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June 2022

THE UPSIDES OF INTENTIONAL
RISK-TAKING
p. 52

A NEW LOOK AT
CHRONIC LYME DISEASE
Research. Treatments. Hope.
p. 64

10 TIPS
FOR MAKING THE MOST OF LIFE'S
TIME LIMITS
p. 58

CHART YOUR OWN COURSE

NFL legend and philanthropist
LARRY FITZGERALD
on navigating and balancing his priorities off the field.
p. 16

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LUTSEN 99ER JUN. 25

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SILVER RUSH 50 MILE TRAIL RUN JUL. 9

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NEW YORK CITY TRIATHLON JUL. 24

LEADVILLE STAGE RACE JUL. 29-31

LEADVILLE TRAIL 100 MTB AUG. 13

LEADVILLE TRAIL 10K RUN AUG. 14

LEADVILLE TRAIL 100 RUN AUG. 20

CHICAGO TRIATHLON KIDS & SUPERSPRINT AUG. 27

CHICAGO TRIATHLON AUG. 28

CHEQUAMEGON MTB FESTIVAL SEP. 17

BARN BURNER SEP. 17

CHICAGO HALF MARATHON SEP. 25

THE RAD DIRT FEST OCT. 8

BIG SUGAR GRAVEL OCT. 22

AUSTIN RATTLER MTB / RUN NOV. 5

TURKEY DAY - CHICAGO NOV. 24

TURKEY DAY - MIAMI NOV. 24

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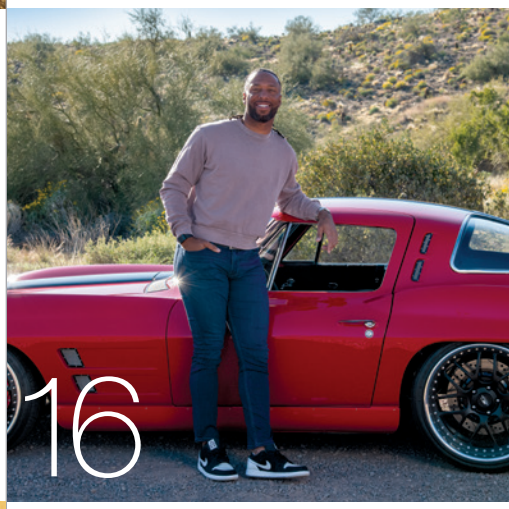
Contents

Experience Life

June 2022
CHART YOUR OWN COURSE

Features

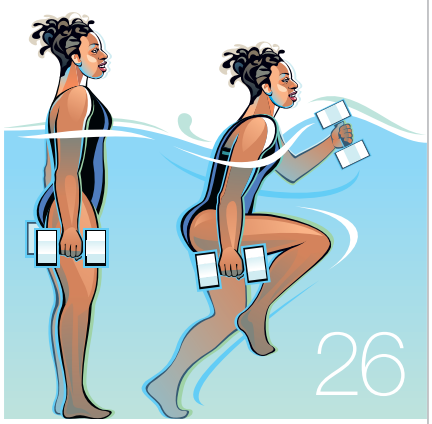


In Every Issue

Volume 24, Issue 5

Departments

REAL FITNESS



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REAL LIFE

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UNDEFINING MASCULINITY

This Father's Day, listen to actor, director, and author Justin Baldoni talk about easing the pressure we put on young boys, breaking down gender stereotypes, and showing up with radical honesty and vulnerability. **ELmag.com/baldonivideo**

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This summer, supplement your gym and studio workouts with outdoor exercise. Check out our 50 tips for taking fitness outside at **ELmag.com/50tipsfitness.**

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Page 4: (top, and bottom right) Andrea D'Agosto; **p. 7:** Sara Rubinstein; **p. 22:** (center) Lee Wermy; **p. 35:** (bottom) Chad Holder; **p. 42** and **43:** (condiments) Kelly Loverud and Colin Simmons; **p. 52** and **57:** Luke Batten; **p. 71:** Jennifer Jacobson; **p. 75:** (bottom) Vik Orenstein; **p. 76:** (top left) Jennifer Jacobson; **p. 77:** (bottom left) National Park Service.

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Go Your Own Way

A couple of months ago, I was invited to speak at my high school's biennial career-day event. I've done this a handful of times since graduating 20-plus years ago, and each visit feels like stepping back in time.

So many of the sights, sounds, and smells are exactly as I remember. The thumping of basketballs in the gym. The photos of each graduating class lining the walls above the lockers. The trophy cases displaying years of plaques and awards, including one with the team photo from my senior year, when we were named co-conference basketball champions.

Some of the teachers and coaches I had as a student are even still there, making the scene all the more familiar. I can almost see my friends and my 18-year-old self hanging out by those lockers, waiting for the bell.

Yet as I stood in a classroom presenting to the students in my session, I was struck by how far I'd come since walking those halls and donning the cap and gown that symbolized the shift to adulthood — and by the combination of coincidence and concerted effort that have led me here.

This realization occurred to me as I was sharing an image of *Experience Life*'s organizational structure, which featured stars next to each of the jobs I've held over the years. I explained that my first role, as an editorial intern, had come to be because I had told a college professor that I was considering a move to New York City to pursue a position at a health-and-fitness magazine (or any magazine that would have me!).

"Do you know that there's a health-and-fitness magazine right here in Minnesota?" she asked. "It's called *Experience Life*, it's published by Life Time, and I do some freelancing for them. I'll make an introduction." She did, and I got the job two weeks after graduating from college.

That conversation set the course for my career — and so many other aspects of my life. In the 17 years since that pivotal connection was made, hard work, proactivity, and passion have helped me build my skills and knowledge. These things have helped me find my way to opportunities that then opened doors to new possibilities, experiences, and roles, including my current one as editor in chief.

That first job informed and inspired so many of my daily habits, which, in turn, influenced my health and hobbies. As I learned more about healthy living, I discovered interests and developed relationships that are now central to my life. And I let go of ones that were no longer fulfilling to me.

Each new phase has built on the last and shined light on the potential for what might come next, whether at home, at work, in my workouts, or in any other area to which I devote my time and attention. And while I certainly didn't (and couldn't) control many things that happened, it's what I intentionally chose to do when there was a fork in the road that determined my direction.

Twenty years ago, I could never have predicted this is where I'd end up. And although it started by chance, each decision along the way has helped me get to this point.

So where will I — where will *any* of us — be five, 10, 20 years from now? Your guess is as good as mine. But as history has shown time and again, we can each chart our own course to some degree. And that's the spirit of this issue. Enjoy!

"Each new phase has built on the last and shined light **on the potential for what might come next."**

YOUR THOUGHTS?

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

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Talk to Us

VAGUS VIEWS

[On "What Happens in the Vagus," March 2022]

I've been a physical therapist for 23 years and have just begun to understand the need for a strong-functioning vagus nerve. I've been giving my patients vagus-nerve exercises for the past nine months and they are life changing! I primarily treat vertigo, and it's quite incredible how many patients with vertigo experience dorsal-vagal shutdown; everything in their environment feels overwhelming and threatening to them, especially those with post-COVID inflammation. By implementing vestibular exercises in conjunction with vagus-nerve exercises, these patients respond so much faster and feel more in control of their lives. It has taken my career and my patients' lives in a completely new direction.
Wendy S.

Thank you for this information. I am elderly and have been experiencing migraines. I have used some of these exercises and found they have helped. Now I will have more info to use in my fight against this problem.
Pat

I appreciate *Experience Life* magazine and its more holistic stance. I read it every month. It's refreshing to see a publication without the pharmaceutical industry's ugly stain in it. But as a practicing chiropractor of 13 years, I wish I would see more information on chiropractic care in your pages. This month's information on the vagus nerve would have been the perfect time to talk about chiropractic care's powerful impact on the fight-or-flight response, vagal tone, heart-rate variability, and the neuroimmune response.

There is a tremendous amount of research, and there are countless satisfied patients. Chiropractic care is so much more than musculoskeletal pain treatments.
Ryan C.

MOVEMENT MATTERS

When it comes to the number of steps that one should take, I don't think there's one answer that fits every situation ("Counting Steps," March 2022). Ultimately, it comes down to other factors such as personal goals.
Carola J.

Love this ("3 Moves to Release Shoulder Tension," March 22, 2022)! I also suffer every day from neck/shoulder tension headaches. Will definitely use these stretches every day!
Doris E.

INSPIRED READING

Just reading the excerpt "Why Black Women Need Self-Care" (February 3, 2022), I knew I needed this book so I can move more consciously through my life. I believe that it will be motivational. Thank you for that.
Angela S.

I plan to share this article with family and friends ("Autoimmunity Now," January/February 2022). It thoroughly explains the complex issue of autoimmunity and how it interplays with having COVID and long COVID. As a lupus patient and pharmacist, I appreciate the timely and easily understood information. I know it will help many who are going through this illness.
Shari P.

I am a Boy Scout getting ready to graduate, and the article "Get Curious" in your January/February 2022 issue about the soldier mindset vs. the scout mindset caught my eye. As I started reading, I could relate. I feel fortunate to be part of scouting because it has given me the freedom to explore opinions — which is very different from what I see at my school. Social groups there will refuse to associate with others because of their opinions. People are closed-minded but expect others to listen to them. The method of scout thinking is the solution to this. Thanks for informing.
Tanner H.

This article is so comprehensive ("The Science of Stress," June 2019). It has helped connect the dots for me to my stress reactions and how they affect my body. I'm bookmarking this and printing out a copy for reference that I will come back to often.
Lois D.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

I am trying to lose weight and found this article insightful ("The Addictive Power of Processed Foods," January/February 2022). I spent all day today making butternut squash, coleslaw, and strawberry jam. This is besides making breakfast, lunch, and dinner. This keeps me busy — and also healthy. Like they say, stick to the perimeter of the grocery store!
Nancy S.

My kid started "Wacky Wednesday" in our household when he was around 5 years old. Ten years later, we are still eating breakfast on Wednesday evenings ("The New Pancake Breakfast," January/February 2022). I often make a protein or keto waffle in our Dash Mini — then we eat chicken-and-waffle sandwiches. Life is good.
@creativelyefficient

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Letters to the Editor
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New USDA "Bioengineered" Food Label: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Once upon a time, it was known as GMO food. Now, it's "bioengineered."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on January 1, 2020, implemented the National Bioengineered Food Disclosure Standard (NBFDS), a move that "requires food manufacturers, importers, and certain retailers to disclose information about whether food offered for retail sale is bioengineered (BE) or uses BE food ingredients." The mandatory compliance date was the start of 2022.

The ruling seeks to clarify official government standards at a time when terms used in labeling, such as "genetically engineered" (GE) and "genetically modified organisms" (GMO), often have more to do with marketing a product than adhering to a standard.

Critics, though, claim the new BE terminology may confound concerned consumers who already recognize current GMO wording. The Center for Food Safety (CFS), for instance, is challenging the ruling in court, arguing that the shift creates too many loopholes and too much confusion. "This case is about ensuring meaningful food labeling, the public's right to know how their food is produced, and retailers' rights to provide it to them," the CFS explained.

Under the standards, BE food must display a text label ("bioengineered" or "derived from bioengineering"); BE symbols; an electronic or digital QR code link; or a phone number consumers can text for information.

The CFS suit also challenges the USDA's unprecedented use of QR labeling, arguing that "requiring a smartphone discriminates against at least 20 percent of the American adult population — primarily poor, elderly, rural, and minority populations — who have lower percentages of smartphone ownership, or live in areas in which grocery stores do not have internet bandwidth."

"Bioengineered" labels are not completely new. Congress passed a law regarding BE foods in 2016 and the *Federal Register* published the NBFDS in 2018.

The revised standards define a BE food as containing "genetic material that has been modified through in vitro recombinant deoxyribonucleic acid (rDNA) techniques and for which the modification could not otherwise be obtained through conventional breeding or found in nature."

A bioengineered plant or animal may include an added gene that gives it a useful trait (such as resistance to pests or disease) or enhances its nutritional value, for instance. The USDA lists 13 crops or foods to be labeled with a BE disclosure: alfalfa, canola, corn, cotton, potatoes, soybeans, summer squash, and sugar beets, plus specific varieties of apples, eggplant, papaya, pineapple, and salmon.

The "contains bioengineered food ingredients" label means that at least one ingredient contains modified DNA.

— CASIE LEIGH LUKES

LOOPHOLES AND EXEMPTIONS

- **Potential BE exposures are not disclosed.** "If a food manufacturer sources nonbioengineered corn and that nonbioengineered corn has an inadvertent or technically unavoidable amount of a bioengineered substance that is less than 5 percent, then [disclosure] is not required," the Agricultural Marketing Service states. The European Union, on the other hand, uses a 0.9 percent maximum for certification.
- **BE food served in restaurants and similar retail establishments is exempt from labeling.** This includes cafeterias, bakeries, delis, food trucks, and airlines.
- **Exemptions on labeling for small food manufacturers** with sales below $2.5 million per year.
- **Processed foods using BE ingredients have allowances.** For example, prepared foods whose first ingredient is meat or eggs may not need to be labeled.
- **Foods from BE-fed animals are exempt.** For example, the milk from a cow raised on BE alfalfa would not be considered a bioengineered food.

The & Housework & Health Connection

It may be time to reconsider our aversion to housecleaning.

Analyzing self-reported data from 489 adults ages 21 to 90, Singapore Institute of Technology associate professor Shiou Liang Wee, PhD, and his research team concluded that the more housework you do, the better your brain and body operate — especially as you grow older.

"Among older adults, housework is associated with higher cognitive function, specifically in attention and memory," the researchers note in *BMJ Open*. "Housework PA (physical activity) is positively associated with functional health among community-dwelling older adults, independent of recreation and other nonrecreational PAs."

Surprisingly, about two-thirds of the older study participants met their recommended quota of physical activity simply by tidying up the house on a regular basis. And that effort — even apart from any exercise regimen — can lead to a lower risk of falls and a general improvement in everyday mobility. It's a practical and purposeful way to build strength and resilience.

On the cognitive front, the researchers note, more intense domestic chores (cleaning windows, painting, floor-washing, vacuuming) make a difference in specific areas. Those who reported doing such "heavy" cleaning, for instance, produced higher scores on tests measuring attention span than their less-ambitious counterparts, who scored higher on short-term-memory assessments.

It's an observational study, so it doesn't ascribe any cause and effect, but the findings are in line with earlier research on aerobic exercise and brain health in older adults. And there are plenty of studies demonstrating the salutary effects of exercise on mobility as we age.

"These results," the researchers conclude, "collectively suggest that the higher cognition, physical, and sensorimotor functions related to heavy housework activities might plausibly be associated with lower physiological fall risk among community-dwelling older adults."

So, next time you're faced with an army of dust bunnies, a sink full of dirty dishes, and a cringeworthy stovetop, remember that the effort you expend while tidying up may produce not only a cleaner house but a healthier you.

— CRAIG COX

Miscounting MILLIONS OF MICROBES

The fact that we are not entirely human is not exactly breaking news. A 1972 journal article by Thomas D. Luckey argues that a large percentage of the body's cell count includes nonhuman microbes. In the article, Luckey estimates that bacterial cells outnumber human ones by around 10:1, a figure that has loomed large over microbiome research for decades.

Yet more recent research suggests we might be a little more human than we thought.

In a paper published in 2016, a team of Israeli and Canadian researchers found that 10:1 was a "back-of-the-envelope calculation" that inaccurately assumed too much bacterial density throughout the digestive tract. They revised the estimate to be around 1:1 — making us half human, half microbe. It's still a substantial percentage, if slightly less dramatic.

The scientists also noted that this ratio is constantly in flux and that something as minor as a "defecation event" can shift the ratio in favor of the human by excreting about a third of the colonic bacterial content, if only temporarily.

They emphasized that their findings in no way diminish the biological importance of the microbiome. This collection of microbial organisms continues to play a vital role in maintaining or disrupting our health.

In that sense, we may be wise to treat it as our better half.

— COURTNEY HELGOE

Salt:
SMALL DECREASES BRING BIG REWARDS

Public-health experts have been promoting the benefits of a low-sodium diet for decades, yet Americans remain stubbornly attached to salty foods. While we do need some sodium in our diet, we consume more than 3,400 milligrams per day, on average. That's more than twice what the American Heart Association considers healthy for the 116 million American adults — nearly half of the population — with high blood pressure.

Processed foods and restaurant fare are major culprits, but, as Jane Brody reports in the *New York Times*, even small changes in your own kitchen can make a big difference.

Citing a recent study involving nearly 21,000 Chinese volunteers known to be at a high risk for stroke, Brody notes that those who replaced regular table salt with a reduced-sodium option significantly reduced their risk of heart attack and stroke — and subsequent death — during an average follow-up period of less than five years.

Beyond the contents of our saltshakers, Brody recommends reducing the sodium in canned foods by rinsing them in a colander before cooking, and limiting our consumption of bread and bakery goods — major contributors to our sodium overload. Also, consider seasoning dishes with nonsalt alternatives like citrus juices or hot-pepper flakes and other pungent herbs and spices.

"As your taste buds adjust," she explains, "high-salt foods you once enjoyed will probably taste unpleasantly salty and thus [be] easy to resist."

For more on the salt issue, see ELmag.com/salt.

— CRAIG COX

Can Exercise Build Brain "Muscle"?

Exercise has repeatedly been found to be powerful medicine — so much so that several new studies explore whether it may even boost brainpower. The proteins amplified or created during activity may benefit learning, memory, and cognition and even help stave off Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

"We're seeing an increasing number of studies where proteins from outside the brain that are made when you exercise get into the brain and are helpful for improving brain health, or even improving cognition and disease," Alzheimer's researcher Rudolph Tanzi, PhD, a professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School and codirector of the McCance Center for Brain Health at Massachusetts General Hospital, tells the *New York Times*.

Most studies so far have focused on mice rather than humans, but the findings may eventually result in therapies and treatments.

In a study published in 2018 in *Science*, Tanzi's team found that exercise provided cognitive benefit to mice engineered to have a version of Alzheimer's. Activity elevated levels of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a key protein aiding neuroplasticity — the ability of the brain to change, grow, and rebuild itself.

Plus, Tanzi speculates that exercise at the earliest stage of Alzheimer's development may provide "a potentially powerful disease-modifying treatment strategy."

For a study published in *Nature* in 2021, researchers injected blood from active mice into sedentary mice, who subsequently performed better on learning and memory tests. The exercise-enhanced plasma transferred clusterin proteins that may increase neuroplasticity and reduce the neuroinflammation connected with Alzheimer's and other neurological disorders.

"Physical exercise is generally beneficial to all aspects of human and animal health, slowing cognitive aging and neurodegeneration," the study authors write. They speculate that the benefits of exercise may someday be used to help patients with neurodegeneration and other forms of brain trauma.

A study published by the Alzheimer's Association in 2022 is one of the most recent linking exercise and cognition in humans. Researchers found that physical activity promotes synaptogenesis, or the formation of synapses in the brain.

"Late-life physical activity (PA) is one of the most consistently recommended lifestyle modifications to support brain and cognitive aging," the authors summarize. "PA is associated with a reduced incidence of Alzheimer's-disease dementia, and inactivity alone is estimated to account for more than 4 million dementia cases."

— MICHAEL DREGNI

Coping With Ambiguous Loss

In 2013, Todd Smith [no relation to this writer] and his girlfriend, Jen, hiked across the Grand Canyon. Upon returning to their Chicago home, Jen felt exceptionally tired and sore. Weeks passed, and soon she couldn't even get out of bed.

Several months later, Jen received a diagnosis: Lyme disease. Because the infection had gone untreated — and because Jen had suffered a concussion around the same time — the disease spread to her brain. Alongside the loss of energy, focus, and general functioning, Todd noticed further changes. Jen was no longer interested in friends or hobbies; she spent nearly all her time in the bedroom or bathroom.

"Her personality changed," he recalls. "She no longer had any joy for life. I realized that the person I fell in love with was no longer there."

Loss Without End

"Absence and presence are not absolutes," writes University of Minnesota emeritus professor Pauline Boss, PhD, in her 2006 book *Loss, Trauma and Resilience*. "Human relationships are more complex."

Boss worked with people whose loved ones had gone missing in war or natural disasters. The survivors existed in a kind of limbo, unsure when or how to mourn those who may or may not have still been alive. She coined the term "ambiguous loss" for this distinct — and often devastating — experience.

As painful as it is to lose a loved one, death is nothing if not certain. By contrast, ambiguous loss is without finality. How do we find "closure" — an elusive goal even with traditional loss — when we're not even sure the door has closed?

Ambiguous loss takes two forms. One entails the physical absence of a loved one whose return is uncertain. Another involves loved ones who are physically present but psychologically absent because of conditions such as Alzheimer's disease, brain injury, or mental illness. Todd entered this realm when Jen descended into psychological dysfunction.

The inconclusive nature of such loss often begets confusion and loneliness. And these losses tend to go unrecognized. When a loved one dies, we can find comfort in the customs that follow — the funeral, flowers, and condolences. Rarely do such conventions follow an ambiguous loss.

It can be incredibly difficult to maintain or define our role in relation to the person we have lost. If a partner goes missing or is deported, should we open ourselves up to a new relationship? What if, as in Todd's case, the partner is still here but is no longer the person we once knew?

At times Jen improved; then she'd regress. They married, and Todd took on a caregiver role. He struggled to accept Jen's condition, clinging to the belief that she would bounce back. But he also felt resentment — and guilt.

For a time, Todd became isolated and depressed just like Jen: frozen in the grieving process.

Moving Forward

Navigating ambiguous loss demands a reworking — or even outright rejection — of conventional attitudes toward grief.

This often entails relinquishing responsibility over the circumstances. Ambiguous loss is almost always due to a situation beyond anyone's control; accepting this helps free survivors from shame and self-recrimination.

Community is also essential to healing. Because ambiguous loss typically lacks formal grieving rituals, it's especially important for survivors to lean on others for support.

Moving forward is different from moving on, however. Coping is not about finding closure but about learning to live with ambiguity, and this requires acknowledging complicated emotions. In Todd's case, it meant recognizing that he had bound his own happiness to Jen's.

"For a long time, I felt guilty when I was happy," he says. "I had to accept that I deserve happiness even though my partner is suffering."

Eventually, Todd began to let go of what he calls a false sense of hope for Jen's recovery. He realized that remaining stuck in this hope prevented genuine healing.

Such acceptance is essential to the healing process. Often (but not always) fostered through spirituality or religion, acceptance of the situation's essential intractability enables us to find resolution within ourselves.

Accepting unchangeable situations does not have to mean accepting the forces that created those situations. Identifying productive ways to channel anger, such as advocating for systemic changes, can be a healthy part of the coping process.

Sometimes the necessary changes happen on an individual level. Recently, Todd and Jen — who has made enormous strides in her recovery — agreed to go their separate ways.

"We love each other dearly," he says. "But we both need to move forward."

As he transitions into a new phase, Todd feels an unexpected gratitude for the experience. Through it, he has found a clarity of purpose and an appreciation for life's uncertainty.

"I have learned how to surrender," he explains. "I can't prevent bad things from happening, but I can choose not to engage in needless suffering."

— ALEXANDRA SMITH, MA, LPCC

LEARN MORE

For a longer version of this story — plus coping strategies for ambiguous loss during the pandemic — see **ELmag.com/loss.**

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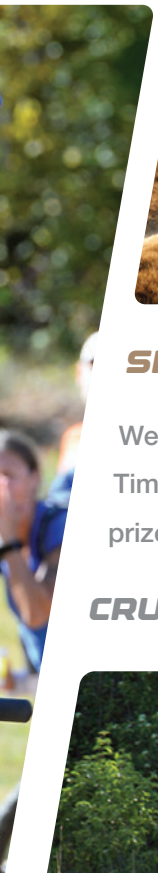

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Larry Fitzgerald has devoted much of his life to a variety of philanthropic efforts, including leading sports camps, supporting improved education, and traveling the world to better understand different cultures.

BEYOND THE END ZONE

A lifelong learner, NFL legend Larry Fitzgerald has been intentionally planning for life after football.

BY ***EXPERIENCE LIFE*** **STAFF**

When former NFL wide receiver Larry Fitzgerald stepped away from football after the 2020 season, he had no qualms about what was next. He had been mapping it out for years.

Throughout his 17 seasons with the Arizona Cardinals — during which he set many NFL and franchise records — Fitzgerald found time to launch a charitable foundation, invest in more than 40 companies, explore 108 countries, start his own travel company, and indulge his passion for golf and photography.

The only thing the 11-time Pro Bowler really worries about is becoming one-dimensional. "There's a shelf life to being an athlete," he admits. "It's very easy to get consumed by being great at your own profession. But if I'm looking to get into marketing, for instance, and all I can write down for my experience is that I'm really fast, I can jump really high, I'm really quick laterally, and I can catch oblong pigskin balls at high velocities . . . all those things are fabulous, but they're not going to help the marketing department."

Cultivating a well-rounded approach to life is something Fitzgerald has focused on for years — and advocates for when he visits schools. "When I ask kids what they want to do, about 90 percent of them say, 'I want to be an athlete' or 'I want to be an entertainer,' especially in schools in predominantly African American or Latino communities," he notes.

"If kids aspire to be a professional athlete that is a goal worth striving for. However, I want them to know it's OK to pursue one goal while having others in mind so as not to be singularly focused on one pursuit. It's important for kids to play sports, get good grades, and pursue other extracurricular activities to be an overall well-rounded individual."

Although Fitzgerald is considered one of the best receivers in NFL history — second only to Jerry Rice in career receiving yards — he has always remained humble. In fact, in 2011, at the height of his football career, he completed an internship with investment bank J.P. Morgan. "I've never been a stranger to starting at the ground level," he said last year. "I enjoy the journey."

Most future Hall of Famers might scoff at the idea of working as an intern, but Fitzgerald believes humility and hard work are key to lifelong learning.

"I really respect and admire people who are able to have long-term success," he has said. "People often talk about Warren Buffett and how he's slow-grinded for 60, 70 years — nothing special, no cockamamie schemes, just consistency every single year. There's something to be valued and respected about people who just methodically go about their business."

We talked to Fitzgerald about philanthropy, the importance of mindset, his values and beliefs, and some of his most meaningful accomplishments.

Q&A

WITH LARRY FITZGERALD

EXPERIENCE LIFE **| Who taught you about mental resilience?**

LARRY FITZGERALD | My parents always set a great example for my brother and me. My dad is a sports journalist and my mom was on the not-for-profit side. I would be on the Vikings sideline as a ball boy on Sunday, and then on Monday, my mom would be hosting a charity event for cancer or HIV/AIDS. We saw completely different ends of the spectrum, and it gave us great perspective.

EL **| Why did you make a conscious decision to step away from football?**

LF | As you get older in your career, you start looking at the landscape and figuring out what you want to do next — what your five- or 10-year plan is going to be. So, I was getting prepared for the season, and I was like, *Man, I'm just not really feeling it at this point.*

You never know in sports when the game will decide to be done with you, so I worked really hard to prepare myself for the next phase. There was no question in my mind that I was ready — mentally, physically, psychologically — to move on.

EL **| You've said that philanthropic work matters most to you. Why?**

LF | Years from now, people won't remember that I caught 100 touchdowns or caught a couple thousand yards of receiving. But the young people that I'm able to positively influence with the things that we do with the Larry Fitzgerald Foundation, they'll remember that — because I do.

I remember being in Children's Minnesota hospital in Minneapolis — I had a little procedure done — and [NBA star] Kevin Garnett came in to visit patients. He saw me in the hospital, and he showed me love. I mean, Kevin Garnett didn't know me from Adam. I was down, and he built my confidence up.

THERE ARE REAL STRUGGLES OUT THERE, SO I ALWAYS TRY TO **MAKE SURE I AM KEEPING EVERYTHING IN PERSPECTIVE,** AND THAT ALWAYS HELPS.

Is that the reason I became a professional athlete — who's to say? But he chose to be there on his off day, and it meant a lot to me. It's so much bigger when you do things off the field in your community.

EL **| Can you talk about how your mindset influenced your career?**

LF | Mindset is probably my greatest attribute. Anytime I went through something adverse, I could always look back and think about things that are actually really tough.

There are people all across our globe who haven't eaten a meal today, and many of us can go to our refrigerator, and find 10, 12, 13, 14, 15 different options of what we want to eat.

There are real struggles out there, so I always try to make sure I am keeping everything in perspective, and that always helps.

EL **| When you think about the core values and beliefs that have guided you, what would they be?**

LF | Growing up, we always talked as a family about the faith, focus, finish. Faith is your foundation. You always have to be focused on the objective — you know, whatever it is that you are into or doing at the time. And if you started or committed to something, you have to see it through to the finish.

This is something I do with my kids now, and it sets a good tone.

EL **| What do you do to relax?**

LF | My favorite thing to do is play golf. I play pickleball two or three days a week. I really enjoy anything that's a workout.

EL **| You've visited more than 100 countries. What about travel is meaningful to you?**

LF | Travel is one of the things you spend money on that actually makes you rich. I've been to about 110 countries, and the small, intricate details that I've been able to learn by traveling have really enriched my life.

I don't have enough time to talk through some of the life-altering experiences that I've had, including going through Vietnam and staying in remote villages, sleeping on the floors of people's homes, just listening to their experiences and how much they value their families.

EL **| What book has influenced your life the most?**

LF | Probably *The Alchemist*. I'm an optimistic person, and it's the most optimistic book I've ever read. I'm a big fan of Paulo Coelho and what he teaches about being in touch with oneself.

EL **| What is the stamp of impact you're hoping to leave in 2022?**

LF | I'm leaning in heavily with my foundation work. We're doing some really cool projects with Microsoft to put technology labs in schools, and my goal is to be able to add 30 to 35 more schools in Arizona over the next year. If I can do that, that will be something I'm really proud of.

BEHIND THE SCENES

Hear more from Larry Fitzgerald in the video from our cover shoot at **ELmag.com/larryfitzgerald.**

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How to Use Tea-Tree Oil

This antiseptic and antifungal essential oil has several applications. Discover a few ideas for your home and body.

BY **COURTNEY LEWIS OPDAHL**

Finding a multipurpose essential oil is like uncovering treasure — and tea-tree oil is a veritable gem. It eases inflammation of the skin, supports wound healing, and can even be used to disinfect surfaces. Make sure you purchase organic tea-tree oil, made from the leaves of the native Australian plant *Melaleuca alternifolia*, from a reputable company to ensure quality. Give it a try with these uses.

DISINFECTING SPRAY

With its antiseptic properties, tea-tree oil helps sanitize countertops, doorknobs, and even yoga mats. Mix about 10 drops with about 2 cups water in a spray bottle; add a sweeter-smelling essential oil of your choice (such as lavender) to tame the medicinal smell from the tea-tree oil.

BUG REPELLENT

Mosquitoes and gnats avoid the strong scent of tea-tree oil. Try this recipe from *Farmers' Almanac*: Mix six drops tea-tree oil, six drops peppermint oil, nine drops citronella oil, and one tablespoon carrier oil (such as almond, coconut, or jojoba), and smooth on skin before heading outdoors.

Note that deep-woods explorations may require stronger protection, especially to prevent tick attachment.

GOOD TO KNOW

Tea-tree oil can be dangerous to pets, so use caution and check with your veterinarian. Learn more about the dos and don'ts for essential oils at **ELmag.com/essentialoils.**

CUT AND WOUND SUPPORT

Prevent infection and help small cuts heal faster with a drop or two of antiseptic tea-tree oil applied directly on a bandage. If applying to skin, mix one or two drops with 12 drops of a carrier oil, such as coconut.

FOOT TREATMENT

The antifungal properties of tea-tree oil make it useful in preventing and controlling athlete's foot. Researchers have also found tea-tree oil to be more than twice as effective as a placebo in relieving associated burning and itching. Mix one or two drops of tea-tree oil with 12 drops of carrier oil and apply to soles of feet and between toes.

HAIR, SKIN, AND NAIL CARE

Tea-tree oil is a common ingredient in treatments for itchy scalp and eczema, and studies have found it to be effective in treating dandruff. Add a few drops to shampoo and wash as usual.

Mix one or two drops of tea-tree oil with 12 drops of a carrier oil and apply to skin to soothe acne inflammation and encourage healing, or smooth on cuticles to treat nail fungus. (Tea-tree oil can dry the skin, reduce or discontinue use if irritation occurs.)

Thanks to its antibacterial properties, you can also use tea-tree oil to quell underarm odor. Make your own deodorant with our recipe at ELmag.com/diydeodorant.

INSET ILLUSTRATIONS: MARY WOODIN

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

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From left: Birdie Wermy at the Portland Marathon in October 2021; representing her identity as an Indigenous runner; with her children after their first 5K as a family in October 2021.

Running for a Healthier Future

How a grueling relay started one Indigenous runner on a path toward a healthier, happier life.

BY **BIRDIE WERMY**

While lacing my shoes on a winter day south of Portland, Ore., I considered the challenge ahead. I'd recently agreed to join some coworkers to run the annual Hood to Coast Relay, an exhausting, overnight, 199-mile race, and I was just starting my training.

Outside, I noticed the cool air in my lungs as I took my first steps — just a light jog to start. I knew nothing about training for long distances, and I didn't want to take things too fast.

I could feel my body protesting, yet I didn't stop. Instead, my mind wandered to my children. I thought about giving birth to my son a few months before, in September 2015; my daughter was almost 3. For a long time, I hadn't been happy with myself or my choices. I'd had gestational diabetes when I was pregnant, and I was going through a divorce.

I thought about my son's birth, which had reminded me that physical, emotional, and spiritual health are *everything*. As a mother, I wanted to be a good role model.

I reflected on my pride in our Southern Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Pawnee ancestry and how I could share that with my children. We honor our ancestors, including Chief Kias from the Southern Cheyenne Tribe and those killed at the Sand Creek Massacre, by wearing our regalia at powwows and speaking our language proudly.

As I rounded the final corner of my first training run, my lungs and leg muscles burned, yet I was overcome by a sense of mental clarity and peace. I slowed my pace and realized that my recent decision to move with my children to my parents' house, though difficult, had been worth it.

Somehow, suddenly, I knew running was worth it, too.

Expanding the Circle

During that rainy winter, I ran with my kids strapped into an unwieldy double jogging stroller on the weekends. The experience was the perfect preparation for uneven terrain.

It was the most committed I'd ever been to running. For years I'd been a basketball player and occasional runner, but already this had become about more than training for a relay. When I ran, I was relieved from the stress of my mediation and divorce process. I could feel truly at peace with myself and my thoughts.

Then, as winter gave way to spring, running became spiritual. In late April 2016, I flew to Oklahoma to comfort relatives after my dear aunt Athamah

died when a drug- and alcohol-impaired driver smashed into her car.

My visit coincided with a 5K race to commemorate the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. I ran beside my cousin and his wife, with my then-7-month-old son in a jogging stroller. I thought and prayed about my aunt, which helped me mourn and grieve for my loss. Gratitude for the memories we'd made flooded me as I ran.

Finishing the race, I realized that running had become my medicine. I dedicated the rest of the year's training to my aunt and began focusing on what kind of runner I wanted to be.

Recentering

In the late summer heat, I felt my beloved aunt's presence as I ran my relay legs from the top of Mount Hood to the Pacific with Team HANDS (Healthy Active Natives Doing Something). At the time, I was deep in grief. My people mourn for a full year, during which we cut our hair, don't partake in powwows, and don't wear our regalia. The race felt like a culmination of my emotional struggle over the past months: As I worked through the tough miles in foggy darkness, I was also working through my grief.

During my third and last leg, my feet were covered with blisters, but I felt powerful. When I finished, I was crying so hard that bystanders worried I was injured. After months of training and emotional pain, I had become a runner — an Indigenous runner.

One night the following spring, I was playing on a coed basketball team and dribbling down the court when I stopped and pivoted, tearing my anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) and partially tearing my medial collateral ligament (MCL). Surgery and rehab eclipsed my regular training runs.

As the seasons changed from hot to cold to hot again and again, I waited — not so patiently — for my body to heal.

When I returned to running in 2018, I ran a steady lineup of races. I could feel my relations — past and present — cheering for me on each run, supporting the growth of my mind, body, and spirit. I was so strong by the following summer that I ran my first-ever half-marathon.

Always looking for an edge, I decided at Christmas to stop drinking alcohol for four months. I hoped this would improve my performance in my next half-marathon, slated for late April, right before my 38th birthday. I planned to celebrate with drinks.

Completing the Circle

As the year closed and a new one was born, I realized I was on another journey — toward an alcohol-free life. After attending a 12-step meeting to educate myself while teaching drug-and-alcohol awareness classes, I had a spiritual awakening: My Creator showed me the person I was when I drank, and I didn't like what I saw. Plus, I realized that to be a great runner, I had to jettison the mindset of going cold turkey before races and celebrating with drinks afterward.

During the pandemic, I ran virtual races by myself, even though many runners abandoned their training regimens. What kept me going was the philosophy of the Seven Generations: Each day my choices make the world better for the next seven generations. It all starts with me — maintaining healthy habits, aligning my behavior with my values, honoring my culture — and then it passes to my kids and their children and the next generation and the next.

Nowadays, I seek food that supports my body and my goals. I've been alcohol-free since December 27, 2019, and I start each day with a run, regardless of weather or season.

What I love most now is jogging short distances with my kids. I'm so proud when I see them next to me with smiles on their faces, celebrating their strength. In those moments, I'm overwhelmed by the power of living a healthy life connected with my ancestors, my future generations, my spirituality, my culture, and my self.

Birdie's Top 3 Success Strategies

1

LEAN ON YOUR SUPPORTERS. "My family helps me reach my running goals by watching my kids on weekends while I do long runs," Birdie says. "They also volunteer for events I'm competing in."

2

EXERCISE OUTDOORS FOR PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING. "I love listening to the birds and being one with Mother Nature," notes Birdie, who also recommends variety. "Going to a new park or hiking area keeps my running fresh."

3

REWARD YOURSELF DURING TRAINING AND AFTER YOU'RE DONE. A massage or special dinner are good ways to celebrate your effort. When Birdie is tapering before a race, she loves having her kids join her. "They're at an age where they can jog with me for about three miles — and doing it as a family encourages us all."

TELL US YOUR STORY!

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

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Real Fitness

There's a new fitness challenge at hand: Committing to an exercise streak is a powerful way of energizing your whole training routine.

Page **32**

Your movement routine doesn't have to end when your streak does. Keep the momentum alive with these expert tips.

INTO THE POOL

This water workout offers a strength-and-cardio challenge that's gentle on your joints.

BY **LAUREN BEDOSKY**

You might think of pool exercises as being easy — maybe too easy. But anyone, no matter their age or fitness level, can get a great cardio-and-strength workout in the water. And you don't need to know how to do the backstroke or butterfly, either.

"The water itself offers 12 to 14 percent more resistance than air, so just being in the water and having to balance the whole time means you're always working your body in some way," says Donna Pozdol, studio manager of group training at Life Time in Burr Ridge, Ill.

Pool exercises include strength and cardio moves performed while you're standing in water reaching the center of your chest or collarbone. Many workouts also make use of pool-specific noodles and dumbbells. If you feel at home in the water and need a greater challenge, you can always venture into the deep end.

Moving your workout to the pool is a great way to build strength and fitness without stressing your joints. Thanks to the water's buoyancy, your joints get support through a full range of motion. "For folks who have had knee surgery or a hip replacement, the water takes the pressure off so they can move, whereas they might be afraid to do that out of the water," Pozdol says.

Runners and other athletes who spend a lot of time pounding the pavement can also benefit from cross-training with pool exercises.

The natural drag of the water, however, won't allow you to complete pool exercises at the same pace as you would if you were doing them on land. In fact, rushing through pool exercises only makes them less effective, says Pozdol: "You'll get more out of it if you slow it down and make your motions bigger."

THE WORKOUT

FOR THIS POOL CIRCUIT, you'll need a noodle and a pair of medium-to-heavy water dumbbells. You'll hold the dumbbells until the last exercise, but feel free to set them on the side of the pool if you need a break. Keep the noodle nearby for the final exercise.

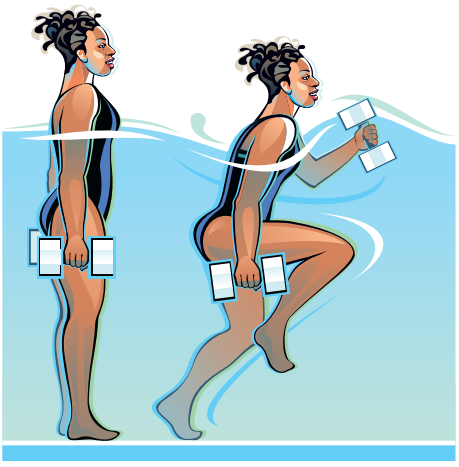
Perform each exercise in the circuit consecutively, taking rest as needed. When you complete the last move, pause for a quick breather (30 to 60 seconds) before starting again at the beginning.

Perform three to five rounds to build a 30-to-60-minute routine.

- Jog in Place: 1 minute
- Rocking Horse With Arm Press: 12–15 reps, left foot forward
- Jog in Place: 1 minute
- Rocking Horse With Arm Press: 12–15 reps, right foot forward
- Jog in Place: 1 minute
- Side-to-Side Lunge With Arm Press: 12–16 reps total
- Jog in Place: 1 minute
- Core Twist: 12–15 reps total
- Jog in Place: 1 minute
- Jump Front to Back: 12–15 reps total
- Jog in Place: 1 minute
- Jump Side to Side: 12–15 reps
- Jog in Place: 1 minute
- Jumping Jacks: 12–15 reps
- Jog in Place: 1 minute
- Suspended Ski: 12–15 reps
- Jog in Place: 1 minute
- Core Tuck: 12–15 reps

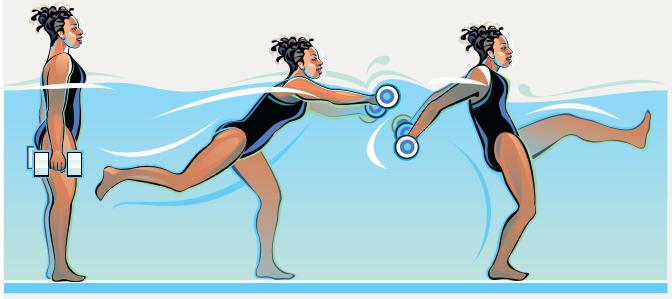
THE MOVES

JOG IN PLACE



This low-impact cardio exercise helps build endurance without stressing your joints.

- Stand with your feet hip width apart and hold a dumbbell in each hand down by your sides, palms facing in.
- While standing in place, lift one knee and bend the opposite arm to reach toward your shoulder.
- Lightly bounce on the ball of your standing foot to alternate sides, lifting your other knee and opposite arm.
- Stay light on your feet as you alternate sides for one minute.



ROCKING HORSE WITH ARM PRESS

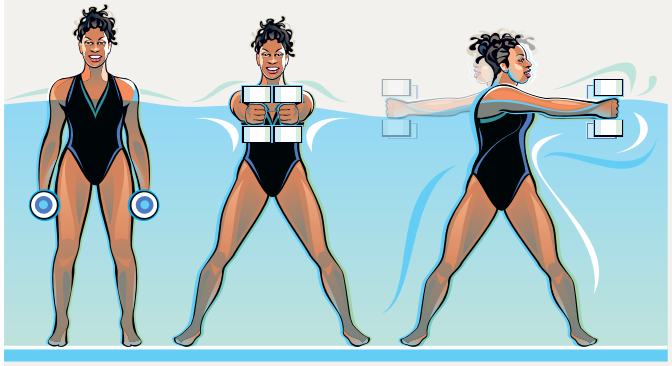
Works hip extension and flexion, shoulders, back, and chest.

- Stand with a weight in each hand down by your sides.
- Bend your right knee to kick your right foot back. Lean your torso forward and sweep both arms up, palms facing down.
- Sweep your arms down to your sides, palms facing up, and lean back. Transfer your weight onto your right leg and kick your left foot forward.
- Build up speed until you can flow back and forth.
- Continue for 12 to 15 reps. Repeat on the opposite side.

SIDE-TO-SIDE LUNGE WITH ARM PRESS

This exercise works your shoulders, chest, back, and lower body. It also builds coordination, agility, and power.

- Stand with your feet wider than hip width apart and hold a weight in each hand down by your sides.
- Shift your weight and twist your torso to the left so your feet point toward the left.
- Bend your left knee, lowering your hips as far as you're able.
- As you lunge, punch your right arm in front of your chest.
- Shift your weight back to center, then twist your torso to the right to repeat the movement, punching with the left arm.
- Keep your movements fluid as you alternate sides for 12 to 16 reps total.

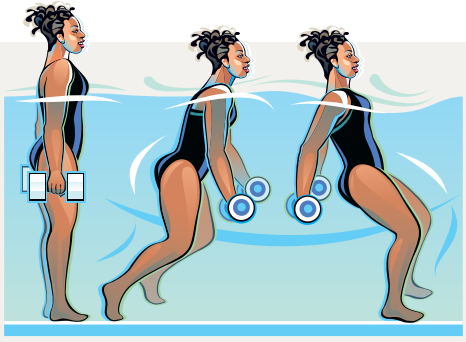


CORE TWIST

Get your abdominals firing from side to side with this rotational exercise, which also challenges your coordination.

- Take a wide-leg stance and extend both arms in front of your chest. Grip the dumbbells with palms facing in.
- Without moving your hips, rotate your torso to the left as far as you're able. Your head, arms, and waist should move together. Return to center, then rotate to the right. This is one rep.
- Do 12 to 15 reps.

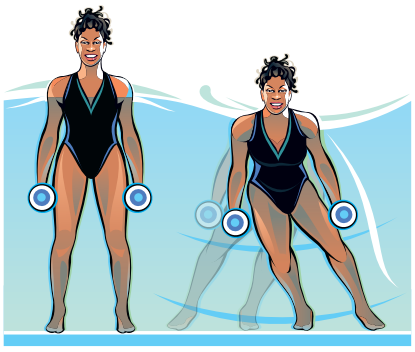
ILLUSTRATIONS: KVETA



JUMP FRONT TO BACK

Jumping forward and backward works agility and coordination.

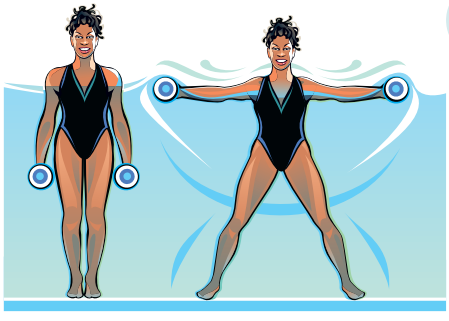
- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, toes pointed forward. Hold a weight in each hand down by your sides, palms facing in.
- Keeping your arms at your sides, jump forward with both feet. Then jump backward with both feet. That's one rep.
- Do 12 to 15 reps total.



JUMP SIDE TO SIDE

Like jumping forward and backward, moving side to side also builds agility and coordination.

- Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, toes pointed forward. Hold a weight in each hand down by your sides, palms facing in.
- Jump to the left with both feet and then to the right with both feet. That's one rep.
- Do 12 to 15 reps total.



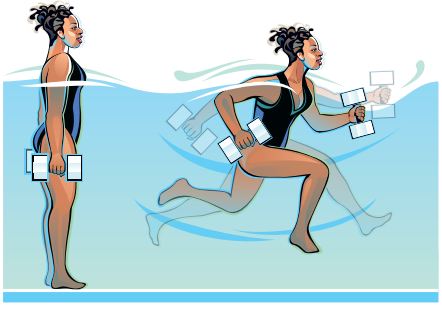
JUMPING JACKS

This classic cardio exercise activates your inner and outer thigh muscles.

- Stand and hold a weight in each hand down by your sides, palms facing in.
- Hop your feet wide and raise the weights out to your sides, stopping once you reach water height.
- Hop your feet together and bring your arms back down. Repeat for 12 to 15 reps.

GET THE DETAILS

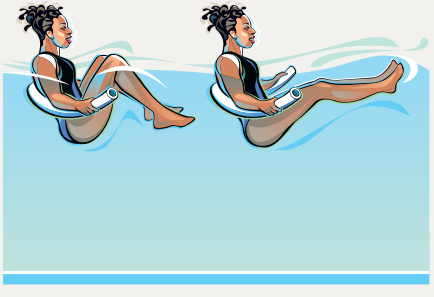
For full exercise descriptions and video demos, visit ELmag.com/poolworkout.



SUSPENDED SKI

Hovering in the water and moving your limbs back and forth challenges your core muscles, balance, and coordination.

- Stand with your feet together and hold a weight in each hand down by your sides, palms facing in.
- Lift your feet so you hover over the pool floor and bend both knees, bringing one forward and the other back.
- Alternate kicking one knee forward and the other behind you. As you move your legs, bend your elbows and pump your arms to mimic a skiing motion.
- Continue alternating arms and legs for 12 to 15 reps.



CORE TUCK

This exercise builds core strength and balance.

- Set your weights on the side of the pool. Place a noodle behind your back and tuck the ends under both arms. Let your legs float in front of your body.
- Bring your feet together. Keeping your back straight, use your lower abdominal muscles to bring both knees in to your chest.
- Then extend your legs in front of your body.
- Repeat for 12 to 15 reps.

LAUREN BEDOSKY is a Minnesota-based health-and-fitness writer.

3 MOVES TO STRETCH YOUR INNER THIGHS

Mobilize your adductors to improve pelvic positioning and protect against inner-knee and lower-back pain.

BY **LAUREN BEDOSKY**

You likely give your back, shoulders, quads, and glutes plenty of attention, but you may tend to forget your inner thighs, or hip adductors. Letting this area get tight may cause poor pelvic positioning plus inner-knee and lower-back issues.

The hip-adductor muscles pull your legs toward your body, control movement at the knee, and help your hamstrings and gluteus maximus extend the hip.

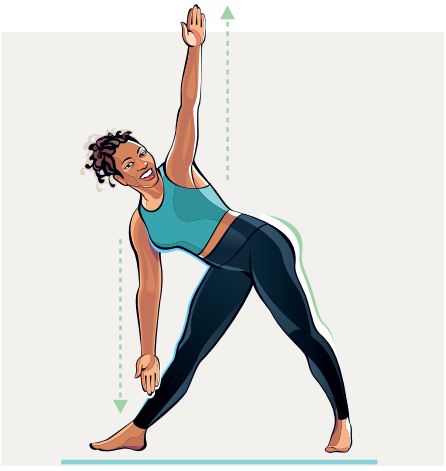
When your adductors get tight — often the result of sitting for long periods — lower-body movements can feel stiff and awkward, notes orthopedic specialist Stephanie Carter Kelley, PhD, PT. This immobility can throw off your pelvis, stressing your lower back, knees, and groin.

"To optimize movement and prevent injury to the adductors, regular stretching can go far," she says.

To counteract stiffness, Carter Kelley suggests flowing through the following moves every other day for two to three weeks. After that, incorporate these exercises into your routine once or twice weekly.

GET MORE SPECIFIC

For full instructions and video demos of the exercises, visit **ELmag.com/innerthighworkout.**



TRIANGLE POSE

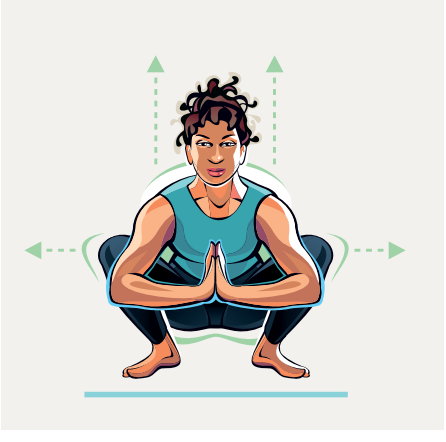
This classic yoga pose opens up the long hip-adductor muscles.

- Step your feet wider than shoulder width and point your right foot out.
- With your spine straight, reach your right hand over your right foot and bend your trunk toward your right leg.
- Touch your right hand to your right leg. Reach your left hand toward the ceiling, letting your gaze follow.
- Breathe deeply and hold for one to two minutes. Repeat on the opposite side.

WIDE-LEG FORWARD BEND

This bend helps stretch out the adductors, as well as the hamstrings.

- Step your feet out wider than shoulder width, toes pointed forward.
- Hinge at the hips to bend forward.
- Place both palms flat on the floor or elevated on yoga blocks. You should feel a gentle stretch in your thighs.
- Walk your hands over to one leg to deepen the stretch; then alternate legs.
- Breathe deeply and hold for one to two minutes in each position.



DEEP PRIMAL SQUAT

This squat stretches the adductors in the groin area and mobilizes the hip, knee, and ankle joints.

- Step your feet hip or shoulder width apart (depending on your mobility) and point your toes outward.
- Squat down to bring your butt to your heels.
- Lift your chest to straighten your spine, and place your elbows or upper arms against the insides of your knees.
- Gently press your arms into your knees to stretch out your inner thighs.

LAUREN BEDOSKY is a Minnesota-based health-and-fitness writer.

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The Curtsy Lunge

Try this twist on a go-to lower-body move to build glute and leg strength, improve hip stability, and challenge your balance.

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

Lower yourself vertically, bracing your abs to maintain an upright posture. Imagine that your torso is an elevator moving straight down and up.

Keep your arms extended for balance or place your hands on your hips.

Keep your hips and shoulders squared and stacked.

Your back knee can graze the floor, but take care not to relax at the bottom of the move.

PHOTOS: COLIN SIMMONS; STYLING: PAM BRAND; MODEL: ALEJANDRO MARTINEZ

Lunges are great for building strength in your legs and glutes while also improving balance, stability, and mobility. Chances are you've done forward, reverse, and lateral varieties; each offers a subtle but powerful difference to challenge you. Now, meet the curtsy lunge.

True to its name, it involves stepping one foot behind the other and bending your knees into, well, a curtsy. But don't be fooled into thinking this move is a gendered gesture.

Instead of stepping straight to the front, back, or side, the curtsy lunge calls for simultaneously stepping your foot back and behind your standing leg. In addition to the usual lunge benefits, this motion adds an extra challenge to your hip stabilizers as well as your inner thighs.

To get the most out of curtsy lunges and avoid common pitfalls, try these tips:

• Don't overstep. For beginners, a good starting point is to line up the knee of your moving leg with the heel of your planted foot. Depending on your mobility and physiology, you may be able to perform a deeper curtsy with a longer stride.

• Don't push your butt out or let your hips twist to the side. Imagine your hips are headlights and your pelvis is a bowl of soup. Keep those headlights pointing forward and the soup bowl steady as you descend into the lunge.

• Don't let your standing knee or ankle splay out or twist in. Protect the joints by tracking the knee over your toes and remain grounded through your planted foot.

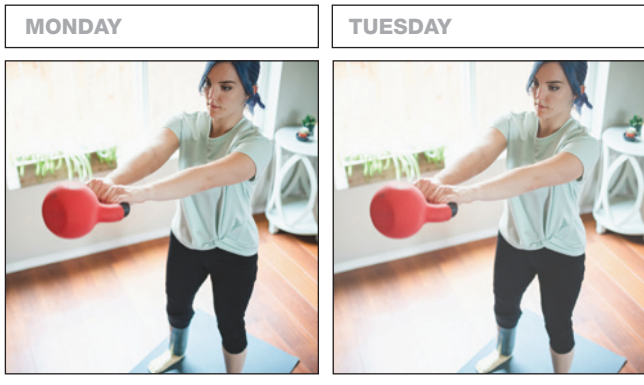
INSTRUCTIONS

1. Stand with feet about hip width apart. Keeping your chest proud and shoulders squared over your hips, step your right foot back and to the left, allowing both knees to bend.
2. Lower your body straight down, without wrenching, until the front (left) knee forms a 90-degree angle.
3. Reverse the movement by stepping your rear (right) foot back to the starting position.
4. Complete the desired number of reps and repeat on the opposite side.

+ TRY THESE VARIATIONS

For five ways to mix up your curtsy lunge, visit **ELmag.com/curtsylunge.**

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



When the Streak Is Over

Streak challenges are a powerful way to energize a training routine. Keep the momentum alive with these tips.

BY **ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS**

The term "streaking" may sound scandalous, perhaps evoking memories of classmates sprinting naked across a field. But in a fitness sense, it refers to something much less racy: repetition.

A fitness streak is simply a commitment to repeating a daily exercise habit for a set period of time. Challenges of this sort come in many forms: a daily yoga practice, a daily run or bike ride, a daily 100-rep squat or pushup session. Some streaks are less specific — a challenge to move in some way, shape, or form for, say, 30 minutes each day.

More often than not, streaks are temporary commitments to pushing beyond one's baseline, and they typically last for 30, 60, or 90 days. Depending on needs and starting point, the streaker might face the challenge weekly rather than daily.

Streaking isn't complicated. The rules are flexible and adaptable, with lots of room to play and explore your personal relationship to movement. It's a chance to improve strength, power, endurance, and other fitness markers; to practice new skills or immerse yourself in a favorite activity; and, maybe most impactful of all, to build the simple big-picture habit of moving every day.

But, as often happens when we embark on new active endeavors, the promise of sudden, radical transformation can overshadow streaking's subtler benefits. Having unrealistic expectations of what a short-lived streak challenge can deliver, and pushing your body to the point of burnout, exhaustion, or even injury, are common pitfalls that keep many exercisers from bridging their streak experience to their everyday lives.

"Exercise is a powerful vehicle for change, but it's not magic," says Jolie Kobrinsky, an unconventional-training veteran and owner of Elektren studio in Seaside, Calif. "Big changes take a long time and lots of work. A monthlong fitness challenge is really just a single step on what is hopefully a lifelong path."

Big changes take a long time and lots of work. A monthlong fitness challenge is really just a single step on what is hopefully a lifelong path."

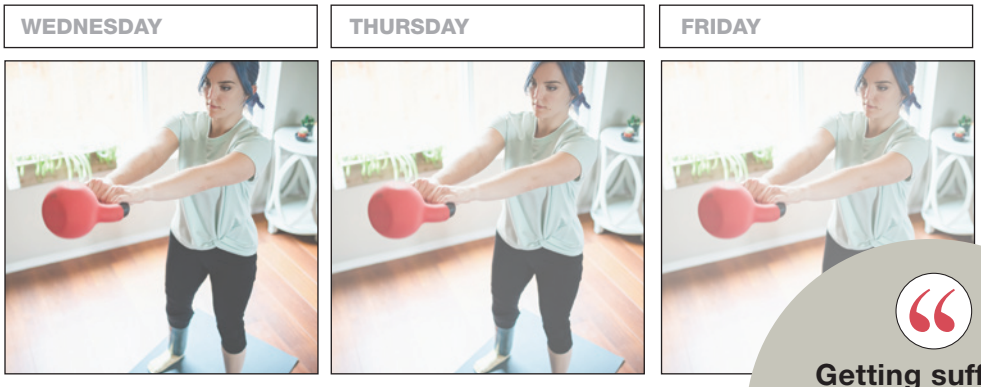
If you're currently considering a fitness streak — or perhaps approaching the end of a challenge — remember: Your new-found movement habits don't have to end when your streak does. Our experts share their best tips for maintaining the momentum for the long haul.

Shift Your Focus

It's natural when taking on a fitness challenge to set your sights on the positive outcome you hope to achieve. This might take the form of a performance or aesthetic goal — but it's important to remember that many substantial changes develop over the long run. The goal of fitness streaking isn't to lose 30 pounds in one month, double your VO_2 max,

or achieve some other unlikely, unsustainable (and potentially unhealthy) outcome.

While you don't need to abandon these loftier goals, it can be helpful to revise your focus and look at the bigger picture: "The goal of fitness streaking is to establish healthy behaviors as a part of your daily routine," says personal trainer Lindsay Ogden, CPT, creator of Life Time's digital habit-building program, Fit + Focused. "Whether it's movement, workouts, or nutrition, the focus is building consistent, healthy habits." With habits dialed in, "fitness becomes a lot easier," she adds.



By prioritizing habit-building, you can view your other goals from a place of data collection and curiosity. For instance, let's say your streak challenge is to perform 75 kettlebell swings every day for 30 days. You might ask yourself, *How will I feel, physically and mentally, by pursuing this challenge each day? How will my fitness change over these 30 days?*

You can focus on honing your swing technique daily while gradually improving your strength and conditioning. You can practice carving out time in your busy day to move your body — time that you might ultimately choose to devote to different exercise modalities.

(For a firsthand account of staying motivated and curious through a running streak, visit ELmag.com/streakchallenge.)

Give Yourself Some Grace

It's tempting to see your success in a fitness challenge in strictly black-and-white terms. Let's say you've been avoiding exercise for three years and decide to complete a daily-movement challenge. Reviewing your log after 60 days, you find that on 15 days, you went to the gym. On 30 days, you completed a 10-minute walk. And on the other 15 days, you were too busy to exercise at all.

Your first instinct might be to view this as a failure — after all, you committed to 60 workouts and missed a quarter of them. But the 45 days that you did exercise constitute a huge win. After a long layoff, you followed through on your commitment the vast majority of the time, completing 45 workouts that you probably wouldn't have done otherwise. You improved your cardiovascular health and metabolism. You built muscle. You got stronger.

> **Getting sufficient sleep, hydration, protein —** those are things you should try to maintain daily."

Perhaps most important, you practiced a new habit that can last well beyond the brief time frame of the challenge — if you don't derail your progress with the erroneous belief that you failed.

"Some people miss a day and it completely sidelines them. But that's like getting a flat tire, pulling over, and flattening the other three," says Ogden. "You don't have to follow the plan 100 percent. You just need to get there some of the time. You're mastering the art of showing up."

With health-and-wellness habits, she adds, that's most of the battle.

Missed a day? Forgive yourself and move on. Burned out on a challenge? The fitness streak is a tool to help you improve, but if it triggers feelings of guilt or inadequacy, toss it and find a different approach.

Realize It's One Step on a Long Journey

Even before your streak ends, consider what you'll do next. Ideally, you'll want to choose something that builds on or complements what you've accomplished. For instance, if you improved your cardiovascular endurance over 30 days, maybe your next goal is to complete a 5K — or perhaps to move into a strength-training phase to keep progressing on your activity of choice.

The only streaks you should stick with indefinitely, Ogden contends, involve recovery. "Getting sufficient sleep, hydration, protein — those are things you should try to maintain daily," she says.

With intense exercise challenges, however, you'll get the best results if you wrap it up when the time frame ends and move on to something else. "There's a seasonality to movement," Ogden says. "Your body needs different things at different times."

So, as you emerge from your fitness streak, temper your discipline and sweat with a healthy dollop of self-compassion. You'll have more fun — and likely stay fired up and ready for more.

ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS, is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

GO ON A STREAK

Avoid boredom and burnout on your next streak challenge with these expert tips: **ELmag.com/streak.**

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Coming Into Focus

After years of perceived failures, our fitness editor reimagines the purpose of setting goals.

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

The first time I set a "fitness goal," I didn't even know fitness goals were a thing.

It was the summer of 1994, the eve of a new school year at a new school — middle school — in a new town. I was 11 years old, feeling trapped in a changing body I didn't recognize or understand, and full of nerves about making a good impression.

I need to lose weight, I decided. I didn't know much at 11, but I'd already absorbed the message that being skinny was desirable, powerful even. If I could just shrink down to the "right" size, I'd ace all my classes and win the hearts of the other kids.

I spent the last week of summer walking all over my new neighborhood and skipping meals. Whether this was an attempt to exert control over my body or over a scary situation — or both — is something I can only guess at now, 27 years later.

Not surprisingly, a week of these efforts didn't have the exponential results I'd hoped for. What they did was set the tone for a mindset I'd battle for years to come.

Throughout my school years, I struggled with my body image and self-confidence. I spent many after-school hours in the basement working out to exercise videos. I skipped breakfast and lunch. I weighed and measured my body. I never reached my goal weight.

In my teenage eyes, I had failed.

I couldn't see the gifts I was giving myself with those exercise videos, which included yoga, dance, kickboxing, and strength circuits. I couldn't see how they were instilling in me a love of movement and an appreciation for physical challenges.

I also couldn't see the ways I was hurting myself: pushing myself too hard, eating too little, and denying myself basic care and pleasures.

This pattern continued into my early 30s, even after I shifted my focus away from being purely about aesthetics and toward performance goals like running and lifting.

And still, even though I had my why, even though I had a good training plan, even when I reached the goals I had set, it wasn't enough.

> Goals aren't a final destination. They aren't an endpoint. **They're simply an invitation.**

Again, I now understand there was so much I couldn't see. I didn't look beyond the goals I had set, yet this performance-focused phase of my journey taught me so much about exercise and human movement. I had learned new skills and found sports I loved. My doctor was always impressed by my lab work; once, with a stethoscope to my chest, she marveled, "The heart of an athlete."

If I had the heart of an athlete, then why did I always feel like a total failure?

The answer arrived when I broke up with goal-setting, at least in the way I'd been doing it. In my fitness life (and, if I'm being honest, my *whole* life), I had looked at goals as destinations on the horizon — an endpoint I should reach.

But I came to understand that what I desire is to be able to live and move without self-blame and shame. I want to grow as a person by becoming more myself — not less.

To achieve this vision, I needed to reframe my understanding of goals.

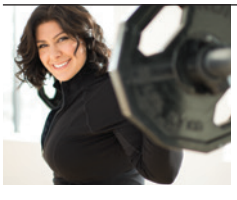
So, I stopped setting them.

I began approaching movement from a place of curiosity. I asked, What if . . . ? I followed my intuition about how and when to move. As I followed my instincts, my intuition got louder. And in this process of learning, my greatest fear since childhood — that if I stopped setting goals, I'd stop moving altogether — fell away. Even without specific goals, I got stronger.

This hasn't been a linear journey, but my circuitous, oftentimes surprising path has given me the best result I could have asked for: I no longer think of myself as a failure.

For a while, I thought the moral of this story was that goals are overrated at best, injurious at worst. But the narrative I embrace now is less binary: Goals aren't a final destination. They aren't an endpoint. They're simply an invitation — to take a step forward, to explore a direction, and maybe to let myself get lost along the way and discover something new.

Finally, I can accept that sometimes I must get lost to find what I was looking for all along.



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

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In Search of Sustainable Seafood

BY **HEIDI WACHTER**

Fish offers a host of health benefits, but pollution, overfishing, and human-rights abuses have muddied the waters. Learn how to make more sustainable choices.

Humans have eaten seafood for millennia. Today, about 1 billion people worldwide depend on fish as their primary source of animal protein, and health experts recommend fish as one of the best sources of anti-inflammatory omega-3 fats. Many dietary guidelines recommend eating at least two servings of fish each week.

Yet a number of factors now call into question whether eating seafood is truly healthy — for us or for our planet.

Earth's oceans have gone from being rich with biodiversity to becoming polluted with waste and chemicals, home to floating islands of discarded plastic.

Because of overharvesting, many fish populations are under severe stress. "There are things in the ocean that make you despair," says Charles Clover, cofounder and executive director of Blue Marine Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to restoring oceans.

The number of overfished stocks has tripled in the last 50 years, according to the United Nations. One-third of the world's fisheries are currently overfished, and 60 percent are fished to capacity. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing — accounting for approximately one in five fish caught — are some of the most prevalent global crimes.

Yet some sustainability experts believe it's not too late to reverse course. "Imagine if the sea had all the species in it that it used to and we had brought back nature within sight of our shores," suggests Clover. "There are parts of the world where it has already happened or is happening."

Many areas are already "achieving defensible, scientifically credible results in conservation," he says. Smarter management policies, better collaboration between fishers and government, and heightened consumer awareness have all been shown to make a difference.

Such efforts helped rockfish return to San Francisco's historic Fisherman's Wharf, even after becoming so depleted that they were almost added to the endangered-species list. Since 2000, 47 U.S. federally managed fish stocks have been declared rebuilt.

Today, Florida researchers are working to return red snapper to the Atlantic Ocean. Conservationists worldwide are working to revitalize sturgeon populations through habitat restoration, fishing bans, repopulation of waterways, and connecting local communities with the historical, ecological, and cultural significance of these "dinosaur fish."

Angler and tribal involvement in conservation efforts is also helping fisheries rebound. Efforts to restore Chinook salmon to the Snake River in the Pacific Northwest, for example, include cooperation between Native tribes, state and federal fish and wildlife services, and others.

Get Informed

Determining which fish are truly sustainable starts with asking questions like these.

The Shoshone-Bannock people have worked tirelessly to save the sockeye-salmon runs on Idaho's portion of the Snake River. The strong cultural ties to salmon for certain Native communities have led some non-Indigenous people to wonder whether it's best to avoid consuming salmon altogether — at least until populations rebound — or to eat only fish from Indigenous-owned salmon fisheries so the tribes can continue to restore the salmon population.

"It's not just an animal; it's not just a fish," says tribal research biologist Sammy Matsaw, PhD. "There's a whole people and culture that can be lost."

This is just one example of the ethical complexities that now accompany a seafood meal. The choices are complicated. Still, many sustainable-food advocates believe that thoughtful fish consumption is part of the solution.

While some ocean-health advocates do advise against eating fish at all, Clover and others believe that that approach is too simplistic. If we don't support those who are working to make seafood more sustainable for all, says Clover, "you undermine the economy of local places; you undermine the people who are looking after those areas."

Far better to support their positive efforts than to treat the seafood industry as if all producers were the same.

IS THERE A SUSTAINABILITY DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FRESHWATER AND SALTWATER FISH?

Overfishing happens everywhere: local streams, the Great Lakes, and the sea. Both saltwater and freshwater harvests have increased dramatically in recent decades and show no signs of abating. As one species is overfished, fishers turn their efforts toward those that remain.

Sustainability efforts place a lot of focus on ocean stocks — but waterways are connected, so issues such as pollution, invasive species, and climate change affect all aquatic life.

ARE SOME FISHING METHODS MORE SUSTAINABLE THAN OTHERS?

Commercial fishing employs a broad range of methods, only some of which are sustainable. The most sustainable methods have the smallest impact on other aquatic species and the environment. These include pole and line (an angler can quickly identify and release any unintended catch); spearfishing and harpooning; and trolling.

Floating fish traps and weirs are also sustainable methods, because fish can enter traps without risking entanglement, which is an issue with nets.

All these methods help minimize environmental damage and overfishing as well as bycatch, which is the accidental harvest of nontarget species, such as dolphins, turtles, and seabirds.

At the other end of the spectrum are methods that take an enormous toll on sea life and ocean health. These include bottom trawling and dredging, both of which involve dragging weighted nets across the sea floor. These methods damage habitat, sweeping up everything in their wake, and they lead to substantial bycatch.

Giant drift nets, which move with the current, also capture large numbers of nontarget species. The same is true for miles-long lines with multiple baited hooks; these attract many species, so bycatch is significant.

(For a more comprehensive look at the impact of different fishing methods, see "How Fish Are Caught" at ELmag.com/sustainableseafood.)

ARE THERE LABOR ISSUES IN THE FISHING INDUSTRY?

Seafood sustainability efforts also include creating safer, fairer conditions for those who work in the fishing industry. Human-rights abuses — including forced labor, trafficking, physical punishment, and insufficient food and water for workers — have been reported on vessels throughout the commercial-fishing industry.

One survey of workers in the fishing industry in the Gulf of Thailand found that approximately 17 percent were working against their will and unable to quit. Reports of labor exploitation have also come from fisheries in the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

As organizations document more of these abuses, large seafood companies have begun establishing codes of conduct for their suppliers, implementing improved traceability and inviting third parties to audit supply chains.

The safest bet is to buy seafood from small suppliers who share information about their supply chains.

HOW MUCH DOES POLLUTION AFFECT SEAFOOD QUALITY?

Many contaminants in our waters harm both aquatic and human health. These include microplastics, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), and endocrine-active compounds that can mimic the effects of hormones.

One analysis found that fish throughout the world's oceans are frequently contaminated with persistent organic pollutants from farming and industry. Although these substances were banned in 1977, heavily used compounds like DDT and PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) made their way into waterways and accumulated in sediment. Slow to break down, PCBs accumulate in the fatty tissues of fish and other animals.

Mercury is another concern; because it binds to proteins, this neurotoxin is often found in fish.

To reduce the risk of mercury exposure, health experts recommend avoiding larger fish species, including shark, swordfish, king mackerel, and tilefish.

To reduce your exposure to all toxins, vary your fish choices. Opt for panfish (such as stream trout, smelt, and perch) that eat insects rather than other fish; smaller gamefish (such as walleye, lake trout, and bass) that likely haven't accumulated as many toxins in their systems; and leaner fish (such as yellow perch, sunfish, and crappie).

It's also helpful to eat fewer fatty fish, like lake trout, or those that feed on lake and stream bottoms, like catfish and carp. Properly cleaning fish, as well as preparing it by broiling, grilling, or baking, may help drain away some of the fat, where contaminants accumulate.

You can always consult one of the available guides to find low-mercury fish. The Environmental Working Group's *Good Seafood Guide* provides a calculator that considers a person's age, weight, and risk of heart disease and offers sustainability rankings for seafood. The Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) Seafood Selector also offers information on mercury risks and sustainability ratings.

WHAT SEAFOOD SHOULD I AVOID?

There are many reasons you might want to steer clear of eating a particular species: It may be overfished, high in mercury, or endangered. It might be caught in ways that are harmful to workers or the aquatic environment.

Likewise, which seafood is a good choice depends on a variety of factors, from the current status of wild stocks to where farmed seafood originates, because countries have differing regulations. And most of these conditions change routinely.

There are guides that track this evolving information. The Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch includes regularly updated sustainability ratings. The EDF Seafood Selector is also a good tool. Below are some fish that frequently appear on their "best avoided" lists.

ATLANTIC HALIBUT: Wild Atlantic halibut often has high levels of mercury. Pacific halibut is still a good choice.

ATLANTIC SALMON: Although Pacific salmon are usually wild caught, most Atlantic salmon are farmed; they are typically raised in offshore floating cages in the Canadian Atlantic, Chile, Norway, and Scotland. They suffer from problems similar to those of livestock in large-scale farms on land: They live in crowded quarters, contract illnesses that require antibiotics, and are fed other fish that are harvested en masse.

CATFISH, IMPORTED: Imported catfish undermines the production of U.S. farmed catfish, which tends to be responsibly farmed, using minimal antibiotics.

CHILEAN SEA BASS: These large, slow-growing fish have been brought to the brink of extinction.

COD: Stocks of Atlantic cod collapsed from overfishing in the mid-1990s and have not recovered. Pacific cod from Japanese fisheries are caught by trawls and are overfished. Alaskan cod, however, is well managed.

CRAB, IMPORTED: Crab harvesting in the United States gets a high sustainability rating from the EDF Seafood Selector, but the majority of imported red and blue king crabs are harvested unsustainably by one poorly managed Russian fishery.

FRESHWATER EEL: Beloved by sushi fans, unagi eel rates high in toxins. (To learn more about the best and worst choices for sushi, check out the EDF Seafood Selector.)

MAHI MAHI: This saltwater fish from Peru and Taiwan is typically caught with long lines that attract bycatch.

OCTOPUS: Most varieties of this highly intelligent species are overfished.

ORANGE ROUGHY: Also overfished, orange roughy take up to two decades to reach maturity; populations require a long time to rebound.

POLLOCK: It matters where it comes from — most Atlantic and Alaskan pollock is sustainable, but Canadian and Russian fishers use gill nets, trawls, and long lines that produce substantial bycatch.

SHARK: Overfishing has been a disaster for shark populations as well as oceans, because these predators play an important role in maintaining biodiversity. Shark often contains high levels of mercury.

SHRIMP: Farm shrimp ponds are replacing mangroves in many areas, contributing to shoreline erosion and worsening the impact of tsunamis. Fresh shrimp is often caught by trawls using forced labor. Bycatch is also an issue, with 2 to 10 pounds of other fish caught for every pound of shrimp. Unless you can get wild-caught shrimp in season near one of the U.S. coasts, it's best to steer clear.

SPINY LOBSTER, IMPORTED: This crustacean often comes from Belize, Brazil, Honduras, and Nicaragua, where regulations and stock management are weak.

SQUID: Squid fisheries are largely unregulated and not well studied. Squid are also typically caught with bottom and midwater trawls, with substantial bycatch.

SWORDFISH: This grand saltwater fish often contains high levels of mercury and is typically caught with longlines.

TUNA: Tuna — including albacore, bluefin, skipjack, and yellowfin — can accumulate high mercury content, and it is typically unsustainably caught and overfished. Japanese hamachi (Pacific yellowtail tuna), beloved by sushi fans, often contains high levels of toxins. Pole-caught tuna is much more sustainable.

HOW CAN I FIND SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD?
Again, the easiest route is to use a guide. The Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch and EDF Seafood Selector are useful for checking the sustainability of seafood species when you're shopping or dining out. Here are some other strategies to use.

EXPAND YOUR PALATE. Shrimp, salmon, pollock, cod, crab, canned tuna, and clams make up the majority of seafood consumed in the United States. Choosing less-mainstream fish can help ease pressure on popular favorites and allow their stocks to rebound.

TRY SMALLER, MORE ABUNDANT SPECIES. Think anchovies, sardines, and mackerel, which are caught sustainably and also provide plenty of healthy omega-3 fats.

Still, moderation matters. Although smaller fish are more sustainable, they're also central in many subsistence and traditional diets, and they're becoming increasingly unavailable to those who rely on them daily.

"If fish that were once caught in sustainable quantities by local fishers for local eaters are now being harvested by factory vessels and shipped worldwide to be eaten by wealthy people, local food security is disrupted," notes food journalist and cookbook author Mark Bittman in *Animal, Vegetable, Junk: A History of Food, From Sustainable to Suicidal*.

LOOK FOR THE COUNTRY OF ORIGIN. A 2016 survey of 28 countries found that countries with effective fishery management generally produced healthy fish stocks, while countries without fishery management featured declining stocks. The best-performing fisheries were found in the United States and Iceland; the poorest were in the Philippines, Bangladesh, China, Brazil, Thailand, and Myanmar.

"The principal responsibility is with governments to make sure that the fish caught in their waters are caught sustainably without bycatch and in a way that means they're not destroying the environment," notes Clover. Shop at a fish market and ask where the catch originated. Or read labels for the origin.

LOOK FOR SUSTAINABLE SOURCING. When you're buying canned or frozen fish, look for companies that source seafood from fishers who use sustainable methods, such as pole-and-line fishing or reef nets, as well as selective harvesting.

BUY A SHARE IN A COMMUNITY-SUPPORTED FISHERY (CSF). Like their terrestrial kin, community-supported agriculture, CSFs allow local and small-scale anglers to get a better price for their product, promote environmental stewardship, emphasize sustainable fishing practices, and protect local and regional food systems. One study found that CSFs emphasize abundant species not targeted by industrialized fisheries, encourage experimentation with lower-impact fishing methods, and help familiarize eaters with species that would otherwise be discarded.

VOTE FOR LEGISLATORS WHO SUPPORT GOOD FISHING POLICY AND HABITAT PRESERVATION. This is good for the ocean and the planet as well as recreational, subsistence, and commercial fishers. Visit the Marine Fish Conservation Network and Ocean Champions sites to learn more about the issues.

HEIDI WACHTER
is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

Culinary Gems From Around the Globe

Welcome to an array of international condiments and sauces — and ideas for using them in your next meal.

BY **CAMILLE BERRY**

Odds are you have a bottle of soy sauce or sriracha in your pantry, maybe a jar of tahini tucked away in the fridge. But there's a whole glorious world of sauces and seasonings beyond these familiar staples just waiting to be discovered.

Supplementing your pantry with condiments from different regions makes it easy to perk up stale recipes, and it can help you nudge yourself out of your culinary comfort zone. Plus, ingredients from the global pantry offer an opportunity to explore other cuisines via your home kitchen.

So, the next time you're grocery shopping, consider picking up one of these culinary gems. If the international aisle of your local supermarket looks a bit sparse, try searching online: There are myriad online specialty sites that offer a treasure trove of ingredients. Who knows? You just might discover a new favorite flavor.

HARISSA | Take note, spice fiends: Harissa will set your taste buds alight. This hot Tunisian red-chili paste is a blend of roasted red peppers, Baklouti peppers, and garlic, mixed with a fragrant assortment of spices and herbs. Use a dab on burgers or in sandwiches, toss it with your roasted veggies, or swirl it into sauces and dips to add a fiery kick.

FURIKAKE | A Japanese umami-rich dry seasoning crafted from a blend of seaweed, sesame seeds, and dried fish, furikake is typically sprinkled over rice. It can also add flavor and a satisfying crunch to salads, soups, roasted potatoes, or even a bowl of popcorn.

POMEGRANATE MOLASSES | This concentrated sweet-tart condiment appears in both sweet and savory Middle Eastern dishes. It is brilliant for glazing meats, whisking into salad dressings, or using in place of molasses in your favorite baking recipes to give them the tantalizing taste of pomegranate.

MISO PASTE | This salty, earthy condiment has so many uses — it's no wonder it's one of the cornerstones of Japanese cuisine. Miso is made by fermenting soybeans with salt and koji, a mold used to make everything from sake to soy sauce. Mix it into marinades or stir it into vegetarian dishes to infuse them with savory flavor. Add it to cookie dough or brownie batter for an unexpected explosion of umami. If you've never tried miso, start with the shiro (or white) variety: Its sweet, mild flavor offers the ideal introduction.

BLACK VINEGAR | Viscous and flavorful, with malty, earthy notes, this Chinese vinegar (also called Chinkiang vinegar) offers much more than a pop of acidity. Jason Wang, owner of New York's Xi'an Famous Foods, writes in his cookbook of the same name that black vinegar provides "a tangy, rich kick so ingrained in our cooking, so deified, artisans were trained to make it specifically for the imperial court during the Zhou dynasty." Add a tablespoon to your noodles or salad dressing for a sweet-sour complexity.

CHILI CRISP | Garlicky and peppery, with layers of warm spices, Chinese chili crisp gets its texture from fried onions and garlic and typically includes roasted nuts for added crunch. Packed with flavor but not too fiery, chili crisp is perfect for spooning over noodles, dumplings, and even fried eggs. Is there anything that isn't enhanced with a dab of chili crisp? You be the judge.

DUKKAH | A flavorful Egyptian condiment, dukkah (also duqqa) is crafted from a fragrant blend of nuts, seeds, and toasted spices. As with many other spice blends, recipes vary, but coriander, cumin, and sesame seeds, plus hazelnuts or peanuts, are all common ingredients. Sprinkle it over hummus or yogurt dips to add a satisfying crunch; use it as a dry rub; or sprinkle it on your avocado toast. If you make dukkah at home, follow chef Yotam Ottolenghi's advice and "be sure not to burn the seeds, removing them from the heat as soon as they begin to pop, and also not to process them much with the mortar and pestle so that they keep their texture."

ZA'ATAR | "If there is one smell to match the emblematic image of the Old City of Jerusalem, one odor that encapsulates the soul of this ancient city nestled in the Judean Mountains, it is the smell of za'atar," writes Ottolenghi in his cookbook *Jerusalem*. Numerous versions of za'atar exist, but this herb-and-spice blend typically includes oregano, wild thyme, marjoram, sesame seeds, and sumac. Common throughout the Middle East, za'atar is also used across northern Africa and brings an earthy yet citrusy flavor to roasted and grilled fare, dips, and flatbread.

CHAMOY | This sweet-savory sauce is traditionally made with ume fruit, but modern versions often include mango, tamarind, and other sour fruits. Use it to marinate chicken or ribs, or enjoy it the way generations of Mexicans have: drizzled over mangoes, apples, and cucumber, or generously poured over shaved ice.

ACHAR | A kind of South Asian pickle, achar is made by fermenting vegetables and fruits with spices and oil. Lime, mango, lotus stem, and chilies are all common ingredients, but the mixture varies depending on the region and what's in season. The most basic way to enjoy achar is heaped over rice, but it goes with virtually everything. Try spooning it into dal to give the lentils a tangy flavor.

SICHUAN PEPPERCORNS | Sichuan (or Szechuan) peppercorns are unique in the spice world. As Wang writes, "While Sichuan peppercorns don't have capsaicin like spicy peppers, they do include another compound that triggers a vibrating, intense tingle." That tingle is a numbing sensation that brings out the flavors of other ingredients. Toast the peppercorns, then grind some over a spicy stew or zingy marinade to elevate the dish to a whole new level.

CHAAT MASALA | This spice blend is the standard garnish for chaat, an umbrella term for savory snacks enjoyed across South Asia. Sprinkle it over roasted vegetables or fruit salads for a sour kick, or add it to soups and stews for a layer of complex spice.

FISH SAUCE | If you've ever had pad thai, you're already acquainted with fish sauce. It's made from fermented fish and has a unique salty, savory, and — yes — fishy taste. Try a teaspoon or two of fish sauce in sauces, dressings, and marinades for a hit of funky flavor.

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

Get Cultured

Fermented foods support the immune system plus provide strains of good bacteria that are essential for health.

BY **KAREN OLSON**

You may be surprised by the number of foods that require fermentation. Bread, cured meats, cheeses. Beer, wine, certain coffees and teas. Sauerkraut, miso, yogurt.

Not only are these foods and beverages tasty, but they share a characteristic that is essential for life. Our bodies are ecosystems teeming with trillions of bacteria — both good and bad — and fermented foods offer the healthy strains of bacteria our systems need to stay in balance. In short, if you eat enough raw sauerkraut, the bad guys are less likely to wreak havoc on your immune system. (For more on the health benefits of good bacteria, see ELmag.com/microbiome.)

While you can find probiotic-rich fermented foods throughout your grocery store, making your own is easy — and fun. These recipes offer simple, good-for-your-gut food that you can try on your own at home.

Coconut-Water Kefir

Often made with various kinds of dairy or nondairy milks, kefir can also be easily made from water or coconut water. This recipe is adapted from www.culturesforhealth.com, which is also a good source for kefir grains.

Makes 1 quart
Hands-on preparation time: 5 minutes
Total preparation time: 24 to 48 hours

- 1 quart coconut water
- 3 tbs. live kefir grains
- 1 tbs. organic sugar
- Optional flavorings: ½ cup berries (pictured) or diced melon, or one diced apple and a cinnamon stick

Special equipment:

- 1½-quart carafe
- 6-x-6-inch square of cheesecloth
- Rubber band

Place all the ingredients together in a jar or carafe, cover with cheesecloth, and secure with a rubber band.

Set in a draft-free area for 24 to 48 hours for the culture to develop. Taste for desired sweetness level, then store in the refrigerator for up to three weeks.

PHOTOS: TERRY BRENNAN; FOOD STYLING: BETSY NELSON

Green-Tea Kombucha

Makes 3 quarts
Hands-on preparation time: 30 minutes
Total preparation time: One to one and a half weeks

Kombucha is a pleasantly tart probiotic drink. You can also make this with black tea (though not flavored or decaf tea), fruit juices, and chopped fresh fruit and herbs. There's a lot of sugar used in the first fermentation, but don't worry: It's for the SCOBY (symbiotic culture of bacteria and yeast) to eat, not you. This recipe is inspired by Mastering Fermentation *by Mary Karlin, www.happyherbalist .com, and www.kombuchakamp.com; both websites are great sources for starter liquid and SCOBY.*

First Fermentation:

- 12 cups filtered water (do not use chlorinated water)
- 4 to 6 tsp. loose-leaf unflavored, caffeinated green tea in a tea infuser or strainer (or 4 to 6 tea bags)
- 1 cup unrefined cane sugar
- 8 oz. starter liquid
- 1 SCOBY

Special equipment:

- Heatproof bowl
- 1 gallon-size glass jar or crock
- 8-x-8-inch square of cheesecloth
- Rubber band

Bring 4 cups of the water to a boil and pour over tea in a heatproof bowl. Add sugar and stir until the sugar is dissolved. Steep the tea for 30 minutes and remove the leaves from the water.

Add the remaining 8 cups of water. Cool to room temperature and add the mixture to your jar or crock.

Add the starter liquid and SCOBY. Cover the jar with the cheesecloth and secure with the rubber band. Store in a warm, dark location for seven to 10 days. Taste it every few days to check for the transition from sweetness to sour. When the kombucha tastes similar to your original starter liquid, or more tart than sweet, it is ready to bottle for the second fermentation.

Second Fermentation:

- 2 cups filtered water (do not use chlorinated water)
- 4 tsp. green tea, in a tea infuser (or 4 tea bags)
- ½ cup organic cane sugar
- 4 tbs. grated fresh ginger
- 12 cups first-fermentation kombucha

Special equipment:

- Eight 12-oz. bottles with tight-fitting caps

Boil 1 cup of the water and add the tea. Add the sugar and stir to dissolve.

Steep the tea for 10 minutes and remove the leaves from the water.

Add the remaining cup of water and allow to cool to 96 degrees F.

Add the ginger and pour about 2 ounces of the tea mixture into each bottle.

Fill bottles with the first-fermentation kombucha, leaving a ½ inch of space at the top of each bottle.

Screw on the caps tightly. Keep sealed bottles in a warm, dark place, such as in a cupboard or closet or any spot where the temperature will stay at 65 to 80 degrees F. The warmer your spot, the faster the kombucha will ferment. Every couple of days, open the bottles to "burp" them (this reduces the slim chance that they will explode).

When the kombucha has reached its desired fizziness, usually in about five to seven days, it is ready to chill in the refrigerator.

Drink within one month.

Greek Yogurt

Greek yogurt is thick and hearty. Make it yourself to avoid the artificial sweeteners and thickeners in some commercial brands. This recipe is inspired by Molly Sheridan at www.wonderlandkitchen.com.

Makes 6 cups
Hands-on preparation time:
20 minutes
Total preparation time:
16 hours

- 8 cups whole milk
- 4 tbs. plain whole-milk yogurt with live, active cultures

Special equipment:

- Kitchen thermometer
- 2 quart-size canning jars with lids
- Fine-mesh strainer
- Cheesecloth

Set oven to warm, or 200 degrees F.

In a heavy, 3-quart saucepan, bring the milk to 180 degrees F over medium heat. Remove from heat and allow to cool to 110 degrees F. Whisk in the yogurt until smooth.

Pour the milk mixture into the canning jars and seal with the lids.

Turn the oven off. Place the jars in the oven and close the door. Allow the yogurt to incubate for at least eight hours (or up to 24 hours if you like it extra tangy). Check to see that it has thickened. Once it has, place it in the refrigerator for at least six hours.

Line a large fine-mesh strainer with two layers of cheesecloth and place over a large bowl. Pour the yogurt into the strainer and allow it to drain for two hours or until it is as thick as you like it.

Reserve the whey that collects in the bowl for another recipe, such as pickled vegetables. Store the yogurt in the refrigerator for up to two weeks.

FIND MORE FERMENTS

See the maple-vanilla version of this yogurt and our recipes for Sauerkraut and Summer Pickles at **ELmag.com/fermented.**

Wine Vinegar

This is a great way to use leftover wine. Red wine produces the fullest flavor, but rosé or white will work as well. This recipe is inspired by Ideas in Food *by Aki Kamozawa and H. Alexander Talbot.*

Makes 3½ cups
Hands-on preparation time:
5 minutes
Total recipe time:
Two to three weeks

- 1½ cups organic apple-cider vinegar (Bragg or another type that has a "mother")
- 2 cups red wine

Special equipment:

- 1 quart-size jar with a loose-fitting lid (or use a 2-quart jar if you want to keep adding to it as a continuous ferment)
- Cheesecloth
- Rubber band
- 1 quart-size bottle and cap

Combine the vinegar and wine in the clean jar. Cover with the cheesecloth and secure with the rubber band; this will keep fruit flies out.

Rest the jar lid on top without the ring to allow for airflow. Let the vinegar sit in a cool, dark location for one week.

After a week, check the vinegar for flavor. You may use it now or add another cup of wine to it and let it sit for at least another week to allow the flavor to mature.

When your vinegar has aged for one to two weeks, pour it into a bottle, saving the sediment in your base jar, and seal it with a cap.

Add more wine to the base to continuously produce your own vinegar.

Gingered-Carrot Relish

This lactofermented relish makes a lovely condiment for Asian-inspired grilled meats and fish; it's also great in a salad, sandwich, or rice-bowl dish. Adapted from Nourishing Traditions *by Sally Fallon.*

Makes 1 pint
Hands-on preparation time:
30 minutes
Total preparation time: Six days, but store for one to four months for better flavor

- 2 cups grated carrots, tightly packed
- 1 tbs. freshly grated ginger
- 1½ tsp. sea salt
- 2 tbs. whey (if not available, use an additional 1½ tsp. salt)

Special equipment:

- 1 pint-size canning jar, with lid

In a bowl, mix all ingredients together and press with the rounded bottom of a soup ladle.

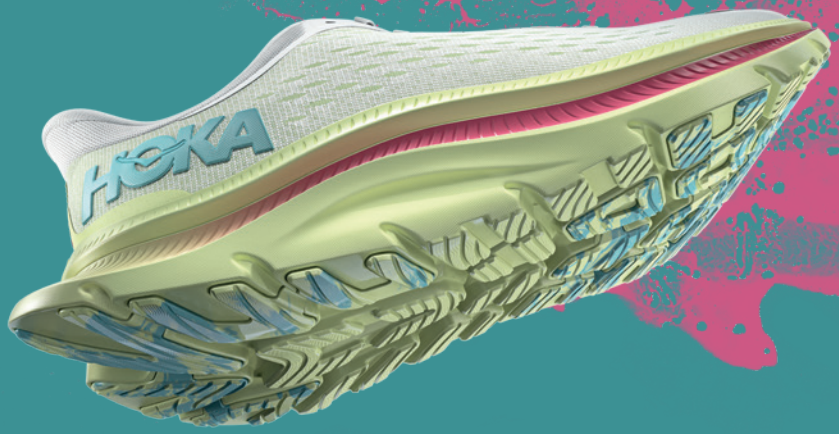
Transfer the carrot mixture into a jar and press down firmly with the soup ladle until the juices cover the carrots. The top of the carrots should be at least 1 inch below the top of the jar.

Cover the jar tightly and leave at room temperature for about three days before transferring it to the refrigerator. These can be enjoyed after being refrigerated for at least three days but will improve with age for up to three weeks.

KAREN OLSON is a Minneapolis-based writer. All recipes were created by **BETSY NELSON** (a.k.a. "That Food Girl"), a Minneapolis-based food stylist and recipe developer.

REIMAGINE THE RUN

KAWANA



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Cabbage

This cruciferous veggie is endlessly versatile and a storage superstar. These tips can help you feel more confident using it in your kitchen.

BY **KAELYN RILEY**

TRY THEM ALL

American markets sell just a few of the more than 400 varieties of cabbage. Green cabbage is peppery when raw, but cooking mellows its flavor. Red or purple cabbage is less tender and will add a bit of color to your recipe. Savoy cabbage has supple leaves that work well for longer cooking times, while sweet Napa cabbage is ideal for eating raw in salads.

SHOP AND STORE

Look for cabbages that feel heavy and compact for their size, and avoid those with visible blemishes. It's OK if a few of the outer leaves are slightly wilted, but the inner leaves should be bright and crisp. Be sure the leaves aren't starting to separate from the stem — this is a sign of age. Store in the crisper drawer of your fridge, where it will keep for up to two months.

KEEP THE CORE

Sure, you can compost your cabbage scraps, but you can also save the core, which is edible. It will take longer to cook because it's tougher and denser than the leaves. Cut the core from a head of cabbage and dice it into bite-size pieces, then add it to your next braise or stir-fry for an extra dose of nutrients, including vitamins C and K and soluble fiber.

COOK IT UP

Try our Cabbage Salad With Anchovy and Garlic Dressing (ELmag.com/cabbagesalad), or add cabbage to chicken soup (ELmag.com/chickensoup). Prefer to wrap it up? Try our Tofu and Napa Cabbage Rolls (ELmag.com/cabbagerolls). Curious about cabbage juice? Learn about its gut-healing potential at ELmag.com/cabbagejuice.

ILLUSTRATIONS: JENNIFER JACOBSON

KAELYN RILEY is an *Experience Life* senior editor.

WHAT'S THE

Writer Emily Schaldach carves a corner in a short-track mountain-bike race in September 2020.

RISK

BY **EMILY SCHALDACH**

RISK IS ABOUT MORE THAN IGNORING YOUR FEARS OR YOUR BETTER JUDGMENT: TAKING INTENTIONAL, MEASURED RISKS CAN HELP YOU CULTIVATE COURAGE THAT SERVES IN OTHER AREAS OF YOUR LIFE.

As a professional bike racer, I loved taking risks. And not just any risks — leap-off-a-cliff-type risks. I approached big races, technical descents, and dangerous jumps by ignoring my fear. Instead, I often listened to the voices around me urging me on.

Taking extreme risks led me to national titles — and a sense of invincibility. Even outside of biking. I charged into whitewater rafting and backcountry-skied in avalanche terrain.

I was surrounded by people who leaned in to adrenaline. We had varying degrees of concern about the real dangers: Many of my peers took even greater risks than I did, which in my mind validated the decisions I was making. My mindset normalized dangerous behavior. In this risk-oriented environment, my brain and body adapted. I bent to the expectations.

Then, in 2018, I crashed in three races. The wipeouts culminated in a gnarly, cumulative concussion. Expecting the effects to fade in a week with just a blip in my competitive season, I fell into the familiar approach of muscling my way through the injury. But as weeks of recovery accumulated, I begrudgingly accepted that healing would not be quick or linear. I spent the next eight months taking two healing steps forward, one painful step back.

In retrospect, I am thankful for those months. I was forced to slow down. My risky, whirlwind lifestyle was put on hold; I had no choice but to rest, put my phone away, work as little as necessary, and listen to my body.

I once believed racing bikes had prepared me for any risk. But when I was forced to listen to my injured body, I realized this new challenge required a significantly different and more nuanced type of bravery — one that was foreign to me.

THE UPSIDE OF RISK

"Risk" is a loaded word. In some cases, it carries negative connotations: financial risk, health risk, risk of injury. In other instances, it's flush with possibility, adventure, the promise of discovering something new. Or it can be empowering, such as when we bravely stand up for ourselves or others when people around us are silent.

"Risk is anything that includes going beyond your comfort zone and has potential dangers," says Grant Holicky, a cycling and swim coach based in Boulder, Colo. "Taking risks pushes us to the edge of what we know. Without risk, we can't really grow."

There are negative and positive risks, but it's worth noting that a positive risk may not have a good or desirable outcome, and a negative risk may not have a bad or dangerous outcome. In fact, the outcome may be irrelevant: "Positive" and "negative" describe the intention and consideration behind an action, not its eventual success or failure.

Positive risk involves considering the benefits and potential dangers — and *then* acting because the benefits outweigh the concerns.

Negative risk, on the other hand, involves taking an action without fully considering potential consequences.

Positive risk-taking has two chief benefits, according to Natasha Duell, PhD, a researcher at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill who studies risky behavior in adolescents. The first is strengthening resilience: learning to recover from, cope with, and grow from failure. The second is building self-confidence to take future positive risks.

In a 2020 study published in the *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, Duell and her team clarified positive risk-taking as something that benefits the individual's well-being (a person may gain something); its potential costs are mild (there is no threat to health or safety); and it is socially acceptable.

Conversely, negative risk-taking is considered dangerous — possibly with severe negative outcomes — or illegal.

Although Duell's research focuses on young people, these benefits of taking positive risks transcend age. They don't diminish as we get older, experts say; older people are just less likely to engage in risky behaviors. (More on that later.)

It's important to "stop regarding daring and risk-willingness simply as undesirable and uncontrolled behavior patterns," says behavioral analyst Dagfinn Moe, a senior research scientist at SINTEF in Trondheim, Norway. "Daring and risk-willingness activate and challenge the brain's capacity and contribute toward learning, coping strategies, and development."

> **"ALL OF US HAVE THE POWER WITHIN US TO USE RISK TO OUR ADVANTAGE. IT'S NOT JUST THE STUFF OF SUPERHEROES [AND LEGENDS]: RISK IS THE KEY TO LEARNING AND GROWTH FOR ALL OF US."**

We each view risky behavior in different ways, and the first step toward understanding it is to break from the belief that it automatically equals jumping off a cliff. "It doesn't have to be a complete adrenaline rush to be pleasurable or beneficial," says paramedic and ski patroller Kim Dalen.

"Life is inherently risky," writes Kayt Sukel in *The Art of Risk: The New Science of Courage, Caution, and Chance*. Making decisions is a cornerstone of adult life, and everyone takes small risks multiple times daily. Whether you're deciding what to have for breakfast, debating whether to take a new job, or booking a thru-hike for your next vacation, risk exists on a spectrum.

What all risk has in common is being "a decision or behavior that has a significant probability of resulting in a negative outcome," writes Sukel.

"We are all, each and every one of us, risk-takers. Because risk-taking is part and parcel of everyday decision-making, and it's a process, not a trait. All of us have the power within us to use risk to our advantage," she notes. "It's not just the stuff of superheroes [and legends]: Risk is the key to learning and growth for all of us."

THE TIDES OF RISK TOLERANCE

What constitutes a risk is personal: Risk tolerance varies among individuals and can even ebb and flow throughout a lifetime. Genes, biological age, life experience, and cultural influences all contribute to our own sense of risk tolerance.

• **GENES:** In a 2013 study, genetics researcher Cynthia Thomson, PhD, recruited 503 skiers and snowboarders for psychological and genetic tests, as well as to assess their sports-specific risk-taking behavior. She zeroed in on a gene called DRD4, which is involved in the development and function of the brain's dopamine receptors. A single variation in the coding of this gene had been previously associated with sensation-seeking behavior, including substance use.

Sure enough, participants in Thomson's study with this DRD4 variant also displayed more risk-taking behavior on the slopes.

Yet higher-risk athletes didn't score high on impulsivity, says Thomson, indicating that their decisions — even ones that could be deemed reckless — were calculated and intentional.

• **AGE:** Research has shown that biological age is also a predictor for risk tolerance. Specifically, most people become more risk averse as they get older, and experts agree that the tipping point is around age 25, when the brain reaches maturity.

Neuropsychiatrist Daniel Siegel, MD, author of *The Developing Mind*, explains that adolescents experience a greater willingness to take risks and seek out new things than they did before the age of 12 or will have after their mid-20s. "Adolescence is a period of remodeling of the brain,"

he says. "You're basically going from being a generalist as a child to being a specialist during adolescence."

One change occurs in the dopamine reward system of the brain: During adolescence, the baseline levels of dopamine are lower than in childhood and adulthood, but the dopamine-release amounts are higher. "One of the major things that releases dopamine is novelty," Siegel explains, which draws adolescents to choices that are "uncertain and potentially dangerous."

Another change is the development of "hyperrational thinking," which highlights the positive aspects of a choice while minimizing the negative.

In young brains, excitatory cells are primarily active, and inhibitory cells are inactive, notes neurobiologist Sandra Kuhlman, PhD. Excitatory activity is important for learning and development, and inhibitory cells help the brain filter information and control behavior. "The inhibitory cells — the traffic-cop cells — don't fully come online until after adolescence," she explains.

Experts note that encouraging positive risks for young people can help them keep taking risks. For people in their late 20s and beyond, taking risks can become harder. But even if you are — or have become — risk-averse, it's never too late to try.

• **LIFE EXPERIENCE AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES:** From birth, we're taught what is considered acceptable risk according to our parents, communities, educators, peers, and the media, which all contribute to our understanding and assessment of dangers and benefits.

Traveling to new locales, sustaining an illness, recovering from an injury, and starting a family also play roles.

EXPANDING YOUR COMFORT ZONE

It's likely you've been given the well-intentioned advice to get out of your comfort zone. It's also likely, particularly if you're risk-averse, that you've ignored that advice. After all, your comfort zone is comfortable — it's a zone of minimal stress and a sense of security.

"The comfort zone is a behavioral state within which a person operates in an anxiety-neutral position," writes Judith M. Bardwick, PhD, in *Danger in the Comfort Zone*. It's natural to want to operate here.

Yet the comfort zone can limit us. Growth requires something called "optimal anxiety" — a state of slightly heightened stress.

Take note of the word "slightly" here: Too much stress, and performance drops off quickly. There's a Goldilocks zone of discomfort — too much or too little discomfort, and you won't really get anywhere. To expand your comfort zone, you want to seek out the "just right" amount of discomfort.

What does this have to do with risk? Well, positive risk-taking offers a path toward productive discomfort.

OVERCOMING FEAR OF FAILURE

Many people avoid taking risks not because they fear for their physical safety but because they fear failure, explains psychotherapist Sandra Gaskill, MS, EdS, LPC. That's because we live in a society that celebrates success and undervalues anything perceived as less-than.

That's a shame, Gaskill says, because failure is an opportunity to learn and grow.

"The human brain does not learn much from success; the human brain learns from failure," says Holicky. "If we do something that doesn't work, our brain will assess what we did wrong and how we can do better. That failure allows us to grow in maturity, in athletic ability, in love — in every aspect of our lives."

As a coach and a dad, Holicky helps people bypass the fear of failure by reconsidering their goals. "When I am encouraging people to do something new or different, often the end goal isn't the whole goal. The idea is that what you're doing is a point on the path of where you ultimately want to be, which is always much bigger than the individual moment of failure."

Running a 5K or moving to a new town may be the specific goal, but the larger goal might be to broaden your horizons and build confidence. When you expand the scope, suddenly one goal becomes a step toward the bigger, broader goal.

Such a reframe often helps people lower their perception of risk to a more approachable level. "One of the ways to encourage risk is to sit down and have a logical conversation about what the worst-case scenario will be," Holicky explains. "How will that make you feel and how will it affect your life? Is it a failure in your eyes or a failure in everyone else's eyes? Can you let this moment move you toward a broader goal?"

RISK-ASSESSMENT MATRIX

SEVERITY	PROBABILITY	EXPOSURE
1. Insignificant	1. Rare	1. Below Average
2. Minor	2. Unlikely	2. Average
3. Moderate	3. Possible	3. Above Average
4. Major	4. Likely	4. Great
5. Catastrophic	5. Very Likely	
VALUES	**RISK LEVEL**	**ACTION**
1–19	Slight	Acceptable/Proceed
20–39	Possible	Attention Needed/Proceed With Caution
40–59	Substantial	Correction Required
60–79	High	Immediate Correction
80–100	Very High	Discontinue/Stop

"IF WE DO SOMETHING THAT DOESN'T WORK, OUR BRAIN WILL ASSESS WHAT WE DID WRONG AND HOW WE CAN DO BETTER. THAT FAILURE ALLOWS US TO GROW IN MATURITY, IN ATHLETIC ABILITY, IN LOVE — IN EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES."

MEASURING RISK

Our unique emotional landscapes can provide intuitive clues for risk assessment, but this introspective process may feel nebulous — at least at first. The U.S. Air Force, NASA, and the U.S. Department of Defense use many tools to assess risk, including the severity, probability, and exposure (SPE) risk-assessment matrix (see the table at left).

Johanne Albrigtsen is a field scientist who uses the tool daily in her work in Denali National Park and Preserve, where she spends frigid winters with a team of scientists and sled dogs. The team operates in vast, barely accessible areas in temperatures as low as -45 degrees F with limited sunlight. The SPE matrix helps her rate risk levels.

If Albrigtsen needs to cross a frozen river where she could break through ice, the severity of that risk according to the matrix might be catastrophic (5), the probability might be rare (1), and the exposure might be above average (3). The formula's result of 15 (5 x 1 x 3) means the risk is acceptable and one she can take.

The formula is applicable on a range of scales. For example, you might be considering signing up for your first open-water swimming race. While you may initially be nervous, the risk assessment may help you feel more confident.

Using the tool can help you understand how you relate to risk. Do you tend to catastrophize about situations that are likely safe? Or do you overlook some of the risks and agree to situations that are actually dangerous?

Try recalling a few risks you've faced in your life and whether you decided to go through with them or to step back. Then use the tool to see where you land: The results may offer an opportunity to calibrate your approach to risk.

Risk assessment is not always a yes-or-no, all-or-nothing situation. We all often let external voices and pressures cloud our judgment. To some degree, the pressure I perceived from my peers influenced how and when I took risks when racing my bike.

"If you have learned that specific risks are the ones you should take, and if you don't, you will not be loved or successful or good enough, then you might push yourself to take those risks even if you're getting some intuitive hit that they aren't safe," explains Gaskill.

That's not to say other people's opinions aren't valuable — they just don't need to hold more weight than your own. External voices can nudge us into an unsafe and unreasonable situation; they can also force us to play it too safe and miss out on the benefits of pushing the limits.

In recalibrating our relationship to risk, this question might be helpful: Is this decision mine? Differentiating between external opinions or forces and our own internal voices can help build confidence around a decision.

As Brené Brown, PhD, MSW, notes in *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*: "There's no equation where taking risks, braving uncertainty, and opening ourselves up to emotional exposure equals weakness."

Schaldach performs a balancing act on her race bike, named Jane.

5

RISK-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Pausing to reflect before taking a risk may help you untangle the options and find a clearer answer. Asking yourself these questions may aid you in your decision-making process.

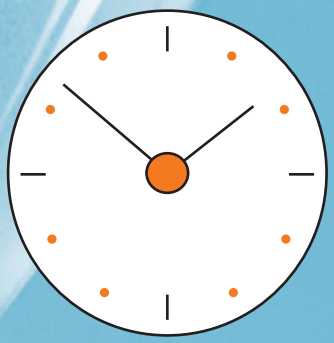
- **What do I stand to gain by taking this risk?**
- **What do I stand to lose?**
- **How does the possibility make me feel?**
- **How do I want to feel?**
- **Is this decision mine?**

As for me, I returned to cycling nine months after my injury, and I still race today. Sometimes I choose to jump my bike off a cliff; sometimes I don't. Risk, I've learned, is about more than making the leap — and it's about more than taking the dare despite my fear or better judgment.

What's changed for me is that I've come to a new understanding around how I make decisions, and much of the fearlessness I once embraced is no longer worth the risk.

It can be brave to jump off a cliff — and it can be just as brave to not jump off that cliff.

EMILY SCHALDACH is a writer and professional cyclist based in Reno, Nev. Additional reporting by **MAGGIE FAZELI FARD,** an *Experience Life* senior editor.



TIME MANAGEMENT FOR MORTALS

Most of us have about 4,000 weeks to live — a fact we might rather ignore. But psychology journalist Oliver Burkeman believes that embracing this limitation can help us get more satisfaction out of life.

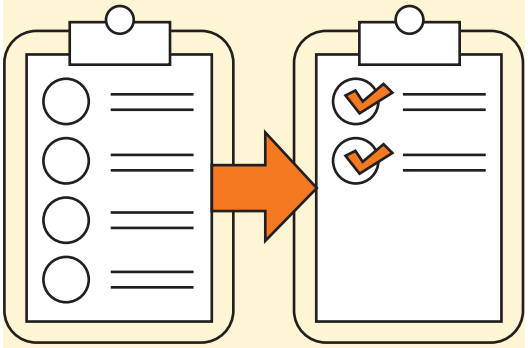
BY **OLIVER BURKEMAN**

The average human lifespan is absurdly, terrifyingly, insultingly short. But that isn't a reason for unremitting despair, or for living in anxiety-fueled panic about making the most of your limited time.

It's a cause for relief. You get to give up something that was always impossible — the quest to become the optimized, infinitely capable, emotionally invincible, fully independent person you're officially supposed to be. Then you get to roll up your sleeves and work on what's gloriously possible instead.

In my 2021 book, *Four Thousand Weeks: Time Management for Mortals*, I make the case for embracing the truth about your limited time and limited control over that time — not simply because it's the truth, so you might as well face it, but because it's actively empowering to do so. By stepping more fully into reality as it actually is, you get to accomplish more of what matters, and feel more fulfilled about it.

These are 10 techniques for implementing this limit-embracing philosophy in daily life.



1. ADOPT A "FIXED VOLUME" APPROACH TO PRODUCTIVITY.

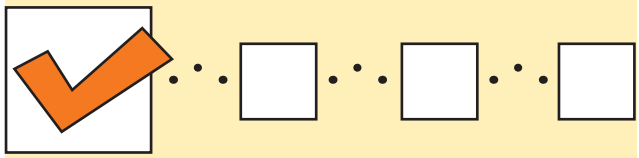
Much advice on getting things done implicitly promises that it'll help you get everything important done, but that's impossible, and struggling to get there will only make you busier. It's better to begin from the assumption that tough choices are inevitable and to focus on making them consciously and well.

Any strategy for limiting your work in progress will help here, but perhaps the simplest is to **keep two to-do lists, one "open" and one "closed."** The open list is for everything that's on your plate and will undoubtedly be nightmarishly long. Fortunately, it's not your job to tackle it: Instead, feed tasks from the open list to the closed one — that is, a list with a fixed number of entries, 10 at most.

The rule is that you can't add a new task until one's completed. (You may also require a third list, for tasks that are on hold until someone else gets back to you.) You'll never get through all the tasks on the open list — but you were never going to in any case, and at least this way you'll complete plenty of things you genuinely care about.

A complementary strategy is to establish **predetermined time boundaries for your daily work.** To whatever extent your job situation permits, decide in advance how much time you'll dedicate to work — you might resolve to start by 8:30 a.m., and finish no later than 5:30 p.m., say — then make all other time-related decisions in light of these predetermined limits.

"You could fill any arbitrary number of hours with what feels to be productive work," writes Cal Newport, in his book *Deep Work*. But if your primary goal is to do what's required to be finished by 5:30, you'll be aware of the constraints on your time, and more motivated to use it wisely.



2. SERIALIZE, SERIALIZE, SERIALIZE.

Following the same logic, focus on one big project at a time (or at most, one work project and one non-work project) and see it to completion before moving on to what's next. It's alluring to try to alleviate the anxiety of having too many responsibilities or ambitions by getting started on them all at once, but you'll make little progress that way; instead, train yourself to get incrementally better at tolerating that anxiety by consciously postponing everything you possibly can, except for one thing.

Soon, the satisfaction of completing important projects will make the anxiety worthwhile — and since you're finishing more and more of them, you'll have less to feel anxious about anyway.

Naturally, it won't be possible to postpone absolutely everything — you can't stop paying the bills, or answering email, or taking the kids to school — but this approach will ensure that the only tasks you don't postpone, while addressing your current handful of big projects, are the truly essential ones, rather than those you're dipping into solely to quell your anxiety.

ILLUSTRATIONS: LYDIA ANDERSON

3. DECIDE IN ADVANCE WHAT TO FAIL AT.

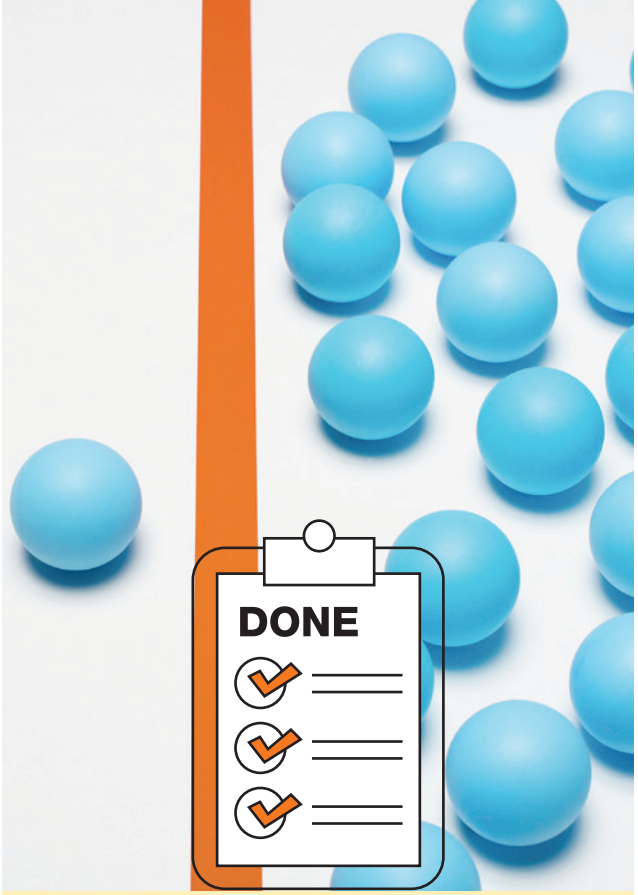
You'll inevitably end up underachieving at something, simply because your time and energy are finite. But the great benefit of **strategic underachievement** — that is, nominating in advance whole areas of life in which you won't expect excellence of yourself — is that you focus that time and energy more effectively. Nor will you be dismayed when you fail at what you planned to fail at all along.

"When you can't do it all, you feel ashamed and give up," notes author Jon Acuff, but when you "decide in advance which things to bomb, you remove the sting of shame." A poorly kept lawn or a cluttered kitchen is less troubling when you've preselected "lawn care" or "kitchen tidiness" as a goal to which you'll devote zero energy.

As with serializing projects, there'll be plenty you can't choose to "bomb" if you're to earn a living, stay healthy, be a decent partner and parent, and so forth. But even in these essential domains, there's scope to **fail on a cyclical basis:** to aim to do the bare minimum at work for the next two months while you focus on your children or let your fitness goals temporarily lapse while you apply yourself to election canvassing.

Then switch your energies to whatever you were neglecting. To live this way is to replace the high-pressure quest for "work–life balance" with a conscious form of imbalance, backed by the confidence that the roles you're underperforming in right now will get their time in the spotlight soon.

To live this way is to replace the high-pressure quest for "work–life balance" with a conscious form of imbalance.



4. FOCUS ON WHAT YOU'VE ALREADY COMPLETED, NOT JUST WHAT'S LEFT TO COMPLETE.

Since the quest to get everything done is interminable by definition, it's easy to grow despondent and self-reproachful: You can't feel good about yourself until it's all finished — but it's never finished, so you never get to feel good about yourself. Part of the problem here is an unhelpful assumption that you begin each morning in a sort of "productivity debt," which you must struggle to pay off through hard work, in the hope that you might reach a zero balance by evening.

As a counterstrategy, keep a **"done list,"** which starts empty first thing in the morning, and which you then gradually fill with whatever you accomplish throughout the day. Each entry is a cheering reminder that you could, after all, have spent the day doing nothing remotely constructive — and look what you did instead! (If you're in a serious psychological rut, lower the bar for what gets to count as an accomplishment: Nobody else need ever know that you added "brushed teeth" or "made coffee" to the list.)

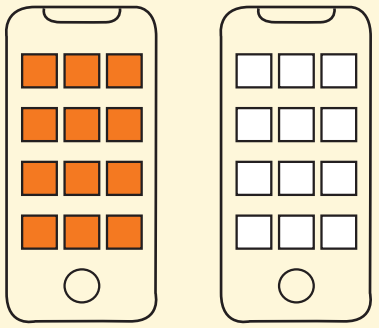
Yet this is no mere exercise in consolation: There's good evidence for the motivating power of "small wins," so the likely consequence of commemorating your minor achievements in this fashion is that you'll achieve more of them, and less-minor ones besides.

5. CONSOLIDATE YOUR CARING.

Social media is a giant machine for getting you to spend your time caring about the wrong things, but for the same reason, it's also a machine for getting you to care about too many things, even if they're each indisputably worthwhile.

We're exposed, these days, to an unending stream of atrocities and injustice — each of which might have a legitimate claim on our time and our charitable donations, but which in aggregate are more than any one human could ever effectively address. (Worse, the logic of the attention economy obliges campaigners to present whatever crisis they're addressing as uniquely urgent. No modern fundraising organization would ever dream of describing its cause as the fourth- or fifth-most-important of the day.)

Once you grasp the mechanisms operating here, it becomes easier to **consciously pick your battles in charity, activism, and politics:** to decide that your spare time, for the next couple of years, will be spent lobbying for prison reform and helping at the local food pantry — not because fires in the Amazon or the fate of refugees doesn't matter, but because you understand that to make a difference, you must focus on your finite capacity for care.



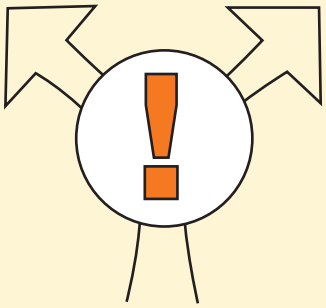
6. EMBRACE BORING AND SINGLE-PURPOSE TECHNOLOGY.

Digital distractions are so seductive because they seem to offer the chance of escape to a realm where painful human limitations don't apply: You need never feel bored or constrained in your freedom of action, which isn't the case when it comes to work that matters.

You can combat this problem by making your devices as boring as possible — first by removing social-media apps, even email if you dare, and then by **switching from screen color to grayscale.** "After going to grayscale, I'm not a different person all of a sudden, but I feel more in control of my phone, which now looks like a tool rather than a toy," the technology journalist Nellie Bowles writes in the *New York Times*.

Meanwhile, as far as possible, choose devices with only one purpose, such as a Kindle reader, where it's tedious and awkward to do anything but read. If streaming and social media lurk only a click or a swipe away, they'll prove impossible to resist when the first twinge of boredom or difficulty arises in the activity on which you're attempting to focus.

> **"After going to grayscale, I'm not a different person all of a sudden, but I feel more in control of my phone, which now looks like a tool rather than a toy."**



7. SEEK OUT NOVELTY IN THE MUNDANE.

It turns out that there may be a way to lessen, or even reverse, the dispiriting manner in which time seems to speed up, so that the fewer weeks we have left, the faster we seem to lose them.

The likeliest explanation for this phenomenon is that our brains encode the passage of years on the basis of how much information we process in any given interval. Childhood involves plentiful novel experiences, so we remember it as having lasted forever; but as we get older, life gets routinized — we stick to the same few places of residence, the same few relationships and jobs — and the novelty tapers off.

"As each passing year converts . . . experience into automatic routine," wrote William James, soon "the days and the weeks smooth themselves out in recollection to contentless units, and the years grow hollow and collapse."

The standard advice to counteract this is to cram your life with novel experiences, and this does work. But it's liable to worsen into another problem: existential overwhelm. Moreover, it's impractical: If you have a job or children, much of life will necessarily be somewhat routine, and opportunities for exotic travel may be limited.

An alternative, Shinzen Young explains, is to pay more attention to every moment, no matter how mundane: **to find novelty not by doing radically different things but by plunging more deeply into the life you already have.** Experience life with twice the usual intensity, and "your experience of life would be twice as full as it currently is" — and any period of life would be remembered as having lasted twice as long.

Meditation helps here. But so does going on unplanned walks to see where they lead you, using a different route to get to work, taking up photography or birdwatching or nature drawing or journalizing, playing "I spy" with a child: anything that draws your attention more fully into what you're doing in the present.

8. BE A "RESEARCHER" IN RELATIONSHIPS.

The desire to be securely in control of how our time unfolds causes numerous problems in relationships, where it manifests not just in overly "controlling" behavior but in commitment phobia, the inability to listen, boredom, and the desire for so much personal sovereignty over your time that you miss out on enriching experiences of communality.

One useful approach for loosening your grip comes from the preschool-education expert Tom Hobson, though, as he points out, its value is hardly limited to interactions with small children. When presented with a challenging or boring moment, **try deliberately adopting an attitude of curiosity,** in which your goal isn't to achieve any particular outcome or successfully explain your position, but, as Hobson puts it, "to figure out who this human being is that we're with."

Curiosity is a stance well suited to the inherent unpredictability of life with others, because it can be satisfied by their behaving in ways you like or dislike — whereas the stance of demanding a certain result is frustrated each time things don't go your way.

Indeed, you could try taking this attitude toward everything, as the self-help writer Susan Jeffers, PhD, suggests in her book *Embracing Uncertainty*. Not knowing what's coming next — which is the situation you're always in with regard to the future — presents an ideal opportunity for choosing curiosity (wondering what might happen next) over worry (hoping that a certain specific thing will happen next and fearing it might not) whenever you can.

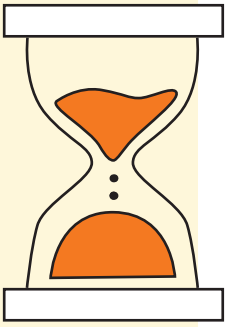
9. CULTIVATE INSTANTANEOUS GENEROSITY.

I'm definitely still working on the habit proposed by the meditation teacher Joseph Goldstein: Whenever a generous impulse arises in your mind — to give money, check in on a friend, send an email praising someone's work — **act on the generous impulse right away,** rather than putting it off until later.

When we fail to act on such urges, it's rarely out of mean-spiritedness, or because we have second thoughts about whether the prospective recipient deserves it. More often, it's because of some attitude stemming from our efforts to feel in control of our time. We tell ourselves we'll turn to it when our urgent work is out of the way, or when we have enough spare time to do it really well; or that we ought to first spend a bit longer researching the best recipients for our charitable donations before making any, et cetera.

But the only donations that count are the ones you actually get around to making. And while your colleague might appreciate a nicely worded message of praise more than a hastily worded one, the latter is vastly preferable to what's truly most likely to happen if you put it off, which is that you'll never get around to sending that message.

All of this takes some initial effort, but as Goldstein observes, the more selfish rewards are immediate, because generous action reliably makes you feel much happier.



10. PRACTICE DOING NOTHING.

"I have discovered that all the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their own chamber," Blaise Pascal wrote. When it comes to the challenge of using your 4,000 weeks well, the capacity to do nothing is indispensable, because if you can't bear the discomfort of not acting, you're far more likely to make poor choices with your time, simply to feel as if you're acting — choices such as stressfully trying to hurry activities that won't be rushed or feeling you ought to spend every moment being productive in the service of future goals, thereby postponing fulfillment to a time that never arrives.

Technically, it's impossible to do nothing at all: As long as you remain alive, you're always breathing, adopting some physical posture, and so forth. So, training yourself to "do nothing" really means training yourself to resist the urge to manipulate your experience or the people and things in the world around you — to let things be as they are.

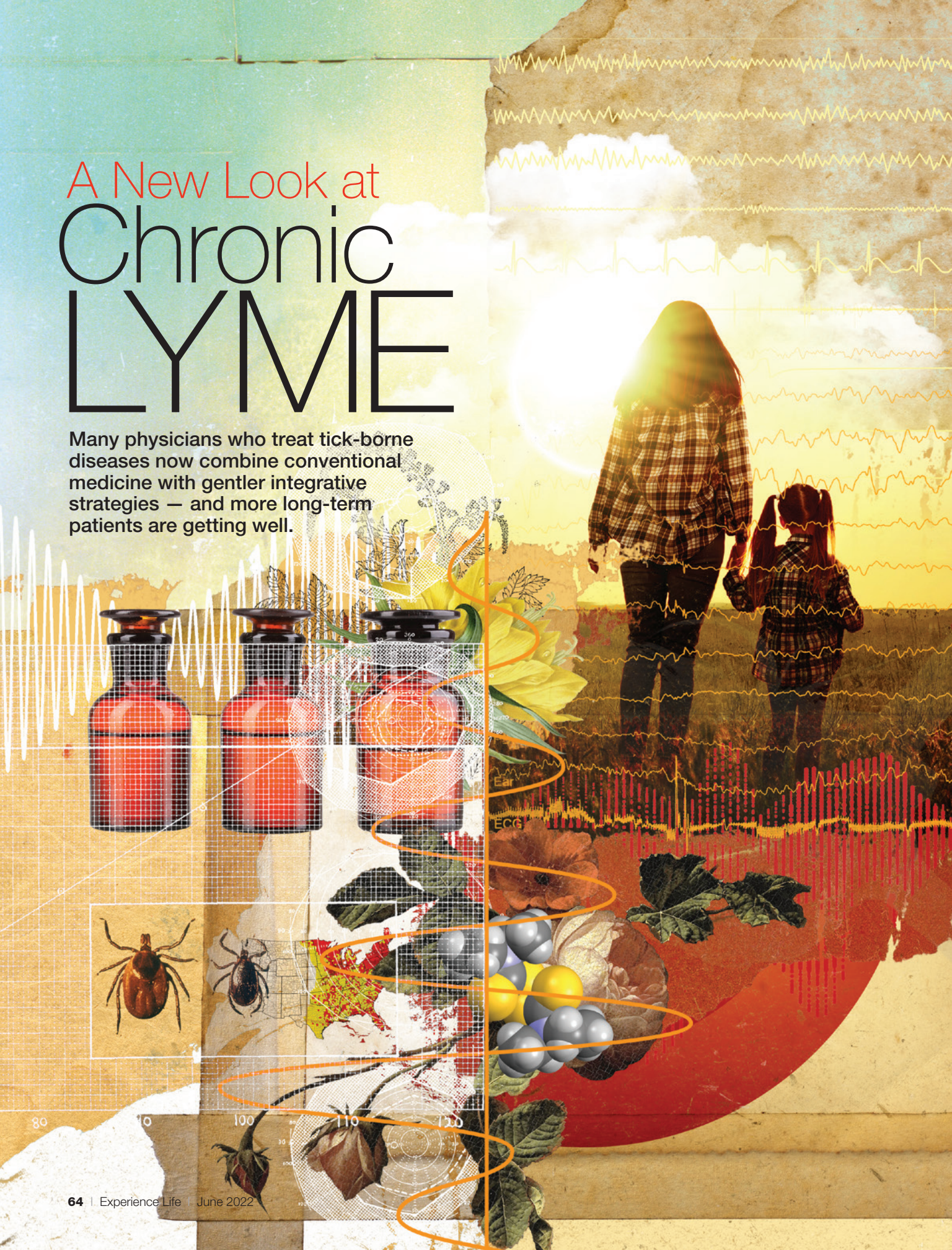
Young teaches **"Do Nothing" meditation,** for which the instructions are simply to set a timer, probably only for five or 10 minutes at first; sit down in a chair; and then stop trying to do anything. Every time you notice you're doing something — including thinking, or focusing on the breath, or anything else — stop doing it. (If you notice you're criticizing yourself inwardly for doing things, well, that's a thought, too, so stop doing that.) Keep on stopping until the timer goes off.

"Nothing is harder to do than nothing," remarks the author and artist Jenny Odell. But to get better at it is to begin to regain your autonomy — to stop being motivated by the attempt to evade how reality feels here and now, to calm down, and to make better choices with your brief allotment of life.

OLIVER BURKEMAN is a psychology journalist and author.

A New Look at Chronic LYME

Many physicians who treat tick-borne diseases now combine conventional medicine with gentler integrative strategies — and more long-term patients are getting well.



BY **PAMELA WEINTRAUB**

In the summer of 1997, Jennifer Crystal discovered a red, splotchy rash on her arm. A 19-year-old counselor at a camp in Maine at the time, Crystal had grown up in Connecticut; both states are epicenters of tick-borne diseases like Lyme.

Yet no one thought much of that rash — not even later, when, back at her Vermont college, she developed flulike symptoms: joint aches, fever, headache, and extreme fatigue. "I could barely get to class," she recalls.

In the years that followed, the cluster of symptoms persisted. Crystal doggedly pushed through, completing a semester abroad, finishing college, and moving to Colorado to become a ski instructor — her lifelong dream — until it all became too much for her health. She ended up moving back to Connecticut to live with her family.

There, she sought the care of a naturopathic physician who suspected she had chronic fatigue syndrome. The condition is defined by exhaustion after exercise, unrefreshing sleep, concentration problems, and muscle pain lasting six months or more. Herbal treatments, an anti-inflammatory diet, and acupuncture barely made a difference.

Her illness remained a mystery until 2005, the day Crystal noticed two new bull's-eye rashes emerge spontaneously. Finally, a clue.

A Lyme-disease test proved positive, which led her physician to diagnose other tick-borne coinfections. (Many persistent Lyme cases feature coinfections.) Months of IV antibiotics brought Crystal back to reasonable health. Believing she was cured, she took a job as an editor in Vermont.

Yet she remained fatigued, and working to support herself pushed her to the edge again. By 2007, at age 27, she was back home in Connecticut, in bed.

This time, with the help of her Lyme-disease specialist, Crystal approached her recovery differently. Along with antibiotics, supplements, and an anti-inflammatory diet, she pursued psychotherapy, integrative manual therapy, and neurofeedback. She regained traction, along with a new understanding that managing her illness would be an ongoing practice.

"I don't consider myself sick," Crystal says today — yet she also doesn't consider herself cured. She has learned how to live with her chronic Lyme as well as symptoms from long COVID, and she is now documenting her experiences in a memoir called *Long Hauler*.

"I have needs from illness that come along with me, just the same way that diabetics have needs that they take along in their lives, to keep the illness in check."

Crystal is one of up to 20 percent of Lyme patients whose symptoms are chronic, meaning they persist well past the initial course of treatment. In 2018, some estimates suggested there were more than 1 million Americans with chronic Lyme, or what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) calls posttreatment Lyme-disease syndrome (PTLDS).

Today we're especially attuned to the long-haul fallout from COVID, where respiratory issues, brain fog, and depression hobble many patients for months. Those with chronic Lyme have faced similar hurdles for decades.

Doctors who are literate in chronic Lyme used to be rare. If you could find one, you'd likely be subjected to high doses of antibiotics and antimalarials in harsh regimens that might've lasted months or years.

The success of this approach was mixed. Some chronic-Lyme sufferers regained their lives but endured grueling side effects, including destabilized microbiomes. Others suffered side effects but did not improve.

Perhaps because so many chronic Lyme cases involve coinfection, these treatments often didn't resolve the problem.

Today, many of these same practitioners have taken a different path, a multipronged approach that combines the judicious use of drugs with more natural therapies. And many patients with intractable illness are finally getting their lives back.

When problems cascade, you must treat the whole patient before the person can clear the infection, says Lyme expert Daniel Kinderlehrer, MD, whose Denver-based integrative medical practice focuses on tick-borne disease. He starts treatment by addressing sleep and pain issues. The problem has "become so much bigger than that infection; there are so many things that are wrong that you can't treat by just treating the infection," he explains. "Even if you made the infection go away, you'd still have these other issues in the mix."

ILLUSTRATIONS: STEVE RAWLINGS

The Lyme Divide

SOME 30,000 LYME CASES are reported to the CDC annually, but the agency also notes that around 476,000 people are treated for Lyme each year, according to insurance claims. It's caused by the bite of a black-legged tick, commonly known as a deer tick, which transmits the spirochete *Borrelia burgdorferi* (and more rarely, *Borrelia mayonii*) into the bloodstream.

Lyme is one of a handful of illnesses transmitted by the hard-bodied deer tick in the United States; others include anaplasmosis, babesiosis, ehrlichiosis, and tularemia; all cause significant health issues, but Lyme is the most common and best-studied.

Lyme was first reported in the Northeast and Midwest; now rising temperatures are contributing to an expanded range for ticks. (Greater awareness has also led to increased reporting.) In the most recent CDC survey, infections were reported in every state but Hawaii and Oklahoma.

Other tick-borne diseases are also on the rise. California, where standard Lyme has long been endemic, is seeing the surge of *Borrelia miyamotoi*, a separate spirochete that can be carried by black-legged ticks. It causes a fever disease (called "hard tick relapsing fever") that is often confused with Lyme.

Overall, two types of Lyme disease now prevail: The first features a straightforward infection, diagnosed early, with no additional immune issues. Patients typically recover after a two-to-three-week antimicrobial course. If the infection isn't cleared on this round, the Lyme spirochetes can invade cardiac, neurologic, and joint tissue; a month or two of IV antibiotics will usually clear it.

Then there are those with Lyme (or a mix of tick-borne infections) who remain sick after the standard treatment. They are usually diagnosed late and may have contracted more than one infection. This is the second type: chronic, complicated Lyme, a systemic illness so profound that sufferers may be too disabled to go to work or school.

A study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* found a group of such patients to be as impaired as those with congestive heart failure and sicker than those with type 2 diabetes. Researchers at Johns Hopkins Medicine have also documented a striking degree of neuroinflammation in these patients.

Some 30,000 Lyme cases are reported to the CDC annually, but the agency also notes that around 476,000 people are treated for Lyme each year.

Chronic Lyme causes the body to fall into general instability and disrepair. Yet a Lyme diagnosis remains controversial for the persistently sick group, and many physicians are reluctant to offer it. These patients are more likely to be labeled with chronic fatigue syndrome or fibromyalgia and offered scattershot treatment.

The controversy may stem partly from the inadequacy of Lyme tests, which don't reliably register Lyme antibodies for about six weeks. And a significant subset of people with Lyme may never test positive on standard serologies. The disease can lie dormant within tissues, and some tests can't register certain strains of *Borrelia*.

Many patients and providers may never think to test for Lyme, especially if a tick bite failed to trigger the mottled red Lyme rash, erythema migrans (EM). But the rash can take many forms beyond the iconic bull's-eye, and it may be difficult to spot, especially on darker skin. It can also fail to appear at all.

Complicating matters, many doctors rely on the CDC's surveillance case definition, which requires a positive test or the EM rash. But the criteria were not designed for diagnosis or treatment. In 2019, the CDC released a disclaimer, which may help more patients receive treatment early on.

Still, an early course of antibiotics does not eliminate the risk of chronic Lyme for those people who remain sick after standard treatment, says physician Elizabeth Maloney, MD, president of Partnership for Tick-Borne Diseases Education. The longer a patient has been misdiagnosed, the more likely treatment will fail.

Lyme+: The Coinfection Problem

LYME DISEASE on its own can be debilitating, but when other tick-borne infections are also present, the problem can be exacerbated.

Zoonotic-disease expert Steven Phillips, MD, who treats a range of complex vector-borne diseases and is the coauthor of a recent book, *Chronic: The Hidden Cause of the Autoimmune Pandemic and How to Get Healthy Again*, calls these complex cases "Lyme+." Treatment might be prolonged, and a cascade of other problems, incited by infection but sustained by immune dysfunction, can take hold.

These instances show that Lyme disease alone may not account for some of the most confounding cases. "Those most difficult to treat usually have more than one infection, such as babesiosis or bartonellosis," says physician and Lyme researcher Richard Horowitz, MD, the author of *How Can I Get Better? An Action Plan for Treating Resistant Lyme and Chronic Disease.*

The same ticks that carry Lyme-causing bacteria may also carry *Anaplasma*, which can cause the severe flulike anaplasmosis; the sometimes-fatal Powassan virus; and a series of other *Borrelia* microbes (including *B. miyamotoi*) that can cause relapsing fevers and other symptoms.

Bartonellosis may be the most disabling coinfection, because of its devastating neuropsychiatric impact, believe Horowitz and Kinderlehrer. (Horowitz thinks that *Bartonella* can also amplify nearly every underlying Lyme symptom, including fatigue, neuropathy, muscle and joint pain, and sleep disorders.) Researchers previously doubted that bartonellosis and Lyme spread together via ticks, but some are now changing their positions. The Lyme and Tick-Borne Diseases Research Center at Columbia University now reports that "the evidence for ticks as vectors of *Bartonella* organisms is circumstantial but fairly strong."

Evidence that coinfections add to illness continues to grow. In a study published in the *European Journal of Microbiology and Immunology* in 2021, researchers assessed 104 people with chronic-Lyme symptoms. They found that 48 percent had been infected by more than one microorganism, and 25 percent showed evidence of at least three.

An Integrative Approach to Treatment

THE CURRENT EVOLUTION in integrative treatment still includes pharmaceuticals, but for shorter courses than the former years-long treatments. It also often involves herbal treatments and a focus on overall health, including sleep and nutrition, since a long-term infection or immune dysfunction will destabilize multiple systems in the body.

Though quite experimental, emerging integrative approaches may focus on dormant or sluggish spirochetes, which are believed to be harder to conquer than others. The research, much of it coming from university labs, is new and remains controversial, but practitioners say that these discoveries have helped move the needle for some chronically ill patients for the first time in years. These are some of the newest approaches.

Tackling Persister Cells and Biofilms

Recent research has identified more dogged forms of the Lyme spirochete. These "persister cells" are antibiotic-tolerant variants of Lyme bacteria, meaning they are generally unresponsive to drugs.

Researchers have also begun to consider the role of biofilms: starchy, gel-like coatings made of various microbes, including Lyme *Borrelia*. Microbes operate symbiotically to protect themselves in these films, making it particularly hard to eliminate them.

Stanford researchers subjected persister versions of the Lyme spirochete to more than 4,000 drugs to see which ones might have an effect on *Borrelia*. Kenneth Liegner, MD, an internist trained in critical-care medicine, has begun treating some Lyme patients with disulfiram, a drug that has FDA approval for treating alcohol dependence and can also be a potent agent against Lyme. Disulfiram has helped some Lyme patients — and caused especially severe side effects in others.

Other researchers continue to search for treatments beyond pharmaceuticals. Microbiologist and immunologist Ying Zhang, MD, PhD, has tested Lyme-containing biofilms with a broad selection of antibiotics and herbal substances. For instance, he and other researchers have found that Japanese knotweed, black walnut, sweet wormwood, and Ghanaian quinine are all effective against Lyme *Borrelia*.

Although these tests were in vitro and studies of human subjects have yet to be done, many practitioners treating chronic-Lyme patients have been adapting these finds on the fly, using drugs as well as herbs when necessary.

Different Drug Protocols

Horowitz has tested a drug called dapsone. It's normally used to treat leprosy, which also involves persister bacteria. A two-month course of dapsone combined with the biofilm-buster rifampin has helped almost half of the persistently ill Lyme patients in one study to return to health.

Fruitful developments have also occurred by accident. One of Horowitz's patients was in the midst of a divorce and so caught up in grief that she took quadruple the study dose for four days, before stopping cold. Though she'd been chronically ill for years, this short-term, high-dose regimen put her symptoms into full remission, which has lasted nearly a year now.

A few other patients signed on for the four-day treatment with significant success. Horowitz now is conducting a clinical trial to see if shorter, higher-dose treatments can do the job consistently.

Recent success with short-term aggressive drug treatments has convinced Horowitz to change the focus of his practice and eliminate long-term antibiotics for good. "Perhaps the answer is to hit hard for several days three or four times a year," says Horowitz.

The search for safer, even more effective protocols continues.

A Gentler Approach

Other Lyme doctors choose potent herbal treatments to help patients heal. These include many essential oils that academic researchers have found to be active against persisters and biofilms: garlic, cinnamon, oregano, and clove, among others.

To suppress the inflammation that makes people feel so sick, they look to turmeric, alpha-lipoic acid, glutathione, and more.

Such strategies have worked for Kinderlehrer, whose practice focuses on tick-borne-disease patients, some of whom are unable to tolerate antibiotics, even for short periods. His protocol includes lifestyle changes, antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory herbs, CBD, and efforts to restore normal hormone function.

In many of Kinderlehrer's patients, a formerly straightforward infection has morphed into body-wide instability. They may have developed extreme sensitivities to foods, mold, and chemicals that never bothered them before. Some experience activation of mast cells, the white blood cells close to small blood vessels, provoking dangerous allergic reactions. These reactions can trigger brain fog, mood problems, pain syndromes, and profound fatigue.

Still other patients suffer from immune suppression, which likely occurs when *Borrelia* invade the lymphatic system, interfering in the process where antibodies are generated and sustained, according to University of California, Davis, immunologist Nicole Baumgarth, DVM, PhD.

This lowering of the guard, notes Kinderlehrer, could enable reactivation of yet other infections, such as the Epstein-Barr virus, as well as endocrine or neurological disruption. (Experts are also seeing this same reactivation happening in many patients with long COVID.)

Because no two chronic-Lyme patients are the same, **treatments must be highly individualized.**

Integrative physician Erica Lehman, MD, is another practitioner who now treads more softly in her treatment of Lyme patients. "A decade ago, I was more heavy-handed with antibiotics," she recalls. But a retrospective analysis of her patients' outcomes has made her rethink her approach.

She still uses antibiotics, including IV treatment to reduce the load of infection, but then she switches to lower doses and herbs as soon as possible. "Slow and steady wins the race," Lehman says.

Years of experience have helped her recognize patient clusters: those with neurologic disease versus illness that hits the gut, the endocrine system, joint tissue, and more. Each cluster has a different treatment protocol and separate path to wellness; though their problem may have started with a tick-borne disease, they face other issues now. (Much of her approach is informed by MyLymeData, a patient-powered Lyme-disease research project.)

Because no two chronic-Lyme patients are the same, treatments must be highly individualized.

Bill Rawls, MD, author of *Unlocking Lyme*, couldn't agree more. He was almost 50 when he experienced a devastating descent into illness that was diagnosed as Lyme. After weeks of antibiotics, he was sicker than before. Ultimately, Rawls — who sought training in herbal medicine after his Lyme diagnosis — developed an herbal therapy protocol aimed at slowly killing tick-borne microbes while helping his immune system heal.

"Most of my patients don't recall a tick bite," he explains. Instead, they got sick after some extreme stress: a toxic exposure, head injury, overwork, or a traumatic life event. All can weaken the immune system and allow under-the-radar infections to gain purchase.

Each Journey Is Unique

MANY OF THE HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS who specialize in chronic Lyme end up doing so because they've experienced it themselves. Like Rawls, naturopathic physician Mac Toohey, ND, was bitten by a tick in 2007. She was lucky enough to have a bull's-eye rash, an incontrovertible sign of the disease. (Though not everyone who gets Lyme will have the rash, nearly everyone who has the rash ends up with Lyme.) Despite early diagnosis and treatment, she developed neurological symptoms.

When her stomach could no longer tolerate antibiotics after a yearlong course, she turned to herbs, such as Japanese knotweed and skullcap. That plus a shift to a more plant-based diet aided her in turning the corner.

Then she contracted Lyme again in 2015, and the same treatments didn't help. Toohey soon learned she had yeast overgrowth and small-intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO), which had to be treated first.

Based on what she learned, she now treats chronic-Lyme patients with IV antibiotics, addresses microbiome imbalance, and focuses on patients' overall nutrition and sleep habits.

Toohey's experience has shown her that when a tick-borne disease causes a patient to remain ill for months or years, it is always a journey of one. Much depends on the infections involved and the person's own biology: Complex chronic illnesses damage different systems and present in unique ways. Practitioners like Toohey, trained in the integrative arts, gently strip the layers of illness, relying on research to guide the way.

Many other practitioners have taken note. Some of the most aggressive, antibiotic-focused Lyme doctors have begun to adapt their treatment protocol, creating new hope in the chronic-Lyme community. The long-term, heavy-dose pharmaceuticals these physicians offered have been controversial, harsh, and costly to maintain. Lyme patients who couldn't tolerate them often sought support in the world of alternative care, where they may have faced quackery and scams, such as the groundless promotion of malaria treatments.

Today, a well-considered integrative approach is backed by a growing body of peer-reviewed research. Though more clinical studies are still necessary to validate treatments and elevate the level of care for chronic Lyme, the integrative world is a good place to turn when the fallout from tick-borne illness just won't end.

And as the rates of other complex chronic illnesses, like long COVID, continue to climb, the hard-won experience of chronic-Lyme survivors may be able to provide a road map for us all.

PAMELA WEINTRAUB is a writer and editor specializing in the sciences. She is the author of *Cure Unknown: Inside the Lyme Epidemic*.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Real Life

With more than 420 monuments, lakeshores, historic sites, landmarks, grasslands, preserves, and wilderness areas in our national park system, there are many destinations that remain hidden treasures.

Page **76**

Check out the itineraries of some of our favorite less-traveled national sights for ideas on getting away from it all.

Run, Walk, Sit

Ahhh, meditation . . . it's much easier said than done, especially if you struggle to sit still. Try this approach.

BY **LAUREN BEDOSKY**

On an unusually sunny afternoon, I took my dog, Otter, for a walk. It was meant to be a fun, stress-relieving outing for both of us. But while Otter snuffled happily along, I compulsively refreshed the Gmail app on my phone and fretted about work, conjuring a mental to-do list for the remainder of my day.

Like many people, I struggle to live in the present moment. My mind toggles between rehashing the past and worrying about the future. But I hadn't truly realized how much I was doing it — or the effect it was having on my life — until it ruined that particular walk.

In fact, I realized, worries creep in anytime I try to unwind. It happens when I'm out in nature, and it happens anytime I try to sit still.

A few years earlier, I'd attended a mindfulness-meditation workshop that provided my frenzied mind a glimmer of hope for calm. The idea of mindfulness — observing thoughts, sensations, and emotions as they arise, without judging or dwelling on them — appealed to me. But I found it hard to sit still long enough to even notice when these arose.

The leader of that workshop, Ben Connelly, a Soto Zen and secular mindfulness teacher at the Minnesota Zen Meditation Center, had emphasized the importance of adapting a meditation practice as needed to reap its benefits. So, after my walk with Otter, I contacted Connelly and asked him to help me give mindfulness another try. I needed ideas for how I might tailor my practice to accommodate my aversion to sitting still.

Moving meditation is a great entry point, he suggested, because you can pay attention to physical sensations and environmental changes. Once you get the hang of tuning in to your movement, you can progress to less active forms of meditation that tend to be more challenging, like sitting.

With Connelly's guidance, I eased back into a mindfulness practice, starting with two weeks of mindful running, followed by two weeks of walking meditation and two weeks of traditional sitting meditation. My goal was to practice three or four times a week for 10 to 20 minutes per session. This is what happened.

Running Meditation (Weeks 1 and 2)

THE INSTRUCTION: Run more slowly than usual and focus on the environment and any bodily sensations. If you feel your mind start to wander, bring your attention back to your breath. Leave your headphones at home.

MY INITIAL RESPONSE: How am I going to make it through a run without my music? This sounds like it's going to be boring and uncomfortable.

THE EXPERIENCE: The first couple of sessions were rough. Because my mind was wandering, I kept snapping myself back into the present moment, which made me feel like I wasn't doing it right. Connelly assured me that this was normal and perfectly OK.

"Mindfulness is not about getting rid of thoughts, controlling thoughts, or stopping thoughts," he said. "That's an exhausting, frustrating practice."

I kept this in mind during my next run and simply let my thoughts come and go without judgment. I found I had a lot to pay attention to: the ever-changing flow of my breath, the activation of my calf muscles, a slight twinge in my ankle. I noticed when my breathing became ragged and my form began to falter. Instead of pushing through, I slowed and adjusted, which made the run a lot more enjoyable.

THE INSIGHT: Tuning in to discomfort — whether mental or physical — doesn't have to be scary. Noticing how I felt in the moment actually made the run feel like a privilege (I *get* to run) instead of a chore (I *have* to run). Other activities, by extension, also felt like privileges — my regular strength-training workouts, walking through the aisles of the grocery store, and even driving my car to run errands.

Walking Meditation (Weeks 3 and 4)

THE INSTRUCTION: Identify a 30- to 40-foot path or loop and walk slowly, aligning your breath to your movement.

MY INITIAL RESPONSE: The less-intense movement might make it harder to tune in to my body. Would slowing down trigger my restless mind?

Bringing a mindfulness component into an everyday activity made me realize that **I take walking for granted.**

THE EXPERIENCE: I began by just trying to be mindful on my regular walks, as I had with my runs. But my thoughts wandered all over the place, so I decided to try Connelly's more formal practice.

I started at one end of my living room and inhaled as I raised the heel of one foot. While exhaling, I stepped forward with that foot. I continued in this way for 10 minutes and managed to complete only one lap around the room. By going slowly and matching breath to step, I was able to bring more focus to my movements.

THE INSIGHT: Bringing a mindfulness component into an everyday activity made me realize that I take walking for granted. During one especially mindful evening walk, I thought, *How cool is it that my body can take me from point A to point B?* I learned that simply walking can be grounds for reflection and gratitude.

Seated Meditation (Weeks 5 and 6)

THE INSTRUCTION: Take a comfortable seated position, cross-legged or kneeling on a cushion, or in a chair with your feet flat on the floor. Maintain an upright, active posture with eyes open or closed. Pay attention to your breath and any physical sensations.

MY INITIAL RESPONSE: Without the aid of movement, I expected I would be bored within seconds. Besides, I already sit so much during the day — do I really want to sit to meditate?

THE EXPERIENCE: I struggled during the entire two weeks. In fact, I checked my timer midway through the first session and stopped after 10 minutes during my second one. I tried counting breaths and focusing on my posture, but I felt restless.

I made it through the remainder of the two weeks by capping my sessions at five minutes, which was brief enough to complete yet long enough to leave me feeling energized and refreshed when the timer went off.

THE INSIGHT: Seated meditation isn't for me — at least not yet. "There's something to knowing yourself," Connelly said when I described my experience. In other words, even if you try some form of mindfulness practice and the only thing you discover is that you don't like it, that's still helpful information.

Nonetheless, Connelly encourages people to try seated meditation. "It's intended to challenge fundamental things," he explained. "You'll find that your need for activity is something that you can begin to dissolve."

LAUREN BEDOSKY is a Minneapolis-based health-and-fitness writer.

ILLUSTRATIONS: LUCY DAVEY

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Filter Out Fear

Being afraid is natural. These four strategies can help keep fear from controlling you.

BY **HENRY EMMONS, MD**

In his first inaugural address, President Franklin D. Roosevelt famously warned, "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself."

He made a good point. Fear is frequently used as a tool of manipulation, and it begets more of itself. Politicians urge us to vote for them or suffer the fearsome consequences that they plant in our minds like seeds. Terrorists aim to destroy just enough people or property to create a panic. Marketers use fear as an inducement: "Buy this to avoid that."

Yet if we walk with fear as a regular companion, it creates its own set of problems. We may make ourselves ill with our own thinking. Or we might spread panic to one another on a global scale.

In our highly connected world, fear moves from person to person, city to city, and nation to nation at speeds unprecedented in human history. Fear can act like a wildfire, spreading rapidly and destructively from one mind to another.

And all this damage occurs at the level of thought.

Fear does have a purpose: to ensure our survival. Yet we need to find ways to protect ourselves from fear's destructiveness while retaining its usefulness. These four actions can help.

ACTION 1: TAKE A NEWS BREAK.
Do you feel more vulnerable, insecure, or rattled after scrolling through your social-media feeds or watching the news? There's a reason: The nervous system responds to alarming news just as it does to any bodily threat. It doesn't distinguish very well between concrete and abstract dangers.

Awareness is important, but consciously choosing where to direct your attention is not the same as denial. Being discerning about what you take in through your mind is a lot like choosing what you eat: You know whether something is healthy or harmful by how you feel after consuming it.

When your anxiety is high, take a few days or a week off from following the news. The information you genuinely need will get to you, and a break will allow your nervous system to rest, recover, and develop more resilience.

ACTION 2: SEE WHAT'S *NOT* WRONG.
The human brain has a negativity bias. This means we have built-in radar that constantly scans the environment for what may be wrong or dangerous.

We evolved this tendency to improve our chances of survival when we were surrounded by predators that might be sizing us up as lunch. Those life-threatening dangers have mainly receded, but with forces using fear to capture and manipulate our attention being so prevalent, it's vital that we intentionally seek out what is working.

Notice acts of kindness and share good news. Think of it like rebalancing an investment portfolio. If you're constantly afraid, that means you are too heavily invested in risky stocks. A smart investor would sell off some of those and buy more of the safer, less-volatile investments.

Consciously choosing to focus less on what is wrong with the world and more on what is right is a way of investing in your own well-being.

ACTION 3: GET GROUNDED.
It used to be common practice to install a lightning rod on top of buildings. The idea was that it would absorb the force of a lightning bolt that could otherwise destroy the structure. A lightning rod must be grounded into the earth by a metal wire to safely disperse the electrical energy.

Likewise, you can defuse the excess energy of fear by finding ways to ground yourself. This usually involves doing something physical or otherwise engaging your senses:

- Rub something pleasant to the touch, like a pet's fur or a pocket stone.
- Practice a breath-awareness meditation or a yoga pose.
- Take a deep whiff of a lemon or some other pleasing scent.
- Contact the earth: Lie on the ground, lean against a tree, dig in the dirt.

ACTION 4: SEE THOUGHTS FOR WHAT THEY REALLY ARE.
Thoughts are the primary generator of fear, yet you can also use them to calm yourself. To do this, it helps to engage in a mindfulness practice that allows you to recognize a thought for what it is — a transitory thing.

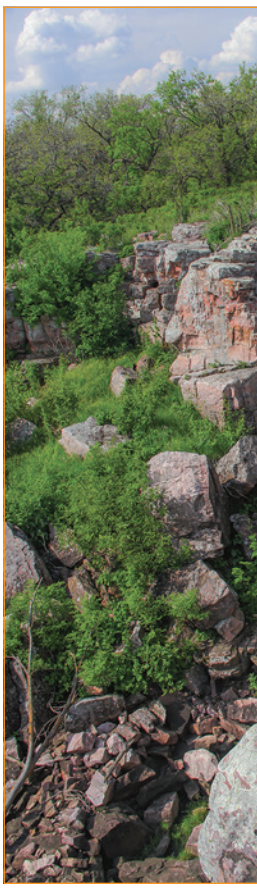
When you learn to observe your own thoughts, and you realize that you are the thinker and your mind is the creator of those thoughts, you can put them in their proper place. You might say to yourself: *This is only a thought. It is not The Truth. It has power over me only if I let it, if I believe it to be true.*

Then you can step back, give yourself a little distance from the thought, and choose not to engage with it. It will dissipate like a cloud, as all thoughts do if we just let them.

HENRY EMMONS, MD, is an integrative psychiatrist and the author of *The Chemistry of Joy, The Chemistry of Calm*, and *Staying Sharp*. He is also the cofounder of NaturalMentalHealth.com.

Getting Away From It All

Escape into nature and step back in time to explore some of the nation's less-visited treasures.



BY **MICHAEL DREGNI**

One moment, we're on interstate I-94 in a scrum of semitrailers, RVs, and other cars. The next moment, we're in another world: Beyond the exit ramp, there's nothing but sun, silence, and the prairie breeze carrying the scent of sweet sage through the multihued Badlands. The whole horizon and that wide open sky belong to us — and a multitude of prairie dogs and a soaring red-tailed hawk, plus several impossibly majestic bison.

Welcome to Theodore Roosevelt National Park near the Montana–North Dakota border. Culture shock is rarely so blissful.

During the long months of the pandemic, many of us turned to thoughts of escape. And getting away from it all often took the form of good old-fashioned road trips to our country's national treasures: our 423 national park sites, including monuments, lakeshores, historic sites, landmarks, grasslands, preserves, and wilderness areas. In fact, 15 national parks set visitation records in 2020, according to the National Park Service. And 2021 may have been another record-busting year.

If you too want to get lost, standing in line to view Old Faithful probably isn't what you had in mind, especially after a drive across the country.

Fortunately, there are many national treasures that remain hidden gems — getaways beyond the busy byways. We rounded up some of our favorites.

Offshore Options

WHERE: Dry Tortugas National Park, Florida

WHO: History buffs and water lovers.

WHY: This park lies off the mainland in the Florida Keys. Fort Jefferson was built between 1846 and 1875 to stand guard on Garden Key. The park is home to several shipwrecks as well as the Loggerhead Key lighthouse.

WHEN: Year-round, but it's an ideal warm-weather destination in winter months.

HOW: Travel by ferry or seaplane to the fort. Less than 1 percent of the park is above ground, so plan to snorkel, scuba, or swim amid the underwater wonders.

Quarries and Quartzite

WHERE: Pipestone National Monument and Blue Mounds State Park, Minnesota

WHO: Anyone interested in history — but remember, this is a site sacred to Indigenous people.

WHY: For generations, Native Americans quarried the red pipestone here and carved it into calumet pipes used for religious rituals. Those traditions continue today.

Blue Mounds is a well-kept local secret, home to glorious quartzite cliff faces, bison, and what's believed to be an ancient buffalo jump, where Indigenous people drove bison off the cliffside.

WHEN: The Minnesota prairie is subtle yet beautiful in any season, but it's famously cold and windy in winter. Summer and autumn are especially stunning.

HOW: Walk to the pipestone quarry, where Native artisans still work today. Hike through Blue Mounds' grasslands, and bring your binoculars for birdwatching.

Historic Highway

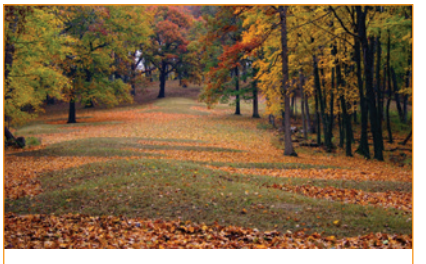
WHERE: Natchez Trace Parkway, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee

WHO: Travelers seeking a journey back in time.

WHY: This 444-mile drive through 10,000 years of history follows a trail used by Native Americans and early settlers. Caves, waterfalls, a cypress swamp, and Chickasaw sites line the route.

WHEN: Any time, but be careful at nighttime: The road is not lit, and roaming nocturnal critters far outnumber cars.

HOW: You can access portions by car or bicycle all along the route.



Sacred Mounds

WHERE: Effigy Mounds National Monument, Iowa

WHO: Anyone interested in history — but remember, this is a site sacred to Indigenous people.

WHY: More than 200 Native American effigies and burial mounds sited in picturesque sections of the Upper Mississippi River Valley. Giant bear and bird earthworks are surrounded by forests alive with animals, birds, and reptiles.

WHEN: Open year-round, but it can be hot and humid in summer.

HOW: Tour the mounds with an interpretive guide or on your own.

Wide-Open Spaces

WHERE: Theodore Roosevelt National Park and Little Missouri National Grassland, North Dakota

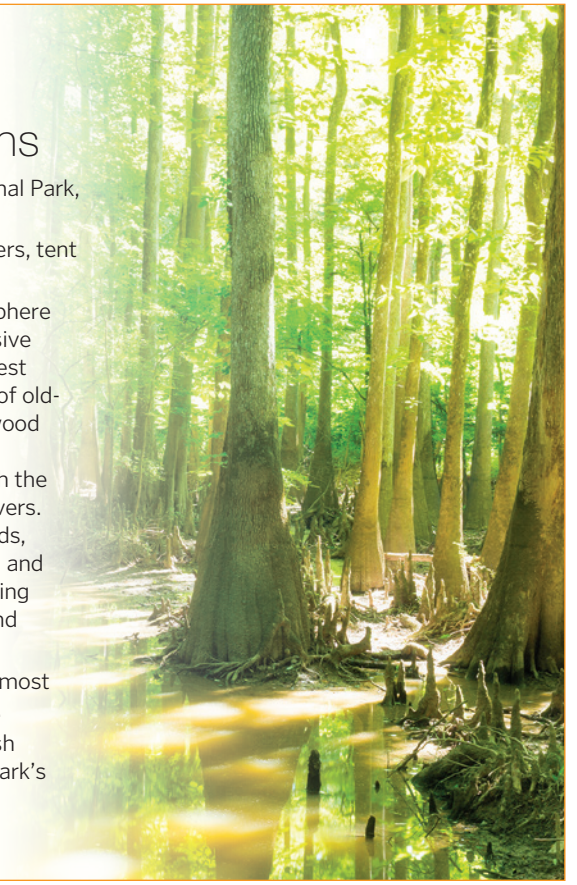
WHO: Families, campers, hikers, stargazers, anglers, and horseback riders looking for a truly novel escapade.

WHY: The idea of grasslands may not spark your imagination, but this ecosystem is glorious. Bison, eagles, pronghorns, elk, and even a herd of wild horses make their home here. As President Theodore Roosevelt famously said, "It was here that the romance of my life began."

WHEN: Any time. Summers are warm and colorful; winters are ideal for snowshoeing and exploring. And don't forget nighttime options: The stars shine so intensely here that the park hosts an astronomy festival in September.

HOW: Start at the Painted Canyon Visitor Center to get a taste. Drive or hike the South Unit, then venture to the North Unit (which is in a different time zone!) to really get away from it all. Find an overlook to watch the sun set on the Little Missouri National Grassland.

Forests and Floodplains



WHERE: Congaree National Park, South Carolina

WHO: Natural-history lovers, tent campers, and anglers.

WHY: The Congaree Biosphere Region features an expansive biodiversity, from the largest remaining intact expanse of old-growth bottomland hardwood forest in North America to floodplains connected with the Congaree and Wateree Rivers. The array of species of birds, mammals, reptiles, plants, and trees is astounding, including ancient cypress, tupelo, and loblolly pine.

WHEN: The park may be most beautiful in spring and fall.

HOW: Canoe, kayak, or fish the waterways. Hike the park's many trails.

Coastline Jewel

WHERE: Acadia National Park, Maine

WHO: Families, hikers, and campers.

WHY: Located on Mount Desert Island, this park is a northeastern gem, with the rocky Atlantic headlands along the coast as its crown jewels.

WHEN: Any time of year, although it can be busy in summer.

HOW: Historic hiking trails and motor roads lead you to spectacular oceanside views — plus, there are lighthouses and fire-tower lookouts to visit.

Borderland

WHERE: Big Bend National Park, Texas

WHO: Hikers, bikers, birdwatchers, backcountry campers, and more.

WHY: Traveling to the "big bend" of the Rio Grande River on the Texas-Mexico border is a daunting journey but well worth the effort. Deserts, limestone cliffs, mountains, and an incredible array of cacti, orchids, and animals make the park a unique southwestern destination.

WHEN: Summers are hot, so October through April is the park's busiest time.

HOW: Horseback rides may be the best — and most fitting — way to see the park.

Cacti Wonderland

WHERE: Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Arizona

WHO: Anyone excited to explore the desert — especially in warm winter months.

WHY: This 517-square-mile park in the Sonoran Desert is named for the statuesque cacti that can tower up to 26 feet tall. The park's also an International Biosphere Reserve, marked by the United Nations to conserve key samples of the world's ecosystems. Native species include mountain lions, bighorns, javelinas, lots of lizards, and "more bird species than can be listed," according to rangers.

WHEN: As the park's website states, this "is where summer spends the winter." During summer months, temperatures can soar to over 100 degrees F, but wintertime weather often features a balmy 70 degrees F.

HOW: Hike one of many trails to springs, silver and gold mines, or the Lost Cabin. Ride horses to get to places other visitors may never see.

MICHAEL DREGNI is an *Experience Life* deputy editor.

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Making Friends as an Adult

How to get past the awkwardness of reaching out to new people.

BY **JESSIE SHOLL**

Lifelong bonds with friends are wonderful but not always possible. Adult friendships frequently take a back seat to jobs and spouses and children. Sometimes partnerships end, and we're no longer comfortable in the same networks as our exes. Or there's a global pandemic, and the ability to meet new people organically in a public setting is severely hampered.

And then there's geography. After you've relocated — once or multiple times — frequent phone conversations with dear friends often dwindle into occasional Facebook posts.

That's what happened to Kia Wakefield. She was headed toward 30. After moving seven times in five years, she found herself in another new city, lonely and struggling to make friends. She writes about her experiences in *Social Elephant: New Rules for Making Friends in Our Changing Social Economy*. "Friendlessness makes a person feel inadequate. That creates a cycle, because we bring those feelings of inadequacy to the table."

Self-doubt is only one of the challenges. "When we get older, it's harder both internally and externally," says psychologist Elizabeth Lombardo, PhD, author of *A Happy You*. "Externally, we're simply not exposed to as many people — and it's less expected that you'll become friends."

Internally, she adds, we often have a lot more negative self-talk, telling ourselves that so-and-so has enough friends. When we're younger, we are less likely to second-guess ourselves, and we're a little less selective. Consider how children on their way to an adult event ask, "Will there be any kids there?" That's their sole criterion for a possible good time.

"As we get older, there can be a lot of fear around making friends," says Nicole Sbordone, LCSW, author of *Surviving Female Friendships*. Asking a new acquaintance to coffee or lunch can make the most outgoing person feel vulnerable. Some vulnerability is required for friendship — trust and intimacy are built when we reveal ourselves, at least a little — but knowing when to open up can be tricky.

For all these reasons, friendship often gets pushed to the bottom of priority lists. "It's kind of like exercise: 'I'll do it when I have time,'" Lombardo says.

Worth the Investment

Friends are nice, but do we actually need them? Research says yes. If the pleasure of human company weren't enough to confirm it, there are myriad ways that friendship — and its lack — has been shown to influence health. "By middle age, lonely adults consume more alcohol and engage in less vigorous exercise," writes social neuroscientist John Cacioppo, PhD, in *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection*. "They sleep just as much as the non-lonely, but their sleep is less restorative . . . and they report more daytime fatigue."

Conversely, other studies suggest that our pain thresholds rise when we're laughing with friends. Friendship helps ward off cognitive decline. And having friends even strengthens the immune system. The famed Nurses' Health Study showed that women who had 10 or more friends were three times as likely to survive breast cancer.

Yet time with friends can still feel like an extravagance. "People can hear those benefits and still view friendship as a luxury," says psychologist Andrea Bonior, PhD, author of *The Friendship Fix: The Complete Guide to Choosing, Losing, and Keeping Up With Your Friends*. "Because maybe they have to care for everybody else. But friendship is actually good for your family."

WHAT MAKES A GOOD FRIEND?

To have good friends, you must be a good friend. The following telltale signs are adapted from Andrea Bonior's *The Friendship Fix*.

1. Good friends have real meaning in each other's life. Your best friends are among the first you share your good and bad news with — the deeper, more meaningful news beyond what you post online. These friends are privy to your important moments and are not an afterthought.

2. Good friends give each other feedback about their friendship: Your best friends let you know you mean a lot to them, and vice versa. Some people aren't prone to sentimentality, and validation about how happy friends are to spend time together may come with gentle teasing.

3. Good friends attract people who become good friends. Enough said, right?

4. Good friends feel comfortable together and treat each other well. You let your guard down around each other and find it easy to open up with your thoughts and concerns.

All the more reason to make an effort to build your circle when you haven't connected for a while.

Inviting a new person out can be awkward, so Bonior suggests making invitations casual — and don't hesitate to joke around about your nervousness if you feel it. "Acknowledging the weirdness makes it a lot easier," she says.

And she suggests treating these meetings as an experiment, much like dating. "Nobody expects to marry the first person they go on a date with, so why are we so hard on ourselves if a friendship doesn't get off the ground?"

It's also helpful to adjust the expectations we place on our adult friends. Not every pal needs to be a confidante, says Marla Paul, author of *The Friendship Crisis: Finding, Making, and Keeping Friends When You're Not a Kid Anymore*. She believes that lighthearted friendships are not superficial — and they're necessary.

"Your friendship menu needs a range of both intimates and acquaintances," she writes. "Think of them as concentric circles. You should have an inner ring of close friends with whom you can share and who will rally around you in an emergency. And you need an outer band of casual friends and social groups that offer companionship and a sense of belonging."

That outer band might include work colleagues, neighbors, and members of your meditation center or gym. And meetups with online groups are an easy way to build new connections. These are people with whom you already have shared interests.

Same goes for the well-worn cliché that you should take classes or join a book group, tennis club, or basketball team to make new friends: You already know you have at least one thing in common with everyone there.

Taking the Risk

What do you do if you want to build deeper connections with people you see only occasionally? "Continuity is important," Bonior says. "Often, people will steer away from follow-up questions because they're afraid of prying, but people like it when you remember details about their lives."

So, the next time the person on the mat next to you in yoga class returns from a vacation, ask how it went. "It's about being willing to stick your neck out," she adds.

This is precisely how Jo Maeder — who at 47 moved from her adopted home of New York City to Greensboro, N.C. — met one of her best friends.

Maeder, an author, had relocated to take care of her ailing mother. The financial toll made it impractical to return to New York City when her mom died. "I was unmarried, childless, and not a member of a church. I kept looking for work and love there, hoping that would change."

Then one day at her local café, Maeder saw two women chatting and laughing. "I walked over and said, 'You two look like you're having so much fun. Do you mind if I sit with you while I wait for my order?' One of them was Rita. We became Facebook friends. Then she came to a community event I started called the BookUP. After that, she invited me to talk to her book club."

The two became fast friends and still are, proving that a little discomfort can sometimes make life a whole lot better. ◔

JESSIE SHOLL is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

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A Place to Belong

While we desire adventure, we can also long for familiar surroundings. Life Time can offer a bit of both.

BY **BAHRAM AKRADI**

This past March, I found myself in Coral Gables, Fla., for a Life Time Living event. The party's theme was Havana Nights, and the energy was electric. The band was on fire, the contagious Cuban beat inspiring salsa dancers as they found their rhythm and twirled across the pool deck.

As I made my way through the crowd, I met a Minnesota couple who are longtime members. Joe and Jone Hafermann had recently bought a Twin Cities–area home that needed a significant remodel; since it was happening over the winter, they decided to head south to spend their displacement in sunny southern Florida, at Life Time Stay (a week-to-week or month-to-month rental option at Life Time Living).

Because their health is a top priority for them, the Hafermanns did what they'd done several times since becoming empty nesters: They mapped their road trip to Florida based on Life Time locations in or near major cities: Minneapolis, Des Moines, Kansas City, Atlanta.

Each night, a different hotel. But each day? A familiar place — their third space — where Jone, who loves group fitness, could attend her favorite class, and Joe could make himself at home on the workout floor.

I love these kinds of stories, and I thought about the Hafermanns a lot in the days after the event: about why they love Life Time, how they use our entire ecosystem, and how they experience it as a network of athletic country clubs.

And that is exactly how our brand has evolved. Since that first custom-built club in Eagan, Minn., Life Time has become an expansive, comprehensive healthy-way-of-life company that provides trusted places and programs — both in-person and digital — served up by amazing people across the United States and Canada.

This includes Life Time Village, where Work, Living, and Stay are coupled with one of our athletic country clubs. This "live, work, play" concept is not only convenient and fun, it's naturally and intuitively good for the environment: With the places where so many of us spend the majority of our time in one location, there's less need to drive, for instance.

It's things like this that deliver on our commitment to meet you, our members, where you are — to anticipate your needs and see things from your point of view.

Today, that perspective is expanding. Thanks to technology and innovation, the world has gotten smaller, and we can navigate it more easily.

Some of you have been with us for years and now have kids and friends who live in different cities. Many of you can work from anywhere.

During your occasional travels, whether for work or pleasure, Life Time is here for you, giving you the freedom and flexibility to be where you want to be while also staying on track with your healthy-living endeavors.

With 160-plus athletic country clubs in 41 major markets (and more to come over the next few years), as well as an array of digital offerings, Life Time provides a sense of home wherever life or wanderlust may take you.

This duality — the desire for adventure while simultaneously wanting to feel comfortable and secure — is part of how we, as humans, are wired. As a species, we've always been innately curious. We have a love affair with freedom; discovery is part of our evolutionary DNA as we explore new horizons. We love possibility, seek novelty, and wonder what's next.

The paradox is that we simultaneously long for the familiar. We want that feeling of connection, so we develop attachment and bonds with people and places. One of our strongest desires is to feel that we belong — and all the better if it's within a community that offers something extraordinary.

Life Time can be part of that seeking while also being that place of belonging. We hope to serve you wherever your life, your work, your family, or your call for adventure takes you. And though the geography and faces may be different, the positive, healthy, happy energy is the same.

As we continue to grow as an organization, our goal is for *everyone* to experience the expansiveness of Life Time like the Hafermanns have — and to be known for that one-of-a-kind athletic country-club experience, where the spirit of exploration meets the comforts of home.

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

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