

HEALTHY. HAPPY. FOR REAL. |

Experience Life

LIFETIME

June 2023

GET IN SYNC

THE LATEST RESEARCH
ON CIRCADIAN HEALTH
— AND WHY SLEEP IS
SO ESSENTIAL

p. 62

BODY ACCEPTANCE

GUIDANCE FOR MOVING TOWARD
BODY NEUTRALITY

p. 56

LIMBER FOR LIFE

THE POWER
OF MOBILITY
FOR AGING WELL

p. 32

MOVE FOR JOY

p. 50

June 2023

\$6.95



EXPERIENCELIFE.COM

Olympian, coach, and TrackGirlz founder
Mechelle Lewis Freeman
is inspiring top-level athletes *and* the
next generation to trust their potential
and pursue their passions. p. 14



KIT UP NOW

TEN THOUSAND

THE ONLY TRAINING GEAR YOU'LL EVER NEED.

FEATURED IN

RollingStone **GQ** GEAR PATROL Men'sHealth MENS JOURNAL RUNNER'S WORLD



30,000+
FIVE STAR REVIEWS

TENTHOUSAND.CC

Contents

Experience Life

June 2023
MOVE FOR JOY

Features

50

MOVE FOR THE JOY OF IT

Focusing on achieving your fitness goals isn't the only way to make progress. When you're attuned to the joys of movement, you can set yourself up for more sustainable fitness success.

By **Andrew Heffernan, CSCS**



In Every Issue

4 Experience Life Digital

7 Editor's Note by Jamie Martin

9 Talk to Us

10 Well Informed

Concerns about new childhood-obesity guidelines; the increase of body dysmorphia in men; air quality and health; and more.

14 On the Cover

Leading With Heart

Olympian and coach Mechelle Lewis Freeman on inspiring more people to move — now and throughout their lives.

By **Jill Patton, FMCHC**



56

EMBRACING BODY NEUTRALITY

Maintaining a body-positive attitude feels good, but it isn't always possible. The alternative doesn't have to be negative, though. A growing number of people are practicing a "body neutral" approach, which advocates for accepting your body as it is today — and as it changes tomorrow.

By **Elizabeth Millard**



62

GET IN SYNC

A regular sleep schedule does more than keep you rested: It keeps your organs' rhythms aligned and your body running smoothly. Discover the latest on circadian health and how to best support your body's many clocks.

By **Laine Bergeson Becco, FMCHC**



18 One Healthy Habit

Hydrate Your Body

Water is critical to the smooth functioning of all the body's cells and systems. This month's challenge will help you drink more of it throughout the day.

By **Experience Life Staff**

20 My Turnaround

Arrest and Recovery

One man kicks his drug addiction and finds peace through serving others.

By **Matthew Hurley**

81 Worthy Goods

83 Perspective by Bahram Akradi

84 Meditation

Departments

REAL FITNESS

24 The Workout Short Stack

Low on time, energy, or motivation? Stacking 10-minute bursts of activity might be the trick you need to get moving.

By Nicole Radziszewski

29 Break It Down The Lateral Raise

Finesse your form to get the most out of this shoulder-isolation exercise (and its many variations).

By Maggie Fazeli Fard, RKC, MFT-1, Alpha

32 Up Your Game Limber for Life

Mobility is a critical component of aging well. Fitness experts explain why and share insights on how to maintain it for the long haul.

By Lauren Bedosky

35 Expert Answers

What Are Some of the Latest Rules Around Health Club Etiquette?

You can still pursue your fitness ambitions while paying attention to how you affect the people around you.

By Maggie Fazeli Fard, RKC, MFT-1, Alpha



REAL FOOD

38 Nutrients Feed Your Libido

A variety of factors can cause sex drive, which declines naturally with age, to play hide-and-seek. These key nutrients and herbs can fuel the fire — and keep it burning.

By Mo Perry

43 Something Simple Pan-Fried Halloumi With Cucumber Salad

Its high melting point makes this cheese an ideal pick for a vegetarian main dish.

By Maddie Augustin

44 Foodstuff Eat Less, Live Longer?

Headlines suggest that restricting calories can extend your life — but the reality is a little more complicated.

By Helen Martineau

46 Confident Cook Pop Up!

Ditch the store-bought frozen pops for these fun, nutritious, and refreshing homemade varieties.

By Robin Asbell

REAL LIFE

70 Balance Urgent Care

Frightening or distressing medical experiences are common. Lean on these strategies for overcoming your fears.

By Quinton Skinner

73 Joy Lab Compassionate by Nature

Though it can sometimes seem like too much to take on, caring for others is something our brains are wired to do.

By Henry Emmons, MD, and
Aimee Prasek, PhD

74 Renewal How to Halt Diet Talk

Conversations about eating habits can trigger complicated emotions involving food and weight. One expert offers advice to help you set healthy boundaries.

By Jon Spayde

77 Natural Healing What Is Healing Touch?

What we understand about this increasingly popular form of energy healing.

By Courtney Helgoe

78 Green Space Keep Your Cool

Hot ideas for staying chill during the summer months.

By Alexandra Smith



11 Summer Mocktails

Sitting back with a cold drink in the summer heat is one of the simple pleasures in life. Many people opt for cocktails, but zero-proof beverages can be just as satisfying. Check out our creative, refreshing recipes for Sober Sangria, Thai Basil No-Jito, Pomegranate Lime-Tini, and more.



SCAN THE QR CODE
OR VISIT
[ELMAG.COM/
SUMMERMCKTAILS](http://ELMAG.COM/SUMMERMCKTAILS).

WIN THIS!

ICE-CREAM BUNDLE

Make your own ice cream, frozen yogurt, or sorbet at home in 20 minutes or less with this

Cuisinart ice-cream maker — and then scoop it into this insulated ice-cream container and head to the beach. The double-walled, vacuum-insulated canteen keeps sweet treats frozen for four hours (or up to eight hours if you put it in a cooler). Sign up for your chance to win the bundle by scanning the QR code or visiting ELmag.com/junegiveaway.



LAP-SWIMMING ETIQUETTE

Don't let a crowded pool keep you from regular workouts. Follow these six rules, and lane sharing will be a breeze.

ELmag.com/lapswimming

SAFE SUNSCREEN

Many sunscreens contain harmful chemicals, including oxybenzone, which has been linked to allergic reactions and potential hormone disruption. Check out these tips to find a safe and effective sunscreen. ELmag.com/sunscreen

SUMMER, RECLAIMED

Remember those long, glorious summer breaks we enjoyed as kids? Here's how to recapture some of the season's lost magic — despite your schedule.

ELmag.com/summer

Best Day Yet.

Non-Alcoholic Craft Beer



BestDayBrewing.com

© 2023 Best Day Brewing LLC.
All rights reserved.

querlin monge

Experience Life

BY LIFE TIME

OUR MISSION:

Empowering people to become their healthiest, happiest, most authentic selves and supporting their enjoyment of a balanced, sustainable, deeply satisfying way of life.

OUR MANTRA:

HEALTHY. HAPPY. FOR REAL.

EXPERIENCE LIFE MAGAZINE

EDITOR IN CHIEF **Jamie Martin**

DEPUTY EDITORS **Craig Cox, Michael Dregni**

MANAGING EDITOR **Courtney Lewis Opdahl**

FEATURES EDITOR **Courtney Helgoe**

SENIOR EDITORS **Maggie Fazeli Fard, Kaelyn Riley**

COPY EDITOR/FACT CHECKER **Mike Oakes**

ASSOCIATE EDITOR/FACT CHECKER **Molly Tynjala**

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS **Laine Bergeson Becco, Catherine Guthrie, Andrew Heffernan, Jill Patton, Mo Perry, Jessie Sholl, Jon Spayde, Heidi Wachter**

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS **Robin Asbell, Maddie Augustin, Lauren Bedosky, Henry Emmons, Matthew Hurley, Helen Martineau, Elizabeth Millard, Aimee Prasek, Nicole Radziszewski, Quinton Skinner, Alexandra Smith**

EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR **Lydia Anderson**

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR **Jane Meronuck**

ART DIRECTOR **Jennifer Jacobson**

DIGITAL DIRECTOR **Anjula Razdan**

SENIOR MANAGER-DIGITAL MARKETING AND MEDIA STRATEGY **Laura Fogelberg**

AUDIENCE-DEVELOPMENT MANAGER-CIRCULATION **Carrie Stafford**

AUDIENCE-DEVELOPMENT MANAGER-DIGITAL **Tatyana McNamara**

DIGITAL CONTENT SPECIALIST/SPECIAL-PROJECTS COORDINATOR **Christy Rice**

EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT/OFFICE MANAGER **Sara Ellingsworth**

FOUNDING EDITOR **Pilar Gerasimo**

Please address all written correspondence and editorial inquiries to Managing Editor, *Experience Life*, 2145 Ford Parkway, Suite 302, St. Paul, MN 55116 or experiencelife@experiencelife.com.

LIFE TIME

FOUNDER, CHAIRMAN, AND CEO **Bahram Akradi**

PRESIDENT, MEDIA **Kimo Seymour**

Please address all media and advertising inquiries to ltmedia@lt.life.

PICTURE CREDITS

Cover, p. 2 (far right) and p. 14-16: Kwaku Alston/foureleven.agency (photographer), Lisa Bae (wardrobe styling), Adria Bruce/@thebellhaus (hair), Christina Buzas/Celestine Agency (makeup); Wardrobe (cover and p. 2): top by Alo, pants by Free People, (p. 14-16): apparel by Life Time.

Page 4 (top): Andrea D'Agosto; p. 7: Sara Rubinstein; p. 35 (bottom): Chad Holder.

The stock images in this magazine were purchased from Getty Images.

LIFE TIME®, LIFE TIME FITNESS®, LIFE TIME ATHLETIC®, and EXPERIENCE LIFE® are all trademarks of LIFE TIME.



EXPERIENCE LIFE Magazine (ISSN 1537-6656) is published eight times a year — January/February, March, April, May, June, July/August, September/October, and November/December — by LIFE TIME, 2902 Corporate Place, Chanhassen, MN 55317. SUBSCRIPTION RATE: One year (8 issues) \$27.95; two years (16 issues) \$44.95. LIFE TIME MEMBERS: For member questions, cancellations, or change of address, call Member Relations at 888-430-6432 or email subs@experiencelife.com. NON-LIFE TIME MEMBERS: For nonmember questions, cancellations, or change of address, call

800-897-4056 or email ELFcustserv@cdsfulfillment.com. Periodicals postage paid at Chanhassen, MN 55317 and additional mailing offices. ISSUE DATE: June 2023. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Carrie Stafford, EXPERIENCE LIFE Magazine, 2145 Ford Parkway, Suite 302, St. Paul, MN 55116.

LIFE TIME
HEALTHY WAY OF LIFE

Copyright 2023 by LIFE TIME. All rights reserved. Printed in USA. Reproduction of this magazine, in whole, or in part, is prohibited unless authorized by the Publisher or its advertisers. The advertising space provided in EXPERIENCE LIFE is purchased and paid for by the advertiser. None of the products or services is necessarily endorsed by LIFE TIME.



The paper used in this publication is certified by the Sustainable Forestry Initiative®. Please recycle this magazine.

The information contained in the magazine is intended to provide broad understanding and knowledge of healthcare topics. This information should not be considered complete and should not be used in place of a visit, call, consultation, or advice from your physician or other healthcare provider. We recommend you consult your physician or healthcare professional before beginning or altering your personal exercise, diet, or supplementation program.

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



I've thought a lot about the times in my life when I'm content — feeling joyful and focused in the present. And I've realized, perhaps ironically, that it's often when I'm in motion."

YOUR THOUGHTS?

Email us at experiencelife@experiencelife.com.

Contentment in Motion

All I could hear were the sounds of the water. Floating on my back in the Pacific recently, my family splashing nearby, I closed my eyes and let my body rock with the waves. I took several deep breaths and noticed the warmth of the sun on my face, the taste of salt on my lips, the refreshing coolness of the water on my skin. I felt . . . content.

The ocean is my happy place — and it's the scene I imagine when I'm back home and stress is high and schedules are hectic.

I identified this in 2018 during a session at the Institute for Functional Medicine's annual international conference. Integrative-medicine expert Keesha Ewers, PhD, author of *Solving the Autoimmune Puzzle: The Women's Guide to Reclaiming Emotional Freedom and Vibrant Health* (among other books), was sharing ideas for supporting our rest-and-digest system — also known as the parasympathetic nervous system — in our daily lives.

I remember her prompting us to picture a place that is calming, along with all the sensory elements that make it so. Then, she encouraged us to write about it and reminded us that we could visualize this place anytime we need it, no matter the circumstances and no matter where we are.

Since then, I've imagined floating in the ocean many times and am grateful to have it as a self-care resource, especially these last few years. But to be physically back in the water once again? It felt like coming home.

In the months since that getaway full of peaceful floats, I've thought a lot about the times in my life when I'm content — feeling joyful and focused in the present. And I've realized, perhaps ironically, that it's often when I'm in motion.

It's when I'm running, usually a couple of miles in. Finally hitting my stride, I suddenly find it easier to put one foot in front of the other. (An upbeat playlist of my favorite songs helps me stay in the moment.)

It's when I'm lifting weights, usually in those minutes and seconds between sets and reps. During a recent deadlifting session, I felt elation as I celebrated a heavy-for-me set and prepared to go for one more.

It's when I'm dancing on Saturday mornings, focused on keeping up with the choreography of my favorite livestreaming Dance Jam class, a ridiculous smile plastered on my face. (Shout out to performer Nikki N., at Life Time in Chanhassen, Minn., for motivating me to cut loose!)

It's when I'm shooting hoops with my daughters, encouraging them as they practice their skills and recalling my own glory days of basketball.

It's when I'm playing pickleball with my husband, and we're rallying toward that final point.

It's when I'm paddleboarding across the lake during the too-short Minnesota summers. Despite my arms burning a little more with each stroke, it's impossible to dwell on anything but the beauty all around: the reflection of the trees and clouds on the water; the mist rising with the sun; the ripples as my paddle dips below the surface to propel me forward.

I could go on, but you get the point. In all of these instances, movement is joy for me — and I bet you might have an example or two like this of your own. If not, then I hope this issue, and articles like “Leading With Heart” and “Move for the Joy of It” (on pages 14 and 50, respectively), inspire you to seek out activities that bring you joy. Because movement can make a difference — for your health, yes, but for your happiness too.

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.

Now Available— Second Opinions

from One of the Top Orthopedic
Programs in the Country



When faced with questions about your healthcare, consulting another medical expert can help you get answers. Understand your options and play an active role in your care with an orthopedic second opinion from NYU Langone Health. Getting started is convenient, easy, and virtual.



NYU Langone
Orthopedics

Talk to Us


ILLUSTRATION: CLAUDI KESSELS




SUPPORT, EMPATHY, AND ENCOURAGEMENT

 This was such a helpful article (“How to Ask for Help in Times of Need,” January/February 2023). Life has served up heavy challenges for me, and this landed in my inbox offering tremendous insight and inspiration. A trainer at my local club saw that I was very down, and she wandered my way to ask if I was OK. It was a relief to say no, but I couldn’t discuss it. She told me, “We’re here for you.” It was uplifting to see that someone cared. With the suggestions in this article and the thoughtful staff at the club, I hope to activate this in my future.

Betsy K.


 I really enjoyed reading “Spring Awakening” by Maggie Fazeli Fard in the March 2023 issue. This time of year is always really hard for me, especially when it comes to my exercise routine. I loved what she said about having patience with yourself. This quote brought tears to my eyes: “I want to be at peace, in mind, body, and spirit. I want to move my body without sacrificing that peace.”

Katie V.

 Modeling it is the best way to teach empathy (“4 Strategies to Teach Empathy to Children,” December 2022).


Talk about how they feel in different situations and ask if they would want others to feel that way.

Donna P.

 I always feel I have to say something, then I say something stupid (“What to Say When You Don’t Know What to Say,” December 2021). I’d rather keep my mouth shut and just listen, but sometimes my granddaughter wants feedback from me. Now I just say, “I understand.” And, “I’m sorry that you’re brokenhearted.”


Roseanna G.

ON THE RIGHT PATH

 I usually pick up your magazine at the gym while I wait for my wife. What amazing, educational, and well-written articles you offer. The one about “emotional healing” (“How Guided Imagery Can Boost Your Health — and Performance,” January/February 2023) is spectacular! I have been observing, feeling, thinking, and trying little things without having proper training. The article proved I am doing the right thing and confirmed I am on the right path.


Wilther S.

MOTIVATION TO MOVE

 I love Enneagram types (“What’s Your Enneagram Fitness Personality?,” January/


February 2023). How we all connect, deliver, think, and communicate changes everything — the more we can understand each other, the more united we will be.

@ammiele


 I lift my legs 2,400 times each day in an effort to save my knees (“Live Longer by Increasing Your Exercise Efforts,” January/February 2023). My doctor suggested this — but not so many reps. I haven’t had to replace my knees so far.

Mack B.

IN APPRECIATION

 As a non-Black POC, I wanted to express my gratitude for the thoughtful detail put into this article (“How to Be an Ally to the Black Community,” February 2021). I love that most of the supportive tips go above and beyond the typical “donate” suggestions — these creative strategies are endorsed or created by Black educators and activists. I also really appreciate the simplicity of the language used here. The author, without fear, very clearly stated what’s appreciation and what’s appropriation, and she suggested listening more than we speak. I hope this article left others hopeful as well.

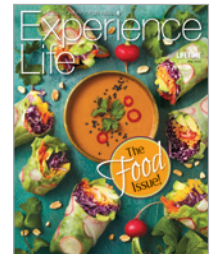
Brooke R.

 Thank you for the excellence of the work in *Experience Life*. In every respect, the content exemplifies a lucid, coherent, and objective analysis of the issues it addresses. Not only is each issue a great read and very well presented, the topics are of vital social importance.

Currently, approximately 42 percent of our nation’s population is obese. Obesity is frequently a comorbid para-

meter in the onset and advancement of types 1 and 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cardiomyopathies, cerebrovascular accidents, Alzheimer’s disease, and a plethora of neurologic pathologies. As a medical research physician conducting research on the incidence, remediation, and prevention of obesity, I frequently discuss your excellent publication as germane points of patient consideration and praxis in their respective healing process. Most of these patients have obesity and suffer in ways that words cannot adequately convey. Your work deserves a nationwide standing ovation.

Philip K.



Experience Life welcomes your comments and suggestions. Email experiencelife@experiencelife.com, connect with us on social media, or send feedback to:

Letters to the Editor
Experience Life
2145 Ford Parkway, Suite 302
St. Paul, MN 55116

Please include your city and state. We reserve the right to edit letters for length, grammar, and clarity, and to publish at our discretion. All submitted copy and materials become the property of the magazine. We do not return or guarantee the publication of unsolicited materials. For reprint and publication requests, please contact **experiencelife@experiencelife.com**.



New Treatment Guidelines for **Childhood Obesity** Met With Concerns

Obesity has become one of the most common pediatric chronic diseases: Some 14.4 million American children now live with the condition. To address the crisis, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recently updated its guidelines on childhood obesity for the first time in 15 years, stating that these kids require urgent and intensive treatments, ranging from lifestyle therapy to pharmaceutical interventions and bariatric surgery.

Pediatricians have historically treated the condition with “watchful waiting” — delaying treatment to see if children outgrow obesity, says guidelines coauthor Sandra Hassink, MD, MS.

But as lead author Sarah Hampl, MD, explains, “We now know more about obesity as a disease, its contributors, and what works for treatment.” Risks can include cardiovascular diseases and type 2 diabetes, plus emotional and mental health concerns.

The new AAP guidelines urge pediatricians to “offer treatment options early and at the highest available intensity” and recommend the following approaches:

- **Intensive health behavior and lifestyle treatment** should be available to all children starting at age 6.
- **Weight-loss pharmaceuticals** should be offered as an adjunct to behavioral therapy to adolescents age 12 and older.
- **Metabolic and bariatric surgery** should be considered for teens age 13 and older.



The medical field tends to overestimate the ‘risk’ of ‘obesity’ and maintains that **the negative side effects of weight-loss treatment outweigh the risk(s) of ‘obesity.’**”

Guidelines Criticism

Critics have lambasted the AAP for reinforcing the conventional medical focus on weight as a key measure of health.

“The medical field tends to overestimate the ‘risk’ of ‘obesity’ and maintains that the negative side effects of weight-loss treatment outweigh the risk(s) of ‘obesity,’” argues the Collaborative of Eating Disorders Organizations (CEDO) in an open letter responding to the new guidelines.

The AAP’s recommended treatments have triggered the most alarm. Promoting weight-loss pharmacotherapy, the CEDO statement notes, “creates the false impression that a pill will ‘fix’ the problem. This allows

the reckless market of over-the-counter diet pills and weight-loss supplements to thrive.”

CEDO also argues that bariatric surgeries carry significant risks. “Adolescents do not have the emotional or cognitive capacity to navigate the complex medical, nutritional, and life changes that bariatric surgery involves.”

Child psychiatrist Deborah Simkin, MD, DFAACAP, is concerned about the causes and effects left out of the report — particularly the role that PTSD caused by adverse childhood experiences plays in obesity.

“No weight-loss program will help until this is addressed,” Simkin says.

Others view the issue of obesity as a larger, more complex cultural and socioeconomic problem: “We cannot solve anti-fat bias by making fat kids thin,” writes Virginia Sole-Smith, author of *Fat Talk: Parenting in the Age of Diet Culture*, in a *New York Times* essay. “Our current approach only teaches them that trusted adults believe the bullies are right — that a fat body is just a problem to solve.”

— MICHAEL DREGNI

LEARN MORE

For a longer, more detailed version of this article, see ELmag.com/childhoodobesity.

The Trouble With “Buff Enough”: Male Body Dysmorphia

Self-comparison, self-judgment, even self-hatred: The effects of body-image concerns were once thought to chiefly apply to young women. But these issues are increasingly being recognized among men — as well as transgender and nonbinary people who face the additional hurdle of their sex and gender not aligning. The combined forces of social media and the pandemic have hastened the spread.

Societal and other pressures

to conform to a certain

body type have long

been shown to

trigger disordered

eating, obsessive

exercising, and

mental health

conditions, such

as anxiety and

depression.

Until recently,

however, few

studies have

focused on how

men respond to

these pressures. The

picture this research

presents is not a pretty one.

• Surveying 2,000 British men between the ages of 16 and 40 in the first year of the pandemic, the suicide-prevention organization Campaign Against Living Miserably found that nearly half of respondents had struggled with body-image issues, and almost six in 10 blamed the isolation caused by COVID-19. Only one in four reported feeling happy with their appearance.

• The results of a 2021 study suggest that cultural assumptions

about masculine behavior — and appearance — drove many participants during times of stress to report dissatisfaction with their bodies.

• A 2020 meta-analysis of 23 studies concluded that “body dissatisfaction appears to be related to anxiety and depression in otherwise healthy adult males.”

• Reviewing 1,000 Instagram posts to determine how the body types

shown affected the response of

the men viewing them, a

team led by Thomas

Gültzow, PhD,

found that a clear

majority of posts

depicted lean or

muscular body

types, and they

elicited many

more likes and

comments than

those showing

less-athletic men.

“The stigma

around male body-

image issues often

prevents young men from

speaking honestly about their

experiences and seeking treatment

for related mental health challenges,”

notes the Newport Institute, a

nationwide network of mental health

treatment facilities. “Hopefully, the

male body-positivity movement

will begin to grow in momentum as

awareness around the prevalence and

severity of male body-image issues

increases.” (For more on body-image

issues, see “Embracing Body Neutral-

ity,” page 56.)

— CRAIG COX

“
Hopefully, the male
body-positivity movement
will begin to grow in
momentum as awareness
around the prevalence
and severity of male
body-image issues
increases.”



A Serious Rise in Alcohol- Related Deaths

Between 2015 and 2019, one in eight Americans ages 20 to 64 died due to injuries or illness caused by excessive alcohol use — an increase of approximately 25 percent over a similar period nine years earlier. This included one in five deaths among adults ages 20 to 49, according to a new Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report published in *JAMA*.

“This is really affecting adults in the prime of their life,” study leader Marissa Esser tells the *New York Times*.

Numerous reports suggest that U.S. adults drank more to cope with the stress of the pandemic, and a 2022 *JAMA* research letter backs this up: Alcohol-related deaths rose during the first year of the pandemic, accounting for 3 percent of all deaths in 2020, up from 2.8 percent in 2019 — a 25 percent increase in one year.

Excessive alcohol use is associated with heart and liver disease and cancer, as well as with motor-vehicle crashes and incidences of violence, the CDC states.

18.2%

Increase in alcohol-related deaths among adults 65 and older from 2019 to 2020, according to a 2022 CDC National Center for Health Statistics report.

3

Rank of alcohol use among the leading preventable causes of premature death, according to the National Institutes of Health. The top two are tobacco use and poor diet/physical activity.

— MD



Building a Better Brain via Exercise

We all know that certain types of exercise affect certain parts of the body, but what if we could design workouts to target specific parts of the brain?

That's the question Jeremy Manning, PhD, and his team of Dartmouth College researchers set out to answer when they collected a year's worth of activity data on 113 Fitbit users and correlated it with the participants' performance on a variety of memory tests.

"Mental health and memory are central to nearly everything we do in our everyday lives," says Manning, an assistant professor of psychological and brain sciences. "Our study is trying to build a foundation for understanding how different intensities of physical exercise affect different aspects of mental and cognitive health."

Manning and his colleagues expected to find a clear and positive association between physical activity and functional memory — as well as mental health. But the results, published in *Scientific Reports*, suggest a more nuanced connection.

Participants who favored low-intensity workouts performed better on some memory tests, for example, while high-intensity exercisers scored higher on others. Low-intensity exercisers reported low rates of anxiety and depression, while their more athletic counterparts tended to have higher levels of stress.

Overall, participants who were more active than average performed better on memory tests than less-active study participants, but the type of memory (episodic, associative, and spatial) in which they excelled depended on the type of exercise they performed.

"When it comes to physical activity, memory, and mental health, there's a really complicated dynamic at play that cannot be summarized in single sentences like 'walking improves your memory' or 'stress hurts your memory,'" Manning explains. "Instead, specific forms of physical activity and specific aspects of mental health seem to affect each aspect of memory differently."

— CC

Poor Air Quality: Bad for Physical and Mental Health

People inhaling higher amounts of air pollution are more apt to suffer from multiple long-term health conditions, according to a 2022 King's College London study.

The research, involving 364,144 participants, is just the latest in decades of studies showing that air pollutants such as ozone and particulate matter increase the prevalence — and severity — of lung and heart disease as well as other health problems. "Outdoor air pollution is the leading environmental cause of premature mortality globally, contributing to between 4 and 9 million deaths annually," the authors report in *Frontiers in Public Health*.

Past research suggests that some people are more susceptible than others to air pollutants. "These groups include children, pregnant women, older adults, and individuals with preexisting heart and lung disease," notes the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "People in low socioeconomic neighborhoods and communities may be more vulnerable to air pollution because of many factors. Proximity to industrial sources of air pollution, underlying health problems, poor nutrition, stress, and other factors can contribute to increased health impacts in these communities."

Another study, published last year in *Environmental Science & Technology*

Letters, found that neighborhoods that were redlined in the 1930s tend to have higher levels of air pollution even now. Redlining was a discriminatory Depression-era appraisal practice employed by the U.S. government to spotlight risky mortgages within Black and immigrant neighborhoods.

"In the United States, communities of color are exposed to higher levels of air pollution at every income level," the study authors write.

Breathing polluted air threatens our health in multiple ways, including via asthma attacks and other breathing problems, cardiovascular disease, lung cancer, low infant birth weight, childhood developmental damage, and susceptibility to lung infections.

In addition, bad air may affect our mental health. "Breathing in polluted air changes the brain," writes Clara Zundel, a researcher in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Neurosciences at Detroit's Wayne State University School of Medicine. People who breathe polluted air are more likely to develop anxiety and depression disorders, she notes in a 2022 systematic review in *NeuroToxicology*.

"Studies examining brain effects found significant physical and functional changes within the emotion-regulation brain regions in those exposed to increased levels of air pollution."

— MD

“Outdoor air pollution is the leading environmental cause of premature mortality globally, contributing to between 4 and 9 million deaths annually.”



The Power of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction for Addressing Anxiety



Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) programs have long been shown to be a promising treatment approach for a host of physical, psychological, and emotional conditions, but recent research from Georgetown University aimed to better quantify its ability to treat anxiety disorders. It's the first clinical trial comparing MBSR with a first-line pharmacological treatment for anxiety, and results indicated it performed as well as the drug escitalopram.

Renowned researcher and meditation teacher Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, introduced MBSR more than 40 years ago as a therapeutic intervention at UMass Memorial Medical Center. Since then, hundreds of studies have demonstrated the value of this meditation-based protocol in treating a range of health issues.

“When I started MBSR in 1979, in the hospital, my goal was to teach medical patients who were falling through the cracks of the healthcare system how to do something for themselves as a complement to whatever medical treatments they were getting,” says Kabat-Zinn.

But while MBSR today is widely accepted and available at hospitals and other settings around the world, this eight-week program remains out of reach for many people in part because the cost — typically \$300 to \$650 — is often not covered by insurance.

We spoke with lead researcher Elizabeth Hoge, MD, associate professor and director of the Anxiety Disorders Research Program at Georgetown, about what this latest study adds to the field of MBSR research.

40 Million
Number of American adults affected by anxiety disorders, which have become the most common mental disorders in the United States, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America.

Experience Life | MBSR has long been studied for anxiety and other mental health conditions. What's different about your research?



Elizabeth Hoge |

Earlier studies typically compared against a “waitlist” control, which causes an expectancy bias: Anybody who's in the active arm of a trial is going to be biased

to say they feel better compared with those who had no treatment. So, the first step was to hold all the variables constant except the meditation itself. We did that in a 2013 study that found that MBSR decreased anxiety more than stress-management education.

The next step was to compare MBSR to current medical treatment. In showing this is as good as a gold-standard treatment, we hope insurance companies may pay attention and reimburse for MBSR.

EL | Can MBSR replace other treatments for anxiety?

EH | This study was an attempt to find where this treatment fits in the toolbox of other treatments we use in psychiatry. If patients want to try medication, fine; the drugs work great. Psychotherapy also works.

But MBSR is really an education, so it doesn't have to be delivered by a clinician or a psychologist or a therapist. We'd like to find out what types

of patients do well with meditation versus drugs because we certainly had people who were in either arm of the study who would have preferred the other arm.

EL | Can people DIY their own MBSR with a meditation app?

EH | I think that the best way to learn to meditate is with an in-person class. There are several reasons that having a live, in-person experience is important. Sometimes you have experiences that are unusual, or things come up during meditation that you don't know what to do with, or you think you're not doing it right and you give up. If you have an in-person MBSR class with a teacher, you can ask the teacher, “How did this happen? What does it mean? How do I deal with this problem?” If you want to use apps as booster sessions, great. But I wouldn't start there. 🌱

— JILL PATTON, FMCHC



LEADING WITH HEART

Mechelle Lewis Freeman stepped into her power to become an Olympic athlete. Now she's intent on helping others find their strength as well.



BY **JILL PATTON, FMCHC** ● PHOTOS BY **KWAKU ALSTON**

When an injury side-tracked her running career at the University of South Carolina, Mechelle Lewis Freeman wasted no time launching her plan B. She set her sights on a master's degree in marketing and communications and imagined herself settled in a corner office of a New York City advertising agency.

Two weeks into an unpaid practicum, however, her plan B threatened to unravel. She'd moved to the city for the internship and was planning her wedding when the engagement was suddenly called off.

Rather than leave New York brokenhearted and empty-handed, Freeman found a way to make her plan work. She moved in with a coworker, completed the internship, graduated, and was offered a position with the firm. All in three months. None of it was easy.

"It was a time of pure isolation," she recalls, noting that the lessons she'd learned from her parents — move from a foundation of faith, get clear on her values, hold herself accountable to her vision — guided her through the period. "That was a time of understanding myself and coming into my power," she adds.

As her sense of self became clearer, plan A reappeared.

Freeman's college track-and-field teammates had continued to compete and were qualifying for world championship teams; some had made the 2004 Olympic team. At that point, it had been four years since she'd run competitively. But she'd been considering it again, so she started training. Soon she saw her athletic dreams hadn't died after all.

"I realized if I wanted to make the Olympic team, I had to 100 percent commit to that vision," she says. So, Freeman chose to chase her dream.

In 2007, she won gold at the world championships in Osaka, Japan, and

took home two silver medals from the Pan American Games — momentum that helped her secure a spot on the women's track-and-field team for the 2008 Olympics.

After retiring from competition in 2010 and returning briefly to the advertising world, Freeman refocused her career — now to support new generations of athletes. She founded TrackGirlz, a national nonprofit that provides access to track and field to middle- and high-school girls. She is head women's relay coach for USA Track and Field. She leads trainings for Ultra Fit, Life Time's performance-focused group training program, teaching fellow coaches the science of moving optimally, so they, in turn, can coach others. And in her work with the Life Time Foundation, she's helped pilot the launch of movement programs for schools.

For Freeman, this all adds up to helping as many people as possible discover their own power and potential.

Q & A



WITH MECHELLE LEWIS FREEMAN

📍 mechellelewisfreeman

EXPERIENCE LIFE | After the 2008 Olympics, you shifted your focus from your own dreams to those of others. What inspires you to lead women and create opportunities for girls through track and field?

MECHELLE LEWIS FREEMAN |

When I was growing up, my mom always did everything she could to make sure my sister and I had access to opportunities. So, when USA Track and Field called me about coaching after I retired, for me it was, *OK, what can I do to be an example now?* My focus shifted from myself to what I'm creating for others, what I'm leaving behind.

With TrackGirlz, which I founded the same year I started coaching, I started to think about how middle- and high-school years are so formative for girls and how track and field helped me with my development during this time period. Then I learned more about track and field's influence — that it's the highest-participatory sport for middle- and high-school girls, and how it makes such a significant physical, mental, and social positive impact on girls' lives. And I realized there was a need for more support.

I started with workshops where I brought my network — Olympians and world champions — to these communities, giving girls direct access to the highest-level athletes. Now we have grants that give direct resources to girls, and we have a curriculum for third parties to implement the empowerment lessons we've been teaching.

EL | What's the connection for you between the literal movement of fitness and movement toward goals — and through life's challenges?

MLF | I do think of physical movement as a metaphor. We were born to move. I want to be able to move as best as I

can, feel the best as I can. Movement is that freedom to be an example for my children and other athletes.

It's also important for us to be moving or progressing toward something mentally, physically, and spiritually. I believe we should be constantly moving toward being the best humans we can be.

And real things happen. My dad has stage IV cancer and they've given him months to live. My twin sister recently had a stroke; she has aphasia and can't move her right arm or speak or write as fluently right now. I lost a best friend, who I lived with in New York, to cancer.

This last six months for me have been what I call a Job phase: In the Bible, Job had everything and lost everything — his kids, his fortune, his health. We're going to face death. We're going to face loss. But at the end of the day, your faith can get you through that, too.

That's when you find out if you can still hold yourself accountable to who you are. That's where your threshold increases, and you grow. That's when you'll be exposed to those magical spaces that a lot of people won't be able to touch. I hope that I can touch those highest levels of faith and perseverance and squeeze out all that I can experience in the days on this earth that I have.

EL | Do you ever take a break?

MLF | [Laughs] I mean, I look at my day and it's constant movement with everything that needs to happen! But rest and recovery are important, whether physically — you need your body to have that recovery to be able to perform your best — or mentally.

I find my mental rest in gratitude. A lot of times I'll find myself frustrated because I want to achieve something and I'm not there yet, or I feel like I am falling short. But then I stop and realize

I'm also so grateful — for my husband, David, for my children, Bayne and Harley. I'm grateful for my sister, my parents, and my support system. I'm grateful for my role to lead these women on a track.

There are so many things that can move you into the hustle and bustle of life — that tug of just trying to do it all and wanting it all. But I find the rest and recovery is in being grateful for what's in front of you as well.

EL | What life lessons do you share with those you lead that go beyond athletics?

MLF | I teach what I learned in New York when I didn't know how I was going to make it all work, but I knew I had to be true to myself. I call it that bold stage of "doing it afraid" because you're going to be scared as hell, but you've still got to do it, whatever it is, step by step. You're not going to see the end of the staircase, but you take the next step, and then the next step shows up and you take that step. That's the whole faith part.

Then the commitment and discipline are your everyday choices. What are you listening to every day? What are you reading every day? Who are you talking to every day? Everything you take in is going to take up space. It is so important to feed what you want to grow and starve habits that don't align with where you're going. You're either moving forward or you're moving backward. But you are always moving. 🔄

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

GO BEHIND THE SCENES

Get a peek at the cover-photo shoot with Mechelle Lewis Freeman at ELmag.com/btswithmechelle.



Nutrition powers results.

The secret to seeing results is making smart food choices. Our LifeCafe executive chef works closely with trainers and dietitians to create meals and snacks rich with the perfect nutrients for your body.

Save time by ordering on the app.



Hydrate Your Body

Take the challenge to drink more water throughout the day to support your overall health and wellness.

BY **EXPERIENCE LIFE STAFF**



WHY

Hydration is critical to the smooth functioning of all the body's cells and systems; it supports cognitive health, athletic performance, exercise recovery, and overall vitality.

HOW

Start your day with a tall glass of H₂O. Sip throughout the day. Set a timer for reminders. Use a filter and infuse your water with fruit and herbs, like lemon and mint, for a tastier drink.

TAKE ACTION

Thirsty for more? Learn about timing, recommended amounts, and hydration helpers at [ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit](https://www.ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit).

NOBULL

NOBULLPROJECT.COM/LIFETIME



Arrest and Recovery

How one man has learned to find contentment through recovery and service to others.

BY MATTHEW HURLEY

The morning I was arrested in 2010, I was lying in bed with my dog, Ollie, whom I'd just adopted from a rescue shelter. I was 26 years old, an addict living in Hollywood, when federal marshals knocked at my door.

At the time, I was strung out, a heroin junkie who'd been struggling to get clean for four years. But addiction presented a challenge that my willpower alone could not overcome.

Meanwhile, my history of dealing had caught up with me — my arrest was related to drugs I'd sold years before in Maine.

It was later the morning of my arrest, as I was sitting handcuffed inside of an unmarked cruiser headed to a federal holding facility, that I felt my past collide with my (then-unknown) future. I had two distinct thoughts:

My life is over.

Thank God, at least that life is over.

If I could go back and talk to my 26-year-old self that day, I'd say, *It's all going to be OK.* Even though I may not have listened or believed it then, I would try to convince myself that this was the best thing that could happen to me. It was the wake-up call I needed.

Escape

I grew up in Belfast, Maine, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, when aggressive promotion and increased prescribing of OxyContin triggered the opioid epidemic. Maine was one of the first places where the crisis took root, and drugs were commonplace when I was in high school.

Though I grew up in a loving home, generations of family trauma preceded



Matthew Hurley completed the Ironman 70.3 in Lima, Peru, in April 2019.

me. Both of my parents' families struggled with alcoholism and domestic dysfunction. This may have contributed to my own susceptibility to addiction.

Ever since I was a young adult, I've been drawn to experiences that allow me to escape the background noise in my head. As a child, you're fully present and the world is magical — filled with possibility. Every experience is new and exciting; you can't help but be fully immersed in the moment.

As you grow up, you start constructing your "self" and understanding your place in the world. You become aware of how the world perceives you: Other people, pressures, and responsibilities influence who you are and who you want to be. You start to experience fear and anxiety.

From early on, I sought spiritual outlets that helped me check out from all of that. I found that sports — particularly running and swimming — allowed me to be present in my body and experience each moment without

fear and anxiety. Movement was comfort, and I became an accomplished high school athlete.

When I got older, I found that drugs also provided an escape, only they acted more quickly — no work required. Over time, I took advantage of this easy escape more often. I began selling drugs because it allowed me to continue using drugs.

My substance use during high school began to interfere with my athletic performance. I gave up running because it was hard to be a good miler when I was smoking every day. That was the first thing I loved that I sacrificed to addiction.

Sobering Experiences

As I progressed to harder drugs during my years at Wheaton College in Massachusetts, I continued to sell drugs to support my habit. For a while, I was a functioning addict; I kept up with my daily life even while I was using. I even continued to swim.

Yet my addiction progressed, and I ultimately failed my junior year for academic reasons, which is when things became dark. This was the lowest point of my journey. Previously, I'd been able to balance sports, school, and my addiction, but failing junior year was when I recognized that I was no longer in control of my life.

I didn't want to lose myself ever again. I'd become better at recognizing when I needed to back off.



I made my first attempt at sobriety and managed to return to school. I stopped selling drugs, got a job, and finished college. After graduating, I moved to California, where I cycled in and out of addiction. Although I tried many times to get sober, I found that I was powerless to make any sustainable changes in my life.

That is, until I was arrested and sentenced to three years in prison for conspiracy to distribute cocaine. Before my trial, I realized that it was now or never: The time had come for me to get sober, and I was finally ready.

In prison, movement became a critical component of my recovery. Exercise had always been an activity I could turn to when I needed solace and confidence. This was especially crucial during the early days of my sobriety — I needed something I could count on, a reason to believe in myself again.

Also, my experience with endurance sports as a young athlete had taught me the value of structure, routine, consistency, and hard work. In prison, I learned I could apply these principles to other areas of my life, including my recovery.

Sober inmates were another great resource. They helped me learn how to ask for and seek out help. I still use this type of support system today.

Once I started competing, I won a handful of Ironman 70.3s and was eventually ranked No. 1 in my age group in the United States and among the top 10 in the world. It felt great to be recognized, but I understood that internal joy doesn't come from winning a race — that was all external. So, I was careful to avoid defining myself by my achievements.



Left: Matthew's dog, Ollie, at Great Sand Dunes National Park in Colorado in 2019. Right: Matthew (left) in the summer of 2022 with a pro athlete he coaches.

From Training to Coaching

I was released from prison on January 28, 2014, and took a 62-hour bus ride to Portland, Maine, where I began to rebuild my life. At that point, I didn't know what I wanted to do or what direction my life would take. I just knew I needed to do something to keep myself busy.

Because movement and exercise had become so important to me and my recovery, participating in endurance events seemed like a good place to start. The mystique and extreme nature of Ironman contests pulled me toward triathlon training.

I showed up day after day for training; I found comfort in consistency and routine. I researched what the world's best athletes were doing and incorporated some of their ideas into my training.

Simultaneously, however, I was careful not to give 100 percent during any session — I didn't want to lose myself ever again. I'd become better at recognizing when I needed to back off.

In 2016, a job opportunity came up at a local fitness facility. It involved teaching cycling classes for triathletes in an interactive studio. I gave it a shot and realized I really enjoyed sharing my knowledge as part of a community of like-minded individuals. But it wasn't until I met Matt Dixon of Purple Patch Fitness later that year that I had a true introduction to coaching.

Through Purple Patch, I started working with a wide range of athletes. Eventually, I became the head of programming and spent my days managing a team of coaches, writing programming for numerous products, and coaching individual athletes.

This type of work gave me a sense of purpose and aligned with what I was doing in recovery. After being so focused on myself and my addiction, it felt good supporting others as a coach in addition to participating in my local recovery community. I began to see how small actions in my



Matthew and his son in January 2023.

life contributed to others' successes, which helped build my sense of self-worth. Slowly, I started to redeem the self-esteem I had sold during my years of addiction.

Stepping Away

I began to reconsider my own role as a competitor in 2019. I still loved triathlons, but I realized I had unresolved issues with my self-worth and self-esteem, and I began to wonder whether I was using triathlons as another form of escape. I also noticed other similar patterns between my drive in sports and my addiction.

I asked myself how much of my motivation to compete stemmed from a desire to serve my ego and seek escape. And when I couldn't answer that question, it really struck me. I could lose myself to endurance sports just as I'd lost myself to drugs.

Further, my priorities had shifted: I was now married, with a child on the way. I needed to conserve my time and energy for other areas of my life.

Endurance sports can be a healthy spiritual pursuit; I know they once were for me. Initially, training and competing helped me rediscover my needs, such as structure, consistency, and routine. They were invaluable tools supporting my journey of self-discovery and recovery. Maybe someday they will be again.

But I needed to step away from competitions. I needed to replace my ego with humility and think less about myself.

Knowing movement and exercise will always be important to me, I took the leap to focus on a new pursuit: After the 2019 World Championships, I sold all my equipment, left Purple Patch, and started my own coaching company.

Cultivating Presence and Peace

If endurance sports have taught me anything, it's that it's more about the journey — the pursuit of something hard and meaningful and the resulting lessons — than the outcome. For so long, I tried to numb my experience of this journey with drugs and endurance sports, but escape is no longer my goal. These days, it's all about cultivating presence, contentment, and peace with my son, who was born in July 2020; with my relationships; with my family.

Today, I'm divorced, but my dog, Ollie (who stayed with my parents for the three years I was gone), still sleeps with me, and I take him for walks around my apartment complex in Louisville, Colo. The rest of the day, I'm coaching, spending time with my son, working out, attending recovery meetings, and reading.

Sometimes I reflect on how far I've come. It's like I've lived two lives, the second of which started on the morning federal marshals arrived at my door. Though I couldn't have known it then, that experience was the first step toward the life I'm living now — a life I want to live to the fullest. 🌟

Matthew's Top 3 Success Strategies

1

CREATE A ROUTINE. "Great is the enemy of good. Perfection is a myth and consistency wins over time — every time," Matthew says. "One of my favorite quotes is 'Only the disciplined are free.' Structure provides that freedom."

2

ENVISION YOUR "BUCKETS" OF LIFE. For Matthew, these buckets are fitness, nutrition, spirituality, fun, family, and service.

3

EMBRACE ADVERSITY. "How we deal with or face challenges is what defines our struggle as meaningful and having purpose or value," Matthew says.

TELL US YOUR STORY!

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





Real Fitness

The ability to move your joints through a full range of motion without pain is key to aging well.

Page
32

Training for mobility doesn't need to be complicated or high in intensity. Find out how to improve or maintain yours — no matter your age.

10
min



SHORT STACK



Having trouble getting motivated to move? Tackle a 10-minute burst of activity — then see if you're up for more.

BY **NICOLE RADZISZEWSKI**



Between finding the time and mustering the motivation, sometimes the hardest part of working out is getting started. But not every strength session has to be an hourlong display of discipline.

“It’s actually surprising how much you can accomplish without a lot of time or a lot of exercises when the work is done at a challenging level,” says Danny King, a master trainer at Life Time.

Research shows that you don’t need to exercise for 60 minutes — the length of time many people associate with a workout that “counts” — to reap many of the benefits of strength training. Brief bursts of activity can contribute to stronger muscles and bones, improved aerobic capacity, a

more resilient immune system, and a better mood.

So, how short can you go?

“If you take three moves and give it hell for two sets, you’ll get a lot accomplished in 10 minutes,” King says.

By the time those 10 minutes are up, though, you might find that you want more.

That’s where fitness stacking comes in: Start with 10 minutes, then assess how you feel. If you’re done, that’s great! You can go on with your day knowing you did something positive for your body and mind. If you’re up for more, stack another 10 minutes of work on top.

Stacking in this fashion provides the opportunity to tackle an achievable goal and listen to

your body’s cues. Over time, it can help build consistent, sustainable exercise habits.

King created three mini workouts — one upper body, one lower body, and one core — each designed to take no more than 10 minutes. They can be done alone, stacked, or performed separately at different times on a given day. Doing one (or more) of these mini workouts might even inspire you to try another fitness activity, such as walking, cycling, or yoga.

They’re also great options for active recovery. If your legs are tired from a long run the day before, for instance, the upper-body or core routine might feel great.

Just remember to listen to your body — it might surprise you.

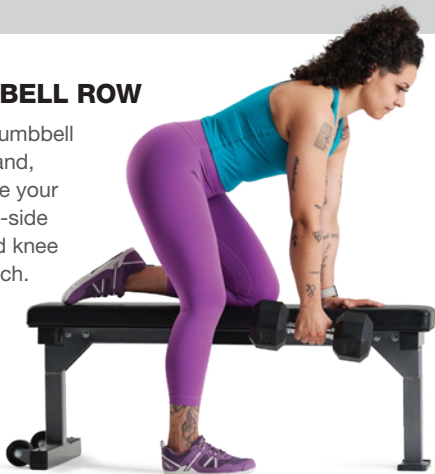
THE MINI WORKOUTS

For all three circuits, aim to complete at least two and as many as four rounds, resting as necessary between rounds. If you can easily complete 15 reps of a dumbbell exercise, King recommends increasing the weight.

Upper-Body CIRCUIT

DUMBBELL ROW

Hold a dumbbell in one hand, and place your opposite-side hand and knee on a bench.



Keeping your back flat, pull the dumbbell upward toward your hip.



Slowly lower the weight and repeat for 12 to 15 reps per arm.

DUMBBELL CHEST PRESS

Holding a dumbbell in each hand, lie back on a bench with your feet on the floor.



Press the weights straight up over your chest, fully extending your arms at the top of the movement.



Slowly lower the weights and repeat for 12 to 15 reps.

DUMBBELL PULLOVER

Sitting in front of a bench and holding a dumbbell in both hands, press your shoulders into the bench, then lift your hips while keeping your feet flat on the floor. Engage your core and maintain a neutral spine. Extend your arms toward the ceiling.



With a slight bend in the elbows and core engaged, lower the weight behind you.



Return to the starting position and repeat for 12 to 15 reps.

Lower-Body CIRCUIT



GOBLET SQUAT

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and hold a dumbbell in both hands at chest height.

Push your hips back and bend your knees to lower into a squat. Keep your chest lifted.

Return to standing and repeat for 12 to 15 reps.



LATERAL LUNGE

Hold a dumbbell at chest height (or hold one weight in each hand at your sides).

Step your left foot out to the side, keeping your right leg straight.

Bend your left knee and push your hips back.

Return to standing and repeat for 12 reps per side.



STABILITY-BALL HAMSTRING CURL

Lie on the floor and position your feet and calves on the top and center of a stability ball. Lift your hips off the floor.

Keeping your hips up, bend your knees and pull the ball toward you.

Straighten your legs and, keeping your hips up, repeat for eight to 15 reps.



Core CIRCUIT

DEAD BUG

Lie on the floor with knees bent. Raise your knees directly over your hips and extend your arms toward the ceiling.

Exhale to engage your core as you extend your opposite arm and leg.



Inhale as you return to the starting position. Alternate sides for up to one minute.



SIDE PLANK WITH HIP DIP

Press up into a side plank with your elbow directly under your shoulder and hips stacked. Extend both legs, or bend your knees for support.



Drop your bottom hip toward the floor, then lift to return to the starting position. Perform up to 20 reps per side.



STABILITY-BALL DIAGONAL CRUNCH

Start seated on a stability ball, then walk your feet forward and lean back.



Crunch up on an exhale, bringing your left shoulder toward your right hip. Return to the starting position. Repeat for up to 15 reps per side. 🔄

BUILD YOUR OWN WORKOUT STACK

If you're feeling great after finishing one of these 10-minute workouts, try stacking another one or two on top to create your own 20- or 30-minute routine. Life Time master trainer Danny King shares his best practices for building your best stack.

- If your goal is to complete two circuits, King suggests pairing upper body and core or lower body and core, with core second.
- If you know you're going to do all three circuits, he recommends starting with upper body, moving on to lower body, and finishing with core.
- If you have time for one mini workout before going for a run, he advises doing the core circuit. "Runners who do core exercises first actually find that they run better," he says. If you have time for two mini workouts, do upper body, then core, and then your run or other cardio activity.
- If you start with the lower-body circuit and discover you have a bit more gas in your tank, try extending your workout with yoga or stretching. (For a three-pose restorative yoga sequence, visit ELmag.com/recoveryyoga.)

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

GET THE SPECIFICS

For full exercise instructions, visit ELmag.com/workoutstack.

ME-TIME WE-TIME & EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

We have something for every age and every stage of growth. From classes to lessons, camps, clinics and more - fun is easy to find at Life Time.

Join the fun at
lifetime.life/kids-family-fun

**LIFE TIME
KIDS**



The Lateral Raise

Finesse your form to get the most out of this shoulder-isolation exercise and its many variations.



Maintain a tall, proud chest and look straight ahead.

Keep a soft bend in your elbows.

Play with your hand position to optimize your shoulder position. Try it with your palms facing down, your thumbs pointing straight up, and anywhere in between.

Avoid rocking, jumping, or swinging the weights up.

Start with light weights — 5 to 10 pounds — or even no weights at all until you have a firm grasp of the proper form.

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

Lateral raises are popular moves for building rounded and defined deltoids. They also offer lesser-known benefits that support shoulder health.

They can improve shoulder strength, mobility, range of motion, and stability, as well as help identify and correct muscle imbalances between your right and left sides.

Now, your routine doesn't need lateral raises: You can train upper-

body strength and mobility without ever doing one. (Find a well-rounded upper-body routine at ELmag.com/fitfocused.) But if you want to incorporate lateral raises into your regimen, be it for aesthetics or function, it's critical to focus on your form.

Common pitfalls include using too much weight, shortening your range of motion, bending your elbows too much, lifting your arms too high, scrunching up your shoulders, and

swinging the weights up. Often, these problems stem from a belief that lateral raises are supposed to be a big and impressive lift. They're not.

The lateral raise is best considered an accessory lift that isolates the shoulders and complements a broad, well-balanced strength-training routine. With ego out of the way, it becomes possible to focus on quality of movement and truly get the most out of this exercise.

INSTRUCTIONS

1

Stand with feet about hip width apart. Grasp a light dumbbell in each hand, with arms long and at your sides, palms facing your body.

2

Keep a slight bend in the elbows, then raise the dumbbells out to each side. Hold the rest of your body still as you lift.

3

Raise your arms until they're parallel to the floor, but no higher. Keep your shoulders down and back, your core engaged, and your neck relaxed.

4

Lower the dumbbells slowly to return to the starting position; repeat for the desired rep count.

MIX IT UP

For seven lateral-raise variations — plus bonus instructions for a front raise — visit ELmag.com/lateralraise.

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

PHOTOS: KELLY LOVERUD; STYLING: PAM BRAND; MODEL: ADAM ABDULKERIM

ENTER RUNNING BLISS



CLIFTON 9

The perfect balance of soft and light,
for the ultimate smooth ride

HOKA FLY
HUMAN
FLY™





Limber for Life

Mobility is a critical component of aging well. Experts explain how to maintain it for the long run.

BY LAUREN BEDOSKY

Like grip strength, balance, and aerobic capacity, mobility is a reliable indicator of longevity. The ability to move our joints through a full range of motion with control enables us to keep up with the everyday demands of living, and allows us to participate in the activities that bring us joy.

“If you have any hope of remaining independent, mobility is crucial,” says Michael E. Rogers, PhD, CSCS, director of the Center for Physical Activity and Aging at Wichita State University. “Once you start losing mobility, your [ability to live on your own decreases], and . . . the risk of falls increases dramatically.”

More than one in four older adults fall each year; it’s the leading cause of injury and injury-related death among seniors, says Rogers. And after a fall, they tend to limit their activity, which only leads to less mobility.

“When they do start to move around again, they’re at an even higher risk for a subsequent fall,” he adds.

Mobility not only helps us avoid debilitating falls and do the everyday tasks that keep us

independent, but it enables us to stay engaged with people as well, warding off social isolation and the associated cognitive decline.

It also makes it possible to sustain an exercise regimen and reap its many health benefits for the long haul. These perks include improved mood, greater stamina and strength, and a reduced risk of complications from chronic disease.

Together, these benefits make mobility a must for healthy aging.

“Not only will you live longer, but you’ll have a better quality of life,” says Juan Najarro, MD, who practices geriatric medicine at California’s Loma Linda University Medical Center.

Maintaining Mobility With Age

Mobility training doesn’t need to be complicated or intense. One of the best exercises is a fundamental one: walking.



TEST YOUR MOBILITY

The ability to get up off the floor with minimal support requires flexibility, balance, motor coordination, and muscle power — and it's a marker of longevity. To help you determine how well you can move, Juan Najarro, MD, who practices geriatric medicine, offers this challenge: Sit down on the ground and stand up without using your hands for support.

If you can sit and stand hands-free, aim to do it as often as possible to retain this high-value skill. Didn't pass? For a workout designed specifically to build sit-stand strength and mobility, visit ELmag.com/getupstandup.

Yoga (including chair yoga), Pilates, tai chi, and other low-impact practices are great activities for maintaining mobility, especially if locomotion through walking or cycling is not an option. Tai chi, in particular, has been shown to improve balance, and because it is a gentle exercise, many people can safely practice it for 20 minutes every day.

Resistance training is also vital for building strength across a full range of motion in an aging body. “Low muscle strength,

particularly in the lower body, is one of the highest risk factors for mobility limitations,” Rogers says.

The National Institute on Aging recommends working your major muscle groups — chest, back, arms, abdominals, legs, and shoulders — at least two days per week. Use resistance bands, dumbbells, or just your body weight. (Learn more about the many ways exercise benefits aging bodies — plus, get guidelines for training strength, cardio, and balance — at ELmag.com/fitforlife.)

And don't underestimate the importance of continuing daily activities like climbing the stairs, gardening, and doing household chores. For many of us, mobility becomes a problem when we stop moving, whether due to a sedentary lifestyle, illness, injury, or other causes. The more we consistently move, the more we'll be able to keep moving. 🧘

LAUREN BEDOSKY is a health and fitness writer.

STAY MOBILE

Learn more about the importance of mobility at any age — and find exercises to improve mobility in your hips, ankles, shoulders, and elsewhere — at ELmag.com/mobility.

Maintaining that movement pattern alone can do wonders for us as we grow older. “Two to three days of walking per week is usually well-tolerated,” Najarro says.

However, that volume of walking — or walking at all — may be beyond the capabilities of many older adults. Walking in a swimming pool, where the water reduces impact and it's possible to assist balance by holding on to a wall, is one alternative. Indoor cycling is another low-impact way to work through a full range of motion for the lower body.





NOBULL

NOBULLPROJECT.COM/LIFETIME





“What Are Some of the Latest Rules Around Health Club Etiquette?”

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

In recent years, many organizations have engaged in a greater social reckoning regarding race, gender, body size, trauma, and other qualities or experiences that can affect one's sense of belonging. Life Time is no exception: In 2020, the company created the Inclusion Council to identify opportunities to empower marginalized communities while ensuring its health clubs would be a place for everybody and every body.

Commitments like these may be part of the reason you're sensing a change in unspoken social rules. Making space for everyone requires awareness and intentionality. It means removing our blinders and paying attention to how we impact an environment — and how it impacts us.

That can be hard in health clubs and gyms, which have historically been spaces to focus on oneself — one's own needs, health, and fitness journey. I've heard from some people that this shift from a singular focus to community awareness is too much for them: They feel that they not only have to monitor their own workouts but also manage how other people feel.

In other words, they think making space for others means losing space for themselves. It's an unfortunate — and, in my view, erroneous — perspective that is exacerbated by the idea of etiquette itself.

“Etiquette” refers to a set of rules intended to be followed in “polite society,” usually with the objective of uniting people around a shared moral code. These rules are, by definition, exclusionary. If you know and follow

the rules, you might be allowed among the elite. If you don't, you're not. The cost of inclusion in such a world is high because etiquette has historically taken only a narrow view of whose comfort should be considered.

The goal of social-justice movements and the new social rules you've likely noticed is not to oppress or exclude. It's to welcome everyone by more intentionally including those who have been excluded or marginalized.

So, I invite you to rethink how you pose your question. Rather than viewing my (or anyone's) advice as rules of etiquette, it might be more useful to consider how certain behaviors might improve the experience for everyone.

Health clubs and gyms are public-private spaces. Yes, I pay a fee to enter and use the equipment and amenities, but that payment does not mean I'm the only one there who matters. There is room for you and me and everyone else to coexist — and thrive! — if we're willing to respect each other.

With this perspective in mind, you might be interested in some of our past coverage of health-club best behaviors: [ELmag.com/healthclubcourtesy](https://www.elmag.com/healthclubcourtesy). I'd bet that most of the tips won't be a surprise. They truly boil down to one simple, timeless idea: Be cool.

Talking loudly on the phone, leaving sweat on a machine, and not putting away equipment — not cool. Bullying or belittling someone, intentionally calling them by their wrong name or pronouns, and making sexualized remarks — not cool. Offering unsolicited advice, making assumptions about people's goals, commenting on

their bodies or clothing, and recording them without permission — not cool.

Luckily, none of these harmful behaviors is required for improving your fitness, your sense of self, or your sense of community. I guarantee you can reach your goals without doing any of these uncool things.

What is cool? Wiping down an exercise machine or piece of equipment after using it to eliminate germs, and returning equipment where it belongs when you're done.

Also cool: respecting other people's space by leaving breathing room between bodies, and not talking to people who indicate they're not interested in conversation or advice. (Lack of eye contact and headphones are two clues someone doesn't want to be interrupted.)

Saying hello, goodbye, and thank you to the people who work at your club? Cool. Just to name a few.

For me, being cool means being mindful of how I show up — both for myself and others. Yes, it takes a little bit of extra energy to broaden my awareness beyond what I'm doing and what I'm gaining from my routine. But if working out has taught me anything, it's that any new skill, practiced intentionally and consistently, can become second nature.



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



HOME CHEF

Clean slates & full, balanced plates

Get Home Chef's fresh, pre-portioned ingredients delivered so you can meet your goals the easy way. With Fresh Start meals that fit your lifestyle, you get perfectly balanced recipes that help you with the heavy lifting.

\$140 OFF

HOME CHEF MEALS



SCAN FOR OFFER, OR VISIT
[HOMECHEF.COM/LIFETIME](https://homechef.com/lifetime)

\$30 off your first four boxes plus \$20 off your fifth box for a total of \$140 off Home Chef. New customers only. Once redeemed, full balance of offer expires 10 weeks after you sign up. No carry over permitted. May not be combined with other offers. May not be used for gift cards. Not redeemable for cash. Not eligible in all states. Visit homechef.com/terms for additional details. Void where prohibited.



Real Food



There's nothing quite so cooling or satisfying on a hot summer day as a frozen treat on a stick.

Page
46

Our eight homemade ice pops are fun, nutritious, and refreshing. Get the recipe for these Rainbow Pops at ELmag.com/icepops.

Feed Your Libido

Interest in sex may wane for many reasons, but nutrition and herbs can help sustain it.

BY MO PERRY

Libido can be mysterious. It's a subtle (or sometimes not-so-subtle) force, one that waxes and wanes, often due to factors beyond our conscious control or understanding.

"Libido is a primal force — it's like an overflow of vital energy," says naturopathic physician and licensed acupuncturist Laurie Steelsmith, ND, MS, LAc, coauthor of *Great Sex, Naturally*.

This feeling of overflow is most evident in our teens and 20s, when we're likeliest to have a robust sexual energy and appetite. But this energy diminishes when we're sick, stressed, or depleted. And it can grow more elusive as we age.

"People think of libido just as sexual appetite, but it's a general representation of someone's physical, mental, and spiritual health," explains Ayurvedic practitioner Veena Haas-Blilie, founder of Saumya Ayurveda.

(Ayurveda is a system of medicine that originated in India more than 3,000 years ago.) "Libido is dynamic and affected by people's constitution and stage of life."



People think of libido just as sexual appetite, but it's a general representation of someone's physical, mental, and spiritual health."

Expecting and understanding that sexual energy fluctuates over time can help us release unreasonable expectations. It can also lead us to reflect on whether our libido is in a healthy, satisfying place for us: "Is sex

feeling depleting, or enjoyable and balancing?" Haas-Blilie asks. "Those are the things to look for."

Because libido reflects one's overall health and energy, diet and lifestyle offer plenty of opportunities to keep things tuned up — despite what we may have internalized about sexual appetite disappearing with age. "As people get older, they can maintain that vital force," Steelsmith says. "It's about giving the body what it needs to function optimally."

Food is a key piece of the puzzle, says integrative and functional nutritionist Cindi Lockhart, RDN, LD, IFNCP. "We want a big part of our diet to be colorful fruits and veggies for so many reasons — including to support libido."

And when you're looking for a little extra support to keep those fires burning, consider supplementing with these nutrients and herbs.

DHEA

HELPS ADDRESS:

HORMONE DYSREGULATION

Dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) is a hormone made by the adrenal gland. It helps produce other hormones, such as testosterone and estrogen, and it counteracts the stressful effects of cortisol. “DHEA is the antiaging hormone,” says Lockhart. Levels peak around age 25 and then start to naturally decline.

Prolonged stress can lead to “adrenal fatigue,” or dysfunction of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, which dysregulates the body’s production of cortisol.

“When women are super stressed, they’ll have high cortisol, and maybe an upregulation of DHEA to help them meet the demands of the stress,” Steelsmith explains. “But then they can develop exhausted adrenal glands, which will then result in low DHEA.” (For more on adrenal health, see ELmag.com/resetstress.)

What does this mean for libido? Testosterone stimulates the libido in both men and women. Because DHEA is a precursor to testosterone, low levels can lead to lower “T” and suppressed sexual appetite.

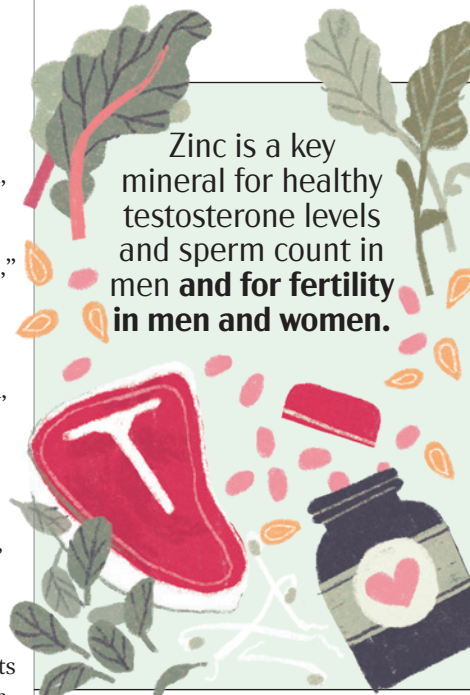
HOW TO SUPPLEMENT: Various tests can gauge DHEA levels in urine, saliva, and blood. Standard ranges vary by age and sex, so consult with a healthcare practitioner to interpret results. Low levels can be supplemented with pills, sublingual tablets or liquids, or topical preparations — though because of the potential for side effects and medication interactions, it’s important to take DHEA supplements only after a discussion with a knowledgeable healthcare provider.

Steelsmith advises against self-medicating with DHEA because it’s so potent: “I’ve seen women taking way too much DHEA as an over-the-counter pill and suffering side effects like acne.”

DHEA is also a precursor to estrogen, so taking too much can be a risk factor for hormone-related conditions and cancers, Lockhart adds. She

recommends working with a trained practitioner and testing levels every three months for anyone supplementing with DHEA.

For her low-libido patients, Steelsmith suggests DHEA creams, which can be applied directly to the vulva and vagina. “It helps with the integrity of that tissue when hormone levels are waning [in perimenopause



Zinc is a key mineral for healthy testosterone levels and sperm count in men and for fertility in men and women.

and menopause] and women are starting to experience more vaginal dryness, thinning, and atrophy,” she notes. There are also some topical DHEA creams for men that can be applied on thin-skinned parts of the body.

For oral doses, Lockhart recommends starting low — about 5 mg per day for women and 10 for men — and increasing as necessary. “This is a short-term product,” she adds. “You wouldn’t want to take DHEA [in the] long term.”

Zinc

HELPS ADDRESS:

LOW TESTOSTERONE

Zinc is a key mineral for healthy testosterone levels and sperm count

in men and for fertility in men and women. It helps prevent the conversion of testosterone to estrogen and support the prostate gland, which plays an important role in healthy, vital sexual function, in men.

Zinc is also critical for producing neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, dopamine, and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), Steelsmith notes. These chemicals aid in regulating our mood and stress response and help us feel relaxed and sensual. This may be one reason that oysters, the most potent food source of zinc, are considered an aphrodisiac.

A 2021 randomized controlled trial examined the effect of zinc on testosterone levels and sexual function in postmenopausal women with zinc serum levels below 62 mcg/dL. (According to the National Institutes of Health, a healthy range is 80 to 120 mcg/dL.) The researchers found that zinc supplementation in the intervention group significantly improved sexual desire, arousal, orgasm, satisfaction, vaginal moisture, pain during intercourse, and overall sexual function compared with the control group.

HOW TO SUPPLEMENT: “Zinc is an essential mineral, meaning we can’t produce it, so we need to consume it through food or supplementation,” Lockhart says.

Unlike DHEA, which more quickly affects testosterone production, zinc and other minerals take time to accumulate in the body.

Food sources include oysters, red meat, pumpkin seeds, leafy green vegetables, bee pollen, and wheatgrass. Zinc testing can reveal whether supplementation is needed to raise your levels. (One sign of possible deficiency: white spots on your fingernails.)

Steelsmith notes that zinc supplements are generally safe and beneficial for most people due to zinc’s role in immune support and liver detoxification. She recommends a daily oral supplement dose of 25 to 50 mg. To avoid nausea, take it with food.

Vitamin D

HELPS ADDRESS: LOW MOOD

This essential nutrient plays a wide range of salutary roles, from mood regulation to the development of white blood cells. “Vitamin D is necessary for the production of dopamine,” Steelsmith says. “It’s important to have robust levels of vitamin D for your bones, your mood, and your immune system.”

Low levels of vitamin D have been associated with sexual and erectile dysfunction, Lockhart notes, as well as with low testosterone. (An ideal range is 50–80 ng/mL.)

A 2018 study in Poland found that premenopausal women who had deficient (less than 20 ng/mL) or insufficient (between 20 and 30 ng/mL) levels of vitamin D experienced improved sexual desire and satisfaction after supplementing with 2,000 to 4,000 international units (IU) of vitamin D3 daily for six months.

HOW TO SUPPLEMENT: Get 15 to 30 minutes of sunshine at least three times a week to stabilize your vitamin D levels. If you live in a climate where you’re covered up during short winter days and can’t get enough sun, many experts suggest taking at least 1,000 to 2,000 IU of supplemental vitamin D3 daily.

“Ideally, take it with vitamin K2, which helps ensure vitamin D is deposited in the bones and not the arteries, and with some healthy fat, which helps with absorption,” Lockhart says.

In rare cases, too much vitamin D can cause toxicity, so be sure to track your current levels. “I encourage people to check their vitamin D levels every six months, in the spring and fall,” Lockhart says. (For more on vitamin D, see ELmag.com/vitaminD.)

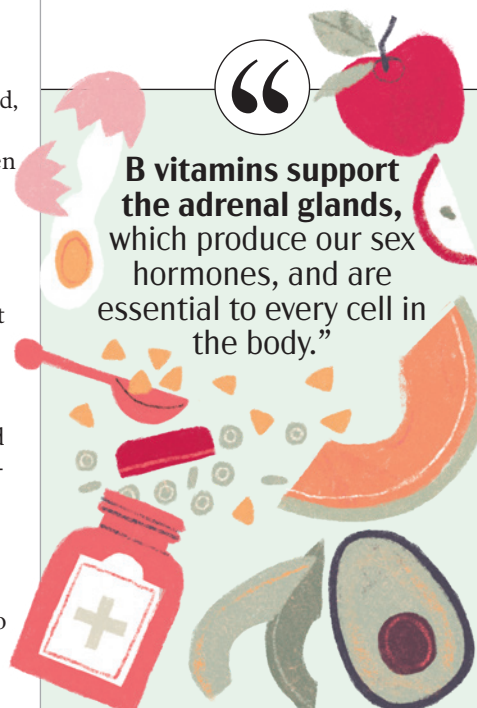
B Vitamins

HELP ADDRESS: LOW ENERGY AND BLOOD FLOW

The B vitamins help process carbohydrates, lipids, and proteins to generate energy. They include thiamine (B1), riboflavin (B2), niacin

(B3), pantothenic acid (B5), pyridoxine (B6), biotin (B7), folate (B9), and cobalamin (B12).

B3, B6, and B12 help with testosterone production. B1, B2, B3, and B5



B vitamins support the adrenal glands, which produce our sex hormones, and are essential to every cell in the body.”

help make adenosine triphosphate, which fuels our muscles. And B3 and B12 are notably beneficial for blood circulation, including to the reproductive organs.

“B vitamins support the adrenal glands, which produce our sex hormones, and are essential to every cell in the body,” Steelsmith says. Lockhart adds that B vitamins are quickly depleted when we’re under stress.

HOW TO SUPPLEMENT: Food sources of B3, which has been shown to support blood flow and even address erectile dysfunction, include avocados, buckwheat, artichokes, kale, spinach, and many nuts and seeds.

B6, which helps activate hormone production, can be found in sweet potatoes, apples, pears, and sesame and sunflower seeds, as well as in barley, spelt, wheat, and other sprouted grains. For B12,

look to animal products: meat, eggs, dairy, and fish. It’s a good idea for vegetarians and vegans to work with a practitioner to ensure they’re getting sufficient vitamin B12.

Oral supplements are available for individual B vitamins as well as for B complex. (For more on B vitamins, see ELmag.com/bvitamins.)

Flavonoids

HELP ADDRESS: POOR CIRCULATION

Fun fact: Viagra was originally developed to combat high blood pressure. It helps enhance dilation of the blood vessels by increasing both the levels and activity of nitric oxide, a compound in the body that relaxes blood vessels and improves blood flow. As the drug’s developers discovered, enhanced blood flow also has a potent effect on the genitals during sexual arousal, particularly in men — though it contributes to stimulation and sensitivity in women too.

Flavonoids are natural chemicals in berries, citrus fruits, tea, and dark chocolate that enhance and regulate nitric oxide. Some of the best-known include quercetin, resveratrol, and luteolin. These compounds help protect plants from pests, and “when we ingest these compounds, they can help protect us too,” Steelsmith says.

“Flavonoids help to stabilize blood-vessel walls and promote scaffolding of the cells,” she adds. There are lots of reasons to emphasize colorful veggies and fruits in your diet, but getting the blood pumping during amorous moments may be one of the most fun.

HOW TO SUPPLEMENT: The best sources of flavonoids include tea, cocoa, leafy vegetables, onions, apples, berries, cherries, soybeans, and citrus fruits.

Flavonoids such as resveratrol, quercetin, curcumin, EGCG (epigallocatechin gallate), and luteolin are also available as individual supplements and in bioflavonoid blends. A functional nutritionist can help design meal plans that contain a variety of flavonoids.

Herbs

Unlike individual nutrients, whole herbs contain multiple elements that work together to produce specific effects.

“Herbs are about nourishing and building. If someone is eating fast food and working 80 hours a week, an herb isn’t going to fix their stress. But herbs can offer laser-specific nutrition for the tissues,” says Haasl-Blilie.

They generally take time (think weeks to months) to exert their effects. Working with a licensed herbalist for personalized selection and dosing is highly recommended because herbs can be potent and interact with other medications.

These are some go-to herbs for libido support that Haasl-Blilie uses with her clients.



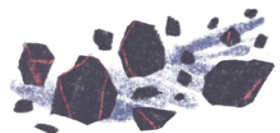
ASHWAGANDHA: “Ironically, this herb is a tonic and sedative rolled into one genius plant,” she notes. “Its energetic quality is heating. It bolsters an exhausted nervous system, which may manifest as hyper qualities, such as unstable emotions, agitation, and feeling stressed. It’s renowned for providing ‘the sexual stamina of a horse,’ and it increases overall strength, promotes restorative sleep, and increases sperm production.” (Learn more about ashwagandha at ELmag.com/adaptogens.)



SHATAVARI: “Called ‘the woman with a hundred husbands,’ this herb is a tonic for the female reproductive system and is anti-inflammatory. It is an aphrodisiac, improves strength, and enhances sexual appetite. It also promotes fertility, lactation, and sperm production.”



TRIBULUS (A.K.A. GOKSHURA): “This herb is nourishing to the reproductive system, enhances sexual appetite and potency, and improves strength,” Haasl-Blilie explains. A small randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study published in 2014 found that women with low sexual desire experienced significant improvement in desire, arousal, lubrication, satisfaction, and pain after consuming 7.5 mL of Tribulus extract twice a day for four weeks.



SHILAJIT: “This is an exudate from Himalayan rocks, also known as mineral pitch and vegetable asphalt. It has a high mineral content, making it an amazing supplement. It is balancing for all constitutions in moderation, and it enhances sexual potency.” 🌱

MO PERRY is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

APHRODISIAC FOODS

Some foods are renowned for their ability to kindle our passions. An aphrodisiac is “any food or drug that arouses the sexual instinct, induces desire, and increases pleasure and performance,” says integrative dietitian Mary Purdy, MS, RDN. These are some of her favorites.



CHOCOLATE: “The aphrodisiac qualities of chocolate can be attributed to the chemicals in it that stimulate the pleasure centers in our brains,” Purdy says.

It contains theobromine, which is a stimulant and vasodilator (increases blood flow); phenylethylamine, which stimulates the brain to release dopamine; and anandamide, which activates the brain’s pleasure receptors. No wonder we give boxes of chocolate for Valentine’s Day!



OYSTERS: Oysters are rich in vitamin B12, which increases energy. They’re the most abundant food source of zinc, which is a key player in testosterone and sperm production.

“Testosterone boosts libido in the fellas, but it also boosts libido in the ladies,” Purdy notes. In addition, there’s something evocative about slurping oysters from their shells — a tactile and sensual treat to share with your partner.



HONEY: Hippocrates, the Greek father of modern medicine, reportedly prescribed honey to increase sexual vigor.

“Honey is rich in B vitamins, which support reproductive health and encourage virility. It also has an antioxidant called chrysin that promotes testosterone production, and a trace mineral called boron that helps with estrogen production,” Purdy says.



HOT PEPPERS: “Some plants affect sexual arousal by increasing the blood flow to certain organs,” Purdy explains. Accordingly, the effects of eating foods like ginger, hot peppers, and warming spices can actually mimic our own stimulation response by getting the blood pumping. So, the next time you’re in the mood to spice things up in the bedroom, try adding a little heat in the kitchen.



Stay in the game

with OS1st® Socks with Purpose® & compression bracing.

*"These not only fit great, **they feel great**. The best part is that they **truly don't slide down** into your shoes. Finally I don't have to stop the game in order to pull my socks back up."*

- A. Roberts, happy pickleball sock customer



OS1st.com

The official sock of



LIFE TIME
PICKLEBALL



OS1st®

Pan-Fried Halloumi With Cucumber Salad

BY **MADDIE AUGUSTIN**

Makes four servings
 Prep time: 15 minutes
 Cook time: eight minutes

HALLOUMI



1 8.8-oz. package halloumi cheese



3 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, divided



½ tsp. sea salt, divided



⅛ tsp. red-pepper flakes

CUCUMBER SALAD



Juice from 1 lime



¼ medium red onion, diced



3 Persian cucumbers, peeled and diced



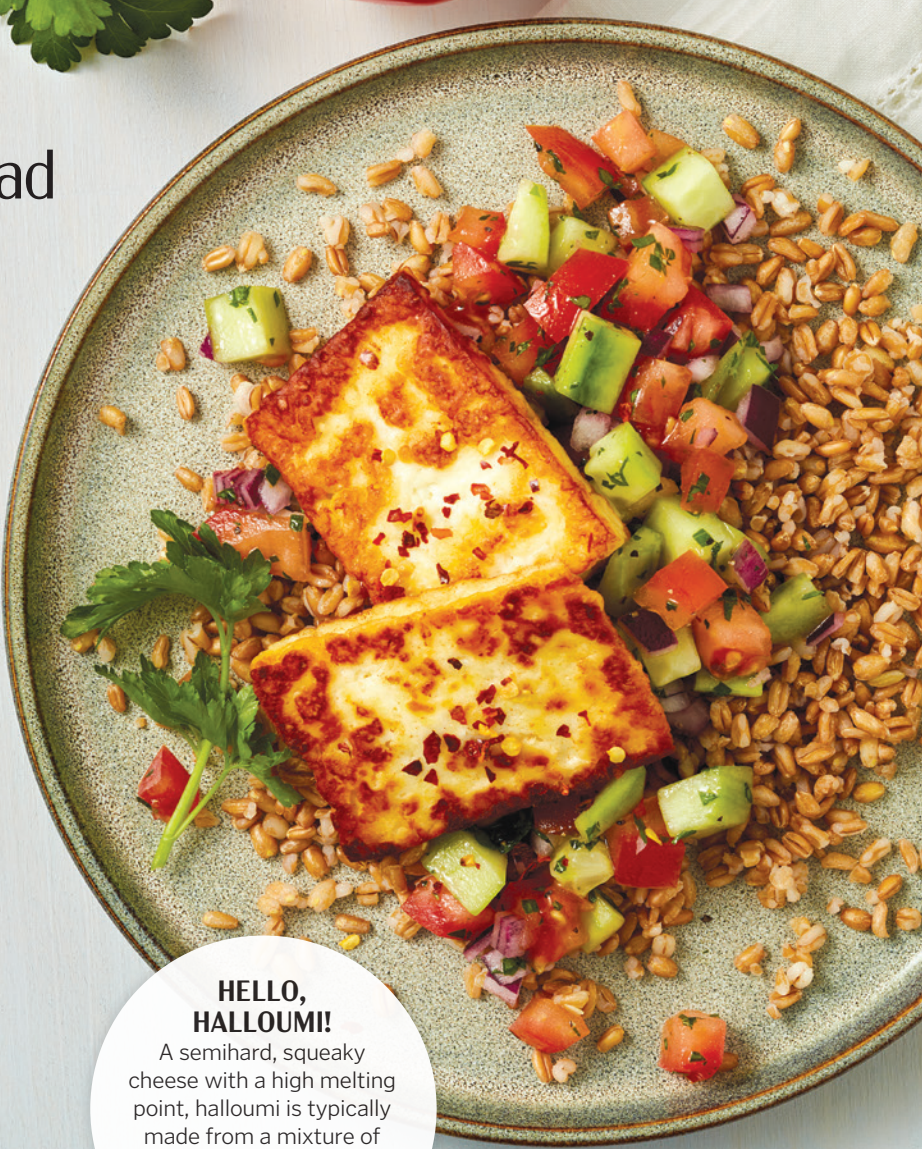
2 medium tomatoes, cored and diced



2 tbs. finely chopped flat-leaf parsley



⅛ tsp. freshly ground black pepper



HELLO, HALLOUMI!

A semihard, squeaky cheese with a high melting point, halloumi is typically made from a mixture of sheep's and goat's milk. It's a good source of calcium and protein.

Slice the halloumi into ½-inch-thick slabs and gently pat dry with a paper towel.

Preheat a skillet over medium-high heat and add 1 tablespoon of the oil. When the oil is hot, fry the halloumi slabs for three to four minutes on each side, or until golden and crispy. Remove from the skillet and season with ¼ teaspoon of the salt and the red-pepper flakes.

In a large bowl, combine the lime juice, red onion, cucumbers, tomatoes, parsley, remaining olive oil, remaining sea salt, and black pepper. Stir to combine.

Serve the halloumi over cooked grains, if desired, and the cucumber salad.

MADDIE AUGUSTIN is a Minneapolis-based recipe developer.



Eat Less, Live Longer?

You've probably seen headlines reporting the research that restricting calories can extend your lifespan. The reality might be a little more complicated.

BY HELEN MARTINEAU

Most of us eat more than we need. Americans had an average supply of more than 3,800 calories daily in 2021, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations — well above the average adult's recommended dietary allowance of between 1,600 and 3,000 calories. And our feasting surged in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic: In a nationwide survey of more than 1,500 American adults, 39.7 percent reported overeating more frequently after the pandemic began.

Many elements of our food system promote overindulgence. Some estimates suggest that more than one-third of U.S. adults eat fast food on any given day, in part because it's convenient and hyperpalatable. And research suggests that our brains are primed to crave such ultraprocessed, high-glycemic fare — so if we drive through once, we're likely to again.

In these circumstances, it's easy to eat more than our bodies need, perhaps without even realizing it.

Given that context, calorie restriction (CR) — a consistent pattern of dieting in which one reduces overall calories by 25 to 50 percent while maintaining an intake of essential nutrients — might seem like a worthy alternative. Scientists have long been interested in the potential for it to

afford us longer, healthier lives. CR seems to hold promise — but it's not that straightforward.

What the Research Says

The idea of CR increasing longevity is based on two theories. The first is the rate-of-living theory: Some scientists believe large mammals live longer than smaller ones because their metabolisms are slower, allowing them to expend energy less quickly.

There's also the free-radical theory. Free radicals are molecules created by our metabolic processes that damage our cells and can cause age-related diseases. The theory suggests that a slower metabolism produces fewer free radicals, less disease, and longer life.

These theories also fit with some of what we know about human metabolism — namely, that we require fewer calories as we age. As we get older, our bodies shift from “building” mode to “protecting and preserving” mode, explains functional-medicine trailblazer Frank Lipman, MD, in *The New Rules of Aging Well*. He recommends eating until you're only 80 percent full after you reach age 45; at that age your body needs fewer calories than it previously did.

Many studies on CR in animals have produced promising results, showing that rodents, worms, and mouse lemurs

lived longer on calorie-restricted diets. Beyond increased lifespan, researchers found the approach resulted in fewer age-related diseases, including cancer, kidney inflammation, and others. Plus, it improved immunity.

Taken together, this research offers hope that similar results could be replicated in humans. Yet few human studies have been done, in part because long-term data is needed, and keeping participants in a lab for a long period of time to limit their diet is both unrealistic and unethical.

Outside of the lab, it's hard to convince people to stick to a restrictive diet. “Adherence to diets is challenging for people, especially when they're trying to embed the regimen into their normal lifestyle,” says Leanne Redman, MS, PhD, an investigator for the CALERIE trial at Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge, La.

Additionally, asking subjects to document their eating habits has drawbacks, even among those for whom CR is a long-term practice: People often forget what they've eaten, and they tend to underreport it. (For more on the trouble with nutrition research, see ELmag.com/foodstudies.)

The CALERIE trial (Comprehensive Assessment of Long-Term Effects of Reducing Intake of Energy) is the first CR study conducted on humans.



Beginning in 2007, the research tracked 218 healthy people for two years. One group of participants ate a diet restricted in calories by 25 percent; another group ate their regular diets (an average of about 2,400 calories per day) as a control. The participants lived at home, and researchers supported those in the CR group with counseling sessions and nutrition education, as well as with supplements to ensure they met their nutritional needs.

The CR participants experienced improvements in body weight, cholesterol, inflammation, insulin-sensitivity index, and metabolic-syndrome score — all markers that indicate one’s risk of heart disease and stroke, two of the leading causes of death in the United States.

From Lab to Real Life?

The benefits of the CALERIE trial should be taken with caution, says University of Southern California gerontology and biological sciences professor Valter Longo, PhD, author of *The Longevity Diet*. He says the trial offers great information about cardio-metabolic health, but it shouldn’t be interpreted as guidance for one’s life.

“The cardiometabolic effects are extraordinary, but because of compliance issues, safety, and also efficacy, I don’t recommend calorie restriction,” Longo says. “The research tells us that a lot of these problems — whether it’s diabetes, or cancer, or cardiovascular events — are preventable. But it also tells us that chronic calorie restriction is not the way to do it.”

That’s in part because it’s nearly impossible to effectively restrict caloric intake on your own. In real life, getting all the nutrients you need through a calorie-restricted diet (without the support of a team of researchers) is hard work, requiring careful planning and strict attention to everything you eat. (For more on the drawbacks of a calorie-

focused mindset, see ELmag.com/beyondcaloriecounting.)

And if your nutritional needs aren’t met, calorie restriction could lead to fatigue, anemia, weakened bones, and muscle loss. Women may experience menstrual disturbances and decreased fertility, while men may have lower testosterone levels. (For more on how to support sexual health with nutrition, see page 38.)

Nutrient deficiencies can also come with a host of psychological effects, some of which were documented in physiologist Ancel Keys’s landmark Minnesota Starvation Experiment, which began in 1944. The study participants — men who ate about 1,500

Ultimately, the question of how much you should eat is for you and you alone to determine: The answer depends on your unique biology and your relationship with food.

calories per day for six months — grew weak and exhausted, became obsessed with food and body image, and suffered severe emotional distress.

Paradoxically, CR often leads to weight gain over the long term. “You could do calorie restriction for a while, but eventually you’ll regain any weight you’ve lost,” Longo explains. “You’ve slowed your metabolism, so your energy expenditure goes down because your body is trying to save your life: It wants you back to your normal weight.”

Your body is likely to respond to calorie deprivation by boosting production of the hunger hormone ghrelin, which may cause you to overeat. It’s a scenario familiar to any serial dieter, and it’s the principal reason diets don’t work. (For more on why going hungry is bad for your health, see ELmag.com/goinghungry.)

The Risks of Restriction

For the CALERIE trial, CR was a specific intervention. Participants followed calorie-reduced diets, and they and the researchers took great pains to ensure they received proper nutrition. But if you simply see a breathless news headline about how “calorie restriction can increase lifespan,” you might assume any low-calorie diet will do.

“I worry about eating advice that could be taken out of context,” says Leah Graves, RDN, LDN, vice president of nutrition and culinary services at Accanto Health. Graves has treated people with eating disorders for more than 30 years. “I could see something like this being a reinforcer for someone who has developed an eating problem.”

Eating disorders are biopsychosocial disorders, she explains, meaning they have no single cause: There are many factors that make people vulnerable to them. “But the gateway to eating disorders for most of our clients is calorie restriction,” Graves adds.

“What I’ve seen over the years is people who make a shift in their eating that they believed was in the interest of health, yet that shift leads to more than they bargained for,” she continues. “And so, the pursuit of health actually leads to a potentially life-threatening eating disorder.”

Ultimately, the question of how much you should eat is for you and you alone to determine: The answer depends on your unique biology and your relationship with food.

It also depends on what you’re eating. Most of us would likely benefit from a focus on quality rather than quantity. If you’re getting plenty of satiating protein and fiber from nutritious whole foods, you won’t have room in your diet for the processed stuff that encourages overeating — and you’ll be improving your cardiometabolic health without the need to do calorie math. 🍎

HELEN MARTINEAU is a Minneapolis-based writer and editor.

Pop Up!

BY **ROBIN ASBELL**

There's nothing quite so satisfying on a hot summer day as a frozen treat on a stick — except that most ice pops at the grocery store are little more than sugar, water, and fake flavors and colors. But you can easily make your own with whole fruit, real flavor, and some of your favorite healthful additions, like kombucha, fresh herbs, and even vegetables.

Molds are available in seemingly endless materials, including silicone and stainless steel, and they typically include sticks. If you don't have molds, you can try these recipes using wooden skewers and paper cups, or make mini pops with toothpicks and an ice cube tray.

Individual frozen treats are a joy for kids and adults alike: They're easy to serve to a crowd, require minimal cleanup, and can add a pop of (naturally) colorful sweetness to your afternoon or the end of your meal. Sure, they might be a little messy to eat — but that's part of the fun.

These homemade ice pops are fun, nutritious, and refreshing.



Green Kiwi Pops

Makes eight servings
Prep time: 10 minutes
Freeze time: six hours

- 2 large kiwis, peeled
- 4 cups baby spinach
- ¼ cup honey
- 2 medium bananas

Set up molds for eight pops.

Place all the ingredients in a blender. Secure the lid and blend on high until smooth, scraping down the sides as needed.

Pour ¼-cup portions into the pop molds. Freeze for 45 minutes, then insert sticks and freeze until solid, about another five hours.



Pineapple Kombucha Pops

Makes 12 servings • Prep time: 10 minutes • Freeze time: six hours

- 1 cup kombucha, plain or ginger
- 3 cups fresh pineapple chunks
- 1 tsp. grated fresh ginger

Set up molds for 12 pops.

Place all the ingredients in a blender. Secure the lid, then blend on high until smooth.

Measure ¼-cup portions into the pop molds. Freeze for 45 minutes, then insert sticks and freeze until solid, about another five hours.

Berry Chia Pudding Pops

Makes 10 servings • Prep time: 10 minutes • Freeze time: six hours

- 10 oz. raspberries, thawed if frozen
- 1 cup full-fat, plain Greek yogurt
- ¼ cup honey
- 2 tbs. chia seeds

Set up molds for 10 pops.

Place the berries, yogurt, and honey in a blender. Secure the lid and blend on high until smooth, scraping down the sides as needed. Add the chia seeds and blend to incorporate.

Pour ¼-cup portions into the pop molds. Freeze for 45 minutes, then insert sticks and freeze until solid, about another five hours.

Horchata Pops

Makes 10 servings • Prep time: 10 hours (50 minutes active) • Freeze time: six hours

- ¼ cup slivered raw almonds
- 2½ cups water, for cooking the rice
- ⅓ cup brown rice, rinsed
- 2 tbs. honey
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- ⅛ tsp. sea salt

Set up molds for 10 pops.

Place the almonds in a bowl and add just enough water to cover. Soak overnight, then drain.

Make the horchata: In a 1-quart pot, bring the 2½ cups of water to a boil, then add the brown rice. Return to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and cover. Cook for about 40 minutes, until the rice is very tender. There will be some water left in the pot. Place the cooked rice and remaining water, drained almonds, honey, cinnamon, and salt in a blender. Secure the lid and blend on high until completely smooth, about one minute.

Transfer the horchata to a bowl. Cover and place in the refrigerator to cool completely, about one hour.

Pour ¼-cup portions into the pop molds. Freeze for 45 minutes, then insert sticks and freeze until solid, about another five hours.



Coconut-Milk Fudge Pops

Makes eight servings • Prep time: 10 minutes • Freeze time: six hours

- 1 15-oz. can coconut milk
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 large banana
- 1 tbs. pure maple syrup
- 2 tsp. vanilla extract

Set up molds for eight pops.

Place all the ingredients in a blender. Secure the lid and blend until smooth.

Measure ¼-cup portions into the pop molds. Freeze for 45 minutes, then insert sticks and freeze until solid, about another five hours.

Cold-Press Coffee Pops

Makes 12 servings • Prep time: five minutes • Freeze time: six hours

- 2 cups oat milk (or oat milk creamer for a creamier version)
- 1 cup cold-press coffee

Set up molds for 12 pops.

Pour the ingredients into a large bowl and whisk until combined.

Pour ¼-cup portions into the pop molds. Freeze for 45 minutes, then insert sticks and freeze until solid, about another five hours.



**Mango
Chili
Pops**

**Cucumber
Mint Spa
Pops**

**Makes 10 servings • Prep time:
10 minutes • Freeze time: six hours**

- 1 cup full-fat, plain Greek yogurt
- 10 oz. mango cubes, thawed if frozen
- ½ tsp. red-pepper flakes

Set up molds for 10 pops.
Place all the ingredients in a blender. Secure the lid and blend until smooth, scraping down the sides as needed.
Measure ¼-cup portions into the pop molds. Freeze for 45 minutes, then insert sticks and freeze until solid, about another five hours.

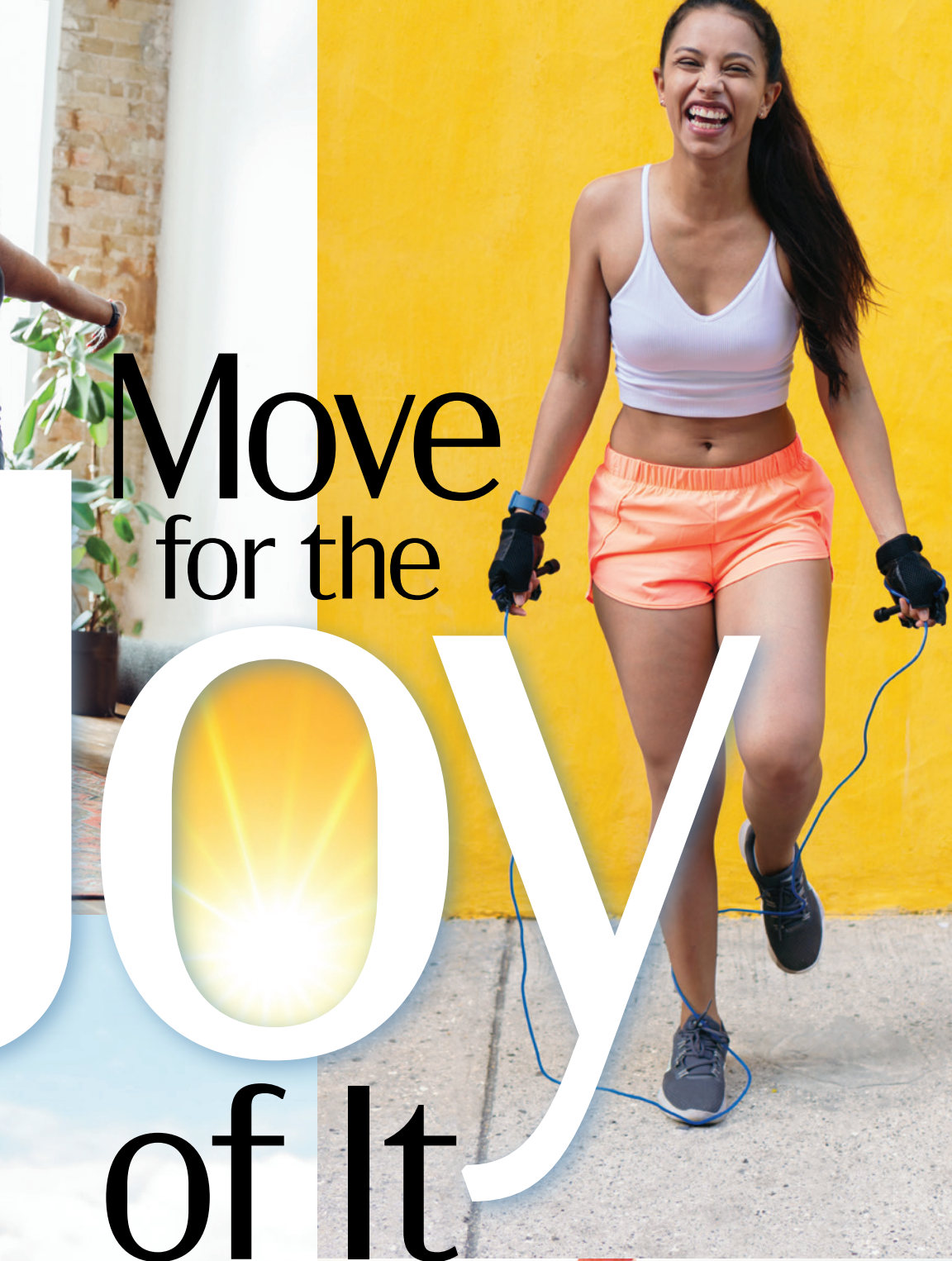
**Makes 12 servings • Prep time:
15 minutes • Freeze time: six hours**

- 2 cups coconut water
- 1 medium cucumber, peeled and chopped
- ¼ cup fresh mint, packed
- 2 tsp. lemon juice

Set up molds for 12 pops.
Place all the ingredients in a blender. Secure the lid and blend on high until smooth.
Pour ¼-cup portions into the pop molds. Freeze for 45 minutes, then insert sticks and freeze until solid, about another five hours. ❄️

ENJOY MORE!
Find our recipe for Rainbow Pops at ELmag.com/icepops.

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



Move
for the

Joy

of It



How positive emotions supercharge the effects of exercise.

BY ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS

Every Tuesday and Thursday at 9 a.m. at a community center in Palo Alto, Calif., Debby Fife, who's in her late-70s, gets down with an eclectic cadre of fellow fitness seekers. The beats are up-tempo and funky. The moves are dynamic and fun. Sometimes the class throws jabs and crosses; other times the group gyrates to a salsa beat. Ballet and old-school calisthenics show up as well.

Pulses pound, muscles flex, sweat flies, and a joyous, can-do spirit prevails — even among students over 90. No one is suffering. No one is straining. More than a workout, the class feels like a celebration: of life, of movement, of vitality.

Having come to exercise later in life, Fife now arranges her schedule around these classes. “It’s as important in my life as anything I do,” she says. “After class, what hurts the most is the muscles of my face: I’m smiling the whole time.”

Leading the class — and several others like it around town — is health

psychologist Kelly McGonigal, PhD, author of *The Joy of Movement: How Exercise Helps Us Find Happiness, Hope, Connection, and Courage*.

To hear McGonigal tell it, many of us are taking an approach to exercise that’s too narrow in scope. “We have all been trained to view movement and exercise as transactional,” she explains. “Culturally, there’s such a tight association between movement and trying to ‘fix’ the body that it leads to experiences that make it harder to connect to the direct joys of movement.”

In other words, the borderline obsession with the *side effects* of exercise may reduce our innate capacity to revel in movement for its own sake. That’s not to say there’s anything wrong with pursuing long-term performance, function, or aesthetic goals. But hyperfocusing on only the end goal “leads people to pick activities that they don’t enjoy and aren’t meaningful to them,” McGonigal says.

These hyperfocusers exercise dutifully — even through boredom, frustration, exhaustion, and pain —

but don’t *enjoy* it. And sooner or later, they quit. By ignoring the opportunity for joy, they may abandon long-term goals too.

For many of us, this negative-feedback loop surrounding exercise began when we were young. “Coaches and gym teachers often dole out pushups and running laps as punishment for mistakes or missed practices,” says Jolie Kobrinsky, Steel Mace Vinyasa, CST, TACFIT, owner of Elektren Studio in Seaside, Calif.

And many of us maintain that perspective long after our gym-class days are over. “You see it all the time,” Kobrinsky continues. “People putting in longer, harder workouts the day after they have a rich dessert or spend time on the couch.”

In this formulation, exercise is anything but joyful.

McGonigal, Kobrinsky, and other forward-thinking fitness professionals encourage a different approach, one that views exercise as a path to joy. And that joy, in turn, makes the exercise more effective and sustainable — helping folks reach their fitness goals more easily.

The Stuff of Joy

Joyful movement may conjure images of contemplative yoga sessions, easy dancing, or meditative strolls — activities that don't typically result in sore muscles or a pounding heart. And, on some days, this kind of restorative movement is just what you need. Easy, yin-style exercise, and even nonexercise movement like gardening and housework, can lift mood, improve circulation and metabolism, and increase feelings of efficacy — especially if you do them outdoors and with others. You almost can't overdo this kind of movement.

But *joyful* movement isn't always synonymous with *easy* movement. McGonigal is quick to point out that strenuous, yang-style activity can evoke joy just as powerfully. "Joy is bigger than enjoyment, and it's bigger than pleasure," she says. "And it might well include exercise experiences that are incredibly uncomfortable and difficult."

Climbing a mountain, for example, might require hours, or even days, of discomfort: exposure to cold, vertiginous drops, dangerous wildlife, and bad weather. But anyone who has made such a climb will tell you that such obstacles make the trek more satisfying, because they force us to confront, and then overcome, fears and perceived limits.

The same can be said of closer-to-home activities like lifting weights or sweating through an intense indoor-cycling class. Under some circumstances, joy can even encompass experiences almost universally considered unpleasant.

"Sometimes when I spar with my advanced students, I'll get tagged with a kick or a punch," says martial arts instructor Stephen Schilling, founder of Wolf Tribe Martial Arts in Encino, Calif. "It's kind of thrilling: They're happy they scored a point. I'm happy they're learning. I never get mad; I just say, 'Good hit!'"

Joy can take many forms. Some-



times it's blissful and quiet, as in an energizing tai chi session; sometimes it's wild and communal, as in an ecstatic modern-dance class.

Importantly, it doesn't have to be the same thing all the time. "Sometimes I'm up for a lot of structure — sets, reps, struggle," says Adriana Rizzolo, founder of Body Temple Church in Los Angeles and creator of the movement practice Body Temple Dance. "That kind of movement gets me in touch with strength, power, focus, commitment. But sometimes I need something more freeform, spontaneous, like dance or moving meditation."

Joy is bigger than enjoyment, and it's bigger than pleasure. And it might well include exercise experiences that are incredibly uncomfortable and difficult."

Your body fluctuates in its need to rev up or wind down, sometimes daily, explains Rizzolo. "The dance between structure and freedom is really important." By paying attention to your body's signals — energy levels, aches, stress, sleep quality, mood, motivation — you'll stay engaged in your workout program and keep joy in the foreground.

4

Steps to Moving More Joyfully

1 Embrace your creativity.

To die-hard exercisers, a hard workout is the best part of the day. To the uninitiated, it can look like punishing labor. This apparent contradiction illustrates another important aspect of joyful movement: imagination.

By broadening your perspective beyond the physical, you can see past temporary discomfort and reframe exercise as something meaningful and resonant. “Once, in the middle of a strength class I was teaching, I blurted out ‘Defend the village!’ to my students,” recalls Kobrinsky. “It was completely spontaneous, but they understood what I meant: Get tough, dig in — just like you would if you had to protect your loved ones.”

Suddenly, swinging a kettlebell or a steel mace was infused with importance. “When you push your physical limits, it’s an almost mythic feeling,” she adds. “You’re embodying something primal — an ancient-warrior spirit that’s inside every one of us.”

Expressing power and aggression is generally discouraged in daily life, but it can be enormously satisfying in a safe environment — an expansion of psychological as well as physical limits.

“One of the things I like best about my job is teaching young girls to punch through boards,” says Schilling. “They

light up. They realize that they’re strong, and they don’t have to be afraid.”

Equally rewarding, he notes, is teaching his male clients, some of whom harbor self-limiting beliefs around what it means to be masculine, to find fluidity and ease in their movements. “Guys can be super attached to showing strength and power. And that’s great, but it also makes them tense and slow. When they learn to relax, it’s instantly more fun for them — and it makes them better martial artists.”

People new to exercise might find the imaginative aspect hard to grasp, and McGonigal acknowledges that you can’t always see it happening from the outside. That’s why there is no real substitution for direct experience, especially with movements that might appear unusual, or even silly, at first.

“People thought indoor cycling was ridiculous,” she says of, essentially, a group of strangers pedaling bikes that go nowhere. “But when you do it, you immediately see that it’s about synchronizing with a group, moving to music, and overcoming the impulse to quit.”

That’s a profound experience to have in just 45 minutes. “If you haven’t had the experience,” she explains, “you might not get it.”

Challenging exercise isn’t the only form of movement that can be rife with meaning for its participants. Restorative yoga offers tranquility and balance. Walking your dog can help you express devotion and responsibility. Nature-based activities can give you perspective and hope.

Nearly every type of movement can connect you to something larger than yourself and give you a point of focus beyond the moments of boredom, discomfort, or awkwardness that can accompany workout sessions.

“Most of the students in my class are women in their 60s to their 90s,” says McGonigal. “They come to express their fabulousness, their fierceness, their sensuality, their creativity. Dance brings out a side of them they might not get to express in other environments.”

Rizzolo agrees. “Sometimes, if my students are feeling really blocked, I’ll have them lie on their backs, close their eyes, and just shake out.” She puts on music that’s wild, passionate, or emotional, and encourages students to move to it. “It gets them out of their heads.”

At the end of the evening, she says, having embodied dozens of different emotional states, they leave class elated and expanded.



2.

Measure progress mindfully.

Setting measurable goals and tracking training helps build self-knowledge and monitor workout efforts. A fitness tracker or workout log can help you chart your progress and stay motivated and accountable.

But setting goals and tracking progress can cut both ways. “If you are getting caught up in the numbers, you will begin to lose the joy that health and fitness can bring,” says David Freeman, Life Time’s national director of Alpha and chair of the company’s Inclusion Council.

According to McGonigal, the “motivations that are most strongly linked with negative outcomes are

Committed gym-goers might wonder what that leaves to track. The answer, says McGonigal, is simple: Do you *enjoy* it? How happy and satisfied do you feel while doing your activity? How about afterward? Does it light you up?

Building awareness of enjoyment may take time and practice, especially for exercisers new to the concept. Start by paying attention to how you feel. If you sense joy and satisfaction, you’re likely on the right track. If an activity doesn’t excite you, it may be a sign to try something different.

The only time that close tracking of performance makes sense, she argues, is if you’re a serious athlete training for a competition, or if you truly enjoy working with hard data.

Most people, however, can stand to be sparing with metrics and instead focus on their personal *why*. Don’t be afraid to go deep in finding your purpose and the meaning that movement holds for you, advises Freeman. “It’s more than just hitting numbers or moving heavy weights.

When you can clearly define the *why* behind exercise, you will enjoy the process so much more.”

This shift in focus, he says, will likely result in a lift in fitness.

“You won’t lose anything, because if you’re experiencing joy, you’re going to work harder, and you’re going to do it more often,” adds McGonigal. “The positive emotions that you experience from movement — whether it’s happiness, pleasure, confidence, connection — are good for your heart and good for your immune system. They make you better able to benefit from the stress of exercise.”

Adopting this self-compassionate approach is a simple but profound pivot: More joy, more progress.



weight goals and appearance goals.” When people focus too closely on their body image, she says, “they are less likely to enjoy exercise, less likely to stick with it, and less likely to experience any of the benefits, whether they’re physical, emotional, social.”

Tracking measures of physical performance and health — running times, lifting numbers, and personal bests — can be problematic too. “If you’ve had a heart attack and are trying to stay alive, those numbers can be motivating,” says McGonigal.

But body-fat percentage, resting heart rate, and other metabolic measures can become proxies for appearance goals and again lead you into dicey territory.

3.

Let yourself learn.

Adults tend to value learning

only as far as it helps us achieve a long-term goal like improving a skill or making more money. “We forget that learning is itself a joy,” says McGonigal, “especially if you’re working with a coach and a community to master a new activity. That’s enormously pleasurable on its own.”

Yet we often fail to recognize that movement — as much as reading or studying — offers ample opportunity for learning.

“We’re still stuck on the idea that the body and mind are separate,” she explains. Consequently, we busy our minds watching TV or talking on the phone while our bodies churn away beneath us.

And while combining your workout with a news download may feel efficient, it also limits what you can experience or learn from your workout. “Routine feels safe,” says Rizzolo. “It’s reinforcing something we already know. But we’re not really safe unless we’re growing.”

In her workout programs, that means pushing your edge, being willing to appear foolish, getting help from others, and remaining open to new approaches and techniques. Taking up a new sport, you must be a beginner again and interact with students of all levels.

Challenge yourself by changing the speed, direction, angle, or intensity of a familiar movement. Are you an expert at the conventional pushup? Try one with your hands on an unstable surface or with one hand elevated. Do a spiderman pushup, moving along the floor. Perform a T-pushup, rotating an arm back on each rep. Work up to a hands-release or even a one-arm pushup.

4. Relish the pleasure in every challenge.



Routine feels safe. It's reinforcing something we already know. But we're not really safe unless we're growing.

Throwing a ball is another simple and fast way to get out of your head and into your body. No partner? Bounce it against the wall, first with one hand, then the other. Bounce it from one hand to the other. Use the ceiling. Use multiple walls. Go for perfect throws and catches every time.

Walking in nature offers limitless possibilities for learning and spontaneity. Walk sideways or backward. Move on all fours on graded surfaces. Leap from one fallen leaf to the next. Hang from tree branches. Climb trees. Improvise.

The highest version of this learning and spontaneity is called “flow” — a state in which you lose self-consciousness, awareness of the passage of time, and even a sense that you are separate from the activity you're performing, explains Kobrinsky.

That's a high bar when you're at a park or at the gym squeezing in some exercise before work. But the flow state is always available if you pay attention to the sensations you're experiencing: the sweat, the working muscles, the bar in your hands, or the turf beneath your feet.

“There's a learning curve for the ‘exercise high,’” says McGonigal. Deep stretches, for example, stimulate pain receptors — so that many people's first response to a yoga class is an intense, even unpleasant one: “They say, ‘This hurts!’”

Not long into a regular practice, however, the experience changes fundamentally: “They'll do the same poses and have the same physical experience, but they'll say, ‘This feels good,’” she explains. “The brain changes how it interprets that same sensation.”

This physiological reframe isn't unique to yoga. Runners learn to savor the feeling of a pounding heart on hard runs; weightlifters relish the strain in working muscles during heavy sets.

Just as your muscles, blood vessels, and heart adapt, your brain adapts too, says McGonigal. As we learn to handle the beneficial stress of exercise, what we once interpreted as pain becomes pleasurable. “The brain adapts to movement and exercise by learning

to enjoy it more and rewarding you for it more,” she says.

The newly joyful perspective produces a greater dedication to movement and more of the long-term results you were hoping to achieve when you first began exercising.

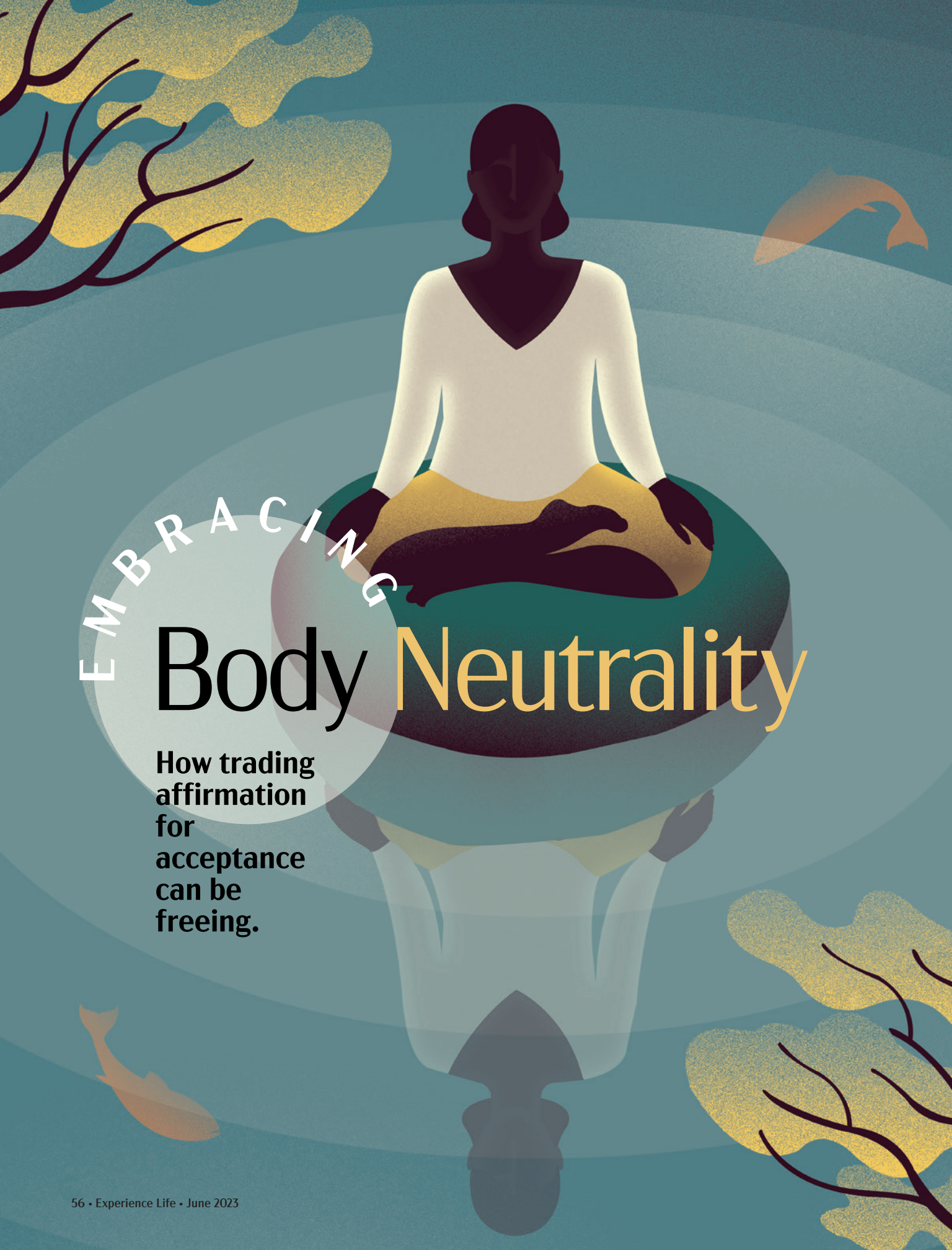
The implicit lesson — one we experience and embody every time we exercise — is that we can adapt to challenges, overcome adversity, and confront fear with strength and resolve.

“You learn to change your response when you feel the first desire to give up,” says McGonigal. Experience that in an exercise class, she adds, and you start to apply the same lessons outside the gym too.

A workout, then, becomes a proving ground for confronting and overcoming difficulties rather than avoiding them.

“Then, when you're dealing with challenges at work, or with your family, or with your health,” she says, you don't shy away from them. “You just say, ‘Oh, right. I can do hard things.’” 🧘





EMBRACING

Body Neutrality

How trading affirmation for acceptance can be freeing.

BY ELIZABETH MILLARD

“You do not have to love your body to be happy with it.”

In the spring of 2021, Natalie Horn was a business major in her junior year at the University of Washington, embarking on a project about body neutrality for a sociology class. That sentence, tucked into the introduction of her resulting term paper, turned out to be more than just a great thesis. It became a personal mantra that transformed how Horn saw herself.

“Body positivity works for many people, but I’ve never been one of them,” Horn says. “It felt forced and caused me to think about my body just as much as when I felt negative about it. Taking this step toward nonjudgment, toward being neutral, has changed my mindset, and that’s changed how I live.”

Like fish that are unaware of the water they swim in, most of us spend our days immersed in a value-laden sea of body judgments — offhand comments about weight loss, social-media images held up for comparison, advertisements that prompt insecurity and then promise to quash it — so commonplace we don’t even notice them anymore. Forget imagining a life without the belief that bodies can be right or wrong, good or bad.

Yet there is a growing movement encouraging us to get our heads above water and recognize this sea of messages.

That’s what body neutrality is all about.

THE SHIFT to Neutral

Although the phrase “body neutrality” emerged around 2015, the concept was soon popularized by body-image coach Anne Poirier, author of *The Body Joyful: My Journey From Self-Loathing to Self-Acceptance*.

Poirier, a certified intuitive-eating counselor, was working at a retreat center in 2016, preparing to teach a class on body image, when she first encountered the term on an older presentation. The concept so intrigued her that she developed a four-part series on body neutrality and has spearheaded work in the field ever since.

“Everyone at that retreat hated their bodies so much it was ridiculous to suggest they simply love themselves,” she recalls. “We talked about how to live in our bodies, instead of beating ourselves up all the time about what we ‘need’ to change.”

She suggested the attendees think of body neutrality as a resting place between body hate and body love, where they could move away from the chaos of their thoughts and beliefs about their bodies.

That experiment wasn’t only for retreat participants, she says — it was a new way of thinking for her as well.

“Up until that point, I’d only ever thought about what my body *couldn’t* do. I focused on what was wrong with it, through comparison, criticism, and judgment,” she says.

Stepping into the body-neutrality mindset, Poirier gained a sense of ownership over her body and began to listen to it and trust what it was trying to tell her. “I started by being grateful for what my body could do

at any given moment and disconnected from what it looked like.”

That midway point between hate and love doesn’t mean indifference, she emphasizes. You’re not ignoring the fact that your body exists or avoiding mirrors. Instead, body neutrality involves cultivating an awareness of your perceptions about your body — and the bodies of others — and changing your inner talk in a meaningful way.

Interior chatter isn’t only about how you look, Poirier adds. It usually has something to say about all aspects of your body and how you direct it, from exercise to intimacy to chronic-illness management.

Body neutrality aims to step away from expectations about how you should be and get closer to how you are, without labels like good, bad, worthy, unworthy, able-bodied, desirable, etc.

It’s not easy. In fact, Poirier concedes that the breadth of conditioning we’ve all undergone since childhood makes refashioning our thoughts incredibly tough.

“The biggest part of body neutrality is changing the conversation with yourself,” she says. “Can you think of your body differently and be grateful for everything it lets you do? That’s what changes the relationship with your body, and honestly, it takes a great deal of effort. Body work like this is uncomfortable because we have connected it to our self-worth.”

Still, the relief that comes with a more neutral perspective — especially if we’ve been stuck in the body-hate end of the pool — can be profound.

“We talked about how to live in our bodies, instead of beating ourselves up all the time about what we ‘need’ to change.”



A New View of **POSITIVITY**

For many people, body neutrality involves questioning both their disparaging thoughts and their encouraging ones.

Messages such as “Love your body” and “Every body is beautiful” have helped plenty of people, especially those whose bodies have been traditionally excluded from the narrow category of acceptability, feel more at ease. Yet body positivity’s relentless focus on the body can backfire.

“For some, body positivity can feel like another type of pressure, as if you’re failing when you don’t ‘love the skin you’re in,’ for example,” says Chrissy King, author of *The Body Liberation Project: How Understanding Racism and Diet Culture Helps Cultivate Joy and Build Collective Freedom*.

“Often, people feel like they can love their bodies as long as they change a few aspects of themselves, but that doesn’t bring freedom. It also doesn’t acknowledge that some people live in bodies that are marginalized, like being

Black, fat, or transgender,” King adds. Affirming a body that has made you the target of other people’s negative assumptions can be difficult, even if it’s those assumptions — not your body — that are the problem.

King believes that body neutrality gets closer to acknowledging, on a collective level, the systems of oppression that are informed by racism, diet culture, and anti-fat bias. When we start to take a neutral attitude toward our own bodies as well as the bodies of other people, it reveals how arbitrary so-called good and bad body traits really are.

At this point, the benefits extend beyond the individual, King explains. The more each of us begins to understand and practice body neutrality, the more it drives a cultural shift toward the acceptance of *all* bodies.

“That’s how we get to body liberation,” she says. “It starts on an individual level, and then you begin to see the impact of *that* on everyone around you.”

NO Comparison

It's perfectly reasonable to embrace body positivity *and* body neutrality; you don't need to choose just one. Some days a positivity approach might help boost your mood, while on other days that same messaging might feel hollow. A body-neutral attitude can support you during periods of physical discomfort or intense self-consciousness, and then you might come through that rough patch and feel like celebrating.

That leads to another major principle of body neutrality: You're always changing, and that's OK.

Poirier says a body-neutrality mindset understands and appreciates that your body is changing from day to day — sometimes within the same day. The you of today is not the same as the you of yesterday or tomorrow.

That sense of impermanence may feel destabilizing at first. Ultimately, though, it can free us. "Part of neutrality is embracing that we are continually changing and choosing to flow with it instead of fighting against

it," explains Poirier. Instead of the mental tug of war that can come with tightly holding a positive view of your body as you try to escape a negative one, neutrality encourages you to just let go.

Consider aging. Your body as a teen is different from your body as a young parent, for instance, and that's different from how your body looks and feels as you head past 60.

With a neutral mindset, these changes are not a problem; they just *are*. You can release the belief that how you look is either good or bad, or a mix of both.

"This disentangles our identity and self-worth from our bodies," says Anjali Ferguson, PhD, a Virginia-based clinical psychologist who focuses on social equity, racial trauma, and early childhood mental health. "That's challenging to do because from a very early age, we've tied these together. But it's never too late to have the awareness around how it's affecting you."

“
Part of neutrality is embracing that we are continually changing and choosing to flow with it instead of fighting against it.”



BODY-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

Casual remarks like "Have you lost weight?" "You look great!" or "That cake is going straight to my hips!" are usually meant to be kind or funny. Yet no matter how well-meaning they are, such statements help reinforce a status quo that suggests thinness is better, says Chrissy King, author of *The Body Liberation Project*. They contribute to the idea that there's a "right" way to look — and that any body that isn't slender and fit (and probably white, gender-conforming, and able-bodied) doesn't qualify.

When you're cultivating a more body-neutral mindset, King recommends paying close attention to your words. "Start listening to how you approach body topics in your conversations," she says. "If everything you're saying is around appearance, and you're assigning value to yourself or others based on that, what does that say about your perspective?"

Every body deserves respect and compassion, King adds, and she acknowledges that expressing those values is not easy for many people — especially when they're talking about themselves.

In that case, the first step may be hearing how you talk to yourself, says body-image coach Anne Poirier, author of *The Body Joyful*. "We're so programmed to talk down to ourselves," she says. "There's almost a sense of belonging and community when you're out with friends and everyone is beating themselves up. When that happens, pause. Sometimes, that's all it takes to reset your self-talk and the conversation. Just stop, listen, remember the size of your body is not related to your worth."

(For more on dealing with diet talk, see "How to Halt Diet Talk" on page 74.)

From Concept to PRACTICE

Body neutrality may feel like an abstract concept, says Poirier. Though its nebulous qualities can seem like a drawback at first, especially if you like rules and programs, the upside is that body neutrality offers a framework that's easily modified based on your needs. Give it a try with these mindset-shifting habits and behaviors.



PRACTICE BODY SCANS. Mindfulness meditation can help you truly feel your body, says Ferguson. Some guided meditations involve a “body scan,” in which you focus on feeling your toes, then your feet, then your ankles, and so on. If you’ve been disconnected from your body for some time, just sensing your breath in your chest and feeling how your chest rises and falls can be a profound experience.

“When you get into your body this way,” she explains, “it’s easier to let your thoughts come and go, which is another way meditation can help.” Extend this to practice nonattachment to your thoughts about your body, letting them flow without judgment or fixation.

2. GET SPECIFIC WITH GRATITUDE. Poirier expresses gratitude to her body daily as part of her neutrality practice. She thanks her eyes for allowing her to see the sunset, her arms for letting her hug her daughter, her legs for taking her on a long walk. “It sounds silly to say things like that out loud,” she admits. “Like, ‘Thank you, fingers, for helping me type.’ But your brain doesn’t think it’s silly. It’s using that appreciation to rewire your perspective.”

That gratitude applies to her changes as well, she adds. For example, instead of feeling discouraged when her pants feel tighter than they were a few weeks before, she appreciates the solidity of her thighs and the feeling of strength that brings.



3. MOVE IN NEW WAYS. When Horn, the University of Washington business major, began her introspection about body neutrality, she noticed that going to the gym often felt like a chore, so she replaced some of her gym time with roller skating and hiking because she loves how those activities make her body feel.

Even for those who feel like the gym is their happy place, finding new ways to move can reveal unknown capacities, suggests functional-medicine coach Mark Schneider, CPT, whose Retreat Strength Gym offers trauma-informed strength training.

“Maybe you explore being able to do things you didn’t think were possible before, and study the effects of that,” he says. “That could allow you to relate differently to yourself.”





4. TAKE YOUR TIME. Poirier suggests approaching body neutrality as you would any new relationship, allowing for a getting-to-know-you period. It takes time, curiosity, openness, vulnerability, and appreciation to create layers of trust and understanding.

The same is true when you're cultivating a fresh way to relate to your body — particularly if you've spent years or even decades considering it an enemy to be thwarted.

Those negative attitudes don't disappear overnight, adds body-image coach and podcast host Jessi Kneeland. "You're dealing with layers of meaning you've put on your body, and you're likely dealing with subconscious emotional needs that may be driving your behavior," she says.

"In some cases, you may be starting with learning how to feel worthy of pleasure. Don't add stress by trying to shorten the timeline for all this. Body image can be a huge block. It takes time to chip away at it."



5. LISTEN TO YOURSELF. Body neutrality involves developing a greater awareness of what you're thinking, feeling, and communicating, says Ferguson. Noticing how you feel in your body is crucial, but it's also important to listen to what you're saying about the bodies of other people — even celebrities.

That's challenging. Casual conversations frequently include references to appearance. But starting to notice your inner monologue as well as conversations with others can be helpful (see "Body-Neutral Language," page 59). Once you begin recognizing how language affects how you feel in your body, you can take a significant step toward neutrality.

6.

EXPECT A RIPPLE EFFECT. Adopting just one or two of these behaviors for a couple of weeks can help you navigate toward a more neutral mindset. And don't be surprised if this creates changes you didn't anticipate.

When Horn began to include more neutral self-talk in her mindfulness practice, for example, she also decided to stop straightening her hair — she realized she was responding to other people's expectations. That saved her an hour every morning, so she began sleeping in, and found she woke up feeling much more energized.

She also began wearing looser and softer clothes, which made her feel like she could move with greater ease.

Horn's body-neutrality project offered one more unexpected benefit: She decided to switch her professional focus from business to sociology, allowing her to bring these insights to a wider audience.

"My comfort and enjoyment now come before anything else, and I want other people to feel like this," she says. "I don't practice body neutrality 100 percent of the time — I'm not sure anybody could. But in making these small changes and embracing how I feel, not how I look, I'm letting my body be itself a little more, and that's powerful." 🌱



ELIZABETH MILLARD is a Minnesota-based writer and editor.

Get in Sync

Learn how circadian rhythms affect your health — and how you can attune to your body's many clocks.

BY LAINE BERGESON BECCO, FMCHC



PANCREAS



MUSCLE TISSUE

If you've ever traveled across time zones, you've likely experienced what chronobiologists call "circadian disruption."

Jet lag is the most acute example. Your brain grasps what the clock on the wall shows, but your body does not. That's because various organs in your body contain "peripheral clocks" set to their own circadian rhythms, and they become confused by long-distance air travel: Your pancreas thinks it's still in London, your liver is stalled over Greenland, and your kidneys suspect you're back home in Akron.

You're hungry for a turkey dinner in the middle of the morning, nodding off at 4 in the afternoon, and wide awake at 3 a.m., with no hope of sleep.

Still, you don't need to fly around the world to experience out-of-sync body clocks. A disruption occurs anytime we get too little or poor-quality sleep or when we get most of our sleep during the day. Misalignment may even be provoked by slight day-to-day shifts in bedtimes and wake times, like when



LIVER



KIDNEYS



ADIPOSE TISSUE



HEART



BREAST TISSUE



GASTROINTESTINAL TRACT

we hang out with friends late on the weekend and sleep in the next day — a phenomenon dubbed “social jet lag.”

The effect of circadian rhythms on our well-being is substantial — and not only because of their role in helping us fall asleep and wake up. When our internal clocks get out of sync, our bodies do too.

“Circadian health is important because it is closely linked to both physical and mental health,” says Phyllis C. Zee, MD, PhD, a professor of neurology at Northwestern University who specializes in sleep and circadian medicine. “There’s a preponderance of evidence that when your circadian rhythms are misaligned, it can be a risk factor for chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and cancer.”

Chronic circadian disruption has also been linked to poor concentration and memory, diminished performance, increased risk-taking behavior, problematic detoxification, and mood and anxiety disorders — as well as a range of other acute and chronic health concerns. (See “Circadian Rhythms and Gene Expression” on page 67.)

Shift work, for example, can create a perfect storm of circadian-disrupting factors: exposure to light at night when our bodies are primed for sleeping, decreased melatonin production, and nighttime eating. Rotating shift work, during which sleep patterns continually change, is even more disruptive. Research showing a link between shift work and increased breast-cancer risk is so well established that

nighttime shift work has been dubbed a potential carcinogen.

A study published in *Sleep* in 2022 found that older adults exposed to any amount of light at night (including a blinking light on an electronic device or a streetlight outside the window) have an increased risk for obesity and diabetes. Even one night of sleep with ambient light exposure increases insulin resistance the next morning.

Unsurprisingly, the key to circadian alignment is adequate sleep. Yet quantity is only part of the equation: Sleep quality matters, as do sleep timing, food timing, and light exposure.

That’s why many healthcare practitioners now prescribe a host of lifestyle strategies — rather than just another pill — to help restore good sleep habits and align the body’s rhythms.

Your Internal Clocks

The body's master clock is in the brain — specifically, in a group of cells in the hypothalamus called the suprachiasmatic nucleus, or SCN. Zee describes the SCN as the “circadian pacemaker.” It's located just above the optic nerve and responds to 24-hour cycles of light and dark, using them to help orchestrate the body's many rhythmic functions. This part of the brain also regulates hormones, including cortisol, insulin, and melatonin, as well as glucose for energy.

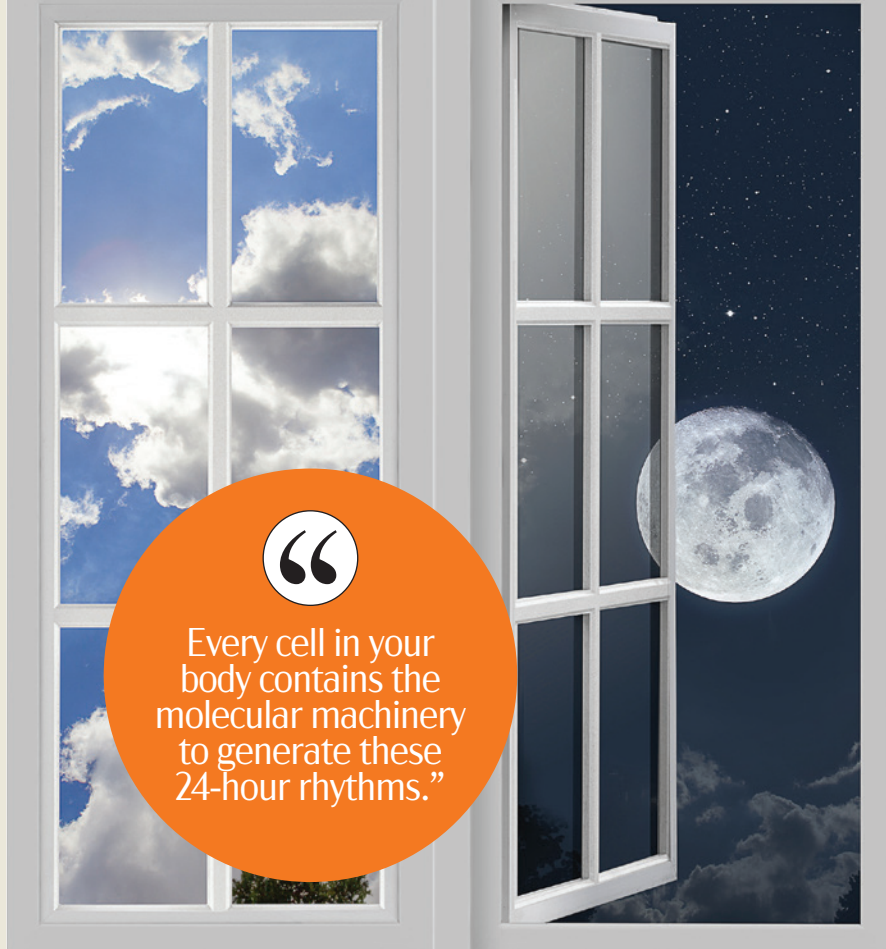
The peripheral clocks in our organs — the pancreas, liver, kidneys, heart, gastrointestinal (GI) tract, muscle tissue, adipose tissue, and breast tissue — respond to instructions from the SCN involving a range of functions, including hormone production and digestion.

In short, it's not just sleeping and waking that are cyclical. Our entire body operates according to rhythmic schedules. “These rhythms are generated at a cellular level in single cells,” Zee explains. “Every cell in your body contains the molecular machinery to generate these 24-hour rhythms.”

The system works like an orchestra, with the SCN as the conductor and the peripheral clocks as the musicians. Each instrument can be played at its own tempo, but if musicians did this during a performance, the orchestra would sound cacophonous. To make harmonious music, each follows the conductor and stays on beat.

When our peripheral clocks are synchronized, that orchestra is well tuned — a state of circadian alignment known as entrainment. When we're entrained, Zee says, we're better able to predict our best times for eating, activity, and performance. Our sleep and wake times naturally become more regular, and we feel better overall.

When the peripheral clocks and SCN are out of sync, however, confusion results — often in the form of mixed physiological messages. For example, if it's 11 p.m. and your SCN sends out signals to prep for bed, but your GI tract believes it's noon and tells you it's time for lunch, you'll



“Every cell in your body contains the molecular machinery to generate these 24-hour rhythms.”

have a harder time falling asleep because you're hungry and thinking about sandwiches. “Ideally, your metabolic systems are ready to eat when you're awake, whereas they're turning all that down when you're sleeping,” says Zee.

If the cyclical secretion of melatonin or cortisol (triggered by signals from the hypothalamus, where the SCN is housed) gets out of whack, we may get conflicting physiological messages about when to be active and when to rest. A strong urge to nap during the day or lying awake at 2 a.m. are both signs of circadian disruption. (For more on cortisol's effects, see ELmag.com/cortisol.)

The most common causes of circadian disharmony are ill-timed or insufficient light exposure, as well as irregular sleep: too much, too little, or too late in the morning. “The SCN is very sensitive to light,” Zee explains.

This disharmony soon becomes a self-perpetuating cycle, she adds. We need regular exposure to natural light and dark because they are “the strongest synchronizing agents” for the circadian system.

Bright light at night is particularly disruptive to our circadian rhythms. The SCN requires stimulation from daylight to stay on track and coordinate internal circadian rhythms with the 24-hour physical environment.

“The best entraining solution is exposure to light during the day and having the unopposed ability through darkness to elevate your natural rise in melatonin at night,” says Zee.

Darkness allows the pineal gland to produce melatonin. Exposure to bright light at night disrupts the production of this soothing hormone and makes it harder to fall asleep.

Likewise, bright light stimulates the SCN through the optic nerve, which prompts your body's clocks to assume their daytime roles. Zee notes that even some people who are blind may not be “circadian blind”; their SCN is still able to respond to bright light.

“The core message here is that you need to have enough, appropriately timed, and sufficient sleep as well as light exposure,” she says.

How to Get the Best Rest

To align your internal clocks and ensure deep, restorative sleep, pay attention to these three key factors.

1. Sleep Timing

Keeping consistent sleep and wake times is one of the best ways to synchronize your body clocks, says integrative-medicine physician Aviva Romm, MD. “A lot of people are very dysregulated in both. Having them tightly controlled is really important.”

This means sticking to the same sleep hours every day of the week — even on weekends. Deviating about half an hour on either side is fine. But that’s it, no matter how tempting it is to stay up until 3 a.m. and sleep until Sunday brunch.

A consistent wake time may be the most critical element for circadian health, says functional-medicine practitioner José Colón, MD, MPH, author of *The Sleep Diet: A Novel Approach to Insomnia*. And he believes it should be on the early side.

“I see it all the time with my patients,” he says. “I ask about when in their lives they got the best sleep and they will say, ‘When I was in the military’ or ‘When I was at summer camp.’ It’s that early wake-up time.”

Colón advises waking by 7 a.m. An early-rising routine helps ensure that melatonin will naturally begin to ramp up around 8 or 9 p.m. This helps you grow sleepier in time to drift off by 11 p.m.

If you’re unable to maintain consistent sleep and wake times and feel tired during the day, Colón suggests avoiding lengthy midday naps — anything more than 40 minutes is probably too long. Extended naps prematurely purge a chemical called adenosine that accumulates throughout the day and induces drowsiness in the evenings. So, come bedtime, the sleepy feeling never arrives.

Shorter naps, however, can boost your daytime vitality without disrupting your nighttime sleep, says Colón. Catnaps are still OK.



2. Food Timing

Going to bed on a reasonably empty stomach can also help with sleep. Zee recommends concluding your evening meal two to three hours or more before bedtime. Because late hours and low light trigger the SCN to signal the peripheral clock in the GI tract to shut down metabolic activity, the body is less equipped to break down food at night.

This is one reason night-shift work can lead to health complications. “People are eating at night, which makes sense, but their bodies never completely adjust,” says Daniel Buysse, MD, a University of Pittsburgh professor of sleep medicine.

Even if someone is accustomed to being awake at night, the digestive and metabolic systems perceive this as an “adverse circadian time,” so night-shift meals are harder for the body to process. “That in itself may contribute to the weight gain and obesity that is often associated with night-shift work,” he explains.

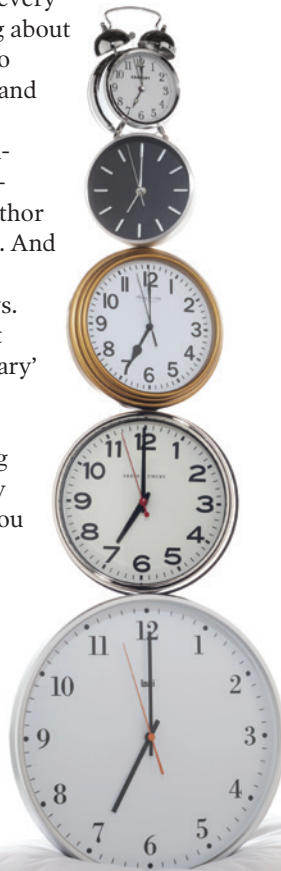
When we eat late, we tend to make more indulgent food choices. Social psychology researchers have posited that willpower is a limited resource that diminishes throughout the day. This is one reason a cupcake may have a mystical power over us after dark — especially if we’re tired, stressed, and trying to work late into the evening.

“No one craves a salad at 11 p.m.,” acknowledges Zee. “We know that if you’re sleep-deprived, you’re more likely to want to eat carbs and make unhealthy food choices.”

Alcohol right before bed can also disrupt sleep. A nightcap may seem like a natural way to wind down, but sleep experts recommend against it. While drinking may reduce the time it takes to fall asleep, it tends to delay the onset of REM sleep — which studies have shown can translate into less restful sleep overall.

If you’re going to enjoy a cocktail, limit it to one drink with dinner at least three hours before bed.

This will give your body time to metabolize the alcohol well before lights out.



3.

Light Exposure

Exposure to light and dark is a critical — and often overlooked — component of circadian health. Bright natural or natural-mimicking light during the day helps regulate melatonin production.

You don't need to be exposed for long periods of time, says Zee: A morning stroll with your dog, a bike commute to work, eating lunch outside, or even making sure your office space is brightly lit can help.

Sunglasses protect your eyes, but Colón warns that wearing them constantly can reduce melatonin production. (If your eyes are never exposed to bright light, the onset of darkness won't trigger the pineal gland to produce the hormone.) Forgo your shades in the morning light to reset your sleep-wake cycle.

Receiving bright light in the morning is another reason an early wake-up time is so important, he adds. That's when blue-wavelength light, the most stimulating type, is strongest. It has the most powerful effect on the circadian cycle because the receptors in our retinas are especially sensitive to it, and they transmit these stronger signals to the SCN. (In the late afternoon, we see

more red- and orange-wavelength light, which are less stimulating.)

Blue light after dark can be a surprisingly powerful sleep disrupter. "One of the biggest things we know that affects sleep is using any kind of electronics before bedtime," says Romm. Blue light is produced by computer, phone, and tablet screens, as well as by energy-efficient light bulbs.

When we're checking email on our phones and reading on tablets as we nod off, we're at odds with our natural rhythms. "The circadian system evolved expecting that our days would be more or less filled with light and activity, and our nights would be filled with darkness and much less activity," says Buysse.

Romm recommends powering down all screens in the evenings at least an hour before bed. If that's not feasible, try a setting or an app that dims blue light on smartphones, tablets, and computers, such as the Night Shift setting for Apple or the Dimmer app for Android.

If possible, keep lamps on their lowest setting after dinner, and

“
One of the biggest things we know that affects sleep is using any kind of electronics before bedtime.”

consider getting a red light bulb or pink salt lamp for your bedroom. Not only is the aesthetic romantic, but our brains associate red-spectrum light with the waning of sunlight and the end of the active day.

The rhythms our body clocks keep are a foundational part of our physiology. When we attune to them and try to align our schedules a little more closely with the rising and setting of the sun, our health will benefit — around the clock. 🌞

LAINE BERGESON BECCO, FMCHC,
is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

The Rise of Circadian Medicine

Until 2014, most circadian researchers believed our body clocks regulated between 10 and 30 percent of our genes. They've since discovered that closer to 50 percent of our genes follow a 24-hour cycle, and this revelation has sparked a surge of research — some of which examines whether circadian rhythms might be leveraged to create more-effective medical care.

Because circadian-controlled genes follow a predictable daily schedule, healthcare practitioners have begun to experiment by timing medical interventions for maximum impact. Just as you'd drink coffee or tea in the morning to help yourself wake up and avoid them in the evening when your body needs to wind down, the best time to target circadian-controlled genes with medication may be the point in a 24-hour period when they would be most receptive to its effects.

Findings from a review published in the journal *Hypertension* in 2021 suggest that taking blood pressure medications at a specific time each day may improve outcomes.

Emerging research on circadian rhythms and cancer has also produced eye-opening results. A study published in 2022 found that circadian dysregulation accelerates tumor growth in young people with colorectal cancer. Eating at night, sleeping during the day, and getting too little sleep are all risk factors for this population, but emphasizing a rhythmic schedule for food and sleep may help improve

their health outcomes and boost survival rates.

Even tumors have a circadian schedule. Metastatic tumors spread by producing and circulating tumor cells throughout the body, and experts have long assumed they shed these invasive cells constantly. But a study published in *Nature* in 2022 tells a different story: Metastatic breast tumors do not produce invasive cells constantly; instead, they create the most cells when the body's asleep and are relatively unproductive during waking hours.

What's more, the cells produced at night are likely to metastasize, whereas cells made during the day lack the ability to morph and spread. The study authors write that these findings provide “a new rationale for time-controlled . . . treatment of metastasis-prone cancers.”

Research into circadian-informed medical interventions is still in its infancy — and barriers abound: Studying large groups of individuals who have slightly different circadian schedules or who have tumors with different cyclical rhythms is a challenge; convincing research subjects to take medications within an hour-or-so window is tricky; and resistance from big pharmaceutical companies is real.

Still, the promise of circadian medicine has a lot of experts feeling optimistic. They believe it's a health-care approach whose time has come.



Circadian Rhythms and Gene Expression

Studies suggest that roughly half of our genes are expressed rhythmically.

“The most robustly rhythmic genes that are being expressed are metabolic genes and genes of the immune system — for example, those that regulate inflammation,” says Northwestern University sleep specialist Phyllis C. Zee, MD, PhD. This may explain why disrupted

sleep has such a strong association with increased risk for chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, cancer, and Alzheimer's.

Type 2 diabetes is a metabolic issue; cancer nearly always involves increased inflammation in some form; and Alzheimer's is now widely understood as an inflammatory condition. Research also suggests this latter disease is

partly attributable to an inability of the brain to detoxify, a process that takes place during deep sleep.

“This connection with chronic disease and metabolic disorders is a really good example of that interaction, where these rhythmic profiles of gene expression can be modified by light and by sleep states,” says Zee.



BUILD. PERFORM. RECOVER.*

Fuel your body with naturally flavored and naturally sweetened, essential protein for healthy metabolism, strong muscles, immune resilience, and healthy body composition.*

Grass-Fed Whey | Vegan | Non-GMO Whey Isolate | Grass-Fed Collagen Peptides

shop.lifetime.life/npd

*These statements have not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.

©2021 LIFE TIME, INC. All rights reserved. nprmg21385615

LIFE TIME

Real Life



At heart, compassion is kindness in response to the pain and suffering that we all experience sooner or later.

— Henry Emmons, MD,
and Aimee Prasek, PhD

Page
73

We are hardwired to care for each other, even when it may seem like too much to ask. Starting small is the key.



Urgent Care

Distressing or frightening medical experiences are not uncommon. Try this advice to be your own best advocate.

BY **QUINTON SKINNER**

It's a scene that was described on front pages and among families during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic: A patient in intensive care, struggling to breathe, placed on a ventilator and fighting for life. For many of those fortunate enough to survive, the trauma of this harrowing experience lingered long after they started breathing on their own again.

Whether it's something as minor as a needle jab or as profound as major surgery, medical intervention is a universal aspect of life. But it's what happens afterward that, for many of us, can cast a cloud over our future sense of well-being.

The term "medical trauma" describes a range of emotional and physical responses that follow medical experiences, often including sensations of pain, fear, and helplessness. This reaction is usually acute and develops in the immediate aftermath of treatment, though it may manifest months or years later.

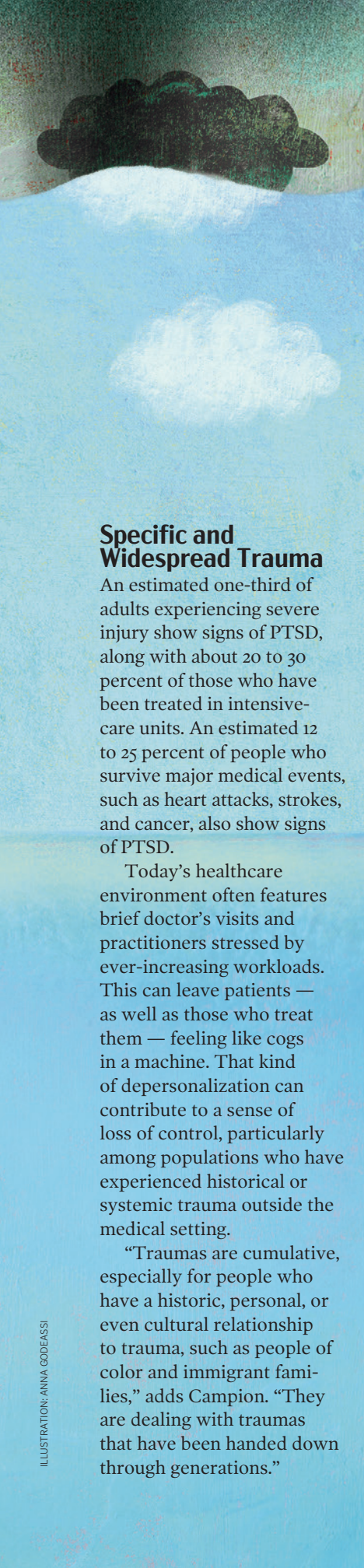
For some, this might involve a relatively mild aversion to doctors' offices or medical procedures. For others, the effects can progress into posttraumatic stress

disorder (PTSD), anxiety, or depression.

Understanding the nature of this trauma requires that we identify the specific experiences that triggered it. "There has been research on patients' fears. Of the two biggest ones, No. 1 is depersonalization and No. 2 is a loss of control," says Jan Chozen Bays, MD, author of *Mindful Medicine: 40 Simple Practices to Help Healthcare Professionals Heal Burnout and Reconnect to Purpose*.

Common symptoms of medical trauma include intrusive thoughts, memories, and nightmares; fearfulness and heightened anxiety; and avoidance of stimuli that might trigger memories of the event. In many cases, medical trauma builds on previous traumatic medical experiences.

"Many clients that I see for this kind of trauma work have residual trauma from childhood medical experiences," says psychologist Maureen Campion, MS, LP, author of *Heal Your Birth Story: Releasing the Unexpected*. "This can be a huge trigger, because suddenly they're in the hands of medical professionals again, which can create a feeling of being very trapped."



Specific and Widespread Trauma

An estimated one-third of adults experiencing severe injury show signs of PTSD, along with about 20 to 30 percent of those who have been treated in intensive-care units. An estimated 12 to 25 percent of people who survive major medical events, such as heart attacks, strokes, and cancer, also show signs of PTSD.

Today's healthcare environment often features brief doctor's visits and practitioners stressed by ever-increasing workloads. This can leave patients — as well as those who treat them — feeling like cogs in a machine. That kind of depersonalization can contribute to a sense of loss of control, particularly among populations who have experienced historical or systemic trauma outside the medical setting.

"Traumas are cumulative, especially for people who have a historic, personal, or even cultural relationship to trauma, such as people of color and immigrant families," adds Champion. "They are dealing with traumas that have been handed down through generations."

Steps Toward Healing

There may be unavoidable repercussions from major medical events, but lasting traumatic stress doesn't have to be a fixture in your emotional landscape. Move forward with the following steps.

RECOGNIZE THE REALITY. Before casting an eye toward future well-being, acknowledge the intensity of your experience. "People will tell you that you're lucky to be alive, or it was all for the best, or whatever platitude we can throw out there," Champion says. "Yes, I'm lucky to be alive — but there's also more to it than that. I was terrified. I had horrible things happen to me. I'm still experiencing pain." (For advice on dealing with toxic positivity, see ELmag.com/toxicpositivity.)

NOTICE THE EFFECTS. Because the original cause of medical trauma may be a rare event, you might dismiss its ongoing emotional impact. It's not every day, after all, that someone gives birth or undergoes surgery, which can make it easier to deny there's anything wrong even as our sleep is restless and our anxiety levels are spiking.

TALK ABOUT IT. "One thing that helps is a narrative approach," says Champion. "It's about telling your story in order to make sense of it." The goal is to place the memory fully in the past.

If you're dealing with PTSD or systemic trauma, you'll want to find a therapist who can support you. If you're not ready for that step, you might prefer to confide in a trusted friend. Either approach can remind you that you're not alone, which can help you process what happened.

"It's like the feeling of almost being in a car crash," Champion adds. "We go home and tell somebody, 'I almost died!' Human beings know how to process that: We need to share it with someone. We need to have it recognized, and that can help keep us from playing it over and over in our heads."

TRY OTHER THERAPEUTIC APPROACHES. Deep breathing exercises can calm anxiety. Movement, such as shaking and dancing, as well as activities like walking, can also ease traumatic stress. And mindfulness practices can help us process traumatic events.

"One effective exercise centers around gratitude for the body and all its sensations," says Chozen Bays. "When something goes wrong with the body, we tend to have negative feelings toward it. We can turn our attention, for instance, to a part

of the body that isn't functioning well and say thank you to it. Sometimes people cry, because they realize how this body part has been working as hard as it can, against the odds, to try [to] take care of them."

Champion also uses mindfulness in her practice to help her clients prepare for what may be a traumatic experience. "I use meditation a lot in preparing for birth and other hospital procedures," she says. "It's not going to protect against everything, but it can keep your reactivity down." (For more ways to find calm, see ELmag.com/beyondmeditation.)

BUILD OUT YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM.

Traumatic medical experiences can also be mitigated, in some cases, by building better relationships in healthcare settings. People can ease their concerns by advocating for themselves, asking for detailed explanations, expressing fears, and creating stronger, more-human connections with providers.

You might find that you want to expand your healthcare team to include another type of practitioner — like a bodyworker or an acupuncturist — who can offer you a more sustained interaction and hands-on support.

You might also consider working with a patient advocate: someone you trust to communicate with healthcare professionals when you can't advocate for yourself. (For more advice on getting the support you need from your healthcare experience, see ELmag.com/empoweredpatient.)

FIND COMPASSION. Another constructive practice is cultivating care for oneself and turning it outward. "We can open our awareness to all the people in the world having the same difficulty," says Chozen Bays. "That widens your awareness to feel compassion for everybody, including yourself."

A compassionate viewpoint can also reduce feelings of helplessness by encouraging you to seek connection. While no single approach is a cure-all for the serious reality of medical trauma or PTSD, how we frame our experience and how we relate to others can help us heal in body, mind, and spirit. 🧘

QUINTON SKINNER is a Minneapolis-based writer.

 **JOOLA**[®] PICKLEBALL

WORLD'S #1 PLAYER
BEN JOHNS

NEXT GENERATION EQUIPMENT
FOR THE
CHAMPION
IN YOU!

JOOLAUSA.COM

Compassionate by Nature

Our brains are wired to care for others, even when it may seem like too much to ask.

BY HENRY EMMONS, MD, AND AIMEE PRASEK, PhD

At heart, compassion is kindness in response to the pain and suffering that we all experience sooner or later. And despite what some have argued, humans are wired for it.

Practicing compassion benefits us in myriad ways — and we can train ourselves to be more compassionate toward others *and* ourselves.

The Compassionate Brain

Our brains are built to respond to the pain of others. Brain-imaging studies have shown that when participants view pictures of someone suffering, their amygdalae, part of the brain's threat-detection system, light up.

Notably, the same area lights up when we are in pain ourselves. When we see pain in others, it's like an empathy alarm goes off: *I see your pain. I understand it. I can even sort of feel it.*

During a moment of empathy, the part of the brain connected to pleasure also activates, triggered by the hormone dopamine. This means we also receive a reward to calm the stress response and slow the heart rate, priming us to approach the person suffering rather than respond to the original fight-or-flight signal.

At this point, compassion is about to shout. This happens when your pituitary gland releases oxytocin — the love hormone — to help prompt our caregiving behaviors.

In other words, when we see or hear about suffering, we're wired to detect it. We feel the stress of it first and then empathize with it. This prompts us to respond with kindness. When we do, even if it's just with a compassionate thought, our system rewards us.

Compassion Fatigue

That said, just because we're primed to act with compassion doesn't mean we always do — or if we do, that we always know how to respond without wearing ourselves out.

The volume of difficulty we face today is testing the limits of our ability to respond without becoming depleted. And this can lead to compassion fatigue.

This occurs when our response system is being activated nonstop — and it's not uncommon in those who deal with people in crisis situations day after day.

Each of these crises pings our brain's compassion-response system. Threat detection, stress response, empathy — again and again, on an endless loop. When there's so much incoming that we can't calm our system with caregiving behaviors, or even a compassionate thought, we enter a chronic state of stress.

Many of us may suffer from this, but it may stem from a slight misunderstanding of compassion. We often think of compassion as suffering with another, or carrying their burden with them, or just feeling bad because they're feeling bad. Sometimes there's even a sense of responsibility or guilt thrown in.

All of this is potentially depleting, and it doesn't quite reflect the wisdom of true compassion: that we are both connected and separate.

Tiny Acts

We may think that if we can't do much to address someone's suffering, there's no reason to do anything. That's not true.

A study out of Johns Hopkins University involving a group of cancer patients found, unsurprisingly, that compassionate care significantly improved anxiety levels for patients.

But here's the surprise: The intervention the study used took just 40 seconds. It simply involved caregivers communicating their compassion: validating the challenge a patient was experiencing and assuring them that the caregiver would support them throughout their treatment.

None of these interventions involved the practitioners taking on the suffering of their patients. The caregivers could be there for them without *being* them.

Remember: just a tiny act, 40 seconds. Try starting with once a day, once a week. At the very least, such acts can calm our nervous systems.

When you feel like you want to close yourself off from the pain and suffering that might be inside or around you, or when you feel totally overwhelmed by it, wise compassion offers up a different choice. It starts with an acknowledgement: *This is how things are.*

When we can accept and turn toward whatever is before us, offering whatever small kindness we can, we can open ourselves to grief and loss without letting it overwhelm us.

These little gestures make a big difference.

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



How to Halt Diet Talk

Comments and conversations related to diet culture can trigger complicated emotions involving food and weight.

One expert offers advice for setting healthy boundaries.

BY JON SPAYDE

You've been developing a healthier relationship with your body and with food. You're tired of restricting yourself and of fearing excess. You're sick of weight-loss diets, weary of worrying about whether a dish of ice cream represents a profound failure of self-discipline that must be "redeemed" by a workout.

You're experimenting with body neutrality, learning to accept or appreciate your body as it is. Maybe you're beginning to eat intuitively, listening to what your body is telling you about how it wants to be nourished.

Friends and family, however, are still entangled in weight-loss culture, still engaging in "diet talk": "I've got to get back on the wagon after this dessert." "I've been so good about staying away from snacks!"

"Kathy has been on keto-paleo and looks fantastic."

This kind of talk pushes you right out of your new mindset, reminding you of earlier struggles and rousing complicated emotions about food and weight. And if you've struggled with disordered eating, diet talk has the potential to destabilize your recovery.

Alissa Rumsey, MS, RD, certified intuitive eating counselor and author of *Unapologetic Eating*, understands the problem. "Our culture ends up causing us to disconnect from our body and its cues in a lot of ways," she says.

When you're trying to rebuild or strengthen that connection, talking about dieting and weight can disrupt your progress — and your enjoyment of food. Rumsey suggests creating peaceful, respectful boundaries to protect yourself when diet talk arises.

Stress Sources

Establishing new boundaries is challenging, especially with family and friends. You may be concerned about alienating those close to you by expressing your discomfort. But Rumsey points out that not doing so can also threaten your relationships. “A lot of people end up finding that if they stay silent because it feels easier to not say anything, they might start to disconnect from the person who’s doing the diet talking,” she says. “It becomes easier *not* to see them.”

Explaining your new outlook could make you seem “holier than thou.” You don’t want to appear judgmental of your friends and family, as if you’re occupying some higher ground of body awareness and self-acceptance. Maybe you’ve also engaged in diet talk in the past and worry about being seen as hypocritical.

You don’t know what to say, and how much to say, about your new orientation to food. “Sometimes,” Rumsey says, “people say to themselves, *If I’m going to bring up my problem with diet talk, I’m going to have to explain everything. I’m going to have to know the perfect way to explain body neutrality or intuitive eating.*”

If the other people in the conversation don’t understand your point of view, you might feel offended.

You don’t feel comfortable addressing the comments in the moment. You might feel that it’s too awkward to say something when diet talk comes up — but you’re not sure what other options you have. Should you just sit there quietly even though the conversation makes you uncomfortable?

Strategies for Success

Build a no-diet-talk bubble. It’s a lot easier to deal with the diet talkers in your life if you have regular support from those who’ve given it up. “That might involve cultivating social media — following people who are expressing more positive messages about food and body image or joining Facebook groups,” Rumsey says. “There’s a lot of great community available online now. Your bubble can include podcasts you regularly listen to, books that you read, and your dietitian or therapist. If you have that kind of community, it’s there for you to go back to even if other people in your life are still engaging in diet talk.”

Plan your response. Rumsey recommends deciding beforehand how you will respond if you encounter diet talk. She sometimes role-plays with her clients to help them decide what they will say, and this is something you can do with a friend. As you plan, you can consider the following points:

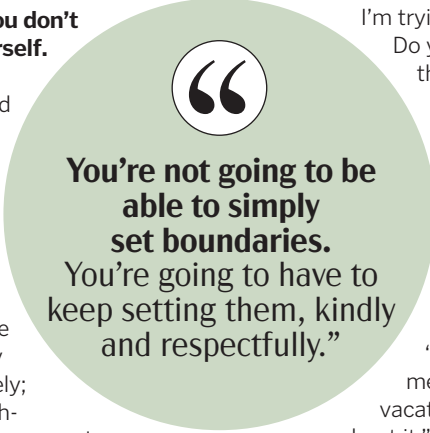
● **Remember that you don’t have to explain yourself.**

Rumsey emphasizes that you’re not required to explain why diet talk bothers you or describe your new attitudes toward food and weight. “You don’t have to say anything at all if you prefer not to,” she says. “You can simply excuse yourself politely; you can go to the bathroom. If you decide to respond, one or two simple sentences about why diet talk bothers you is plenty.”

● **Keep the focus on yourself.** “If you do decide to speak up about diet talk, remember that establishing a boundary isn’t about blaming the other person for the way they’re talking, or about being defensive,” says Rumsey. She recommends using “I” statements.

● **Stay positive.** She suggests acknowledging the other person’s point of view as you explain yours. “Try something like, ‘I’m happy that you found something that works for you, but I’m really working on healing my relationship to food right now, and the whole issue of diets makes me uncomfortable.’”

● **Be empathetic and direct.** This is all about showing compassion for your friends or loved ones, Rumsey says, “because you may have been in their place at some point. If you have, you can say something like, ‘I know I’ve done that diet with you in the past, but I’ve been finding it’s not working well for me, so



“
You’re not going to be able to simply set boundaries.
You’re going to have to keep setting them, kindly and respectfully.”

I’m trying something else. Do you mind if we change the conversation?”

● **Redirect the conversation.**

Rumsey offers a few suggestions: “I just read this really great book or I saw this terrific movie. Have you heard of it?” “Hey, I saw on social media that you went on vacation last month. Tell me about it.”

● **Let go of expectations about how people will react.** “Sure, someone might respond in a way that you were hoping they wouldn’t,” Rumsey says. “But that’s on them, not on you.” Focus on being kind, respectful, and clear.

● **Say more if someone expresses interest.** “If someone in the conversation says something like, ‘That’s really interesting. Can you tell me more about it?’ or ‘I’ve heard about intuitive eating. Can you explain a little bit more?’ you can go into more detail or refer the person to a website or book. But only if you have that kind of opening and their consent — and if you yourself have the bandwidth.”

● **Remember that maintaining boundaries is not a one-time thing.** “You’re not going to be able to simply set boundaries,” says Rumsey. “You’re going to have to keep setting them, kindly and respectfully. This is a practice.” 🔄

JON SPAYDE is an *Experience Life* contributing writer.



SHINE x INFINITY

color-boosting | super-conditioning | long-lasting

*Ask your LifeSpa stylist about adding
Shinefinity gloss to your next hair service.*

What Is Healing Touch?

This form of energy healing is becoming increasingly common in healthcare settings to support pain relief. Here's what we understand about it.

BY **COURTNEY HELGOE**

Hands and healing have long been linked. The laying on of hands is practiced in a range of religious and spiritual traditions; massage is a common gateway to pain relief; and in contemporary medicine, a surgeon's hands are her foundational instruments.

In the energy-healing practice called Healing Touch, the practitioner's hands simply hover over the body of the patient. Yet the reduction in both pain and stress can be startlingly powerful. What's going on here?

Helping Hands

Many people first encounter Healing Touch in a hospital. Thanks to its solid reputation for providing pain relief without drugs, this energy-healing modality is typically used to complement medical interventions involving stress or pain, such as cancer treatment, surgery recovery, or acute injury. It's often administered by trained nurses or certified volunteers.

Despite the name, Healing Touch is nothing like massage. During a session, you typically recline or lie down, and the practitioner quietly moves their hands a few inches above your body. They may or may not touch a few specific points. A session lasts anywhere from five minutes to a full hour, and patients often fall asleep.

Because Healing Touch treatments work with energy rather than with tissues, it can be hard to grasp how or why they help. But patients consistently report measurable reductions in stress and pain — often after trying and failing to treat those conditions by other means, including pharmaceuticals. This has led researchers to wonder whether these treatments intervene at a level that drugs cannot.

The Biofield

Healing Touch was developed in the 1980s by a Colorado nurse named Janet Mentgen. She worked in emergency rooms and home healthcare, and she saw how effective touch and energy work could be in relieving her patients' pain. She began teaching her method to other nurses, and in 1996 she founded Healing Beyond Borders, a non-profit that offers certification to nurses, healthcare providers, and caregivers.

Today, Healing Touch is offered at many major medical centers, including the Mayo Clinic, and in the Veterans Health Administration hospital system. One 2020 study reported that a group of combat veterans receiving Healing Touch for PTSD experienced “clinically significant” reductions in their symptom severity, and other studies have shown measurable pain and stress reduction for cancer patients.

Researchers also found that Therapeutic Touch (a practice similar to Healing Touch) helped regulate the vital signs of infants in a neonatal intensive-care unit (NICU).

“These therapies are based on the idea that the body has a biofield system, not unlike the circulatory, nervous, and lymphatic systems,” explains Mimi Guarneri, MD, a San Diego-based integrative cardiologist and president of the Academy of Integrative Health and Medicine. In this view, Healing Touch produces results by restoring good circulation in the body's energy field.

That the body is surrounded by an energy field, or biofield, is less esoteric than it sounds. The no-contact thermometers we used

during the COVID-19 pandemic measured body temperature at a distance of several inches; EEGs and EKGs measure the body's electrical signals using electrodes.

The hands also emit energy, and healing practitioners are trained to direct energy through their hands. One 2008 study found that bone cells in a petri dish that received treatments



from trained practitioners grew faster and stronger than cells receiving sham treatments or none at all.

Many scientists continue to insist that the positive outcomes of Healing Touch are the result of the placebo effect.

And yet this noninvasive complementary approach has provided relief to many, including those who might be unable to question its powers, such as infants in the NICU. There's little question that receiving positive nurturing attention has a healing power of its own.

So if you're inclined to receive a helping hand from Healing Touch, there seems little reason to refuse.

COURTNEY HELGOE is the *Experience Life* features editor.

Keep Your Cool

Ideas for staying chill during the summer months.

BY ALEXANDRA SMITH

It's warm outside — and it's only getting warmer. As climate change sends temperatures rising across the planet, regions that once experienced mild summers are now subject to extreme heat waves. Homes and other buildings in these areas were not designed to shield their inhabitants from sweltering weather, which can be deadly.

Even in places where hot summers are the norm, residents often struggle against smoldering temps.

So, how do we keep cool? Sure, we can blast the AC — if we have it — but that's not great for our energy bill, the planet, or our own well-being (who wants to stay inside all summer?).

Instead, let's look to these easy, Earth-friendly ways to cool down when temperatures rise.

Keeping Yourself Cool

Your body is designed to self-regulate its temperature. Your skin, sweat glands, and blood vessels are part of an intricate heating and cooling system that constantly adjusts to its internal and external environments. But in extreme weather, this thermoregulation system may need a boost. The following strategies can help.

EAT RIGHT. Metabolizing food generates heat. The more you eat, the more heat. So, keep cooler by consuming smaller portions when temperatures rise. Limit calorie-dense foods, such as ice cream (we know — just keep it to a single scoop), which require extra effort to digest. Instead, reach for energy-efficient digestibles containing plenty of water, such as veggies and fruits.

STAY HYDRATED. Sip water throughout the day — don't wait until you're thirsty, warns the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Limit caffeine, which can raise body temps. And avoid energy drinks that contain “much more caffeine than standard servings of coffee, tea, or soft drinks,” the CDC notes. Finally, watch the booze: Alcohol dehydrates and also triggers blood vessels to expand and warm the skin.

BRING ON THE SWEAT. It may seem counterintuitive, but foods and beverages that warm the body, such as hot tea

or spicy fare, can actually boost thermoregulation on a hot day by causing you to sweat — provided you're in a dry locale where your sweat can evaporate. Opt for minimal clothing to allow the sweat to evaporate more quickly.

SOOTHE YOUR SKIN. Your skin is a crucial element of your thermoregulation system, so you need to be strategic with cooling and warming tactics. For immediate heat relief, soothe the skin by misting it with cool water or applying an aloe vera compress. You can also place your feet in a cold foot bath while you relax; add a few drops of peppermint essential oil for an added cooling effect.

If you take a shower or bath before bed to help with sleep, it's best to opt for warm rather than cool water. Mimicking the sweat mechanism, warm water evaporates once you emerge from the shower or bath, cooling the blood vessels near your skin. Do this about an hour before hitting the hay: It takes time for the cooling to occur.



Keeping Your Home Cool

Blasting the AC may feel great during heat waves, but it's neither financially nor environmentally friendly. Passive cooling techniques, which incorporate building design and materials to regulate heat, require a bit of forethought but can dramatically reduce interior temperatures with little cost to you or Planet Earth, notes University of Oregon assistant professor of environmental design Alexandra Rempel, MArch, PhD, in a 2022 report published in *Applied Energy*.

SHADE STRATEGICALLY. Light-colored cellular shades block heat and light more effectively than curtains do, especially when installed along tracks on the sides of window frames. Pull down the shades when sunlight hits the window — even before the day heats up — but let your windows “breathe” at night, advises Rempel. This allows the glass to radiate trapped heat outward.

ENHANCE VENTILATION. Well-controlled shading and ventilation can reduce air-conditioning loads by up to 70 percent in some climates and seasons, Rempel's team notes. Opening multiple windows creates cooling cross-drafts, but only when it's cooler outside. Close the windows as temperatures rise and let a box fan take over: It can circulate the cool air you've already introduced into the house with minimal energy use. If you have rooms you don't use during the day, shut their doors — then vent the warm air out at night.

CROSS-VENTILATE AT NIGHT. Draw cool night air through your house by opening windows, and pull warm air

outside by placing a box fan in one window as an exhaust.

LIMIT YOUR USE OF APPLIANCES AND ELECTRONICS. Many of our most-used appliances and electronics — dishwashers, ovens, refrigerators, overhead lighting, computers, televisions, and gaming systems — generate heat while running. Limit your use when possible: Wash dishes by hand, rely on natural light during the day, and opt for meals that don't require heating (if need be, choose the microwave instead of the stove). Minimize how often you open the refrigerator door and watch TV only in the evenings, when temperatures drop.

LANDSCAPE FOR SHADE. Shade-bearing trees and shrubs planted on the west and southwest sides of your house can help keep heat and sunlight at bay. “The shade of a large tree can reduce the temperature up to 10 degrees, and these effects can be felt inside a house as well,” says Lynn Steiner, author of *Grow Native*. “Studies show that a few well-placed shade trees can reduce cooling costs by as much as 35 percent.”

Keeping Cool While Out and About

Summer days are meant to be filled with picnics, strolls, and swimming — not heat exhaustion. You can embrace the outdoors even when temperatures rise by being mindful of timing, clothing, and your body's own signals.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING. The sun is strongest at noon, yet heat typically builds through the afternoon and often peaks between 3 and 5 p.m. Schedule outdoor activities, such as running or biking, either first thing in the morning or later in the evening. And pay attention to seasonal changes too: Hold off on exercising in warm weather until your body is acclimated to the heat, the Mayo Clinic advises.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS. Light-colored clothing reflects, rather than absorbs, the sun's rays. Loose-fitting clothing helps sweat do its work. Wide-brimmed hats serve as a personal source of shade. For a quick hit of cool, place some ice in a bandana before wrapping it around your neck or forehead.

And don't forget the SPF — to prevent burns and more. According to a 2019 study involving only subjects with light to moderate skin pigmentation, sunscreen may also help maintain — and actually increase — nitric oxide levels and blood flow to the skin, which helps regulate body temperature.

TAKE IT EASY. What was an easy workout in the spring may be downright debilitating during the dog days of summer, especially when it's humid (sweat needs to evaporate to cool the body, but humidity hinders evaporation). Watch for the warning signs of heat exhaustion — rapid heartbeat, dizziness, muscle cramps, and headache — and be sure to stay hydrated and in the shade as much as possible. 🌿

ALEXANDRA SMITH is a Minneapolis-based health-and-wellness writer.



Healthy Inspiration All Year Long!



Give the gift of
Experience Life

[ExperienceLife.com/LTMemberGift](https://www.ExperienceLife.com/LTMemberGift)



COOL CUSTOMER

The pint-size stainless steel Ice Cream Canteen keeps frozen desserts scoopable for up to four hours, so you can finally bring your favorite chilly treats to the beach. About \$45 at www.food52.com.



GIVE-AWAY!
See page 4 for details.

IDEAL TEMP

Keep your bubbly perfectly chilled for the duration of the bottle with this double-walled, vacuum-insulated wine chiller from Vinglaccé. \$90 for the chiller; \$140 for the chiller plus two glass-lined tumblers at www.vinglaccé.com.



Time to Chill Out

Stay cool with these summer-loving kitchen goods.

ECOPOPS

Make your own ice pops in these stylish, stainless steel molds from Ecozoi. They come with a set of reusable bamboo sticks and silicone rings to keep the sticks stable. \$47 at www.ecozoi.com.



ICE-CREAM DREAM

Cuisinart makes what may be the world's easiest at-home ice-cream maker, perfectly suited to the pace of summer: Add fresh ingredients, press a button, and let the machine finish the job. \$70 at www.cuisinart.com.



SMOOTH START

Step up your iced coffee game with the OXO cold brew coffee maker. Add grounds and water to steep overnight, and by morning you'll have a carafe of smooth, low-acid coffee concentrate to pour over ice. \$52 at www.oxo.com.



Photo: @Matt Trappe

for your
mountain.



jackal II

With cushion and traction ready to take you from door to trail, trail to mountain, and every mile in between, the **JACKAL II** is your new run buddy.



LA SPORTIVA®

lasportivausa.com

SINCE 1928



Start Now

BY **BAHRAM AKRADI**

Our ancestors heard it: A constant, echoing drumbeat of threat, sounding a daily reminder to run for their lives. They were wired to leap, climb, and swim to survive.

Evolution took its course, and hunters and gatherers transformed into farmers; eventually, many became operators of tools and machines.

With the advent of 20th century technology, activity as a necessity almost completely faded away, especially in certain parts of the world. Though we're meant to move, many of us became sedentary.

Today, many people's physical activity peaks by their mid-20s, and less than a third of American adults meet recommendations for daily movement. Instead, we too often find ourselves sitting for the majority of our waking hours.

Without movement, however, we deteriorate. James A. Levine, MD, PhD, first designated "sitting as the new smoking" because of all its health risks. Excessive sitting is associated with dozens of diseases and conditions, including cardiovascular disease, hypertension, back pain, obesity, depression, and cancer.

What was true for our ancestors remains true for us today: An active lifestyle is crucial to our survival.

As much as absence of motion destroys us, the presence of it improves us. Movement affects all 600-plus muscles in our body, increasing our strength, bodily awareness, stability, and coordination. Weightbearing activities, like hiking or jogging, help build dense, durable bones. Move, and the risk of heart disease decreases while cardiorespiratory endurance increases.

Movement also supports brain function. It improves our attention and

memory. It enables us to more quickly process and switch between tasks. It helps us learn new skills and perform better at school and at work.

Over time, it can help protect and grow synapses, the connecting structures of the brain whose deterioration is linked to aging and cognitive decline.

Emotionally, movement stimulates the release of feel-good neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine, increasing the feelings of pleasure, accomplishment, and meaning — well-being that goes far beyond effort itself.

Many people have grown to love high-impact, sweaty, performance-driven exercise — the operative word here being *grown*. Once you start to move and discover how good it feels, there's a better chance you'll repeat it. Which means the key is to start, and discover something you enjoy. And here, the options are endless.

Park in the space farthest from the entrance. Go for a walk around the block. Take to the city streets or head out for a country stroll. Hike through a forest or a nearby park.

Find a lake or a pool. Step into the shallow end; take your time, and slowly submerge. Gravity seems to disappear, and through the elemental nature of your body, buoyancy takes over.

Hop onto a bike. With a bit of physics and balance comes freedom. Propelled by the combustion of your metabolism, you decide where you want to go, how hard you want to work. It doesn't take long to absorb the medicinal effects of nature.

Try yoga. Watch your chest rise and fall as you inhale and exhale. Arms and legs start to move and, somehow, connect with your breath. Effort, then stillness. Notice your perspective shift as you listen to your

heart pumping blood through your body at rest.

Walk onto a pickleball court and remember how fun it is to feel like a kid. Surprise yourself with a burst of speed, and reconnect with how good it feels to reach, swing, laugh, and stretch.

Or be part of the almost spiritual, soul-lifting experience that happens when people come together in a fitness class — any kind, any level. The movements may feel foreign at first, but twisting, shifting, and dancing quickly become more natural. Alone or in unison, rhythm meets ritual as you find a new beat.

Once you begin, you discover how movement is so much more than exercise.

It's contentment when you find yourself, early one morning, on a path to happiness.

It's connection as strangers become friends through passing nods and shared destinations.

It's transcendence when you reach the top of a hill and realize anything is possible.

It's grace that guides you through loss, grief, and sadness.

It's faith that if you keep your eyes up and feet moving, you'll go forward.

It's power that gives you the confidence to outdistance any voice telling you you're weak, wrong, or broken.

It's satisfaction as you progress from first times and first attempts to going all out.

Movement becomes an expression of who you are. And all you have to do is start.

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



**To be beautiful means
to be yourself.**

You don't need to be
accepted by others. You
need to accept yourself.

— THICH NHAT HANH

NEW YEAR

NEW RACE DATE

NEW MOMENT TO CONQUER

NEW YORK CITY TRIATHLON



Swim/Bike/Run or Run/Bike/Run the

CONCRETE JUNGLE

For the first time ever, this iconic New York City race has moved to the fall. Take your bite of the Big Apple this October 1, 2023

10.01.2023 [NYCTRI.COM](https://www.nyctri.com)

LIFETIME[®]



CLIFTON 9

THE ALL DAY EVERYDAY FAVE

HOKA
FLY HUMAN FLY