

Of course, your winter may be milder than mine. (I hope that it is.) And

thanks to global shipping, we can buy citrus from the grocery store at any time of year. But the sweetest, tartest, most precious peak-season grapefruit always arrive, jewel-like in the very depths of winter, at precisely the moment we need it most.

And while you might mistake half a grapefruit on your breakfast plate for a beam of light on a dark morning, it's not just a metaphor.

Sure, citrus fruits are bright and dazzling, but they also imbue our diets with a unique array of nutrients to benefit our bodies during cold and flu season, including a megadose of vitamin C for protecting immune health and reducing oxidative stress.

Sprinkled with a bit of sugar and hit with a kitchen torch (or placed under a hot broiler), the fruit will develop a caramelized shell, kind of like a crème brûlée that's somehow nutritious enough to eat for breakfast. I like a raw sugar like demerara or turbinado here, but you can use any granulated sugar you like.

Of course, adding sugar at all is a personal choice — perhaps even a controversial one, given that the average American consumes something like 17 teaspoons of added sugar per day. If you're trying to cut back, you can use less sugar, or leave it out entirely. You won't get that crackly shell

on top, but you'll get the caramelized flavors from the fruit's natural sugars.

I find that including a bit of healthy sweetness in my day makes it easier for me to skip the ultraprocessed stuff when I encounter it. And because of the fiber in the fruit and the fat and protein from the yogurt, I know I won't be riding the blood-sugar roller coaster for the rest of the day. (For more of the latest research on sugar and your health, flip back to page 40.)

If you don't own a kitchen torch, a preheated broiler is a fine stand-in. But my little butane torch has quickly become one of my favorite kitchen gadgets: It melts cheese, it crisps gratin, it even roasts tomatoes and peppers from the garden when it's too hot outside to turn on the oven.

Beyond that, I find that cooking with fire power is just a lot of fun. Maybe you'll think so too.

Before I learned to brûlée it, I mostly knew grapefruit as a low-calorie fad-diet cornerstone. This recipe, for me, is grapefruit rebranded — not as a weight-loss tool but a dose of vitamins when I'm feeling run-down, something bright and bracing to bear me through January.

When the mornings are dark and cold, the promise of a tart, zesty grapefruit is enough to pull me out of bed. Getting to light it on fire is just a bonus.



Makes two servings
Prep time: five minutes
Cook time: 25 minutes



1/4 cup shelled raw pistachios



1/4 cup unsweetened coconut flakes



1 tsp. coconut oil, melted



1/2 tsp. vanilla extract



Pinch of cinnamon



Pinch of sea salt



1 whole grapefruit



4 tsp. raw sugar, divided



1 cup full-fat Greek yogurt, divided



Fresh mint to garnish (optional)

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F and line two sheet pans with parchment paper. In a small bowl, mix the pistachios, coconut flakes, coconut oil, vanilla extract, cinnamon, and salt. Spread the mixture on one prepared sheet pan and place in the oven for eight to 10 minutes, until the pistachios and coconut are lightly browned and fragrant.

Meanwhile, cut the grapefruit in half across the equator, then slice a bit of

the rind off the bottom of both halves so they'll sit flat. Use a serrated knife to loosen the segments around the perimeter and remove the seeds (if you're serving with a grapefruit spoon, you can skip this step). Then invert both halves on a paper towel to dry slightly.

When the coconut and pistachios are done, place the grapefruit halves cut-side up on the second sheet pan. Sprinkle each half with 2 teaspoons of the sugar.

Use a kitchen torch to melt the sugar until it is golden brown and crispy. Alternatively, place the sheet pan under a preheated broiler for five to eight minutes, until the sugar has melted and the edges are lightly browned (don't worry if the rind gets a bit burnt).

Serve each grapefruit half with 1/2 cup of the Greek yogurt topped with some of the pistachio-coconut mixture. Garnish with fresh mint if desired. 🍋



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Produce Triage

How to tell when the produce in your fridge has really gone bad — and what you can do to save it before it does.

BY **STEPHANIE SOUCHERAY**

YOU HAD GOOD intentions and a clear meal plan when you bought that bunch of cilantro and head of romaine last week. But life moves fast, and now the produce that once held promise is looking past its prime. The herbs are wilted and yellowing, the lettuce looks slimy in some places, and you're regretting that you're about to toss hard-earned dollars into the trash.

With some produce, signs of spoilage are clear. A mold-covered peach is a no-brainer — you shouldn't eat that. But where most of us lack confidence is in the gray zone. Is it safe to eat that wilted cilantro? And if safe, will it still be tasty? Is it OK to cut off a bad spot and salvage the rest? Do we really have to throw away a whole clamshell of raspberries because one berry is moldy?

You may already know that most produce is at its peak nutritional value when harvested. This is one reason why canning and

flash-freezing are common: Those processes preserve some of the food's vital nutrients.

Certain vegetables and fruits, known as climacteric produce, continue to ripen after they've been harvested. Their flavor becomes fuller and more complex; their flesh may become softer or sweeter.

Once fully ripe, as part of its life cycle, produce begins to decay — and late-stage decay results in mold. (For more on the unique lives of your favorite veggies and fruits, see ELmag.com/fruitsandveggies.)

"Mold is a form of food decay, and it can potentially make someone ill," explains Rachel Sweeney, MS, RD,

LD, an education extension specialist at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Though ingesting a small quantity of mold is not typically enough to make a person sick, some people could experience allergic reactions or respiratory problems.

The first step in saving food from decay is planning.

"Ideally, if we can do a little thinking ahead, there are many options for preserving food. Freezing, dehydrating, and even canning can extend the shelf life of produce," Sweeney says. (Get at-home canning tips at ELmag.com/canning.)

Not washing vegetables and fruits until you're ready to use them is one of the best practices for avoiding moldy produce. "That added moisture from washing speeds up the decay process," she says. "From a convenience standpoint, it's nice if they are washed and ready to go, but this step does make a difference."

Storage Advice

Tips for keeping your favorite veggies and fruits fresh for longer.

BANANAS

These fruits emit ethylene, a plant hormone that causes produce to ripen faster. If you have hard avocados on your counter-top, try storing them near a few bananas to speed the ripening process. Conversely, if your peaches are already ripe, be sure to store them separately from bananas.

And if the bananas themselves go brown? You can freeze them for smoothies or use them to make banana bread.

ALLIUMS

Onions, garlic, and shallots can last for several months in cool, dark storage, but they have a shorter window when stored at room temperature. Signs of spoilage include shriveling, softening, and discoloration.

You may have seen a bulb of garlic sprouting green shoots in the middle of the clove. The sprouts aren't harmful, but they can taste bitter, so you might want to remove them from your cloves before cooking.

BERRIES

Berries should be refrigerated if you don't plan to eat them the day they were purchased: They're highly perishable and prone to molding. Depending on the variety, berries can last three days to a week in the fridge.

If you find one moldy berry in the bunch, fear not. Toss the berry and rinse the others well before eating. If a quarter or more of the berries have mold, however, it's best to throw the entire container away.

CITRUS

Lemons, limes, oranges, and other citrus usually keep for one week at room temperature and for two weeks or more in the fridge. Some minor discoloration on the rind is normal, but don't eat (or juice) any moldy fruit.

Other signs your citrus has turned: changes in texture, like softening or shriveling, or a sour scent. Those fruits have got to go.

STONE FRUITS

Don't mistake brown bruising for mold on apricots, nectarines, peaches, and plums. These delicate fruits bruise easily, but those spots can be cut away. If the rest of the fruit is firm, it's still good to eat — and even if much of the fruit is bruised, it might be a good candidate for baking.

If any part of the stone fruit is covered in mold, though, the whole fruit should be tossed. "Fruits and vegetables that are soft have a high moisture content and can be contaminated with mold below the surface," Sweeney explains.

Store stone fruits stem-side down at room temperature, and once they're ripe, eat them as soon as possible. If you need more time, you can place ripe ones in the fridge and they can stay fresh for up to five more days; they'll taste best if you let them come to room temperature before eating.

GREENS

Most greens can stay good for about one week stored in a fridge, especially if you delay washing them. Hardier greens like kale and collards can last longer. Wilting and yellowing are signs that greens may be past their prime and not quite as tasty or nutritious — but not that they're unsafe to eat. If they're slimy, mushy, or just smell off, those are signs that greens should be composted.

HERBS

Most fresh herbs can keep well for up to one week. Some types, like parsley and cilantro, do better in the fridge, while others, like basil, prefer room-temperature storage.

Experts recommend treating herbs like basil and cilantro the way you would flowers: Trim the ends and place them in a glass with about an inch of water. Cover the leaves loosely with a plastic bag and replace the water when it gets cloudy.

ROOT VEGETABLES

Potatoes, turnips, and beets do best stored in a cool, dry place — where they can last for months. But not everyone has access to a traditional root cellar. On your kitchen counter (or in the case of turnips, in your refrigerator), these vegetables typically last a week or two.

If the potatoes sprout eyes but are otherwise firm and not wrinkled, the eyes can simply be sliced off before cooking. Never store potatoes or sweet potatoes in the fridge, because this can alter the taste. 🌱

STEPHANIE SOUCHERAY is a health journalist based in St. Paul, Minn.

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Eggs Around the World

Just about every culture has its own way of cooking and serving eggs. Try one of these dishes to change up your meal routine.

BY ROBIN ASBELL

FROM THE LOFTY soufflé to the simplest scramble, egg dishes are popular staples across many cultures. The near-universal adoration of eggs is well deserved: They add flavor, texture, and vital nutrients to many beloved recipes, and they come in their own freshness-protecting package.

Eggs offer all nine essential amino acids and an array of important vitamins and minerals — including B vitamins and choline, which support brain health. This makes them a nutritious choice for any time of day.

They're also incredibly versatile, relatively affordable, and generally simple to prepare. See for yourself with these delicious egg dishes from around the globe.

Some records date this simple breakfast of poached eggs and yogurt back to the days of the Ottoman Empire. Adjust the amount of red-pepper flakes in the oil to your heat preference.

Turkish Çilbir

Makes two servings

Prep time: five minutes

Cook time: 20 minutes

- 3 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tsp. red-pepper flakes
- 1 cup full-fat Greek yogurt, divided
- 1 large garlic clove, minced
- 2 large organic, pasture-raised eggs
- 1 tbs. white-wine or apple-cider vinegar
- Pinch of sea salt
- 2 tbs. fresh dill, torn
- 2 slices toasted bread, to serve

Fill a medium saucepan with water and place over medium-high heat to bring to a boil.

While the water is coming to a boil, set a smaller pan over medium heat and add the olive oil. Let the oil warm up for a couple of minutes, then stir in the red-pepper flakes and cook until the flakes are sizzling, about five minutes. Remove from the heat.

In a medium bowl, combine the yogurt and garlic, then spread it in two low serving bowls, creating an indentation in the center of each. Drizzle with some of the chili oil.

Crack each egg into a ramekin. Add the vinegar to the boiling water. Use a large spoon to stir the water in a circle, creating a vortex, then slip an egg into the center. Reduce the heat to medium for a bare simmer and cook for about three minutes, until the whites are firm. Use a slotted spoon to scoop out the egg and blot with a clean towel to dry. Create another vortex in the simmering water and repeat with the other egg.

Top each yogurt bowl with a poached egg, a pinch of salt, and some torn fresh dill. Serve with toasted bread of choice.



Catalan Tortilla

Makes six servings

Prep time: five minutes

Cook time: 45 minutes

- 3 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 1 lb. Yukon gold potatoes, thinly sliced
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 6 large organic, pasture-raised eggs
- ½ tsp. sea salt
- Hot sauce, optional
- Sliced green onions, optional

In a 10-inch nonstick skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil over medium heat. Add the sliced potatoes and stir to coat them, then stir in the onion. Reduce the heat to medium-low and cover the pan for 10 to 15 minutes, or until the potatoes are tender. Remove the skillet from the heat and transfer the potatoes and onion to a bowl to cool slightly.

In a large bowl, whisk the eggs and salt, then fold in the potato and onion mixture. Wipe out the skillet, then add the remaining tablespoon of oil. Spread the oil around the skillet and up the sides, then add the egg mixture.

Place the skillet over medium-high heat for about two minutes to reheat, then reduce the heat to low and cover. Every five minutes or so, run a rubber spatula along the edge of the skillet to keep the eggs from sticking. Continue cooking until the eggs are nearly set, up to 20 minutes total.

Slide the tortilla out of the skillet onto a cutting board or rimless sheet pan, then hold the skillet, inverted, over the tortilla. Holding the board from underneath with your other hand, quickly flip the tortilla in one fluid motion back into the skillet, uncooked side down. Place back on the heat for about four minutes, just to finish cooking the eggs. (Alternatively, place the pan under a preheated broiler until the top of the tortilla is cooked through.)

Transfer the tortilla back to the cutting board to cool slightly. Slice and serve with hot sauce and scallions, if desired.

I first learned this take on the Spanish tortilla from my friend Isabel in Catalonia, who taught me that some tortilla purists believe that even adding onions is too much. You can serve yours with hot sauce and green onions for a bit of acid and brightness.



This dish is like a Persian frittata with plenty of greens. And like a frittata, it's versatile — you can use pretty much any combination of tender herbs you have on hand. Dried barberries or cranberries add a touch of tartness.



Persian Kuku Sabzi

Makes six servings

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 50 minutes

- 3 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 large leeks, white and light green parts, halved and sliced
- 1½ tsp. sea salt, divided
- 5 cups mixed tender herbs (cilantro, parsley, dill, mint, tarragon), leaves and stems, chopped
- 4 scallions, sliced
- 8 large organic, pasture-raised eggs
- 1½ tsp. baking powder
- ¾ tsp. ground cumin
- ½ tsp. black pepper
- ½ cup walnuts, chopped
- ¼ cup dried barberries or cranberries, optional

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Use ½ tablespoon of the olive oil to coat a 9-inch pie pan.

Place a large sauté pan over medium-high heat and add the remaining olive oil. Add the leeks and ½ teaspoon of the salt, and stir to coat the leeks in the oil. Reduce the heat to low and cook, stirring frequently, until the leeks are tender and translucent, about five minutes.

Add the herbs and scallions to the leeks and stir, cooking until the herbs are bright green, then take off the heat to cool slightly.

In a large bowl, whisk the eggs. While still whisking, sprinkle in the baking powder, remaining salt, cumin, and pepper.

Stir in the herb mixture, then spread in the prepared pie pan. Sprinkle with the walnuts; add barberries or cranberries, if desired. Press the toppings down into the eggs.

Bake the kuku for 30 to 35 minutes, until it's puffed and firm when pressed. Cool for a few minutes before slicing and serving.



ENJOY MORE!

Find the recipe for Stovetop Shakshuka With Pistachios and Mint at ELmag.com/eggrecipes.



Tamagoyaki is traditionally made in a special rectangular pan, but with a bit of patience and adjusted expectations, you can make a version of this Japanese rolled omelet in a regular nonstick pan. The trick: Keep the heat at medium-low to cook each layer slowly and prevent browning.



Tamagoyaki

Makes four servings

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cook time: 20 minutes

- 8 large organic, pasture-raised eggs
- 1 tbs. cane sugar
- 1 tbs. mirin (or dry white wine)
- ¼ tsp. sea salt
- 2 tsp. soy sauce, tamari, or coconut aminos
- 1 tbs. avocado oil
- Cooked white rice, for serving
- Pickled ginger, optional
- Furikake, optional

In a large bowl, beat the eggs lightly, then whisk in the sugar, mirin, salt, and soy sauce. Place a wire mesh strainer over a bowl and strain the mixture.

Pour the oil into a cup, and have a brush or paper towel available for reapplying oil to the pan between layers.

Place a 10-inch nonstick pan over medium-low heat and coat it with some of the oil. Pour about a quarter of the egg mixture into a thin layer on the pan and cook until the bottom is set and the top is soft but not runny, about two minutes. Use a rubber spatula to loosen the edges from the pan as it cooks.

Use two spatulas to roll the omelet toward you, then push it to the back of the pan.

Oil the pan quickly and pour in another thin layer of egg, lifting the rolled omelet at the back to get some uncooked egg underneath it. When the new layer has set, bring the rolled omelet toward you to wrap it in the new layer of egg. There should be a bit of uncooked egg on the top of each layer; it will continue cooking as you roll the omelet and it fuses together. Continue until you've used all the egg mixture.

For the best shape, wrap the omelet in beeswax wrap followed by a clean kitchen towel (or use plastic wrap). Press gently to shape the omelet into a rectangular slab. Let the omelet sit for 10 minutes or so to allow the residual heat to finish cooking the egg.

Enjoy the tamagoyaki warm or refrigerate it for at least an hour to chill. Serve sliced with cooked rice. Add pickled ginger and furikake, if desired. 🍴



BACK IN

YOUR BODY

10 PRACTICES TO GET YOU OUT OF YOUR HEAD AND INTO THE MOMENT.

BY CHRISTINE SCHRUM

HAVE YOU EVER spent countless hours in front of your computer forgetting to eat, drink, stretch, or go to the bathroom? Or zoned out during a stressful conversation? Or opened TikTok to scroll for a minute — and been shocked when an hour had passed?

These are all mild forms of dissociation, explains trauma therapist Jane McCampbell, MA, LMFT, CPCC, RMFT. Loosely defined, dissociation means leaving your body behind while your mind goes elsewhere. “All of us dissociate to a certain extent,” she says.

In its mildest form, dissociation (sometimes called disembodiment) can help us manage and minimize stress, including the stress of boredom. But during extreme, traumatic events — such as accidents, injury, and sudden loss — we can experience more significant detachment. And later on, we may have trouble reconnecting with our bodies and emotions even when we really want to.

Complicating matters, we live in a culture that tends to prioritize the intelligence of the head over that of the body. Many of us spend our days hunched over screens, commuting in cars, glued to our phones — barely noticing our bodies at all. “Our culture takes that to be the normal state,”

says renowned embodiment practitioner Philip Shepherd.

Psychologist and relationship expert Michaela Boehm, author of *The Wild Woman's Way: Reconnect to Your Body's Wisdom*, describes the journey of embodiment as “the process of becoming alive to the signals of our bodies.”

“Thriving means we are connected with all the faculties of our body,” she says, “including pleasure, including aliveness, vitality, extra energy.”

“Our regulated systems benefit as well, such as our heartbeat and blood pressure. We move away from being reactive to being responsive.”

The benefits of being more in sync with our bodies’ needs are legion. Yet for many of us, this remains a challenge.

Whether we disconnect because of day-to-day stressors or more deep-seated issues, like posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the result is often the same: We’re missing out on the full range of sensation, emotion, and experience that’s available to us as humans.

Yet no matter how distant from ourselves we might become, embodiment experts believe it is possible to find our way back to our bodies, one small step at a time.



WHY WE LEAVE

There are many reasons we disconnect from our corporeal selves. For starters, relentless ads, social media posts, and narratives about “ideal” bodies can leave us feeling that our own bodies don’t measure up.

“The cultural mirrors all around us are constantly telling us, in both obvious and covert ways, that there is a right way to have a body — and it is something other than yours,” writes psychologist, researcher, and embodiment expert Hillary L. McBride, PhD, in *The Wisdom of Your Body: Finding Healing, Wholeness, and Connection Through Embodied Living*.

Perhaps you grew up with a form of religious indoctrination and you still feel as though your sexual impulses are impure or untrustworthy. Or — like me — you live with chronic illness or disability and have internalized notions that your body is somehow less than. If you’ve experienced discrimination or aggression based on your skin color, sexual orientation, or gender expression, you might feel unsafe in your body.

Another reason we might habitually check out is because we once experienced something that was so frightening or painful that we left our bodies. Even if the event occurred long ago, such experiences leave an impression, explains trauma expert Bessel van der Kolk, MD.

“Trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past,” he writes in his book *The Body Keeps the Score*. “It is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body.”

Whether you experience chronic stress and overwhelm (“small-t” trauma) or catastrophic and life-threatening events (“big-T” trauma), the body reacts the same way: with heightened blood pressure; faster pulse; shallow, fast breathing; and narrowed focus. This is the body in survival mode, ready for fight, flight, or freeze.

“If we’re not able to go back into the thriving aspect of our nervous system, very often the information is stored not only in the fascia but in particular movement or tension patterns — and from there, then, of course, into the emotions and into the mind,” says Boehm. “In embodiment practices and somatic therapies, we’re essentially supporting the body in doing what the body does best, which is de-escalate and regulate.”

This allows us to spend more time thriving, rather than just surviving — even as the world around us continues to present its challenges.

SOMATICS AND EMBODIMENT

Rather than suggesting they rely solely on talk therapy, McCampbell helps her clients use their bodily sensations “to inform them or operate as a shorthand.” This is sometimes called a somatic approach.

The word “somatic” comes from the Greek *soma*, which means “the body.” Somatic practices employ the body’s internal sensations to facilitate self-awareness and healing. A somatic framework can be applied to a broad range of practices — from talk therapy to physical exercises.

Philosopher Thomas Hanna, PhD, coined the term in the 1970s, writing that “everything we experience in our lives is a bodily experience.” Drawn from the works of Moshé Feldenkrais and Hans Selye, Hanna’s somatic exercises aim to release contractions stored in the body from “daily stresses and traumas.”

Mind-body integration has long been central to traditional Indigenous and Asian cultural teachings, such as yoga, Tibetan Buddhism, tai chi, and qigong, says Tara Teng, author of *Your Body Is a Revolution: Healing Our Relationships With Our Bodies, Each Other, and the Earth*.

“All across the world, every culture has had an understanding of somatics,” says Teng, who is Asian American/Canadian and uses her bicultural identity to inform her practice. “We are just now collectively using this word — somatics — to describe it.”

HOW TO COME HOME TO YOURSELF

The following activities can help you become more grounded in your physical self. Most somatic practices help your nervous system unwind and release stress, which typically feels calming and relaxing. Yet for some, getting in touch with their bodies can bring up mixed or uncomfortable emotions. If you're dealing with complex trauma, be sure to take your time with any embodiment practices and seek professional support if you need it.

1. CHECK IN WITH YOUR BODY.

Many of us have no idea when we're checked out of our bodies, so making it a habit to check in throughout the day is a great first step, says McCampbell.

Some questions you might ask yourself: *How do I feel right now? Where do I feel tension? Where do I feel easeful and relaxed? Am I hungry or thirsty? Do I need to use the bathroom? Would my body like to shift position, stretch, or maybe go outside for a little fresh air?*

"That piece of recognizing — *I have needs and that's OK* — is so powerful," McCampbell says. She notes that women, especially, are often conditioned to put their own physical needs and preferences last.



2. TURN DOWN THE VOLUME.

Periodically silence your phone, email alerts, and social media, Teng suggests. Notice how it feels when you don't feel obliged to respond instantly to each and every message.

Turning off notifications allows us to decide when and what we will choose to respond to, rather than being in a state of constant reaction. This small act can be a way to reclaim our agency — and our nervous systems.

"When we do this, we move ourselves out of the rat race and into a more embodied natural rhythm," Teng writes.

3. CONNECT WITH YOUR BREATH.

Awareness of the breath is at the heart of nearly every embodiment practice — as well as many spiritual practices, from Tibetan Buddhism to mindfulness meditation. "It's one of the only ways that we can control the engagement of our autonomic nervous system," says yoga therapist and Ayurvedic practitioner Chara Caruthers, MSc, C-IAYT, ERYT-500, CAP.

When we're anxious or stressed, the sympathetic nervous system switches into fight-or-flight mode, and breath gets shallower. Mindfully lengthening and slowing the breath helps activate the parasympathetic nervous system. This signals safety to the body, which allows our rest-and-digest mode to kick in.

Box breathing (a.k.a. square breathing) is a calming yogic breathing practice used by U.S. Navy SEALs to curb stress. Here's how to do it:

- Slowly inhale for a count of four. Gently hold the breath for a count of four.
- Slowly exhale for a count of four. Gently hold that for a count of four.
- If comfortable, continue for a while, until you feel more grounded.

McCampbell recommends this practice for moments of overwhelm. "The breath is the quickest way to get you into your body, but also to calm you down if you are in a heightened state."

4. GET MOVING — OR EVEN DANCING.

Sedentary jobs have skyrocketed by 83 percent since 1950, according to the American Heart Association. Most of us now spend about 10 hours a day sitting.

Spending all this time seated denies us the full experience of our bodies. “Movement is our birthright,” says Boehm, who recommends periodically getting off that swivel chair, putting on some music, and dancing vigorously around your home.

Boehm believes moving the hips, specifically, is important. “We want to bring the energy from the head back down into the body. And for that we need to engage with the lower body.”

If you’re not big on dancing, try some hip circles while standing at your desk or brushing your teeth. Or pull out that Hula-Hoop. For those not comfortable engaging their hips, Boehm suggests jumping a few times a day on a rebounder — a somatic technique found to reduce trauma-related symptoms.



5. EXPLORE YOGA.

Yoga is more than just twisty poses that build strength and flexibility, says Caruthers. “It’s a physical practice, but it’s also a contemplative practice. It gives us this space to explore ourselves and our bodies. I often say the breath is like a flashlight that can illuminate the physical experience.”

The word “yoga” comes from the Sanskrit word *yuj*, which means “to yoke” or “to unite.” Ancient scriptures say the practice, which includes meditation and breathwork as well as physical postures, promotes a union between mind and body.

Yoga poses are powerful tools for developing interoception, or the ability to sense your body’s sensations and signals, says Caruthers. “As you continue to practice, you can begin to associate certain sensations in your body with emotions like anger, sadness, joy — or even more complex things like embarrassment and confusion.”



6. GO OUT IN NATURE.

Time outdoors can be an excellent way to return to the senses. Ideally, you can take a hike in a deep forest or walk on an ocean beach, but even the sidewalk outside your office building works. Being somewhere that’s not climate controlled means you’re likely to feel whatever is happening in your environment — whether that’s a warm breeze or icy rain on your skin.

Shepherd says spending time in nature helps us unite with “the mindfulness of the present.”

“There is companionship in everything. Everything around us in this moment was birthed in the same star matter that we are made of,” he says. “With every inbreath, you are taking into your body the exhalations of forests. They are there to nourish you. And you offer in exchange a gift of carbon dioxide that may someday find itself part of a forest.”

When we live in our heads, we may treat the world around us as inanimate, adds Shepherd. But when we are fully in our bodies and out in nature, we can “come home to what the body recognizes, which is that it belongs.”

7. SPEAK KINDLY TO YOUR BODY.

So much of the marketplace is filled with products that encourage us to “correct” our bodies: antiaging serum, cellulite cream, teeth-whitening treatments, and more. Yet when we are critical of our bodies, says McCampbell, we’re not really seeing ourselves.

“We’re actually seeing the trauma and shame that has been projected upon our body by society, or even by loved ones,” she explains.

Developing a clearer view of our bodies can be a slow, but liberating, process. Start with becoming aware of how you talk to yourself. When you look in the mirror, do you hear critical voices in your head? Do you compare your body with the bodies of others, or with your own body at a different age or level of fitness? How would it feel if you spoke about your own body the way you would speak about the body of someone you loved dearly?

In her book *The Body Is Not an Apology*, author and activist Sonya Renee Taylor suggests noticing the words you use to complain about your body, then making a list of shame-free, neutral alternatives to use instead. (Learn more about how to practice body neutrality at ELmag.com/bodyneutrality.)

8. EXPLORE SELF-MASSAGE.

Touch is a direct reminder of our physical existence, but not everyone feels comfortable being touched by others. If that’s true for you, massaging your own hands or feet can be a safe, easy way to feel more embodied.

“We don’t often get touched a lot in an attentive and therapeutic way,” Boehm says. “Self-massage fills that for ourselves so we are not dependent on other people’s attention.”

Our feet contain many reflexology points that help our bodies de-escalate, she notes. Foot massage is also a great way to diffuse the energy in our brains, where it tends to collect when we do a lot of mental work.

“When we bring the energy to the feet, we’re pulling the excess energy from our neck, shoulders, jaw, and head,” she says.



9. TRY STRENGTH TRAINING.

Strength training fosters interoception as well as proprioception, the body’s sense of itself in space, says Mark Schneider, CSCS, a trauma-informed strength coach in Minneapolis. It can also help us overcome limiting or negative beliefs about our bodies.

As founder of the Retreat Strength Gym, Schneider uses strength training to help people recover from physical or mental setbacks. He defines strength training as any training with resistance that is outside your current physical, mental, or emotional capacity.

In other words, it’s not just about lifting heavy — it’s about being willing to surpass any limiting beliefs about what your body can do. “Regardless of the injuries and traumas of the past, we are able to train with, and around, those narratives and create a different future,” he says. “It’s never too late to start again, and again.”

The benefits of strength training can include improved physical strength, bone density, joint health, and metabolism. While those health benefits are great, strength training can also support embodiment with increased confidence, curiosity, trust, and a stronger belief in your ability to manage stress and the unknown, says Schneider. (For more on trauma-informed training, check out ELmag.com/movementfortrauma.)

10. HIT THE HEALTH CLUB.

Try a new class, like Zumba, barre, or HIIT. Given that all forms of exercise have myriad benefits for the mind and body, Schneider believes the “best” form of exercise is one that keeps you engaged and present while moving you toward your goals. Becoming more embodied can help you know exactly what that movement is. 🧘



STRONG STARTS

Expert guidance for nailing the setup of five common strength moves — so you can make the most of your lifting efforts.

BY LAUREN BEDOSKY

THE BEST WAY to finish strong is to start strong. This golden adage applies to many aspects of life, but it rings especially true when it comes to exercising: A proper setup is essential for maximizing the benefits of any move and can determine its ultimate efficiency and efficacy.

In other words, start strong to get stronger.

“The setup of your exercises impacts what muscles get loaded, how effective the training is, and the relative risk of injury with the movement,” explains Samuel Spinelli, DPT, CSCS, a physical therapist, strength coach, and cofounder of Citizen Athletics.

Your starting position determines the direction your body — and any weight you’re lifting — will travel throughout the movement. A strong setup ensures your body follows the most efficient path for targeting the muscles or skills you want to focus on, no matter how much weight you lift.

The more efficiently you perform an exercise, the more work you’ll be capable of doing, whether that’s how much you’re able to lift or how many sets and reps you can complete. This leads to greater adaptations from the

exercise in the long run, which means better performance overall.

It also allows your muscles, joints, and connecting tissues to work optimally while providing another important benefit: “In many cases, being intentional about getting into a proper setup position alleviates a lot of injury potential,” says Konnor Fleming, signature coach development lead at Life Time in Edina, Minn.

While there is no “perfect” form that works for every person, there are guidelines that can help you find what works best for your body and goals. The following five strength exercises have tricky setups, but these expert tips can help you secure a strong starting position.

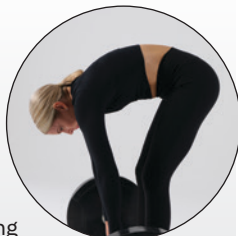
CONVENTIONAL BARBELL DEADLIFT

This compound movement strengthens the hamstrings, glutes, back, and core. It also trains the hip-hinge pattern, which has functional carryover to other exercises and daily activities.

PITFALLS

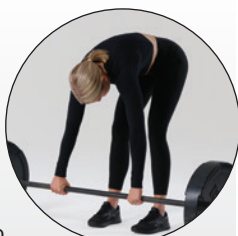
UPPER BACK

DISENGAGED. It's important to have tension in the back muscles, including in the large latissimus dorsi. The lats help you lift the barbell off the floor without needing to round your spine or shrug the weight toward your shoulders, says Alison Heilig, a National Academy of Sports Medicine–certified personal trainer, yoga instructor, founder of Miles to Go Athletics in Maryland, and editor in chief of *Fit Bottomed Girls*.



HIPS TOO HIGH OR TOO LOW.

As a hinge movement, the deadlift relies heavily on getting your hips in the right position. If you set them up too high, your legs won't be able to contribute as much to the effort of lifting the weight off the floor, leaving your lower back to pick up the slack. If your hips are too low, you'll push the bar farther away from your center of gravity, which puts you in a less mechanically advantageous position and makes the weight feel heavier than it is.



BAR TOO FAR AWAY OR TOO CLOSE.

How closely you set the bar to your body affects how well you're able to lift the weight off the floor. If the bar is too far away from your body (say, over your toes), it'll put you in a less effective pulling position and place more pressure on your spine. If the bar is too close to your body (against your shins before hinging), you'll have to shift your weight back toward your heels to grip the bar. "Unfortunately, that can lead to the toes lifting off the ground, including the big toe, which is important for stability," says Gaudreau.



CUES

IMAGINE SQUEEZING AN ORANGE IN YOUR ARMPIT.

This cue creates tension in your spine, lats, and upper-back muscles, helping you create more full-body tension and stabilize the spine, says Steph Gaudreau, NASM-CPT, CISSN, a strength and nutrition coach for women over 40. It also keeps your arms — and the barbell — from drifting away from your body.



SET YOUR ARMPITS OVER THE BAR.

Finding the proper hip position can be tricky, so Gaudreau recommends a simple trick: Hinge forward to grip the barbell and check that your armpits are directly over the bar.



LINE UP THE BAR OVER YOUR MIDFOOT.

When you look down, the barbell should be over the middle of your shoelaces. In this position, the weight is close to your center of gravity. "When you go to lift [the weight] off the ground, you'll be able to leverage better and use your legs more than your lower back," Heilig says.



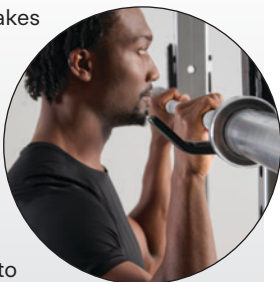
BARBELL BACK SQUAT

This exercise works muscles around multiple joints in the lower body, building strength and muscle in your quads, glutes, and hamstrings.

PITFALLS

J-HOOKS TOO HIGH OR TOO LOW.

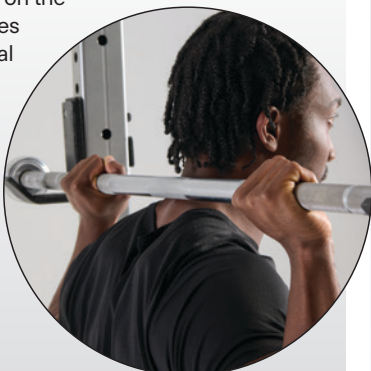
One of the first mistakes people make when setting up for the back squat is setting the J-hooks, which hold the barbell on the squat rack, too high or too low. If you set them too high, you'll have to rise onto your tiptoes to unrack the bar. Too low and you'll have to do a half-squat to get the bar out of the rack for your first rep, Gaudreau says.



FEET TOO CLOSE TOGETHER. Placing the feet hip width apart tends to be too narrow for most people. A too-narrow stance can inhibit the ability to squat through a full range of motion (lowering the hips until the thighs are at least parallel to the ground) and potentially cause people to lift their heels rather than pressing through their full feet.



BARBELL ON THE NECK. Positioning the barbell at the base of the neck can put pressure on the delicate bones of the cervical spine, causing neck discomfort and pain, says Gaudreau.



CUES

POSITION J-HOOKS AT ARMPIT-HEIGHT.

For most people, this is the height that allows them to unrack the bar without rising onto their tiptoes or wasting energy by doing a half-squat, Gaudreau notes.

PLAY WITH YOUR FOOT POSITION. Start with your feet shoulder width apart and your toes turned out about 10 to 15 degrees. This tends to be the most comfortable squat stance for most people because "it starts to naturally open the hips up, making it easier for people to sit deeper into the squat," says Fleming. From this position, experiment with micro changes to your stance — slightly wider or narrower; toes turned out slightly more — to find what works best for you.

MAKE A SHELF FOR THE BARBELL. Instead of letting the bar rest on the bony part of the neck, Gaudreau suggests, use your upper-back muscles. "Think about pulling your shoulder blades together a little, and that's going to give a meaty shelf for the bar to sit [on]."



BARBELL OVERHEAD PRESS

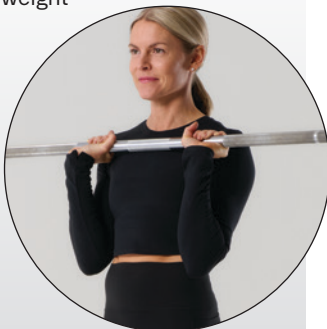
Reaching for or lifting objects overhead is commonplace, making this shoulder strengthener a truly functional exercise.

PITFALLS

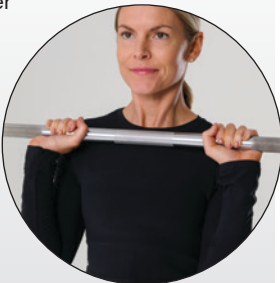
FEET TOO CLOSE TOGETHER. Your lower body provides a stable base for your arms and shoulders to push from. "If your feet are too narrow, all that does is compromise the stability of the position before you've started moving [the weight]," Fleming says. Being even slightly off-balance makes it a lot harder to control the path of the bar when it's time to press it overhead.



ELBOWS POINTED DOWN. Gripping the barbell with the elbows pointing to the floor causes the weight to drift forward, notes Fleming. "As soon as that happens, you're holding the bar with your forearms and biceps instead of supporting the weight on your shoulders."



GRIP TOO NARROW. Ultimately, your grip position depends on your shoulder mobility and whether you're targeting the shoulders or triceps (a narrower grip homes in on the triceps). However, many people place their hands closer together than their overhead shoulder mobility allows, leading them to press the barbell forward slightly to compensate.



CUES

FEET HIP WIDTH TO SHOULDER WIDTH APART. Widen your stance to create a more stable base for the overhead press. You may need to experiment to find your ideal position, but most people settle somewhere between hip width and shoulder width apart, Fleming says.

POINT ELBOWS SLIGHTLY FORWARD. When you grip the bar, allow the elbows to drift in front of the bar rather than point straight down. This gets the bar to sit on the shoulders and collar-bones, giving you a more supportive base position.

GRIP WITH HANDS SHOULDER WIDTH APART OR WIDER. For most people, this tends to be the most comfortable grip position, says Tony Gentilcore, CSCS, cofounder of Core Collective, a fitness facility in Brookline, Mass. Aim to keep your wrists as straight as your unique ability allows.



BARBELL BENCH PRESS

This classic move builds chest and shoulder strength while also improving stability in the small, intrinsic muscles around the shoulder joint.

PITFALLS

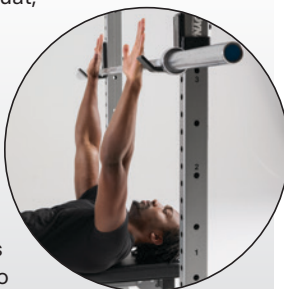
FEET ON BENCH.

Gaudreau sees people place their feet on the bench, often because their feet don't comfortably reach the floor. But this modification takes the legs out of the lift. "We need to push through the legs to create stability in the core and tension in the lower body when we bench," she explains. Otherwise, your midsection will rock from side to side as you struggle to stay rooted in place. (There are bench-press variations that remove active engagement of the legs, but if you're trying to build as much strength as possible, use your legs.)



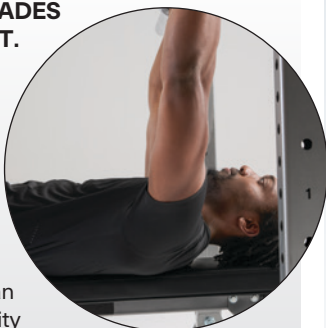
J-HOOKS TOO HIGH OR TOO LOW.

As with the back squat, avoid setting the J-hooks too high or too low for a bench press. If they're too high, you'll have to raise your upper body off the bench to unrack the bar. If the hooks are too low, you'll do half a bench press to get the bar out of the rack.



SHOULDER BLADES SPREAD APART.

Often, people lie on the bench with their shoulder blades spread apart and back flat. "Internal rotation of the shoulder under load can lead to less stability during the lift and increase the risk of injury," Gaudreau notes. "Some people can feel their shoulders pinching."



CUES

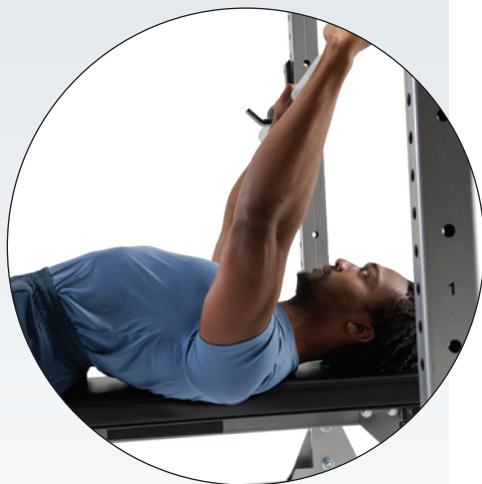
ENGAGE YOUR LEGS. If your feet don't reach the floor, place weight plates or aerobic steps beside the bench to bring the floor to you. Pull your feet back a bit to create a slight arch from your glutes to your feet. "You don't want your feet dangling off the bench," Gaudreau says. Push your feet into the ground (or weight plates or aerobic steps) to create leg tension.



POSITION J-HOOKS JUST SHY OF AN ARM'S LENGTH ABOVE THE BENCH. Check the barbell height before you begin your first rep. Lying back on the bench, grip the barbell and press up without fully unracking — you'll know it's the right height if you only have to press an inch or two to reach full extension.

PACK THE SHOULDERS.

After gripping the bar, draw your shoulder blades together and pull them down and back, creating a stable base, Gaudreau advises. "That's going to put the shoulders in external rotation, which means at the bottom of the bench press, when you get a lot of stretch and your elbows dip very low, you're not placing a lot of pressure on the front of the shoulder."



PUSHUP

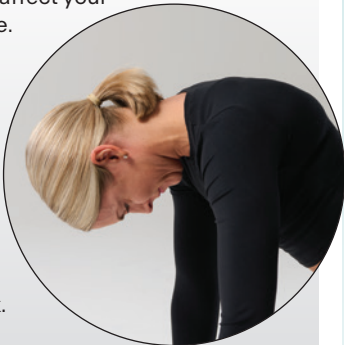
This fitness staple is a full-body exercise that builds core stability as well as back, arm, and chest power.

PITFALLS

HANDS FACING INWARD. Heilig often sees people rotate their hands toward each other on the floor, which causes the shoulders to roll forward during the exercise. "That's not going to be a stable position for the shoulder," she says. In fact, this setup mistake is a common cause of pain at the front of the shoulder.



CHIN TUCKED. Tucking your chin down to look at the floor is a setup pitfall that can negatively affect your pushup posture. A tucked chin can make your shoulders curl, impeding your range of motion and potentially straining your shoulders, neck, and back.



LOWER BODY NOT ENGAGED. Pushups are total-body exercises that are often treated as upper-body exercises. "If you don't feel your butt engaged, your core probably isn't engaged either, because they fire together in that position," Heilig notes. Without help from your glutes, your abdominals can't hold your spine in a neutral position, causing your ribs to drift forward or your spine to arch.



CUES

POINT YOUR INDEX FINGERS STRAIGHT AHEAD.

To get your shoulders in a healthy, stable position, place your hands on the floor with your index fingers pointing straight ahead. Then spread the rest of your fingers to widen your base and think about screwing your hands into the floor. "That's going to activate your shoulder stabilizer muscles," Heilig says.



GAZE SLIGHTLY AHEAD.

Keep your eyes looking slightly forward and your collarbones broad to put your neck in a more neutral position. That sets your shoulders up for better movement during the exercise.



SQUEEZE A YOGA BLOCK OR PILATES BALL BETWEEN YOUR THIGHS. Heilig often uses this trick with her clients to teach them how to activate their lower body and glutes during pushups. You don't have to use a prop for all your reps; once you know the feeling of lower-body engagement, imagine squeezing a block or ball to maintain it. 🎧



GET MORE MOVES

Find pitfalls and corrective cues for four more strength exercises at [ELmag.com/strongstarts](https://www.ELmag.com/strongstarts).







Meet the Oral Microbiome

The bacterial communities in your mouth influence your overall health. Discover what you can do to take good care of them.

BY MO PERRY

IN 2019, nutritionist Megan Barnett, MS, CNS, met with a patient with puzzling lab results. Despite maintaining a consistent diet, exercise routine, and generally healthy lifestyle, the woman's cholesterol levels had spiked significantly. While menopause can trigger higher cholesterol levels, that wasn't the case here — the patient had been postmenopausal for more than a decade. Both she and Barnett were stumped.

Fifteen minutes after the appointment, the patient called Barnett from her car. Something had occurred to her: Her dentist had recently discovered infections in the bone beneath five of her root canals. She wondered whether these hidden infections could drive her cholesterol levels up. Intrigued, Barnett decided to investigate.

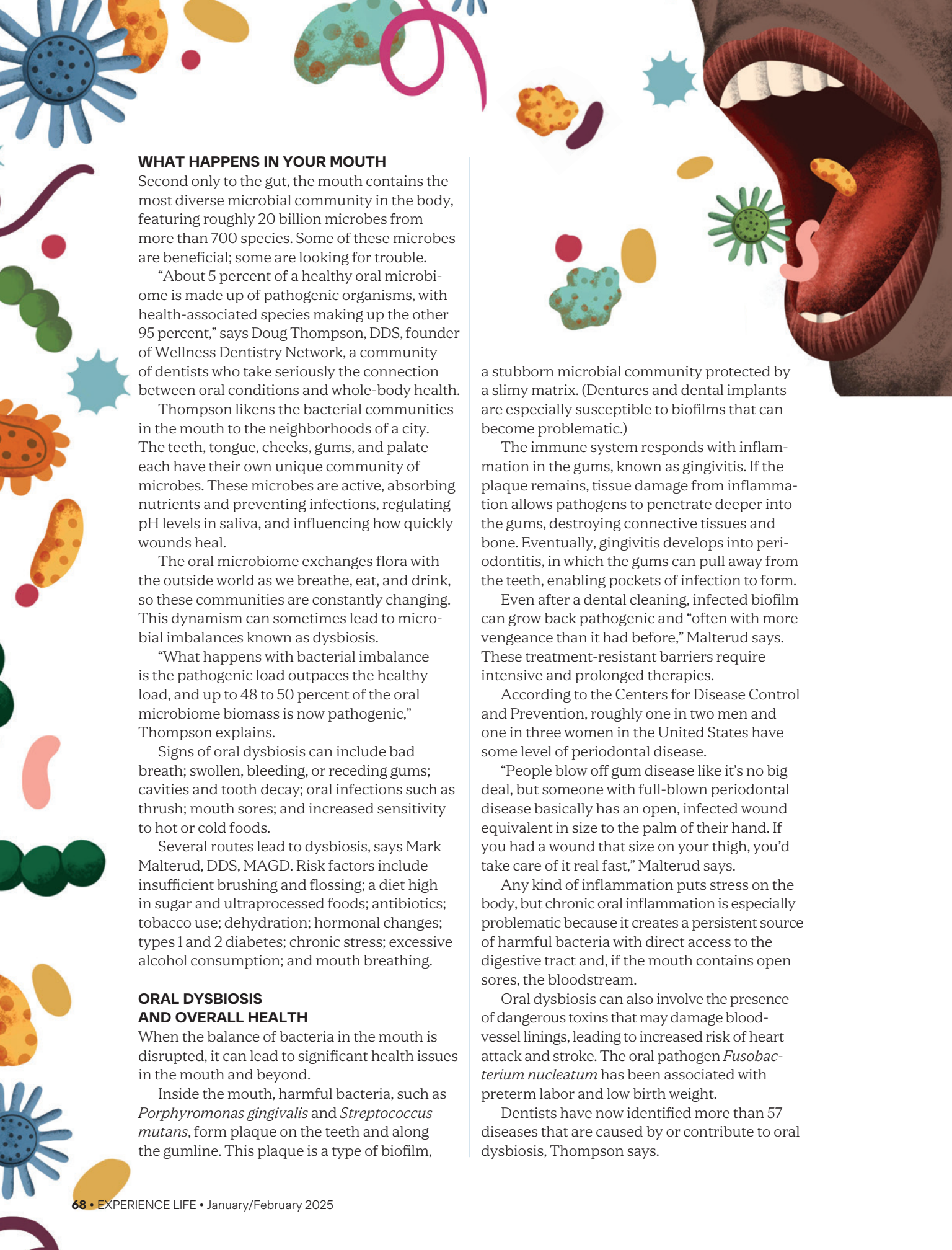
In collaboration with the patient's integrative dentist, Kelly Blodgett, DMD, NMD, IBDM, Barnett devised an experiment. They would run lab tests before and after their patient was scheduled to have the affected teeth removed.

The results were astonishing. Two weeks after the dental work, her cholesterol levels dropped 35 points, returning to optimal range.

"That really triggered my curiosity," Barnett recalls. She started digging into the research. She learned that when the body encounters an infection, the immune response can lead to increased cholesterol production to support immune-cell function.

"We've always known that oral diseases affect cardiovascular health, but the question is, Why?" Barnett says. "One reason is because chronic inflammation in the mouth is triggering systemic inflammatory responses — not just in the heart, not just in the vascular system, not just in the mouth, but throughout the body."

Since their initial discovery in 2019, Barnett and Blodgett have worked with dozens of patients. "We see consistently that there are huge improvements in overall health and well-being when we remove infections from the mouth and support the whole oral microbiome," she says.

A detailed illustration of a human mouth, showing the tongue, teeth, and gums. Surrounding the mouth are numerous colorful, stylized microbes, including bacteria, viruses, and fungi, representing the oral microbiome. The microbes are in various shapes and sizes, some with flagella, others with spores or capsules. The background is white, making the colorful microbes and the mouth stand out.

WHAT HAPPENS IN YOUR MOUTH

Second only to the gut, the mouth contains the most diverse microbial community in the body, featuring roughly 20 billion microbes from more than 700 species. Some of these microbes are beneficial; some are looking for trouble.

"About 5 percent of a healthy oral microbiome is made up of pathogenic organisms, with health-associated species making up the other 95 percent," says Doug Thompson, DDS, founder of Wellness Dentistry Network, a community of dentists who take seriously the connection between oral conditions and whole-body health.

Thompson likens the bacterial communities in the mouth to the neighborhoods of a city. The teeth, tongue, cheeks, gums, and palate each have their own unique community of microbes. These microbes are active, absorbing nutrients and preventing infections, regulating pH levels in saliva, and influencing how quickly wounds heal.

The oral microbiome exchanges flora with the outside world as we breathe, eat, and drink, so these communities are constantly changing. This dynamism can sometimes lead to microbial imbalances known as dysbiosis.

"What happens with bacterial imbalance is the pathogenic load outpaces the healthy load, and up to 48 to 50 percent of the oral microbiome biomass is now pathogenic," Thompson explains.

Signs of oral dysbiosis can include bad breath; swollen, bleeding, or receding gums; cavities and tooth decay; oral infections such as thrush; mouth sores; and increased sensitivity to hot or cold foods.

Several routes lead to dysbiosis, says Mark Malterud, DDS, MAGD. Risk factors include insufficient brushing and flossing; a diet high in sugar and ultraprocessed foods; antibiotics; tobacco use; dehydration; hormonal changes; types 1 and 2 diabetes; chronic stress; excessive alcohol consumption; and mouth breathing.

ORAL DYSBIOSIS AND OVERALL HEALTH

When the balance of bacteria in the mouth is disrupted, it can lead to significant health issues in the mouth and beyond.

Inside the mouth, harmful bacteria, such as *Porphyromonas gingivalis* and *Streptococcus mutans*, form plaque on the teeth and along the gumline. This plaque is a type of biofilm,

a stubborn microbial community protected by a slimy matrix. (Dentures and dental implants are especially susceptible to biofilms that can become problematic.)

The immune system responds with inflammation in the gums, known as gingivitis. If the plaque remains, tissue damage from inflammation allows pathogens to penetrate deeper into the gums, destroying connective tissues and bone. Eventually, gingivitis develops into periodontitis, in which the gums can pull away from the teeth, enabling pockets of infection to form.

Even after a dental cleaning, infected biofilm can grow back pathogenic and "often with more vengeance than it had before," Malterud says. These treatment-resistant barriers require intensive and prolonged therapies.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, roughly one in two men and one in three women in the United States have some level of periodontal disease.

"People blow off gum disease like it's no big deal, but someone with full-blown periodontal disease basically has an open, infected wound equivalent in size to the palm of their hand. If you had a wound that size on your thigh, you'd take care of it real fast," Malterud says.

Any kind of inflammation puts stress on the body, but chronic oral inflammation is especially problematic because it creates a persistent source of harmful bacteria with direct access to the digestive tract and, if the mouth contains open sores, the bloodstream.

Oral dysbiosis can also involve the presence of dangerous toxins that may damage blood-vessel linings, leading to increased risk of heart attack and stroke. The oral pathogen *Fusobacterium nucleatum* has been associated with preterm labor and low birth weight.

Dentists have now identified more than 57 diseases that are caused by or contribute to oral dysbiosis, Thompson says.

The Bigger Picture

These are some of the main aspects of health affected by the state of the oral microbiome.

HEART HEALTH

Numerous studies highlight an association between oral bacteria and cardiovascular diseases. A study from the American Heart Association, published in 2021, found that people with gum disease have higher levels of LDL (“bad”) cholesterol in their blood than those with healthy gums.

Another recent study, in *Postgraduate Medical Journal*, shows exactly how oral dysbiosis damages arterial health. Researchers found that chemicals produced by high-risk oral bacteria can make the walls of the artery more permeable and vulnerable to the invasion of LDL cholesterol. These bacteria also produce substances that make the inner lining of the arterial wall stickier, so it’s more likely to trap bad cholesterol and generate plaque deposits.

Malterud often partners with a cardiovascular specialist who sends him heart patients with oral dysbiosis. “[My colleague’s] biggest thing is reducing oral inflammation and problems like chronic infections following root canals that fail to heal, because he’s concerned about how oral inflammation can set up cardiovascular disease, coronary artery disease, and cerebral vascular disease,” he says.

Studies indicate that tracking oral health can be especially important for anyone whose genetic predisposition puts them at greater risk for cardiovascular events.

METABOLIC HEALTH

Research indicates a bidirectional relationship between periodontal disease and diabetes. Oral inflammation caused by dysbiosis can worsen insulin resistance, and both types 1 and 2 diabetes can exacerbate periodontal disease, creating a vicious cycle.

“Bacteria love sugar, and they love unregulated sugar in the blood,” Thompson says.

A Cochrane Review published in 2022 found moderate-certainty evidence that periodontal treatment improves glycemic control “by a clinically significant amount” in people with both periodontitis and diabetes.

COGNITIVE HEALTH

Anything that damages the cardiovascular system is bad news for the brain, so it’s not surprising that the risks posed by oral dysbiosis extend to cognitive health. An increasing body of evidence points to chronic inflammation and microbial dysbiosis as risk factors for Alzheimer’s. Studies typically connect oral inflammation to the systemic inflammation involved in neurodegeneration and dementia.

Malterud points to new research suggesting a possible connection between oral pathogens and Parkinson’s disease. In a small study, researchers found that early- to mid-stage Parkinson’s patients had higher levels of oral inflammation than healthy controls, even though the groups had similar amounts of plaque.

A few microbes, including *S. mutans*, were more abundant in the mouths of Parkinson’s patients. *S. mutans* is linked to the formation of amyloid plaques, which can contribute to cerebral inflammation.

IMMUNE FUNCTION

The oral microbiome plays a crucial role in regulating the immune system. Healthy oral bacteria help maintain immune homeostasis; dysbiosis can lead to chronic inflammation and immune dysregulation. This can increase the body’s susceptibility to infections and other immune-related conditions, including autoimmunity.

Studies have shown that certain oral pathogens associated with joint inflammation are more prevalent in patients with rheumatoid arthritis. Other research suggests periodontal disease may increase the odds of a longer, more severe COVID-19 infection, mainly by promoting viral adherence and persistence in the mouth.

Research has also indicated that disruptions in the oral microbiome can contribute to the development of allergic reactions, including asthma and peanut allergies.

CANCER RESISTANCE

Oral dysbiosis has been correlated with a range of gastrointestinal (GI) cancers, including those of the mouth, esophagus, stomach, colon, and pancreas.

In a study published in *Nature* in 2024, researchers

examined *F. nucleatum*, one of the bacteria implicated in gum disease. The mouth normally contains small amounts of this bacterium, but in an imbalanced oral microbiome it can overgrow and trigger inflammation. The study noted that *F. nucleatum* is rarely found in the guts of healthy people, but it has been identified in some colorectal cancer tumors, suggesting it may travel from the mouth through the digestive tract and contribute to tumor formation.

Barnett notes the oral pathogen *P. gingivalis* can survive the highly acidic environment of the stomach and migrate to the colon, causing a variety of digestive disorders. It has also been linked to GI cancers.

Because chronic inflammation is a risk factor for all cancers, oral inflammation may increase the risk of non-GI cancers as well. Studies have indicated associations between periodontal disease and an increased risk of lung cancer. A research team at Imperial College of London found that a history of gum disease increased the risk of kidney cancer by 49 percent and blood cancers, such as leukemia, by 30 percent in male subjects.

The burden oral dysbiosis puts on the immune system means oral health is particularly important for those undergoing cancer treatment, Malterud says. “When someone is going through cancer therapy, one of the best things they can do is stay on top of their oral health.”





ORAL-SYSTEMIC DENTISTRY

Historically, Western medicine has treated the mouth as if it were separate from the rest of the body. “As dentists, we’ve always been looked on as the ugly stepchild of medicine,” Malterud says. But that is starting to change.

“I think there’s a huge groundswell that’s occurring within the dental community, and people are starting to understand that we as dentists are a gateway to overall systemic health,” he adds.

In 2022, the American Dental Association made it official policy to support and encourage collaboration and treatment discussions between dentists and their patients’ primary healthcare providers. A growing number of dentists now use tools to evaluate and treat the oral microbiome to help mitigate a range of issues, in the mouth and beyond.

“There are now more than 10 salivary diagnostic companies that I can order tests from, and they measure from five to 29 different pathogens that are most commonly associated with oral disease,” Thompson says.

As with gut-microbiome testing, there’s still much to learn about how specific microbes correlate to specific conditions, he adds. “We’re still gaining understanding about what the pathogens all mean and how they interplay with each other. That’s going to be unraveling for years to come.”

As the knowledge continues to develop, integrative dentists have gained access to a range of insights and tools to help restore balance to a disrupted oral microbiome. These also help to support overall health.

“Sometimes the first step is having teeth removed to resolve an infection site,” says Barnett. “But sometimes we need to look at all the other inflammatory factors that may be going on, as well as [a patient’s] nutritional status, to get them into a healthy-enough condition to respond well to a dental procedure.”

Other techniques include using a hydrogen peroxide solution under the gum line to kill harmful microbes in periodontal pockets that toothbrushes and floss can’t reach. Some dentists are treating patients who have dysbiosis with prescription antibiotics or herbal antimicrobials, depending on the severity of the condition. They’re also using ozone therapy, which targets anaerobic bacteria with concentrated oxygen, to eradicate pathogens.

The Care and Feeding of Your Oral Microbiome

BRUSH YOUR TEETH.

“A toothbrush is one of the best tools people can use,” says Malterud. Regular brushing — two or three times a day — helps remove plaque and food particles to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria.

Use a soft-bristled brush, which is easier on the gums, and take your time, spending at least two minutes scouring all the surfaces of the teeth from every angle. Using an electric toothbrush with a built-in timer can help ensure you brush for the recommended duration, or just set a timer on your phone. Be sure to replace the head of your toothbrush every three to four months; sooner if the bristles are worn down.

Toothpaste helps prevent oral dysbiosis but doesn’t treat it, Thompson says. “There are no toothpastes on the market with enough antimicrobial properties to correct dysbiosis.” He recommends seeking brands that include nano-hydroxyapatite, an ingredient that can help remineralize teeth, reduce sensitivity, and create an environment less favorable to pathogens.

He also recommends sticking with fluoride toothpaste if you are cavity-prone. “I don’t know of a better anticavity strategy than the topical application of fluoride. We just don’t want to ingest it,” he says.

Steer clear of toothpastes that use sodium lauryl sulfate

(SLS), which can irritate tissues in the mouth and disrupt beneficial bacteria.

BE SURE TO FLOSS — AND TRY A WATER FLOSSER.

Regular flossing helps prevent gum disease by cleaning between teeth and below the gumline, where a toothbrush can’t reach. Yet even flossing may leave nooks and crannies where microbes can grow, Malterud says.

“A tooth is not perfectly round,” he points out. Tooth surfaces are uneven, particularly on the molars, so stretching a piece of floss around them inevitably leaves some divots untouched.

As a solution, many dentists recommend using a water flosser, which projects water at high pressure. It’s a bit like a power washer for teeth. “It does some mechanical removal of the biofilm as well as just flushing and liquid removal,” Thompson says.

To prevent or treat mild dysbiosis, he recommends adding a few drops of grapefruit-seed extract or powdered xylitol to the water-flosser reservoir to help prevent and remove biofilms.

AVOID COMMERCIAL MOUTHWASH.

Decades of TV commercials have promoted neon-colored, alcohol-based mouthwashes as the key to fresh breath. Unfortunately, these medicine-cabinet mainstays can do more harm than good.



"Commercial mouthwash is detrimental to the oral microbiome," Barnett says.

Strong antimicrobial agents are the selling point of many commercial mouthwashes, but these agents kill a full range of bacteria, including the beneficial ones that keep rogue bugs in check. This sets up the mouth for an overgrowth of opportunistic pathogens that resist antimicrobial treatments.

Some mouthwashes also alter the pH level in the mouth. "Commercial rinses can be very acidic, and our bad-acting biofilm loves to have an acidic environment to grow in," Thompson says. He adds that acid itself damages the teeth. (This is also a reason to avoid carbonated sodas, which are highly acidic.)

People with a healthy oral microbiome shouldn't need to use mouth rinses at all, Thompson says. Barnett adds that those trying to correct dysbiosis may benefit from a saltwater rinse or products made by Biocidin Botanicals, which contain herbs that promote a healthy microbial balance.

EAT A NUTRIENT-DENSE, WHOLE-FOODS DIET — AND STAY HYDRATED.

Unsurprisingly, whatever you feed yourself, you're also feeding your oral microbes.

When working with a patient to correct oral dysbiosis, Barnett focuses exclusively

on supporting their oral microbiome with diet for the first 90 days. This entails adding fermented foods to increase microbial diversity; removing refined grains and sugar, which preferentially feed opportunistic bacteria; and cutting out alcohol.

"Then we give them a huge variety of plants, because those phytonutrients are going to support healthy microbes," she explains. "We know now that it's not just fibers and resistant starches that feed healthy microbes; it's also the polyphenols."

Omega-3 fatty acids act as food for healthy bacteria; probiotics can be helpful too. "Microbes are talking to each other all over the body, so addressing microbes in one area of the GI tract is going to affect the others," Barnett adds.

Once the oral microbiome is restored to health, eat a well-rounded, whole-foods, low-sugar, Mediterranean-type or other plant-forward diet to maintain it, Barnett advises.

It's also important to drink plenty of water. Staying well hydrated promotes saliva production, which nurtures a healthy balance of bacteria in the mouth.

PRIORITIZE HEALTHY SLEEP AND NOSE BREATHING.

People with sleep apnea often breathe through their mouths, especially during sleep, which

dries out the mouth. Because saliva helps neutralize acids and inhibit bacterial growth, a dry mouth is more conducive to harmful bacteria.

Chronic inflammation caused by poor sleep and reduced oxygen levels can also exacerbate gum inflammation and periodontal disease. "If you're getting poor sleep, if you're mouth breathing, if you're not oxygenating, and you're apneic, then we have to solve for that to protect your mouth," Barnett says.

Though research on the efficacy of mouth taping is limited, some experts recommend the practice to prevent mouth breathing at night. It involves placing a small piece of mouth tape at the center of the lips. You can also try nasal strips across the bridge of the nose to help open nasal passages.

Nasal breathing not only fosters a better environment for healthy oral bacteria but also supports the production of nitric oxide. This improves blood oxygenation, supports immune function, and helps regulate blood pressure.

The mouth stands sentry at the gateway to the body, so by prioritizing oral health, we safeguard the entire body's well-being. Doing this can also prevent potential health issues before they start. 🌱

MO PERRY is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

IF YOU'RE AFRAID OF THE DENTIST . . .

A lot of us avoid the dentist — or want to. According to the Cleveland Clinic, about 36 percent of Americans have a fear of dental treatment, with 12 percent having an extreme fear.

Finding a dentist who understands fear is crucial. Look for a practitioner who advertises a gentle, minimally invasive approach or specializes in treating anxious patients. Reading online reviews can also help identify compassionate providers.

"Minimally invasive dentists often take a more holistic approach to treatment. We take a little more time and get to know the patient," says Mark Malterud, DDS, MAGD. "That's the best way to get rid of a phobia. The patient has to feel [heard] and be given some level of control in the situation. Once they start relaxing, the dentistry gets a lot easier."

These steps can help you overcome your anxiety.

Ask for help. Have a trusted friend or family member schedule the appointment for you.

Bring a friend. Taking someone with you can provide emotional support and distraction.

Practice relaxation techniques. Techniques like tapping (EFT) and eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) can reduce anxiety before and during the visit.

Communicate your fears. Let your dentist know about your anxiety so they can adjust their approach to make you more comfortable.



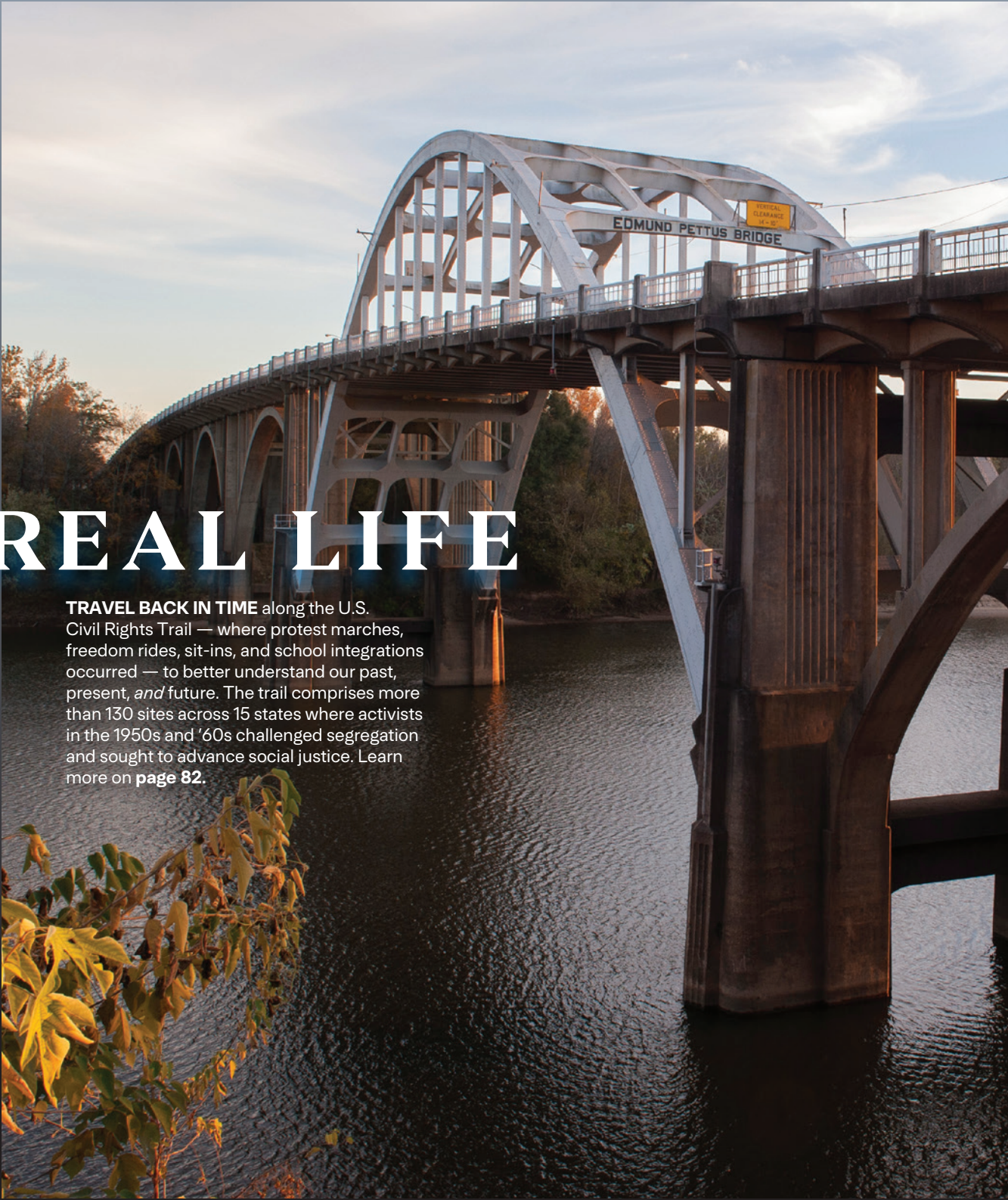
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A photograph of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, a large steel arch bridge spanning a river. The bridge is illuminated by the warm light of sunset, with the sky showing soft orange and blue hues. The bridge's name, "EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE", is visible on a sign above the arch. A yellow sign on the right side of the bridge indicates a "VERTICAL CLEARANCE 14'-00\"/>

REAL LIFE

TRAVEL BACK IN TIME along the U.S. Civil Rights Trail — where protest marches, freedom rides, sit-ins, and school integrations occurred — to better understand our past, present, *and* future. The trail comprises more than 130 sites across 15 states where activists in the 1950s and '60s challenged segregation and sought to advance social justice. Learn more on **page 82**.



Mindfulness in Mindless Moments

It's not always easy to practice awareness in a world rife with distractions. Correct your autopilot tendencies with these tips.

BY KARA DOUGLASS THOM

THERE'S PLENTY OF ancient wisdom imploring humans to stay present. Even modern-day research supports mindfulness as a legitimate health tool, pointing to its benefits for both mental and physical well-being, in part because developing healthy habits means learning to be mindful of our choices and aware of what feels good in our bodies.

Yet many of us still fail to grasp the simplicity of "Be here now." In this age of multitasking and increasing distractions, living in the moment can be a real struggle.

"Being mindful isn't hard, but *remembering* to be mindful is hard," says Diana Winston, director of UCLA Mindful and coauthor of *Fully Present: The Science, Art, and Practice of Mindfulness*. Winston defines mindfulness as paying attention to the present moment with openness, curiosity, and a willingness to be with that experience.

It can be a powerful way to calm your mind, says William Edelglass, PhD, director of studies at the Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. "When we take that pause to be mindful, we can settle into our body — allowing the mind to move at the pace of the body. A sense of relaxation can follow that is deeply nourishing."

It can also be a useful antidote for anxiety, Winston notes. "If you check in with your mind, you're often thinking about the past or obsessing about worst-case scenarios for the future," she says. "Mindfulness is an invitation into the present moment, which can offer peace from the ruminations that cause anxiety in our lives."

And while a seated meditation practice can yield plenty of positive benefits, there are ways to incorporate mindfulness into your daily life that don't require more of your time — by turning typically mindless moments into mindful opportunities.

MAKE YOUR TECH WORK FOR YOU

Smartphones and computers are major sources of distraction, but they are indispensable to most of us — and they're not going away anytime soon. So how can we use technology for good in our own lives?

Lidia Zylowska, MD, an associate professor at the University of Minnesota Medical School's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and author of *The Mindfulness Prescription for Adult ADHD*, suggests paying

attention to your attention — and observing how your devices pull or fragment it. Then create rules for yourself, such as putting in a certain amount of uninterrupted work time first or keeping the phone face-down and muted

when meeting with others. (Get more advice on mindful tech use at ELmag.com/intentionaltech.)

"Of course, devices have an addictive quality, so managing the urge to reach for them is also an important



1.

GET GROUNDED.

We use the term "down-to-earth" to compliment someone who is sensible and genuine; it's also a quality we want to embody. "Feeling your feet on the ground effectively moves your attention away from distracted, distraught, or stressed thinking," says Lidia Zylowska, MD, an associate professor at the University of Minnesota Medical School's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences and author of *The Mindfulness Prescription for Adult ADHD*.

She adds that feeling connected to the ground can evoke a sense of support, both physically and emotionally. Especially when combined with some deeper, slower breathing, getting grounded can shift our bodies from a stressed state to a more relaxed one. Try sensing your weight through your feet, and visualize your connection to what's beneath you.

Mindless Moment Opportunities:

- Getting out of bed in the morning
- Standing in the shower
- Exercising
- Waiting in line

2.

**USE YOUR WORDS.**

Gathas are short poems used in the Zen tradition to keep the mind on-task. “Words are powerful and can provide a little bit of ritual,” Edelglass explains. “They invite us to enter into a world that is meaningful, and [they] support joy even in a world that includes enormous suffering.”

Reciting these short poems is like a modern-day sticky-note reminder attached to the bathroom mirror, a prompt to bring yourself back to the present moment. Many of these can be found in Thich Nhat Hanh’s book *Present Moment Wonderful Moment: Mindfulness Verses for Daily Living*. In one example, the gatha for doing the dishes begins: “Washing the dishes is like bathing a baby Buddha.”

The world-renowned Zen monk also encourages people to create gathas for themselves, writing that “composing your own gathas to fit the specific circumstances of your life is one wonderful way to practice mindfulness.”

Mindless Moment Opportunities:

- Brushing your teeth (“Bristles circling my teeth brush away debris.”)
- Looking in the mirror (“There I am, fully present and so human.”)
- Driving (“I am watching the road for what I need to know.”)
- Going to the bathroom (“My body welcomes nourishment; my body releases waste.”)

3.

**CREATE A CUE.**

A bell sounds at the beginning and ending of a formal meditation session. You can also use cues as part of an informal practice to bring more mindfulness into your day.

Consider designating a certain sound — like a train whistling from a nearby rail crossing — as a reminder to yourself to be mindful. Or use any daily repeatable action to help your mind focus on the present, bring awareness to your breath, and notice what your body is doing.

For Winston, it’s emptying the dishwasher. “I feel the dish in my hand and notice how my arm moves as I lift it into the cupboard,” she says. “Every time you do it, you train your brain to cultivate more moments of mindfulness.”

That response can have downstream effects for the rest of your day and your overall health.

Mindless Moment Opportunities:

- Opening a door
- Washing your hands
- Putting your shoes on
- Hearing the phone ring or a siren in the distance

4.

**BE PROACTIVE.**

Sometimes we need to initiate mindfulness spontaneously to respond to a real-life event, like if your child has a meltdown or someone confronts you aggressively at work. This is the moment you want the mindfulness you’ve been practicing to take over.

“When we do that, not only do we act more skillfully and let go of our own suffering, we are also more open to recognizing and alleviating the suffering of others,” Edelglass says.

In Buddhism, there is an ethical call to be mindful, he explains: When we behave or interact in a way we might later regret, it’s often the result of being reactive. Choosing mindfulness over reactivity provides the opportunity to take a pause. When we do, we tend to act with more integrity.

When these situations arise, you can get into the moment by placing your pointer finger in the center of your forehead just below the hairline, or by putting your hand on top of your head or over your heart. And consider this acronym to get you through challenging moments:

Stop.

Take a breath.

Observe what’s happening inside your body.

Proceed with more awareness. ➦

KARA DOUGLASS THOM is a Minneapolis-based freelance writer.

skill,” Zylowska says. “Mindfulness practice is about noticing what is happening to us and *in* us in the moment, and having an opportunity to make a different choice. It is about being aware in the moment, not lost in it.”

Mindful Tech Tips:

- When you pick up your phone, use that impulse as a cue into mindfulness.
- Create a gatha — from Sanskrit, meaning “song” or “verse” — for sitting down at your computer, such as, “My screen lights up. I partner with my computer to do my best work.”
- Make your computer password an inspiring word or phrase that reminds you to stay present.
- Follow mindful social media accounts so the algorithm drives more uplifting moments to your feed.
- Use apps, like Chill, to provide mindfulness reminders.



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Three Nutritional Pillars of Mental Health

Omega-3 fatty acids, magnesium, and B vitamins can offer real relief from a variety of mental health issues.

BY HENRY EMMONS, MD

THE HEART is an amazing organ. It works nonstop and it never complains — until it does. Then we learn how sensitive it is and how much it depends on good nutrition to do its job.

The brain is even more sensitive and complex than the heart — and less tolerant of nutritional imbalance. An improperly nourished brain complains vigorously via poor concentration, fatigue, and a bad mood.

It's easy to overlook our diet's effect on mood, but addressing the nutritional needs of an unhappy brain can help right the ship.

Interestingly, what's good for the heart is also good for the brain. Omega-3 fatty acids, magnesium, and B vitamins support both organs. They are abundant in foods and available in high-quality supplements too. I consider these nutrients safe to combine with an antidepressant, and they often seem to help the medication work better.

OMEGA-3s: COOLING, STRUCTURE, AND PREVENTION

Omega-3s are fats that are integrated into the cell membranes of neurons and help stabilize neural signaling. They are also gentle anti-inflammatories. Whenever whole-body inflammation occurs, there is brain inflammation. We now understand that neuroinflammation is a cause of depression and other mental health problems, and tamping it down with omega-3s can reduce the risk of these conditions.

I find this the easiest of the three nutrients to get from food. Eating salmon or other fatty fish at least once a week, along with plenty of olive oil, nuts, and seeds, will get you most of the omega-3 fats you need. I still recommend supplementation whenever there are signs of systemic inflammation, such as autoimmune disease or a recurring mood disorder.

Folks taking blood thinners (or who have bleeding disorders) should be careful adding omega-3s: They're known to act like a blood thinner.

And then there are the infamous fish burps. I keep my capsules in the refrigerator, which reduces the taste. If the flavor remains an issue, try storing them in the freezer.

MAGNESIUM: SEROTONIN, SLEEP, AND CALM

Because magnesium does so many good things for the brain, it may be my favorite nutrient. It's a key building block for the calming chemical serotonin, and it also steadies brain-cell activity.

Though magnesium is in many foods — leafy greens, fruits, dairy, whole grains, nuts, seeds, beans, legumes — deficiency is common and has been associated with cognitive impairment.

Magnesium supplementation can improve memory and neurotransmission, reduce anxiety and muscle tension, and support focus. I take it every night before bed and have found it to be one of the best ways to improve my sleep.

I usually recommend the brain-friendly magnesium L-threonate form because it seems to have a better impact on sleep and anxiety. Magnesium citrate works well, too, and has the advantage of relieving constipation.

If you develop loose stools, that's a sign that you're taking too much magnesium. You can simply lower the dose, or switch to magnesium glycinate, which can be easier on the gut.

B VITAMINS: BALANCE, ENERGY, AND PROTECTION

B6, B12, and B9 (folate) help produce the brain chemicals that support mood, motivation, and pleasure: serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine. Without sufficient Bs, your neurons may be unable to replace those chemicals fast enough, leaving you feeling anxious, irritable, or depressed.

B vitamins are also intimately involved with cellular energy production and appear to help protect the brain from stress and aging.

Good dietary sources include whole grains, dried beans, meat, fish, dairy, fresh vegetables, and leafy greens.

Yet it's common to be deficient. Food may be grown in nutrient-depleted soil. We may have genetic quirks that prevent our utilization of B vitamins. Our intestines may have a harder time absorbing these nutrients as we age.

I often recommend a B complex to address stress, depression, or lack of focus. I prefer activated B vitamins, particularly folate, to work around potential genetic problems with absorption.

For some people, B vitamins are so stimulating they cause mild restlessness. Taking a low dose of B6 instead of a B complex, and only in the mornings, can help.

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*.



Friendlier Competition

Toxic competitiveness may lead to relationship issues and stagnation. Practicing self-acceptance and gratitude can relieve the pressure.

BY JON SPAYDE

LET'S START with a statement so obvious that it seems beside the point: Whatever we do in this life, others do too. Whether it's playing sports, parenting, cooking, sealing a deal — you name it — other people are engaging in the same activity, and some of them are going to show up in our world.

For many people, it's easy to celebrate the fact that others are engaged in our pursuits — we can feel fellowship with them, learn from them, or take them under our wing as students. We can also compete with them in necessary and healthy ways, developing our skills even further.

For some of us, though, a natural drive to compete and improve can turn toxic. A lively desire to rack up more points than our opponent can flip the fun of a game into a fear of being bested and a compulsive desire to win at any cost. The need to be *better than* can invade aspects of our lives where it doesn't belong.

And the drive can turn on us, too, creating a competition with ourselves that we can never win.

The result? Frustration, anxiety, flagging self-worth, even damaged relationships.

Brie Vortherms, MA, LMFT, a marriage and family therapist as well as the director of Life Time Mind, an internal coaching program at Life Time, offers some clarifying insights about why we compete, why competitiveness can turn compulsive, and what we can do to detoxify the competitive urge when it gets out of hand.

Hint: It's about self-acceptance.

STRESS SOURCES

Our culture sees competitiveness as inherently good and idolizes winners. "Most of our society is focused on performance-based esteem, which means *I matter more when I win*, in school, athletically, in business, wherever," says Vortherms. "The personal corollary is *I only like myself when I'm doing as well as or better than somebody else*."

You see your competitive drive as an advantage. Given the general cultural attitude, hyper-competitiveness may seem like a competitive advantage. Through this lens, "healthy competition" sounds like just another name for not quite giving something your all. But, Vortherms notes, "if it's only about winning, you're setting yourself up for a really narrow way to feel good."

You don't realize that your competitiveness has turned toxic. Perhaps the line between healthy competition and toxic competitiveness has blurred, and you can no longer tell whether your mindset has slipped toward the toxic end of the spectrum.

You compete with everybody about everything. You've always loved to win at tennis and golf — and now you find yourself compelled to bring the most delicious and elaborate dish to a potluck or to buy a fancier car than your neighbor's, even if doing so is beyond your abilities or stretches your budget to the breaking point. "The toxic competitive urge can drive people to be immoderate in the way they live their lives — to prove they matter," Vortherms says.

You overcompete with yourself too. Striving for personal bests is healthy as long as it doesn't turn into a grim struggle and an unwillingness to accept your own limits.

You take on more than you can handle. Once overcompetitiveness with yourself takes root in your mind, it's easy to overcommit and overwork, which can put a strain on you, your resources, and your relationships.

You resist setting goals because you're afraid that you'll fall short. Eventually, toxic self-competitiveness can become paralyzing. "This is perfectionism," says Vortherms. "*If I can't do it the very best, and if I can't guarantee that I'm going to be successful, I'm just not going to do it at all*." This can send you into a functional freeze and shut you down." In the end, it can become easier to have no goals at all than to risk not meeting them.



SUCCESS STRATEGIES

Look for the signs of hypercompetitiveness. Vortherns recommends paying attention to the ways that your competitiveness may be sliding toward the toxic end of the spectrum. Indications of toxic competitiveness include growing competitive in more areas of your life (even where it doesn't fit); becoming competitive with others to an extent that damages relationships; losing pleasure in competition as the drive to win takes over; feeling that you're worthless unless you are the best; and avoiding setting goals for fear of falling short or not winning.

Understand the relationship between hypercompetitiveness and self-worth. Vortherns identifies a few personas that she thinks are inherent in all of us: "There's the inner wounded child, who doesn't feel worthy, feels unprotected, feels less than," she says. "And there's also the inner teenager, who's out there trying to prove that *I matter* to earn space in the world by being better than. This part of us can be rigid; it's the part, I think, that shows up in toxic competition." We stake our entire self-worth on beating someone else.

But there is also a third part of us — the grownup or functional adult who understands moderation and inherent

worth, Vortherns notes. This is the part we want to have in charge.

Develop self-compassion. Vortherns recommends that once we're aware of our inner needy child and rigid adolescent, we extend compassion to both of them, offering them love and acceptance while denying them the power to run our life.

Focus on your progress rather than your perceived victories over others. "If I want to feel differently about competition and have it be more friendly, more relational, less toxic, I need to give up the extremes of less than and better than," Vortherns says. "Win or lose, your muscles and your brain are learning something new. You can enjoy the effort and be proud of yourself at the end of the day for putting in the effort."

Change your internal language about competition. "The thoughts and beliefs we create by the language we use in our inner dialogues powerfully affect how we feel — and then show up in the world," she points out. "So, what story are we telling ourselves as we move into a competitive situation: *I've got to win?* Or *I'm here to enjoy this process; I'm excited to learn more?*"

Over time, modifying your internal dialogue can help you find more pleasure in the growth process instead of fixating on the final win.

Practice gratitude. One of the best ways to shift into a healthy mindset around competition is by practicing gratitude, Vortherns says. Making lists of what you are grateful for in your life is one good way. "Gratitude helps you shift your focus from *What more do I need? How can I keep acquiring or succeeding? to I'm happy with what I currently have.*"

Substitute vision for competition. Vortherns also emphasizes that curbing your overactive urge for competition doesn't mean settling for stasis in your life. "Some people get worried that if they're practicing gratitude, they're not going to keep moving forward," she says. "But yes, you get to have a vision for how you keep growing."

She points out that if you're grateful for what you already have, your happiness and well-being aren't tied to achieving your goals. "You can be happy with the life you have at every stage while building the life you desire," she says. "If you're abundant in gratitude, you can still be abundant in vision; the two values don't have to be separate." 🌀



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What Is Craniosacral Therapy?

This subtle treatment bridges the gap between massage and energy medicine.

BY COURTNEY HELGOE



IF A MESSAGE practitioner has ever gently cradled your head in their hands, pressing lightly at the back of your skull, you may have unknowingly experienced craniosacral therapy. CST practitioners use gentle pressure and subtle adjustments at the top of the spinal column and at the sacrum to address specific health conditions, such as migraine, sinus issues, and concussions, as well as more general disorders, like chronic pain and anxiety.

Why the emphasis on the cranium and sacrum? They offer direct access to the central nervous system.

"The CNS is right there," explains Janet Crow, MS, CMT, CST-T, a practitioner based in St. Paul, Minn. "And the vagus nerve. When you're softening those tissues, you activate the parasympathetic system, and then your body can self-heal and self-correct."

THE BACKSTORY

Craniosacral therapy was developed in the late 1970s by John Upledger, DO, an osteopathic physician and clinical researcher at Michigan State University. Osteopathy focuses on the many ways in which the spine, joints, and muscles influence overall health; its treatments use noninvasive manual therapies to help stimulate the body's own healing mechanisms.

CST aims to remove tension, increase the subtle mobility in the small bones of the cranium and sacrum, and promote the flow of cerebrospinal fluid. The attention to this flow is somewhat similar to acupuncture, which focuses on the flow of vital energy, or qi. Cerebrospinal

fluid supplies nutrients to nervous-system tissue and removes waste products from the brain.

During a treatment, the practitioner places their hands on the head and at points along the spine, but the therapeutic target of CST is the body's network of connective tissue. This includes the dura, which surrounds the brain, and the fascia, which stretches throughout the body.

The goal is to release restrictions, or "adhesions," in the network caused by injury, illness, or tension, which can trigger a range of health problems. For example, immobility in the connective tissue around the brain might express itself as a headache, or it might feel like anxiety and foggy thinking.

"One technical way CST looks at fascia is that it can have an effect on the nervous system," Crow explains. "Tension in the fascia can pull on the dura and affect the central nervous system that way. It's all one system."

THE ROLE OF ENERGY

CST is a biomechanical treatment, but it also involves energy healing. Crow describes energy as the bridge between the mind and the body.

One example of how that can work is when the body sustains an impact, such as from a blow or a fall. The force of the impact enters the body, and if that force doesn't have a way to exit, what remains forms an "energy cyst."

"Say you're rushing to work, and you step off the curb and fall, hurting your knee," Crow explains. "You're late, so you can't rest and shake it off. Instead, you run off to your meeting."

When we do this, she says, the force of the impact remains and can lead to persistent pain. It's not necessarily the blow that causes it; it's the lack of recovery time. "Energy gets stuck when we don't take time to release it," says Crow.

CST looks at the body through the lens of its connective tissue, which explains why a knee injury can cause pain beyond the knee. Similarly, a concussion might disrupt digestion, balance, and concentration. The force of the impact and the restrictions it can create reverberate throughout the body's connective networks.

Releasing restrictions in the connective tissue enables the release of stuck energy, allowing the body to heal itself. Crow says this is our "inner physician" at work.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Because it promotes nervous-system regulation, CST can benefit pretty much anyone. (People with a recent brain injury or any kind of circulation issue should get a physician's clearance before trying CST.)

My own session with Crow was deeply relaxing, though I felt the most dramatic effects during the hours and days afterward, when I was intensely thirsty and sleepy. Crow later explained these were signs of how my body kept healing itself after I left her office.

"The techniques that happen on the table are the first step," she adds. "The real healing comes afterward."

COURTNEY HELGOE is the *Experience Life* features editor.

HISTORY

Lessons



Travel back in time along the U.S. Civil Rights Trail to better understand our past, present, *and* future.

BY JILL PATTON, NBC-HWC

SITTING IN THE jury box of the Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner, Miss., in 2023, Anne Wernau had a spiritual experience. She was visiting the courthouse to learn about the 1955 kidnapping and murder of a 14-year-old Black boy named Emmett Till by two white men.

After hearing details of the brutal killing, the media spectacle of the five-day trial, and the brief deliberation of the all-white jury that acquitted the murderers, Wernau and other visitors absorbed what they had just learned. They then took turns reading passages from the county's official apology presented to the Till family in 2007, when Tallahatchie County finally broke its 50-year silence and took responsibility for its role.

"We sat in the seats the jury sat in," Wernau reflects. "Most of us could barely get through reading our passages. But it was almost like that little

boy was there, saying, 'I'm glad the truth is being told.'"

She and a friend were on a 10-day guided tour of four Southern states, visiting historic sites along the U.S. Civil Rights Trail. A retired violence-prevention educator from East Lyme, Conn., Wernau, who is white, had lived through the Civil Rights era and always considered herself a supporter. But she also recognized she had little comprehension of what life as a Black person in America was like then — or is like now.

"I realized I needed to know the truth about that era, to be on the ground where this all happened, and to be able to feel a little of what people living at that time felt," she says. "It was spiritual. It was emotional. It was intellectual. It impacted me in absolutely every way."

HISTORY UP CLOSE

Established in 2018, the U.S. Civil Rights Trail comprises more than

130 sites — museums, churches, libraries, schools, monuments, landmarks, lunch counters, streets, parks, and trails — across 15 states and the District of Columbia where activists in the 1950s and '60s challenged racial segregation.

Four major museums along the trail interpret the movement: the **National Museum of African American History and Culture** in Washington, D.C.; the **Birmingham Civil Rights Institute** in Birmingham, Ala.; the **National Center for Civil and Human Rights** in Atlanta; and the **Mississippi Civil Rights Museum** in Jackson, Miss.

Travelers can create their own itineraries with resources found online, starting at www.civilrightstrail.com. (On a road trip? Download and listen to *The United States Civil Rights Trail* podcast.)

These are just a few of the landmarks you can visit to learn more about some of the troubling, powerful, and critical periods of our nation's history.



National Civil Rights Museum at the Lorraine Motel, Memphis

From the mid-1940s, the Lorraine Motel was included in the Negro Travelers' Green Book, which listed hotels and other businesses that welcomed Black travelers during the Jim Crow era. But the motel is infamous as the site where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, on April 4, 1968, on the second-floor balcony.

The Lorraine is now at the center of the National Civil Rights Museum, where visitors can dive deep into the 400-year history of the Black struggle for human rights in America. You can sit in a vintage bus beside a statue of Rosa Parks; in a replica of the flame- and smoke-damaged Greyhound coach that the Freedom Riders narrowly escaped; and in Room 306, where MLK spent his final hours.

Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail

This 54-mile trail follows the path activists marched in March 1965 to protest policies preventing Black Americans from registering to vote. Beginning at the Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Selma, Ala., and crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge toward Montgomery, Ala., protestors attempted this march three times.

The first march, of around 600 people on March 7, was led by Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee chairman John Lewis and Hosea Williams of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. When they arrived at the bridge, they were attacked by local authorities and white vigilante groups, and about 60 activists were injured, some gravely.

Two days later, a group of more than 2,000, led by Martin Luther King Jr., marched to the bridge and prayed, before turning around in observance of a court order preventing them from making the full march.

On March 21, with the support of President Lyndon Johnson and under the protection of the U.S. Army and the Alabama National Guard, the marchers started their five-day journey to Montgomery. These marches represented a key moment leading to the Voting Rights Act of 1965.



Beyond the Trail

Enrich your travel by visiting sites around the country to learn about the struggles and triumphs of other groups working to claim civil liberties.

- **The Women's Rights National Historical Park** in Seneca Falls, N.Y., was the setting in 1848 of the Seneca Falls Convention, the first women's rights convention, which launched the women's suffrage movement in the United States. Participants gathered "to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of Woman."

- **The César E. Chávez National Monument** in Keene, Calif., memorializes the farmworkers' movement that improved working conditions and wages and brought about the passage of the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975.

- **The Stonewall National Monument** in New York City tells of The Stonewall Inn, a popular gay bar that was raided by police at least once a month in an era when homosexuality was criminalized, and why the six-day uprising of LGBTQIA+ protesters in 1969 was a turning point in the gay-rights movement.

Civil rights are guaranteed for all Americans but not always upheld — and national monuments, museums, or parks that honor the rights of many, including Native

Americans and people with disabilities, are rare or nonexistent. However, the National Park Service (NPS) is making strides to preserve important and untold stories.

In 2023, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland announced the NPS will collaborate with Native American tribes on a theme study focused on the Indian Reorganization Period of 1934–1950. This will help identify potential future National Historic Landmarks.

People with disabilities are the largest minority group in the United States, according to the National Institutes of Health, but their stories often remain untold. The NPS website features articles and publications exploring disability history interwoven across the service's 400-plus parks, landmarks, and programs.

Still, there are no sites dedicated to the protests and sit-ins that led to passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Yet every time you see a curb cut in the sidewalk, you can think of and be thankful for the ADA. ➦

JILL PATTON, NBC-HWC, is an *Experience Life* contributing editor and an integrative health and wellness coach.



EXPLORE MORE SITES

Learn about three other key destinations along the U.S. Civil Rights Trail at **ELmag.com/civilrightstrail**.



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Empowering Health

BY **BAHRAM AKRADI**

IT'S THE TIME OF YEAR when many people become ultrafocused on their health. They set intentions and establish big goals, committing (or recommitting) to fresh starts.

For more than a third of American adults, those resolutions revolve around losing weight. Motivated to be leaner or fitter, or to hit a target weight by a target date, they often reach for quick fixes that deliver initial results but are largely unsustainable.

Over more than three decades of new years at Life Time, we've seen many variations of this, as well as countless fad diets, plans, and programs that quickly fizzle out. Very few have staying power because they're too extreme or hard to stick with.

One trend that I predict is here to stay, though, is the use of the weight-loss medications that have gone mainstream in recent years. GLP-1 (glucagon-like peptide one) agonists, such as semaglutide, have dominated headlines because of the significant weight loss and other benefits that many users experience.

Like all things, GLP-1s have their pros and cons. My concern, especially this time of year, is that people will turn to them without fully understanding how they work or what their long-term health implications are.

Two of the primary effects of GLP-1s are appetite suppression and the reduction of food noise — the constant internal chatter about food that many experience. But when you eat less, you're nourishing your body less. In a calorie deficit, you'll lose weight but not necessarily the kind you want. Without proper nutrition — including protein specifically — the body will begin using muscle rather than fat as fuel.

Rather than losing only fat, you'll also lose lean muscle mass as well as

bone density. The latter two are critical factors for healthy aging.

The effects of inadequate nutrition extend beyond muscle and bone loss: Skin can lose its elasticity and glow; mood and energy can tank. So, while you might be achieving weight loss, you're suffering in the larger picture of health. Many people on GLP-1s have experienced this.

My point is not to say these drugs don't have their place — they do. GLP-1s can be an important tool in the healthy-living toolkit when they're used in the right way. They can kick-start the weight-loss journey for those who are struggling with significant weight or who have underlying metabolic issues. They can help regulate body chemistry (insulin and blood glucose, specifically), and they may provide additional benefits, like reducing inflammation and improving cardiovascular health.

The key is to use GLP-1s as part of a holistic, personalized plan that prioritizes regular exercise (particularly strength training), adequate nutrition (including eating multiple times a day and getting plenty of protein), and targeted supplementation, among other lifestyle factors.

As Cliff Edberg, registered dietitian, personal trainer, and senior director of MIORA at Life Time, stated during a livestream event on GLP-1s this past fall: "As people break through that insulin resistance and they start to see success [with GLP-1s], the momentum builds. . . . They're motivated to continue those healthy behaviors." (Tune in to this event at ELmag.com/glp1s to learn more; you can also find it in the On Demand section of the LT app.)

Whatever your goals are as you transition into the new year,



take some time to understand your body and motivations, as well as the broader effects your choices and the tools in your personal toolkit can have on your health and well-being.

And know that Life Time is here to support you. We want to empower you to take your health into your hands, and we have a variety of resources to help you along the way:

- **The LT app** features daily workouts and livestream and on-demand classes, as well as educational podcasts, articles, and programs to inform and inspire your efforts. Use L-AI-C, our AI search tool, to get answers to your health and wellness questions.

- **ExperienceLife.com** has more than 25 years of coverage on health, fitness, nutrition, and wellness topics. Learn how your body works, discover the benefits of certain nutrients, delve into the science of GLP-1s, and more.

- **Our team of Dynamic Personal Trainers and nutritionists** can help you figure out what's right for you — or point you in the right direction. Ask for their help while visiting your club.

- **MIORA Performance and Longevity** combines the tried-and-true foundation of a sound diet and exercise program with expanded nutraceuticals and pharmaceuticals (including GLP-1s, if appropriate) to help you feel and look your best. Visit Miora.lifetime.life to learn about this new offering.

Wishing you and yours a healthy, happy 2025!



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

“True health has nothing to do with diagnosing a disease or prolonging life just for the sake of it; it’s about finding out who we are, paying attention to how we’re called to grow and change, and listening to what makes our heart sing.”

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