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Experience Life

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THE FOOD ISSUE

MAY/JUNE 2024
LIFE TIME

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KIT UP NOW

Volume 26, Issue 3

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THE FOOD ISSUE

IN EVERY ISSUE

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DIGITAL

11 Healthy Desserts

Desserts don't have to be off-limits in a healthy diet. It's relatively easy to create flavorful treats that aren't cloyingly sweet — and that bring extra nutrients to the table — by using alternative flours and sweeteners as well as other ingenious ingredients. We've assembled a roundup of 11 healthy (and easy!) dessert recipes, including Chocolate-Dipped Mandarins With Pistachios, Triple Coconut Rice Pudding, and a delectable Orange Almond Cake made with almond flour and coconut sugar. Who says you can't have your cake and eat it too? Scan the QR code below, or go to **ELmag.com/healthydesserts** to see the recipes.

CONNECT WITH US!

THE CASE FOR SEX THERAPY

Individual or partner therapy can help you understand your intimate desires and personal boundaries, improve communication with your partner, and enjoy better sex. **ELmag.com/sextherapy**

NUTRITION FOR HEALTHY AGING

Download our free guide to learn how to feed your body on a cellular level to tamp down inflammation, balance your hormones, and age well. **ELmag.com/nutritionebook**

THE RISE IN ADULT ADHD

The diagnosis rate of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in adults is growing four times faster than it is in children. Learn why. **ELmag.com/adultadhd**

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BY LIFE TIME

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LIFE TIME
HEALTHY WAY OF LIFE

Origin Stories

"DO YOU KNOW where your food comes from — or how it got here?" I'm not a gambler, but I'd bet most of us heard some variation of this question a time or two when we were kids. Perhaps it was during the educational curriculum about our food systems. Or maybe it was posed to us when we took the food on our plates for granted.

Growing up in rural southwest Wisconsin, I learned early on that much of the livestock raised in the barns and on the pastures of our family farm, as well as the crops grown in the surrounding fields, would eventually become products in our grocery stores. I knew the dairy cows on my grandparents' and uncles' farms were sources of the milk, yogurt, and cheese we could buy; that the pigs and beef cows my grandpa and dad raised would eventually be sold at a deli or meat counter.

Now, raising my daughters in a metro area, I realize how fortunate I was to see agriculture in action as part of my daily life: to witness my dad's dedication to caring for the animals and the land; to understand the sacrifice that farming requires; to enjoy much of that produce straight from the source.

I remember helping our neighbor in her massive garden — and by "helping" I mean picking and eating the fresh strawberries as soon as they were in hand. And I recall that right outside our back door, we filled huge seed bags with just-picked sweet corn that we'd enjoy for weeks while it was at its peak.

I took so much of this for granted, only considering much later that many people never get to experience what I lived during my first 18 years.

It's why my family plants a garden in the corner of our backyard every spring: Leafy greens, green beans, tomatoes, onions, cucumbers, and herbs — a few of which we even start from seeds — make it to our plates from June to September. (To take part in this month's "One Healthy Habit" challenge to eat more veggies, see page 20.)

It's why my daughters spend a week on the farm with their grandparents every summer. They help grandpa feed the cows, and they ride with him in the tractor as he bales hay or harvests winter wheat. They pick ripe red raspberries with grandma (just as I did with my own grandma, from the very same bush) and learn to make jam.

My hope is that because they don't live that life every day, they'll appreciate the food they eat and understand the effort it takes for it to arrive on their plates much sooner than I did. I think that's pretty likely, based on the passion that their generation is already showing for sustainability and environmental consciousness.

As you peruse our annual food issue, I hope you're inspired to explore your own early experiences with food and consider how they've shaped you (read Tlingit writer Kate Nelson's journey with this in "Native Awakening" on page 80). Perhaps it will jog a memory (see chef Justin Sutherland's cover story, "Expanding the Table," on page 16) or prompt you to make that favorite family recipe (and maybe put a healthy twist on it, like we do in "A Fresh Take on Picnic Salads" on page 50).

Whatever you do, I hope you feel more connected to and informed about the food you grow, purchase, and enjoy. Let's eat!

"I realize how fortunate I was to **see agriculture in action as part of my daily life."**

YOUR THOUGHTS?

Email us at **Experiencelife@experiencelife.com.**

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

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TALK TO US

A GREAT WAY TO TRAIN

[On "Strong, Fast, and Fit: A 9-Week Escalating Density Program," (January/February 2024)]

I just read this article in @experiencelifemagazine. This is such a great way to train; it's concise and easy to follow and remember.
@2fit2gether_fitness

Can this routine be loaded into the Life Time Training app?
Tim R.

This program is available in the Life Time app in the "Workouts and Programs" section under the "Explore" tab. To get started, simply select your start date and go. (Not a Life Time member? You can still download the app and access workouts and programs, along with other complimentary offerings.)

ON CONNECTIONS AND QUIET

I love this idea of micro-connection ("One Healthy Habit: Make a Micro-Connection," November/December 2023). We put so much pressure on ourselves to find a circle of friends, build our supports, have these deep connections — and all of that is absolutely necessary in its own way. But there's such an overlooked opportunity to have these little moments. It's a great reminder all around!
@treatyourself.365

Your article "5 Strategies for Coping With Sensory Overload," in the November/December 2023 issue, contained good advice. I like to eat out and socialize a bit, but restaurants are way too loud, and people raise their voices to be heard. So I bought a pair of earplugs that allows me to hear but drown out the nasty noises.
Leanne T.

EATING HEALTHY ON A BUDGET

My family switched from buying precut/prepped chicken breasts to buying whole chickens, from which we get a couple of meals and even make bone broth ("10 Strategies to Save Money on

Healthy Groceries," May 2023). We also buy a whole animal from a local farmer, which we split with our neighbors. It's a chunk of money up front, but the per-pound price is almost half of what we'd pay at the grocery store. We also garden when we can. I've recently started growing sprouts indoors when my garden is tucked in for the winter, and I eat several meatless meals each week.
@archofbrambles

RECIPE REVIEWS

The Braised Daikon Miso Soup is a fantastic recipe ("5 Recipes Using Winter Root Vegetables," January/February 2024)! It's easy to prepare, has easy-to-understand instructions, and is very tasty. I subbed in Hakurei turnip greens for the beet greens.
Yanji L.

I made the Mushroom Farro Bolognese ("5 Healthy Plant-Forward Casseroles," November/December 2023), and I have to say, it was delicious. I often find I need to tweak recipes, but not this one. My only comment would be that the prep time is longer than 15 minutes. There's lots of chopping.
Christine B.

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

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HELPFUL INSIGHTS

I have authored multiple articles and spoken both nationally and internationally on various skincare topics, and I've found *Experience Life* to be the most helpful and well-written magazine I have ever read. I took copious notes from a recent issue, and I will pass along what I have learned to my husband, children, patients, and others.
Amy B., MD

"Expanded Horizons," by Jamie Martin, in the July/August 2023 issue, was like a sign from the universe telling me to do the "thing." I was uncomfortable with this thing, despite how simple it was. I was honestly scared — of going to a big Life Time club. But I thought about the article and how taking the risk to do something out of your comfort zone is the way to truly grow and see what you can do. So, I did it. I went to that gym, and I realized later that the fear was all in my head. I think now that if I hadn't taken the risk and stepped into the waters, I would have never been able to grasp the wonderful opportunities in front of me.
Faith Z.

CLARIFICATION: *The lead anecdote from "Beyond CBD" (March/April 2024) was based on a patient story shared in* Cannabis Is Medicine *by Bonni Goldstein, MD. The name of Goldstein's patient was changed to protect her privacy.*

THE KEY FACTORS INFLUENCING

YOUR CALORIE NEEDS

IT'S AN ENDURING, confounding question: How much do you truly need to eat to power your body through the day? And behind that straightforward question lie myriad factors, according to a recent systematic review conducted by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

The standard answer is 2,000 calories daily. That's what the U.S. Food and Drug Administration uses for general nutrition advice, and it informs the figures you read on Nutrition Facts labels.

Yet 2,000 is a guide. The U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services' 2020–2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans breaks it down more specifically, with ranges accounting for sedentary to active lifestyles:

- 1,400 to 2,200 calories for female children ages 9 to 13 and 1,800 to 2,400 for those 14 to 18; 1,600 to 2,600 for male children ages 9 to 13 and 2,000 to 3,200 for those 14 to 18.
- 1,800 to 2,400 for females ages 19 through 30; 1,600 to 2,200 for females 31 and older.
- 2,400 to 3,000 calories for males ages 19 through 30; 2,200 to 3,000 for males 31 to 59; and 2,000 to 2,600 for males over 60.

But not all calories are created equal. Veggies, fruits, grains, and lean sources of protein typically contain fewer calories but more nutrients; fats and sweets deliver the opposite. And each individual has unique nutritional needs based on their genetics, body type or shape, and more. So, even if you're using a calorie-tracking app, it's possible to undereat — and be undernourished — based on these generalized guidelines.

All of which brings us back to that first, ever-more-confusing question.

FOOD FACTORS

The National Academies report outlines several key factors to consider when answering the calorie question for yourself.

- **Physical size:** The size of your body is the most important factor affecting your calorie requirements. Simply put, the larger you are, the more calories you need.
- **Body composition:** Your body size is balanced by its composition. Fat mass (fat in adipose tissue) is the main storage site for energy, yet its metabolic rate — the number of calories it burns — is only a quarter of that burned by lean mass, which includes skeletal muscle, connective tissue, water, and bone.
- **Physical activity:** Being active can account for up to 50 percent of your total daily energy expenditure versus just 15 percent if you're sedentary. But that doesn't necessarily mean you need to consume a lot more calories. According to the report, an inactive, 200-pound, middle-aged man may need about 2,733 calories daily. But if he were an athlete training for a couple of hours each day, he'd require some 3,519 calories. A 165-pound woman might need 2,112 and 2,647 calories, respectively.

"Physical activity is the most variable energy component," according to the report.

- **Age:** Calorie requirements decline as you get older — most noticeably in your 60s and beyond. Why? As you age, you typically lose muscle and gain fat, which burns fewer calories. And your body's most metabolically active tissue — your brain — starts to shrink and require less energy, Susan Roberts, PhD, senior associate dean of foundational research at the Dartmouth Geisel School of Medicine, tells the *New York Times*.

But not all calories are created equal. . . . Each individual has unique nutritional needs based on their genetics, body type or shape, and more.

Still, new research suggests that eating adequate amounts of protein — and engaging in moderate-intensity physical activity, especially strength (or resistance) training — may help fend off sarcopenia, the loss of lean muscle and strength, as you grow older. (For more advice on eating well as you age, see ELmag.com/agingwellpodcast.)

So, there is no single, easy answer. And any answer will be unique to you — and ever-changing throughout your life.

Regardless of your individual needs, remember: The quality of the calories you consume matters, so focus on nutrient-dense, whole foods as much as possible.

— *EXPERIENCE LIFE* STAFF

NEW THERAPIES FOR Prostate Issues

Prostatitis and benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) are almost as common as the common cold: They affect 50 percent of men by age 50 and 80 percent of men by age 70. Still, medical experts do not completely understand the causes of these prostate problems — or how best to treat them.

Prostatitis is an inflammation of the gland; BPH is an enlargement that usually comes with aging. Both press on the urethra, making it difficult to urinate or empty the bladder, often causing frequent urination as well as pain, sexual dysfunction, and psychological distress. These prostate issues, however, are generally benign and not necessarily precursors to prostate cancer.

For BPH, Harvard Medical School experts note that "if your symptoms are mild and not particularly bothersome, your doctor will recommend a conservative approach called watchful waiting."

Three types of drugs are available to treat BPH: 5-alpha-reductase inhibitors (5ARIs), phosphodiesterase 5 inhibitors, and alpha blockers, including the well-known Flomax. These meds can produce common side effects, including — especially in the case of 5ARIs — erectile dysfunction and lowered libido.

Prostatitis is often treated with a four- to six-week course of antibiotics, but bacteria actually cause only 5 to 10 percent of cases.

Most prostatitis incidents do not show signs of infection, according to functional-medicine practitioner Chris Kresser, MS, LAc; these cases are referred to as chronic prostatitis (CP) or chronic pelvic pain syndrome (CPPS).

"CP/CPPS is notorious for being the most difficult type of prostatitis to live with," he writes on his blog. "Due to its complex nature, CP/CPPS is difficult to treat and often doesn't respond to conventional medical interventions."

New studies are revealing possible causes of CP/CPPS, Kresser reports. "Emerging research indicates that the gut microbiome and reproductive tract are closely linked in terms of health and that bacterial imbalances in the gut may increase the risk of prostatitis," he writes.

Other causes may include disrupted urinary and seminal microbiomes; altered levels of adrenocortical hormones and low testosterone; inflammation and oxidative stress; exposure to environmental toxins; and autoimmunity.

With this new understanding of the root causes, practitioners are exploring new treatments. "The primary goals of the functional approach are to restore health to the gut, seminal, and urinary microbiomes, balance the HPA [hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal] axis, reduce toxic exposures and inflammation, and decrease stress," Kresser notes.

He also highlights the benefits of ancient natural treatments, such as phytotherapy, including saw palmetto and rye pollen extract.

Stress may play a role in prostate issues, and Kresser says mind–body therapies can also help. "Pelvic-floor biofeedback is a form of 'muscular reeducation' that teaches men how to relax their pelvic-floor muscles, thus helping to correct the pelvic-floor dysfunction and pelvic-pain characteristic of prostatitis."

Trials have also found that acupuncture can reduce stress and pain, as well as ease urinary symptoms.

— MICHAEL DREGNI

THE HEALING POWER OF BIRDSONG

If feeling low is for the birds, maybe it's only right that our feathered friends can also lift our spirits.

Recent research suggests that listening to birdsong — whether in nature or via a digital device — may improve our mental well-being. It's about connecting with nature, which has long been shown to improve both body and brain health.

"The special thing about birdsong is that even if people live in very urban environments and do not have a lot of contact with nature, they link the songs of birds to vital and intact natural environments," Emil Stobbe, an environmental neuroscientist at the Max Planck Institute, tells the *Washington Post*.

In Stobbe's study, one group of participants listened to audio clips of birdsong, while another listened to recordings of traffic noise. Those who listened to birdsong reported fewer depressive symptoms and less anxiety and paranoia. Those who listened to traffic noise, on the other hand, reported feeling more depressed.

In another study, spanning three and a half years and involving nearly 1,300 participants, researchers reported a strong association between hearing or seeing birds and improved well-being. And their improved mood lasted for hours.

— CRAIG COX

CBT EXPLAINED

SHAKESPEARE WROTE, "There is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." This axiom illustrates the concept behind cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), regarded as one of the most effective practices in modern psychology.

CBT focuses on objective experience in the here and now, recognizing that the way we think determines the way we perceive and respond to the world around us.

It's often referred to as the gold standard in psychotherapy. Studies support its efficacy in treating a range of mental disorders, including anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, depression, addiction, insomnia, and PTSD. It's practical, flexible, and nondogmatic.

THE MESSINESS IN OUR MINDS

CBT involves replacing dysfunctional thoughts and behaviors with healthier ways of thinking and doing. It also recognizes the role of emotions: Thoughts and feelings are considered symbiotic and bidirectional. We might feel self-conscious and think everybody's judging us. Or we might think about an upcoming stressful situation and feel nervous.

CBT presupposes that these cognitive and emotional processes occur automatically, meaning that we tend to be unaware of what we're thinking or feeling as it happens. So, one of the first steps in this practice involves learning to notice our thoughts.

Meditation and other mindfulness techniques can be helpful in this regard, teaching us to observe mental and emotional activity in real time. Recording thoughts and behaviors in a journal may also be useful, particularly because we can then observe patterns and precipitating factors.

Once we become more aware of our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, we can begin to reevaluate them.

CBT therapists often ask clients to consider the evidence for and against a particular belief or to consider exceptions they may have forgotten. They may explore alternative interpretations of a situation — "Your colleague barely responded when you said hello this morning. You took this to mean she must hate you. Could anything else explain her behavior?" — then consider how we may be distorting reality through the lens of our own biases.

The practice also involves learning to avoid the tendency to mistake feelings for facts, which can help us consider a situation more rationally.

CHANGE STARTS WITH ACTION

Central to CBT is the notion that how we think and feel about a situation determines how we respond to it. Such responses can range from the relatively benign — feeling bored leads to scrolling through social media for hours — to the downright dangerous, as when thinking that our life will never improve leads to self-harm or even suicide.

Learning to change our response to thoughts and emotions is crucial because that's the part we can best control: We may not be able to stop feeling sad or thinking about a breakup, but we can choose to call a friend instead of, say, drinking to excess.

By reminding us that we have agency, behavior change can fuel motivation and build momentum. For example, a depressed person who begins washing the dishes after days of

THIS IS YOUR BODY ON CAFFEINE

Many of us down caffeinated drinks to wake ourselves up in the morning, stay more alert in the evening, or bolster our mood. But the caffeine we're imbibing may not be working exactly the way we think it is. Here's what generally happens when you quaff a caffeinated drink and your body gets hit with the jolt.

WITHIN SECONDS

Caffeine, like alcohol, is one of the few chemicals that is soluble in both water and fat, so it begins to absorb quickly through the stomach lining and small intestine. From there, it penetrates your cells and circulates throughout your body, appearing later in bodily fluids, including saliva, semen, and breast milk.

10 TO 20 MINUTES

You begin to feel more alert. Caffeine's chemical makeup is similar to adenosine, a neurotransmitter that signals your brain to slow down when you're tired. Caffeine attaches to adenosine receptors and blocks them from putting on the brakes. This allows your brain's natural stimulants, like dopamine, to flow.

letting them pile up remembers that they feel better when the kitchen is clean. As they take on other neglected tasks, they find their home — and their mood — subtly brightening; this reminds them that they do, in fact, have some control over how they feel.

Learning which behaviors help or hinder our well-being enables us to replace unhealthy responses to difficult situations, thoughts, or emotions with more adaptive coping skills.

This isn't always easy. We're often convinced that a new or different behavior will be too hard or scary. To start, therapists may incorporate role-playing activities, like rehearsing a difficult conversation, as well as relaxation techniques aimed at helping clients calm the mind and body when stressed.

— ALEXANDRA SMITH, MA, LPCC

LEARN MORE

For an extended version of this article, visit **ELmag.com/CBT.**

WE INEVITABLY SLOW WITH AGE.

Or Do We?

Athletes often lose time against the clock as they get older — but is this truly just a result of aging?

That's the question Johannes Burtscher, PhD, of Switzerland's University of Lausanne, studied with colleagues in a 2022 systematic review of six long-term trials.

Aging has long been linked to fitness decline. VO_2 max, or the measure of the volume of oxygen that your body can utilize at any one time (the gold standard of measuring fitness), declines some 10 percent per decade after about age 25 or 30. And researchers agree that the percentage drops more quickly following your 60th birthday.

But in studies of elite masters endurance athletes, Burtscher found that VO_2 max falls only gradually with age; it's usually a drop in physical activity that causes the steep decline in this important biomarker.

"Although aging leads to reduced fitness, humans can maintain very high fitness up to old age if they train regularly," he says. "Getting older is not an excuse to reduce training."

As we age, continuing to exercise becomes more critical than ever, Burtscher explains. "It is important to highlight that periods of inactivity reduce fitness very rapidly."

Regaining fitness after a break also gets tougher as we get older. "For both aging elite and hobby athletes, increasing probabilities of disease and injury can interfere with rebuilding fitness. This is a dangerous, vicious cycle, since higher fitness prevents many diseases, but disease reduces the possibility to train."

In the end, though, fitness is not just about performance, Burtscher says: It's also about living well.

"Training becomes even more important to prevent age-related diseases and maintain [or] regain not only high levels of endurance fitness but also functional capacities to continue everyday activities. From a health perspective, the combination of endurance training with strength and mobility training — besides healthy diet, sufficient regeneration, and other healthy lifestyle aspects — is a particularly powerful approach to healthy aging and currently more effective [at preventing] age-related diseases, like dementia, heart, or metabolic diseases, than any pills."

— MD

30 TO 45 MINUTES

Caffeine peaks in your blood and slows your absorption of dopamine. This neurotransmitter helps you feel focused, motivated, and energized — and can cause heart palpitations and feelings of fear. Caffeine also blocks the chill-out adenosine receptors in your kidneys, increasing the urge to urinate.

1 TO 5 HOURS

Your body realizes it's being drugged and releases adrenaline in self-defense. This increases your heart rate and blood pressure and tells your liver to attack the caffeine. Via demethylation of caffeine, liver enzymes then create metabolites, which are metabolized into uric acid and excreted in urine.

3 TO 6 HOURS

The buzz subsides as your liver breaks down the caffeine. But the timing varies by individual: Smokers typically process the caffeine in three hours (it's thought the process is accelerated by the chemicals in cigarette smoke). People using oral contraceptives may require 10 to 12 hours (the reason for this is unclear).

12 TO 24 HOURS

Withdrawal kicks in. As caffeine's chemical roller-coaster ride comes to an end, its effect on your cerebro- and neurovascular system dissipates. Your blood vessels relax. As your body attempts to rebalance itself, you may feel a wave of fatigue or the onset of a headache.

— *EXPERIENCE LIFE* STAFF

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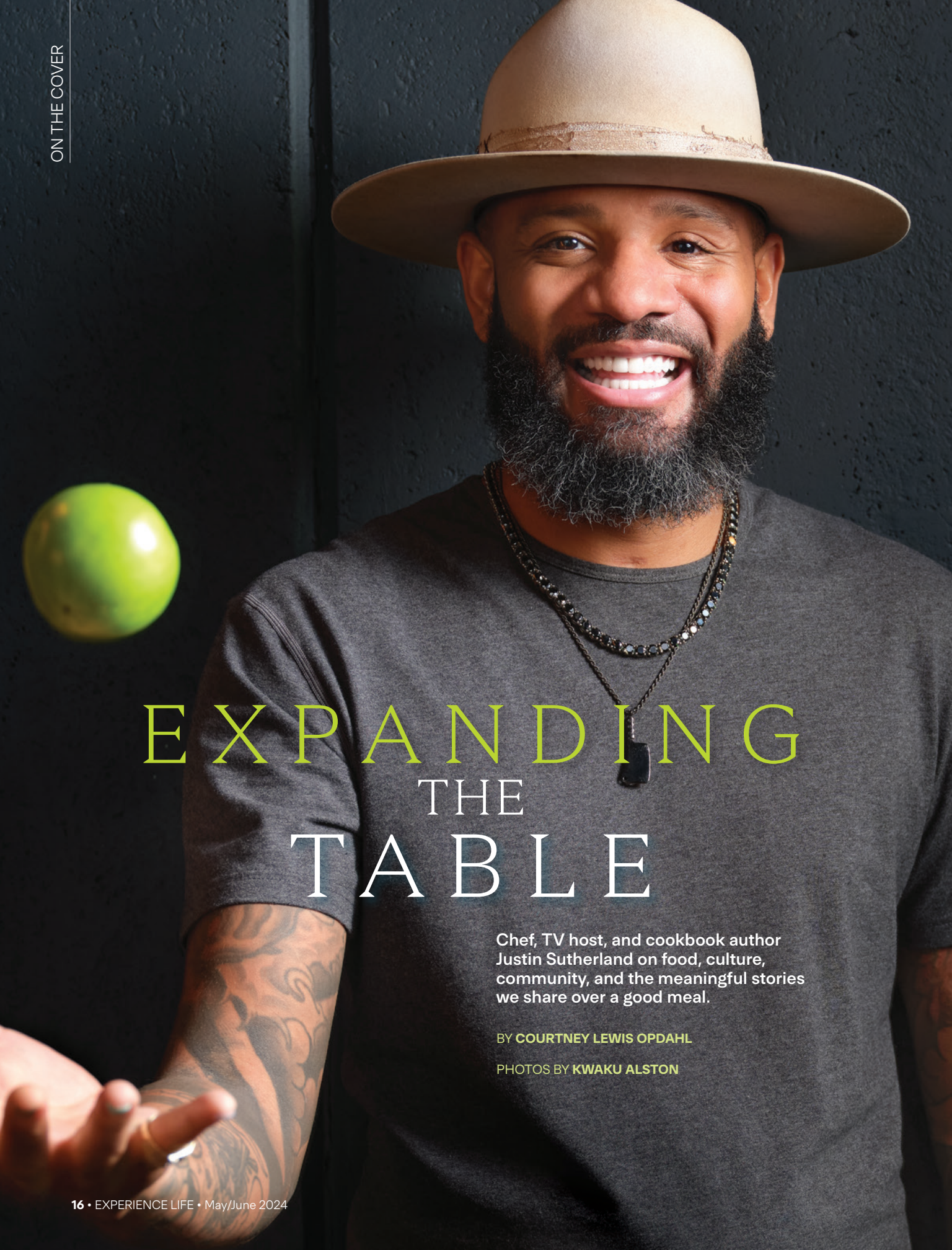

EXPANDING THE TABLE

Chef, TV host, and cookbook author Justin Sutherland on food, culture, community, and the meaningful stories we share over a good meal.

BY **COURTNEY LEWIS OPDAHL**

PHOTOS BY **KWAKU ALSTON**

JUSTIN SUTHERLAND is standing still, if only for a moment, as the crowd gathers at Grand View Lodge in Nisswa, Minn. The chef and TV host travels widely, but he's in his home state to open his latest restaurant, Northern Soul Smokehouse, at the popular resort about 150 miles northwest of Minneapolis. After speeches, Sutherland and his business partners step up to the long, blue ribbon and make the cut with oversized scissors.

Soul food in northern Minnesota? In a town that's 95 percent white, 3.24 percent multiracial, and 1.16 percent Black? You betcha.

For the former *Top Chef* contestant, *Iron Chef America* winner, and *Fast Foodies* cohost, home has never been limited to one culture. Growing up in a Minneapolis suburb, Sutherland developed a love of food from a young age, introduced to his Japanese grandmother's somen, his Norwegian grandfather's lefse, and his African American grandparents' soul food and barbecue recipes.

"Forget math — food is the universal language," he writes in his cookbook, *Northern Soul*.

"I have a grandmother from Japan who moved over here during the Korean War speaking zero English, at a time when the United States had no relations with Japan," he says. "She was told, 'You can't teach your family about Japan; you can't speak the language; you're American now.' And she was terrified to teach my mom and my aunts and uncles — her kids — anything about her culture."

Food was the gateway to her story, he recalls, and as he followed his grandmother around her kitchen, he discovered how food culture is really about connection — to our past and to one another.

After graduating from Le Cordon Bleu in Atlanta, Sutherland returned to Minnesota and worked his way up from a line cook to chef de cuisine at a James Beard Award–winning restaurant. In 2016, he opened his first place, Handsome Hog. In 2020, as other restaurants were shuttering during the pandemic, he moved Handsome Hog to a larger venue with a patio where he could continue operating. (Sutherland recently stepped away from Handsome Hog and is focusing on Northern Soul and his other venture, Big E.)

As difficult as the pandemic has been on the restaurant industry, it has also illuminated the inequities in the business, from pay to working conditions. "I think people just kind of took restaurants and service and that whole experience for granted," he says.

As customers have returned, he sees a renewed appreciation for these community spaces.

That community bond was made clear after July 3, 2022, when Sutherland was piloting a boat and fell into the St. Croix River as he attempted to retrieve his hat. The boat's propeller injured his left arm, head, and face, which required multiple surgeries.

Without health insurance — a common issue for restaurant workers — he was grateful for the GoFundMe collection of more than $275,000 raised by his friends and family; it covered a portion of his hospital bills.

Seeing the community rally to support him is something that still makes him emotional. "It's almost like being a fly on the wall at your own funeral, you know, when you really see that impact you had on certain people's lives — the small stories that people brought up that you never really thought mattered," he says. "I'm very grateful and thankful, and it changes the perspective on the everyday."

The experience deepened his appreciation for life: "It either defines it more or redefines it, solidifies it. It really made me realize I'm here to be something. To keep going."

Sutherland's path forward includes his latest TV series, *Taste the Culture*, which provides historical and cultural context on Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) foodways. In December 2023, Sutherland received a Daytime Emmy for Outstanding Culinary Host for the show.

> "Food is so much more than a means to an end — **so much more than sustenance.**"

In one episode, Sutherland speaks with Keisha and Warren Cameron, the owners of High Hog Farm, a Black-owned-and-operated family farm that shares food, fiber, and education with its Atlanta-area neighbors. As they tour the farm, the couple notes the conversations that arise with visitors about reclaiming Black farming today while recognizing the toll farming exacted during slavery.

"Our agrarian history did not start here," says Keisha, who explained that in farming, she's reconnected to the land and to her ancestors.

Sutherland says he hopes the show helps viewers understand the narrative "that BIPOC food *is* the food of America."

Q&A

WITH JUSTIN SUTHERLAND

EXPERIENCE LIFE **• Your show *Taste the Culture* aims to tell the stories of BIPOC foodways. Why do you feel it's important for people to explore more diverse cuisines?**

JUSTIN SUTHERLAND • I think it's not even about exploring more diverse cuisines. It's realizing that, when we talk about BIPOC food — especially when we talk about African American food — that really is the food of America.

A lot of the grains and spices and plants that made their way over here on slave ships, coming from West Africa, are the foods that have made their way into our everyday lives. I think we take for granted where those foods came from and the struggle that food represents.

EL **• What has this food journey taught you about yourself?**

JS • I come from a very multicultural background. I have a grandmother from Japan. On the other side of my family, I have a grandfather from Mississippi, a descendant of slaves. They moved north to Iowa and brought that soul food culture with them. It's been incredible learning my story and my family history, but also learning about the stories and the history of others.

What makes me so passionate about cooking the food that I cook, especially bringing that soul food north, is telling the stories of where that food really came from and how intertwined it is to the food that everybody's already eating. So it's been that journey of really settling into appreciating the food that built my family, the food that built this country, and the food that continues to sustain us.

EL **• How can food connect us to one another?**

JS • Food is so much more than a means to an end — so much more than sustenance. Although we need it for health and vitality, food is really what brings us together. Everybody eats. Every culture has their own specialty foods. And when all those things come together and connect, it inevitably connects people.

EL **• You also write in your cookbook about food as a memory-maker . . .**

JS • Yeah, food is just one of those things that has this natural ability to trigger memories. You smell a stew cooking on the stove; you smell a pot of collard greens that reminds you of grandma's house. And it's not always positive memories: We go out to eat for celebrating things — birthdays, weddings, accomplishments; we also go out to eat when we're grieving.

It takes you right back to that place, to that time, and to the people you shared that experience with. It has this natural ability to instantly link you back to a previous memory, and in most cases, put a smile on your face.

EL **• It's common for people to disconnect from the pleasure of food when they are focused on improving their health. What would you say to those who have forgotten the joy of eating?**

JS • We need food for vitality, for sustenance, for life. But in the United States, with so much unhealthy food around us, I think that the joy of eating has kind of gotten lost. There are ways to have extremely delicious food and still have it be healthy.

At the same time, don't deprive yourself of the connections that are formed over a meal. I've always said that nobody's ever mad at a barbecue. You get together; you're around people you love. The smells, the conversations that are had, the problems that are solved — food just brings so much joy, and if you pigeonhole it into eating just to live, you're missing out on so much of what it has to offer.

EL **• How can food help build community?**

JS • I think, in American culture, we've gotten away from that family time. When I was growing up, my parents were extremely busy. My mom was a flight attendant working all the time, but one thing that was important, no matter what, was that we sat down at the table. We had dinner together.

Now, many of us go through the drive-through. We eat on the fly. We eat while we're working. We eat in front of the television. I think you learn so much by just taking that time to sit down with somebody else to eat.

Eating outside of your comfort zone, and eating in different communities, and with different cultures, and in different venues — it really resonates and ultimately changes you as a person. Your eyes get opened.

And whether you realize it or not, whether it's intentional or subconscious, the more that you spend time with other people, the more you spend time eating other people's cuisines, the more you take yourself out of your comfort zone and just stop and smell the brisket, you'll definitely be thankful for that.

COURTNEY LEWIS OPDAHL is *Experience Life*'s managing editor and cochair of Life Time's Inclusion Council.

GO BEHIND THE SCENES

For a peek at our photo shoot with Justin Sutherland, visit **ELmag.com/chefjustinbts.**

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LIFECAFE®

Eat More Vegetables Each Day

Boost your overall health by consuming more veggies and herbs.

BY ***EXPERIENCE LIFE*** STAFF

WHY

Although the required amount of veggies varies by individual, the U.S. Department of Agriculture generally recommends that adults eat 2 to 4 cups each day. Functional-medicine experts say that's too few, and suggest 9 cups, measured raw.

HOW

The 9-cup recommendation sounds like a lot, but it's more manageable than you might think. Functional-medicine practitioner Terry Wahls, MD, clinical professor of medicine at the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine and author of *The Wahls Protocol Cooking for Life*, offers the following examples of what counts as a cup:

1 avocado
8–10 asparagus spears
1 beet
1 bell pepper (large)
4–5 large Brussels sprouts
⅛ head of cabbage
1 large carrot
¼ head of cauliflower
2 ribs of celery
⅓ large cucumber
2 cloves of garlic*
4 large lettuce leaves
5 mushrooms
1 handful of spinach
1 large tomato
⅓ large yam or sweet potato

** Wahls gives garlic extra credit for its nutrient density.*

TAKE ACTION

Find more tips at **ELmag.com/onehealthyhabit.**


LSKD
1% BETTER EVERY DAY

Bake It Till You Make It

A nationally recognized mental health advocate uses baking and food to make tough conversations more palatable.

Dayna Altman, pictured in December 2020, hopes that sharing the story of her mental health journey encourages others to find their own path to recovery.

BY **DAYNA ALTMAN**

WALKING ONTO the extremely well-groomed grounds of the White House, I sensed my world shift. It was May 2022, and I was among a group of 30 mental health advocates attending the first Mental Health Youth Action Forum, a two-day gathering devoted to generating ideas for supporting youth mental health. I'd been invited because of my work with Bake It Till You Make It, the company I founded that uses food and baking as a means for authentic storytelling.

I'll never forget the fancy seals on the paper towels or the pressure I felt as I spoke about my work and ideas — just a few feet away from U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, First Lady Jill Biden, and Selena Gomez.

Most of all, I'll never forget the pride and relief that washed over me. I'd struggled with imposter syndrome and feelings of inadequacy for years; being invited to the forum helped me finally take myself seriously.

CRACKS IN THE EGG

Growing up, I was considered a triple threat — an actor, singer, and dancer. I was an active, involved kid, and from an outsider's perspective, I was thriving. Inside was a different story: I felt a lot of anxiety and shame.

At the time, I didn't have the words for the challenges I was facing, but now I know I was struggling with obsessive-compulsive disorder, anxiety, depression, and an eating disorder.

Many factors amplified my mental health struggles. I grew up in a small suburban town where there was a lot of privilege, and I never thought that I fit in or was good enough. I felt pressure to look a certain way and be perfect at everything I did.

I've seen the connective power of food, and it's the vehicle through which I've chosen to talk about mental health.

I also watched my mother count calories and try other dieting strategies, the results of which elicited praise from those around her. I wanted my mother to be proud of my body, so I began restricting my food intake too. But my body never looked the way I thought it should, which led to feelings of shame and further restriction.

I believed I would gain self-worth from flawlessness. This mindset followed me into college, where I began my long, tough journey toward recovery. I attended multiple inpatient programs for eating disorders and suicidal thoughts but made no progress. I wasn't yet ready to take a deeper look at how my past affected my present or change some of my behaviors, like the way I was eating.

THE BINDING AGENTS

In March 2012, I attended another inpatient program after taking a medical leave from college. This time, I connected emotionally with a therapist who supported me throughout the tough, internal work of recovery.

I also felt like I had nothing to lose; I had already tried and failed before. I committed myself to the process, which included intense dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), group therapy, and closer management of the medications I was taking.

After finishing the program, I transferred to another college, where I found like-minded people who were motivated by education and interested in advocacy. I started doing work supporting survivors of sexual violence.

My advocacy work gave me a sense of empowerment, and I graduated in 2015 with the help and support of my therapist. Shortly after, I began working as a community residence counselor and DBT educator at a hospital where I'd attended inpatient treatment programs.

TIME TO RISE

A series of events while attending grad school for public health took me

back to my family home in the summer of 2017, when I started baking to pass the time. I invited friends over, and we talked about our days and mental health as we baked and ate together.

The first treats I baked with an old friend were cupcakes from a boxed cake mix. They were so simple, but I noticed I felt especially connected to my friend during the experience. It was easier to be vulnerable when we were creating something delicious together.

I continued to connect through baking: It gave me a window into other people's unique mental health stories — stories I'd been missing when I began to look toward recovery.

There are so many sites out there with textbook-type information: definitions, charts, and numbers to call. But reading all that couldn't compare with hearing about an individual's experience firsthand.

That's when I realized food could be a powerful vehicle for meaningful storytelling. I decided to write a cookbook that would give other people a chance to share their stories.

I put out a call for recipes and stories and received more than 40 responses. Each recipe was paired with a personal story that highlighted the individual's resilience. I included mental health resources like hotline numbers and websites, and I added descriptions of what it was like to use the programs and services.

The final product, *Bake It Till You Make It,* was published in 2019. Afterward, I created a company by the same name and started doing presentations in schools and community centers, where I told my story using baking ingredients as metaphors.

The *Bake It Till You Make It* documentary premiered in October 2023.

When I talked about difficult times in college, I cracked an egg to represent my feeling of brokenness. When I referenced my therapist, I poured in a can of sweetened condensed milk to show how my work in therapy helped bind my own ingredients into something wonderful.

I continued to grow my offerings leading up to the forum at the White House in 2022, where I met someone who wanted to create a documentary about my work. A few months later, they followed me around to different events and interviewed my family and some of the people I had mentored.

The *Bake It Till You Make It* documentary premiered in October 2023, on World Mental Health Day. My hope is that it encourages people to tell their stories and demonstrate that they can live full, purposeful lives even if they struggle with their mental health.

NOTHING TO PROVE

With my eating disorder, I never felt like I could talk about or enjoy food. It was too riddled with shame. But the work that I've done with Bake It Till You Make It has changed my perception.

I've seen the connective power of food, and it's the vehicle through which I've chosen to talk about mental health. It's the way that I can change the world; knowing that has helped me find peace in my relationship with food and reach a point of body neutrality.

I'm still working on myself at 31. I've learned that creating a beautiful life is like baking a cake. You start off unsure. Some things, like baking powder, need to be measured precisely, while other elements, such as chocolate icing, may vary depending on taste. Practice brings confidence and new opportunities, which can make for delicious new creations.

I'm getting married in September, and I'm dreaming about where Bake It Till You Make It can go next. These are exciting things to anticipate, but I know that life will always have cracked eggs. That's why I feel so thankful for the support system and sense of empowerment I have cultivated to make it — and bake it — through life.

Dayna's Top Takeaways

1.

Find resources. "Understanding the support available to you will be extremely handy when you or someone you care about needs help," Dayna notes.

2.

Question "normal." Not all norms serve us. "Question what you've normalized in your life and how it impacts your health," she says.

3.

Know that mental health looks different for everyone. Dayna learned there is no one-size-fits-all solution to mental health challenges. "Try different things," she advises, "and stay patient on your journey."

TELL US YOUR STORY

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

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SPIN IS IN

SHIFT: The incredible new racket with mind-bending spin for more shots in.

wilson.com/shift

REAL FITNESS


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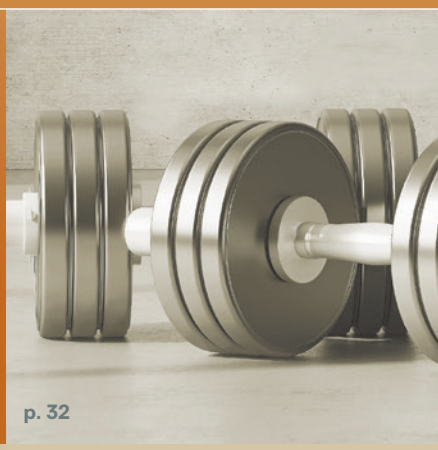
GENTLE YOGA, combined with breathwork, can offer a path to gastrointestinal relief and overall gut health in three key ways: physically, mentally, and energetically. Find a yoga flow designed to ease digestive discomfort on page 26.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Yoga for Digestion

Digestive disturbance got you down? Try this gentle flow to support your gut.

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

DIGESTIVE DISTRESS comes in many forms — with causes as varied as eating a rich meal, public-speaking nerves, or PMS. If you're feeling unsettled, movement can offer relief. Gentle yoga combined with breathwork may be a particularly powerful remedy.

"There are three main ways that yoga can support digestion and gut health: physically, mentally, and energetically," explains Life Time studio lead Madden Zappa, CPT, RYT-200, and a certified yoga and breathwork instructor.

Physically, she says, yoga boosts blood flow and circulation to the digestive tract and organs. Plus, many postures help relieve pelvic, hip, and abdominal tightness, which can contribute to (and result from) digestion issues.

Mentally, yoga reduces stress levels and regulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which is responsible for our ability to rest and digest.

And energetically, yoga supports the chakras, or "wheels of energy that travel from the tailbone to the crown of the head," Zappa explains. "Over time, these wheelhouses of energy can get stuck or clogged. Yoga can help keep these channels open.

"If you're experiencing uncomfortable digestion, you'll want to try and stay away from more vigorous forms of yoga and opt in to a more restorative practice," such as yin. A belly-supporting flow could include gentle compression, stretching, rotation, and breathwork.

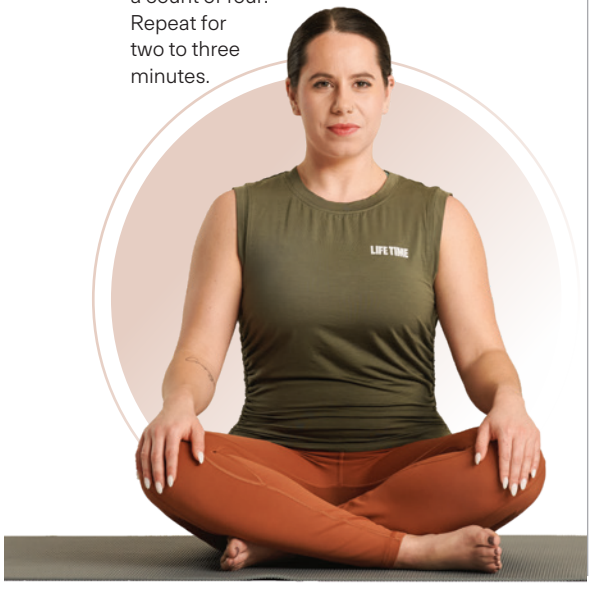
With this restorative mix in mind, Zappa offers the following series. Perform this flow on its own or combine it with a 15-minute walk whenever you need some digestive support.

The Workout

- Easy Pose With Box Breathing
- Cobra Pose
- Prayer Twist
- Seated Twist
- Supported Seated Forward Fold
- Wind-Relieving Pose
- Supine Twist
- Plow Pose

SUKHASANA (EASY POSE) WITH BOX BREATHING

Inhale through your nose for a count of four. Hold that breath for a count of four. Exhale through your nose for a count of four. Hold for a count of four. Repeat for two to three minutes.



BHUJANGASANA (COBRA POSE)

Lie face-down and position your hands beneath your shoulders.

Engage your glutes and back muscles to raise your upper body off the floor. Use your hands for support, but avoid pushing up to force a deeper position.

Hold for five to seven breaths, then lower your upper body with control.

NAMASKAR PARSVAKONASANA (PRAYER TWIST)

Begin standing with your feet together and arms extended overhead. Keeping your spine long, bend your knees, lower your hips, and draw your hands down to your chest.

On an exhale, twist to one side, hooking your elbow over your opposite knee.

Keeping your hips square, knees aligned, and spine long, press your upper arm against your thigh.

Hold for five to seven breaths. On an inhale, release the twist. Repeat on the opposite side.

PHOTOS: COLIN SIMMONS; STYLING: PAM BRAND; MODEL: MADDEN ZAPPA

ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA (SEATED TWIST)

Begin seated with both legs extended. Bend one knee and cross that foot over the opposite leg. On an exhale, rotate toward your bent leg and gently press your opposite arm against it. Focus on keeping your hips planted on the floor and your spine long as you twist.

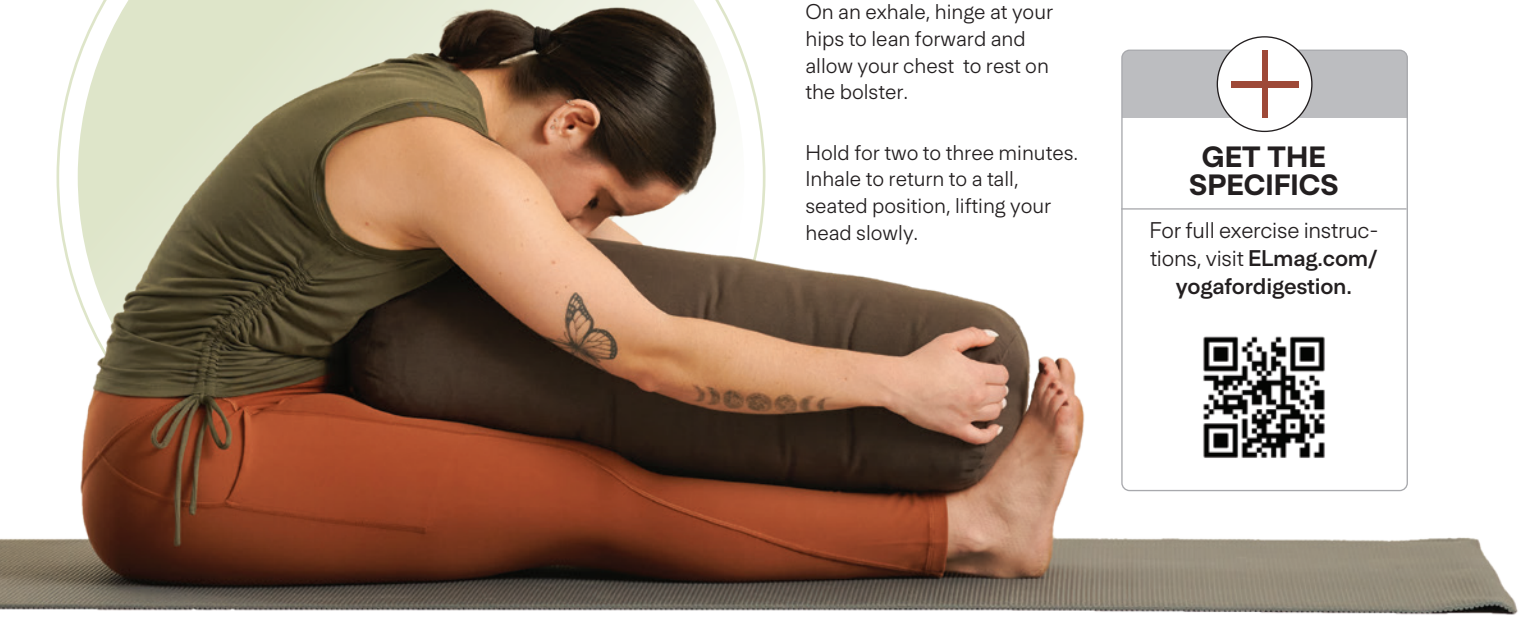
Hold for five to seven breaths. On an inhale, release the twist. Repeat on the opposite side.

SUPPORTED PASCHIMOTTANASANA (SUPPORTED SEATED FORWARD FOLD)

Sit with both legs extended and a bolster (or rolled-up towel or blanket) on top of your legs.

On an exhale, hinge at your hips to lean forward and allow your chest to rest on the bolster.

Hold for two to three minutes. Inhale to return to a tall, seated position, lifting your head slowly.



GET THE SPECIFICS

For full exercise instructions, visit **ELmag.com/yogafordigestion.**

PAWANMUKTASANA
(WIND-RELIEVING POSE)

Lying on your back, bend one knee and grasp that shin or thigh with both hands, and extend the opposite leg.

Hold for five to seven breaths. Repeat on the opposite side.

SUPTA MATSYENDRASANA
(SUPINE TWIST)

Bend one knee toward your chest while extending the opposite leg on the floor. Gently guide your bent knee to the side, keeping your shoulders on the floor.

Don't force your bent knee to the floor. Allow the knee to hang loosely, using a bolster for support as needed. Breathe deeply to help you relax.

Hold for two to three minutes. Slowly release the twist and repeat on the opposite side.

HALASANA
(PLOW POSE)

Begin lying on your back with legs extended. Using your core strength, roll your hips up and off the floor, aiming to stack them over your shoulders. Slowly and with control, lower your legs toward the floor behind your head.

Your toes may touch the floor, but don't force it if they don't. Press your upper arms and shoulders into the floor. Keep your head still.

Hold for five to seven breaths. Slowly roll out of the posture, one vertebra at a time. Remain on your back for about 20 breaths before sitting up.

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

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The Goblet March

Build strength in your grip, core, and back — and improve your balance — with this stability move.

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

YOU'VE LIKELY HEARD of the goblet squat — a squat variation that calls for holding a kettlebell or dumbbell in front of your body. But have you tried the goblet march? The setup is much the same, but instead of squatting down, you lift your knees up for this move.

Even without weight, marching trains balance, coordination, and joint function in the hips and knees. Marching in place while holding a weight at your chest heightens these benefits and also builds strength in your grip, core, and back. If you want stronger abs, better posture, and improved mobility as you age, the goblet march is where it's at.

Marching in place sounds easy, but intention and intensity are important components of the exercise. To fully reap the rewards, it's important to be mindful of some common pitfalls: assuming a slumped posture, taking too-small steps, or rushing the move.

Instead, focus on standing as tall as you can, bracing your core, and, if using a kettlebell, squeezing the weight throughout the movement. With each leg raise, flex your foot as if you're drawing your toes toward your shin; try to lift your legs so your thigh is parallel to the floor, or even a bit higher.

Finally, move slowly and with control. Marching is not a sprint, so don't feel the need to rush. If you can't complete the rep count you've selected, break up the reps or use a lighter weight to avoid sacrificing form and pace.

PHOTO: COLIN SIMMONS; STYLING: PAM BRAND; MODEL: JOE MEIER

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Stand with your feet about hip width apart and hold a weight goblet-style, grasping it with both hands at chest height.

2. Shift your weight onto one foot while you raise the other with control. Draw the raised knee up to hip height.

3. Lower that foot with control, without rushing, and repeat on the opposite side. Each step counts as one marching rep.

4. Perform three to five sets of 20 marches. Do these as part of your warm-up or during your workout as an activation exercise.

MIX UP THE MOVE

For four weighted-march variations, visit **ELmag.com/gobletmarch.**

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

Curious About CREATINE?

Many supplements claim to make you stronger and fitter. This one actually does.

BY **ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS**

HAVE YOU EVER SAMPLED a supplement that promised you boundless energy, superhuman strength, and extraordinary mental clarity — and then been profoundly disappointed with the results?

You're not alone. Because supplements are only loosely regulated, a sizable number of fitness-enhancing products aren't worth the bottles that contain them. "There is no shortage of sports supplements to pick from with many dubious promises and very little data," says exercise scientist Mike T. Nelson, PhD.

One notable exception is creatine monohydrate — popularly known as creatine — a tasteless, inexpensive white powder supplement that's been available in the United States since the 1990s.

"Creatine clocks in with more than 500 peer-reviewed published studies and a proven track record showing that it will help you lift a few more reps, combat fatigue, and may even improve your health in the process," says Nelson.

Creatine is considered an ergogenic aid — a substance that improves athletic performance — and so has sometimes been confused with steroids and other potent, illegal substances with dangerous side effects.

"This is a misconception," notes Samantha McKinney, RD, CPT, national program manager for nutrition and metabolism at Life Time. Creatine isn't a hormone, steroid, or banned substance of any kind.

"Several substances can enhance performance," she explains. These include protein, electrolytes, and even the caffeine in your morning coffee or tea. "However, that does not make them equal in function, risk, benefit, or impact. Creatine is considered safe in almost all instances."

HOW CREATINE WORKS

Creatine appears to power performance in several ways.

Lower-intensity activities are mostly driven by fuels derived from fats, while more-intense activities are fueled by carbohydrates. The highest-intensity activities — sprints, super-heavy squats, jumps, and throws — require an even more potent energy source derived from phosphocreatine, whose primary ingredient is creatine. The more creatine your diet includes, the more phosphocreatine your muscles store and the more energy you have for those high-intensity activities.

Over time, creatine helps build muscle. Along with a regular strength-training program, it signals your satellite cells (stem cells that spend much of their lives in a dormant state) to awaken and transform. That leads to noticeably more muscle, strength, and power.

Finally, creatine boosts your capacity to store glycogen, a fuel that supports medium- to high-intensity activity and helps hydrate muscle tissue. Both effects contribute to improved performance in endurance activities — contradicting a long-held belief that creatine benefits only people seeking maximal strength and bigger, stronger muscles.

MORE THAN MUSCLES

Research has shown that topping off your muscles' creatine tank leads to a noticeable improvement in athletic performance: more reps, more weight, more speed, more power. One 2022 review of 16 independent studies stretching back a decade demonstrated that creatine is an unequivocally effective muscle-building aid for young, healthy people who train consistently.

Another study found that nine weeks of creatine supplementation led to about a 5 percent additional increase in strength and a nearly 20 percent improvement in power among Division I athletes — impressive changes in already highly trained people.

But intriguing new research suggests that creatine does more than support muscular performance. In fact,

studies now show that supplementing with it may offer surprising benefits to your gray matter as well.

A 2023 report, summarizing data spanning several decades, found that creatine supplementation improves cognition and memory — especially in older adults and those experiencing sleep deprivation and other stresses. Plus, it may aid those with depression, anxiety, traumatic brain injury, and muscular dystrophy.

Further preliminary research suggests that creatine may improve mental endurance, even in people who aren't compromised by stress, indicating that long-term use might benefit people in situations requiring extended periods of mental focus.

STORAGE STRATEGIES

High-protein foods like meat, fish, and poultry are decent sources of creatine, says McKinney. Your liver also synthesizes limited amounts by combining key amino acids, available in protein-rich foods, through a process called methylation.

The recommended daily amount of creatine that shows the most benefit is around 5 grams, she notes.

For context, she adds, "You'd have to eat 2 to 4 pounds of chicken, fish, or beef in one day to get to just 5 grams of creatine." That's a lot of meat, even for the most dedicated carnivore.

That's why supplementing is a good idea, especially for vegans and vegetarians, who don't regularly eat creatine-rich foods. They'll notice pronounced improvements when they begin supplementing.

The more creatine your diet includes, the more phosphocreatine your muscles store and the more energy you have for those high-intensity activities.

Take about 5 grams per day, every day — whether you work out or not — with a healthy amount of fluids or food. Importantly, creatine doesn't do much until you've topped off your stores. That usually takes a few weeks of regular use, so don't stop taking it even if you suspect it's not working, and don't take it sporadically.

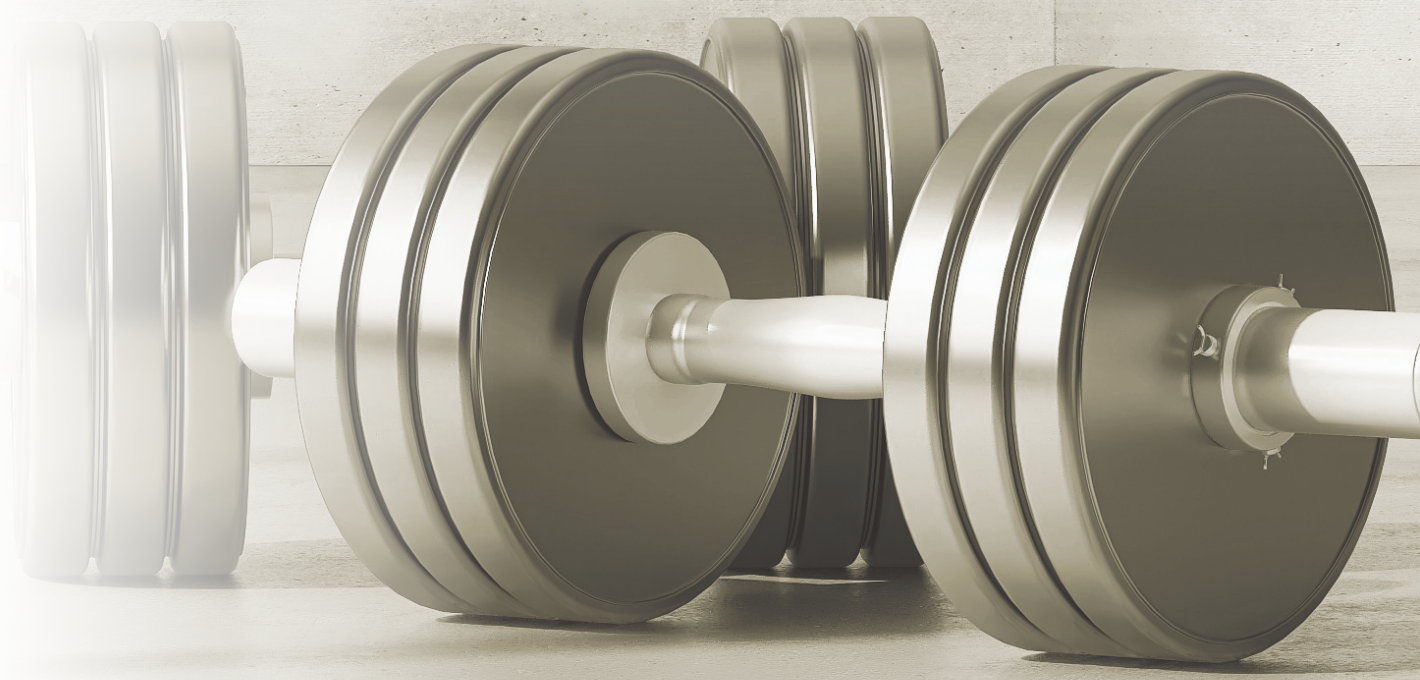
To accelerate the topping-off process, some people start their creatine supplementation with a loading phase, taking 20 grams a day for the first week before tapering to the standard 5-gram dose.

Side effects are minimal. As with most supplements, creatine can lead to minor symptoms, like mild headaches, in some people. If that's the case for you, spread out your dose over the course of the day.

Because creatine leads to muscle gain and better hydration, there is also a chance you might gain a small amount of weight after several weeks of use. But for most people seeking better fitness, improved hydration and stronger muscles are worth it.

Creatine shouldn't replace smart exercise, sleep, or dietary habits. If you don't have the basics covered — regular exercise, sufficient sleep, and plenty of protein, vegetables, and fiber — no powder or pill will be of much help. A supplement is just that: something you add to an already-solid program to give yourself an additional edge.

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



Reimagining Recovery

Some think the RICE protocol is an outdated way to handle injuries. But what are the alternatives?

BY **NICOLE RADZISZEWSKI**

MOST PEOPLE are familiar with the RICE protocol for injury treatment: You tweak your knee or twist your ankle, and without hesitation, you **rest** the injured area, put **ice** on it, apply **compression,** and **elevate** the injured limb. Doctors, coaches, and athletic trainers have used RICE for decades, since Gabe Mirkin, MD, coined the acronym in his 1978 book, *The Sportsmedicine Book*.

Over the past several years, however, sports-medicine experts have been pointing to evidence that RICE falls short when treating soft-tissue injuries. In fact, Mirkin himself revised his opinion in 2014: "Subsequent research shows that rest and ice can actually delay recovery," he wrote. "Mild movement helps tissue to heal faster, and the application of cold suppresses the immune responses that start and hasten recovery."

So, if RICE is out, then what should we do?

In 2019, Canadian physiotherapists Blaise Dubois, PT, and Jean-François Esculier, PT, PhD, proposed the acronyms PEACE and LOVE.

PEACE addresses the acute phase — the first hours and days immediately after an injury. LOVE, meanwhile, speaks to the subacute and chronic phases of soft-tissue injuries.

These new acronyms don't replace all the advice in RICE (you'll note that elevation and compression still have a place), but they do strongly challenge much of the protocol, particularly the use of anti-inflammatory modalities. Instead, PEACE and LOVE offer a more comprehensive approach to injury healing that includes physical treatment as well as psychosocial factors and patient education.

Here's how to implement PEACE and LOVE.

PEACE

Immediately following an injury, let PEACE be your guide.

Protection: Protect the affected area by avoiding activities and movements that increase pain — which does not necessarily translate to rest. "With an acute condition, rest is good for some days. The problem is, we didn't know how long to rest. Now we know that resting for too long is not the best way to create tolerance of the tissue," says Dubois.

He recommends no more than three days of rest and letting pain guide your gradual return to movement and loading.

Elevation: Raise the injured area higher than the heart to drain interstitial fluid — fluid outside of the body's cells and blood vessels — away from the injury and reduce swelling and pressure. Dubois suggests elevating the affected area as often as possible immediately following an injury.

Avoidance of anti-inflammatories: Steer clear of modalities that reduce inflammation, including NSAIDs and ice, both of which have been shown to delay healing by disrupting the natural inflammation process. "When we are injured, we want an inflammatory effect. We want cell proliferation and remodeling because that is what makes the tissue stronger," explains Dubois.

Ice can provide benefits as an analgesic for some patients, says Kane Thompson, PT, DPT, ATC, a physical therapist in Oak Park, Ill. "For clientele who catastrophize pain, it's hard to get them to do anything. If ice improves someone's tolerance for movement and early mobilization after injury, application of ice for a short term can be OK. As long as you're aware of the physiological process, it doesn't have to universally be one or the other."

Compression: Compress the affected area immediately after an injury to help reduce swelling, prevent edema and tissue hemorrhage, and relieve some pain. Dubois and Thompson advise using tape or bandages, applied with the help of a physical therapist or other professional, that allow for a bit of movement at the joint — and avoiding highly compressive sleeves or devices that limit range of motion and decrease comfort.

Education: The final step of PEACE calls on medical professionals to educate patients and clients about the benefits of taking an active approach to recovery. Many patients want to be "fixed" with passive therapies such as ultrasound or massage, says Dubois, which not only have limited effectiveness but also can create dependence on the medical practitioner.

LOVE

One to four days after an injury, begin applying LOVE.

Load: It's important to gradually start loading the area of the soft-tissue injury. Depending on the severity, you can begin as early as the day after the injury and definitely by day four, says Dubois. "If you have an ankle sprain, you need to start to move your ankle and walk. Stressing the ligaments is the best way to make them stronger, as they adapt to stress. The goal is to find a sweet spot where you create adaptation and don't irritate and inflame the tissue more."

Work with a professional to determine what types of movements to do and to what intensity you should load an area after injury, he adds. Consider not just whether you feel pain during an activity but also how you feel afterward.

Optimism: Studies show that positive thinkers recover more quickly from a range of musculoskeletal injuries than negative thinkers. "If you are a positive person and think your injury will repair faster, it's a better predictor of healing than the grade of pathology," says Dubois.

Vascularization: Engage in pain-free cardiovascular activities to increase blood flow to healing tissues. "We know that cardiovascular activity increases the vascularization and metabolism of tissue, which is a key factor of faster repair," Dubois explains.

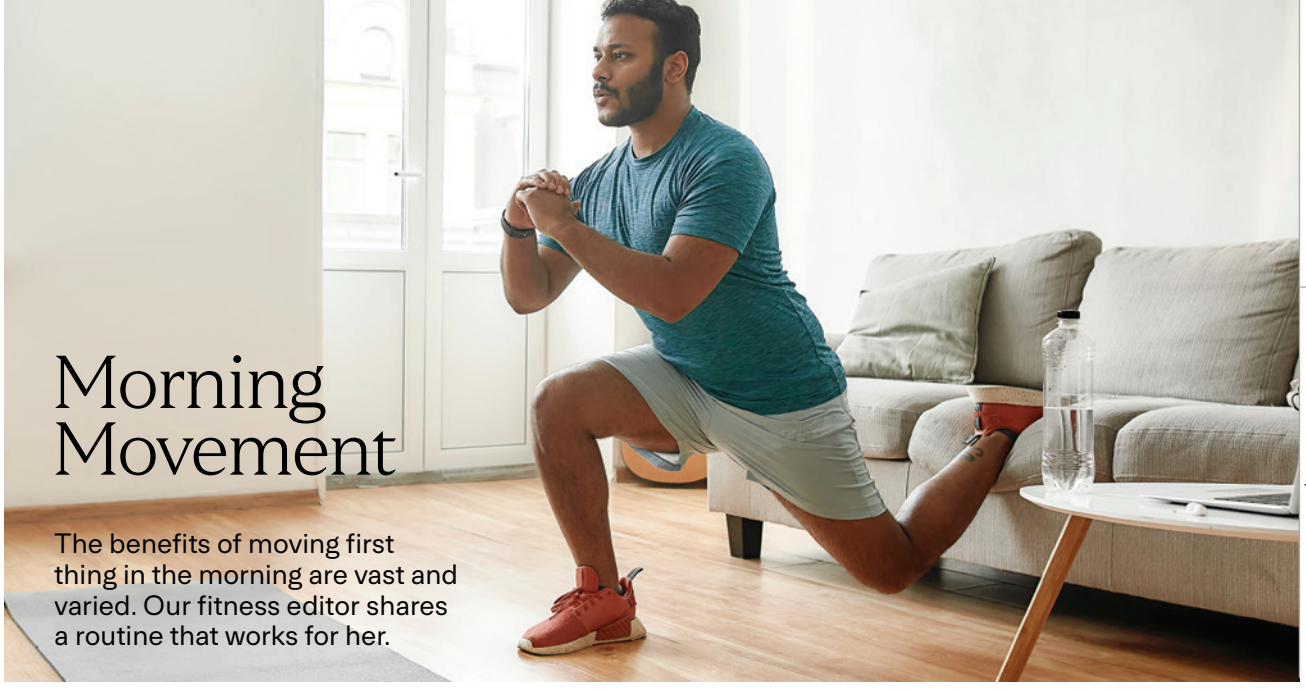
Cardio also boosts endorphins, improves sleep, and works as a physical pump to get the lymphatic system working, moving waste through your body so it can be removed.

Exercise: By training mobility, strength, and proprioception, you can help with healing and reteaching the injured area how to move and how to work with the rest of the body. If you had an ankle sprain, Dubois advises, you would start with stretching to restore full range of motion; then progress to heel raises to strengthen the calf muscles; and then practice balancing on one leg to improve proprioception.

ULTIMATELY, the goal is to put all of these together to return to your sport or activity, says Thompson. "If it's a joint soft-tissue injury, for example, you need to not only go through the appropriate progression in loading ligaments and tendons, but also to train your body [to know] how your leg is moving in space and how to stabilize and control it."

The thought of exercising an injured body part can be frightening, but it's important to understand that controlled, intentional movement promotes healing, Thompson notes. Not only does it help you return to daily life and activities, he says, but it can help break down mental walls around how safe you truly are. "There's something transformational about telling your body it's OK to move."

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



Morning Movement

The benefits of moving first thing in the morning are vast and varied. Our fitness editor shares a routine that works for her.

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

THERE ARE MANY good reasons to work out in the morning. In addition to the benefits exercise provides anytime, early workouts are associated with increased alertness, better focus, and a boost in overall daily activity — plus the boon of fewer of the distractions that might derail you later in the day.

Despite this long list of benefits, morning workouts have never really been my jam. I've done them, grudgingly. Running, yoga, strength training, high-intensity interval training — you name it, I've shoehorned it into my day before the sun is even up, breaking a sweat during those liminal hours between night and true morning.

For years, I forced it. Until one day, my body had had enough. It hurt to get up in the morning. My mood, focus, and energy suffered. It became harder to recover. I wanted — nay, needed — to sleep.

The early days of the pandemic made the transition easy; I was working and working out at home, and I was able to explore what time felt best to move my body. Lunchtime workouts, it turned out, were what I relished most. Moving my body in the middle of the day, before lunch, hit on a sweet spot of energy and interest in exercise.

I rode this wave for three years until, recently, I found my energy and interest shifting. Waning. I tried forcing my habitual midday workout routine, just as I did with morning exercise all those years ago. And again, the shoehorn approach began to mess with my energy, mood, and recovery.

When I opened myself to shifting my schedule again, the renewed possibility of morning workouts bubbled up in my mind.

Not the long, hard workouts of years past, though. What felt good and right was a routine that I could do at home, in my pajamas, before eating breakfast or even drinking coffee. Something that could be nestled into my morning routine between feeding the cats and doing my skincare. Habit-stacking rather than shoehorning.

I began to explore movements, drawing from my experience with yoga, kettlebell training, and neurobics — brain-stimulating exercises that support coordination, balance, and focus. What I settled on is a routine that takes about 15 minutes and warms my body and brain, reconnecting me to the waking world.

I'm sharing it here not because it's the "ultimate" or "best" morning movement routine — and not even because I think anyone necessarily needs such a regimen. I'm sharing it because I think it might inspire someone to examine where they are forcing and shoehorning — and imagine where it might be possible to move with more ease.

Try It Out

This routine isn't a formal workout, so adjust it to suit yourself. I prefer using a light-for-me weight (12 kg or 25 lb.) so I never feel overtaxed. And my sets and reps vary from day to day. I usually like to do two sets of eight reps, though sometimes I'll do just one set, or 10 reps, or five. I let intuition be my guide.

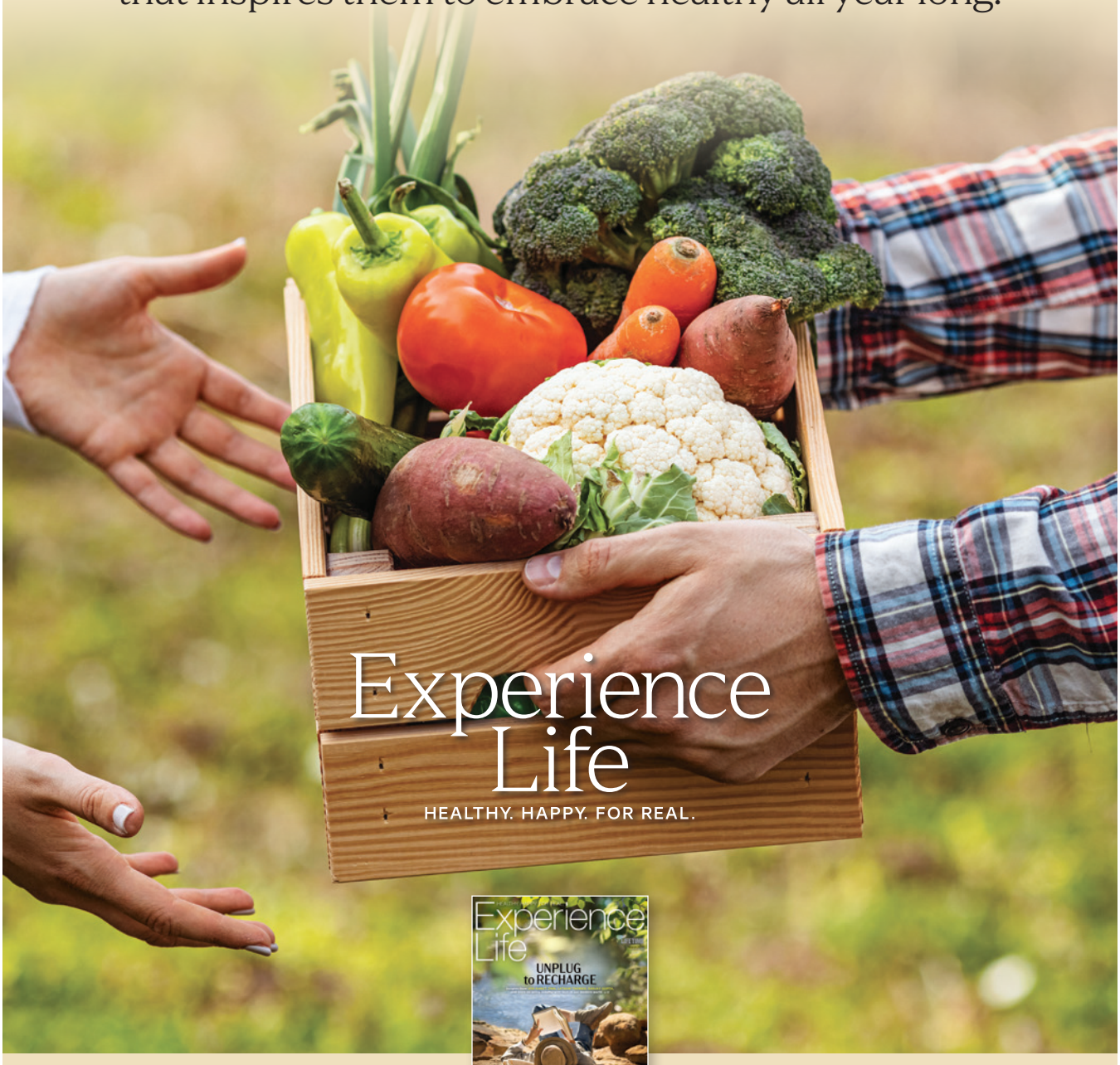
For detailed exercise instructions, visit ELmag.com/morningmovement.

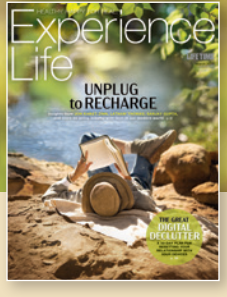
- Contralateral Forward–Backward March
- Upper–Lower Figure Eights (Ipsilateral)
- Upper–Lower Figure Eights (Contralateral)
- Single-Arm Kettlebell March
- Side-Plank March
- Arm Bar With Eye-Tracking and Side-Lying Press
- Dead Bug Rock

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

Give the gift

that inspires them to embrace healthy all year long!





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REAL FOOD


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IT'S THAT GLORIOUS TIME OF YEAR when the weather's ideal for picnics and backyard barbecues. And nothing is more fitting for these gatherings than classic picnic salads — though many of them are notoriously light on nutrients and heavy on mayo. Find our recipes for a few nourishing, herbaceous, and mayo-free alternatives on page 50.

MEDICINAL MUSHROOMS

Six surprisingly potent fungi that can support your health.

BY **CATHERINE GUTHRIE**

HUMANS HAVE USED mushrooms as medicine for thousands of years. Fifth-century Chinese alchemist Tao Hongjing extolled their healing virtues. Hippocrates noted the anti-inflammatory prowess of certain fungi. And Ötzi the Iceman, whose 5,000-year-old corpse was found preserved in ice atop the mountains between Austria and Italy in 1991, was carrying mushrooms with medicinal properties.

Hundreds of published studies now support what our ancestors surmised: Fungi are full of substances that heal the body. They can help fight cancer, regulate insulin, soothe stress, and much more.

This may explain why medicinal mushroom supplements are sprouting up everywhere — often appealingly combined with chocolate and coffee. "Medicinal mushrooms are some of the most valuable and potent therapeutic agents from the natural world," says integrative cancer-care expert Nalini Chilkov, LAc, OMD.

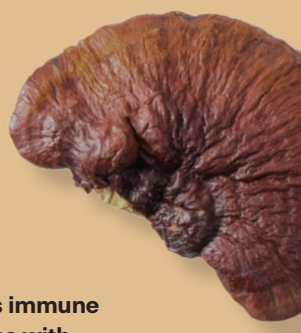
To be clear, the strictly culinary mushroom is no slouch. These tasty fungi deliver vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, fiber, and more. What sets medicinal mushrooms (some of which are also culinary) apart is their enhanced ability to support and modulate our immune systems — in part by nourishing the gut microbiome.

"Mushrooms are the world's most potent prebiotic, capable of diversifying and promoting the growth of the most beneficial species of gut bacteria," says mycologist Christopher Hobbs, PhD, author of *Medicinal Mushrooms: The Essential Guide*. And when the gut microbiome is thriving, the body is well positioned to defend against infections, type 2 diabetes, and many types of cancer.

Mushrooms also support immunity with their abundance of beta-glucans. These glucose molecules wake up the body's innate immune cells, including macrophages, dendritic cells, and natural killer cells. Reinvigorated immune cells are better able to find and destroy pathogens.

Part of the beauty of medicinal mushrooms is how they straddle the worlds of wellness and functional medicine, says Mason Bresett, ND, chief science advisor for Real Mushrooms, an organic-mushroom-extract company. "Mushrooms are used in adjunct oncology treatment plans, and the average person can drink mushroom coffee to boost their immune system and help relieve stress."

These are six of the most well-studied medicinal mushrooms, along with some easy ways to include them in your daily routine.



REISHI
(Ganoderma lucidum)

PRIMARY BENEFITS: Supports immune function and heart health; helps with stress management.

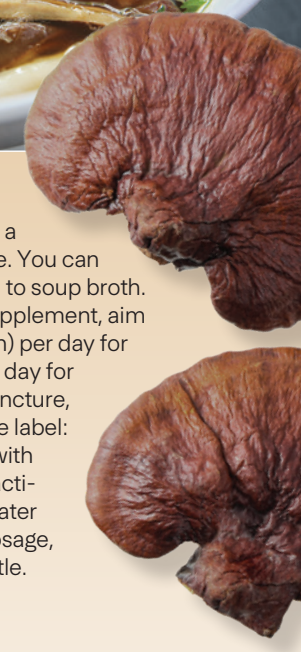
Reishi is sometimes called the queen of mushrooms because of its broad spectrum of health benefits. Evidence suggests it may boost immunity, mood, heart health, and overall energy.

These mushrooms offer abundant triterpenes, substances with anti-inflammatory, antiviral, and antimicrobial effects. Chilkov recommends reishi mushrooms to her cancer patients more than any other medicinal mushroom.

Reishi mushrooms are also adaptogens, which means they help support the body's ability to manage stress. "Reishi is a calming mushroom compared to others," says Bresett. "It can soothe the central nervous system, so if you aren't sleeping well, reishi is a great choice due to its adaptogenic effect."

HOW TO USE: Reishi mushrooms are typically consumed as a powdered supplement or tincture. You can brew them into a tea or add them to soup broth.

If you're taking a powdered supplement, aim for 2 to 3 grams (about 1 teaspoon) per day for maintenance, or 2 teaspoons per day for therapeutic purposes. If using a tincture, look for "double-extracted" on the label: This means it's been processed with both water and alcohol. Alcohol activates the triterpenes, while hot water enlivens the beta-glucans. For dosage, follow the instructions on the bottle.



LION'S MANE
(*Hericium erinaceus*)

PRIMARY BENEFITS: Supports brain and nerve health.

Also nicknamed the smart mushroom, lion's mane is chock-full of brain-supportive compounds. Among them are hericenones and erinacines, which may be useful in the treatment of mood disorders. And erinacines appear beneficial in slowing the impact of aging on the brain.

This Dr. Seussian–shaped shroom also has a growing reputation as a nerve tonic. Studies suggest it has neuroprotective effects, and some of its compounds can cross the blood–brain barrier and jump-start nerve growth.

Lion's mane is also believed to be an adaptogen, meaning it can buffer the physiological impact of stress on the body. Bresett uses lion's mane to treat age-related declines in memory and executive functioning and as an overall tonic for the digestive system.

HOW TO USE: Hobbs likes to prepare fresh lion's mane by slicing it into ½-inch slabs and sautéing it for three to four minutes with olive oil, butter, and tamari — akin to a mushroom steak.

If using dried, take 1 gram (roughly ½ teaspoon) two or three times daily. For a therapeutic dose, take up to 5 grams a day (about 1 level teaspoon twice daily).

CHAGA
(*Inonotus obliquus*)

PRIMARY BENEFITS: Fights cancer and helps heal the gut.

In Russia's Kama River basin, chaga has long been used as medicine, and the name "chaga" is derived from one of their words for "mushroom." Yet chaga is technically not a mushroom — it's a conk, a charcoal-like formation that grows on wounded trees hosting the fungus *Inonotus obliquus*. And it's most definitely medicinal, containing more than 200 different bioactive molecules.

The first recorded use of chaga to fight cancer was in the 12th century, and contemporary research may now explain why it works. Chaga grows primarily on birch trees, whose bark contains high levels of betulinic acid, a substance that prompts cancer cells to self-destruct while leaving healthy cells untouched. Researchers are now investigating betulinic acid as a treatment for a dozen different types of cancer, including lung, pancreatic, and colon.

Traditionally, chaga has been used to treat stubborn skin conditions and heal stomach ulcerations. "Chaga has an affinity for the gut," says Bresett, who prescribes chaga for digestive support and to help patients with gut-related skin conditions.

HOW TO USE: Grind chaga to a fine powder (or purchase it powdered) and stir it into a warm beverage. Hobbs recommends pouring 2 cups of boiled water over 1 heaping tablespoon of powdered chaga and steeping the mixture for an hour. (Consuming the chaga residue offers additional health benefits, but if it bothers you, strain the mixture like tea.) Drink one 8-ounce mug of chaga brew a day for preventive purposes; increase that to two or three cups for a therapeutic dose.

Bresett likes to mix half a teaspoon of finely ground chaga extract with cacao powder and top it off with a little maple syrup to make hot chocolate. "Chaga and chocolate taste really good together, so it's a great way to soothe the digestive system as well as get some immune support."

CORDYCEPS

(*Ophiocordyceps sinensis, Cordyceps militaris*)

PRIMARY BENEFITS: Boosts strength and stamina.

Found mainly on the Tibetan plateau, *Ophiocordyceps sinensis* is known as caterpillar fungus, thanks to its unusual proclivity for feeding and growing on caterpillars. This species and other, similar species are considered to be an overall health tonic in Traditional Chinese Medicine and especially beneficial to the kidneys and lungs.

In recent decades, cordyceps has also gained traction among athletes because of its relationship to adenosine triphosphate, the primary fuel source in cells. While studies of cordyceps use by athletes are sparse, some research suggests supplementing with cordyceps may hone the body's metabolic capacities, lower levels of exercise-induced oxidative stress, and delay exercise fatigue.

Bresett often recommends cordyceps to people who are struggling to regain strength after a chronic illness. He also sees a benefit for athletes seeking greater energy and endurance.

Wild cordyceps are so popular in Asia that overharvesting has led to scarcity. "In dried weight, wild cordyceps are more valuable than gold," says Hobbs.

An alternative species of cordyceps, *C. militaris*, can grow on a grain substrate and produces similar benefits minus the astronomical price tag. This is typically what you'd find in the U.S. market.

HOW TO USE: Supplements claiming to be the true wild *Ophiocordyceps sinensis* (or the out-of-date name *Cordyceps sinensis*) should be viewed skeptically, advises Hobbs, because wild cordyceps are extremely expensive. Instead, look for products made from *C. militaris*.

To increase stamina and support lung health, take ½ to 1 teaspoon cordyceps powder in a little water or tea once or twice a day. You can also add it to smoothies.

TURKEY TAIL

(*Trametes versicolor*)

PRIMARY BENEFITS: Super-charges the immune system to fight cancer, viruses, and other pathogens.

An unassuming mushroom that grows on dead logs and tree trunks worldwide, turkey tail looks almost like the bird's plumage; it has fan-like growths with concentric brown and gray stripes. It may also be the best-studied and most powerful medicinal mushroom.

Extraordinarily rich in beta-glucans, turkey tail also supports the immune system by accelerating the body's production of cytokines and natural killer cells. In Japan, a product made from turkey tail (called polysaccharide K, or PSK for short) has been used alongside chemotherapy to treat cancer for decades. PSK is now covered by Japan's national health insurance and has been estimated to account for 25 percent of the total cost of treating cancer in that country.

Integrative nutritionist Janet Zarowitz, MS, RD, CDN, uses turkey tail mushrooms for her patients during and after cancer treatment.

HOW TO USE: Turkey tail's high beta-glucan content makes it extremely dense and chewy, so it is not a culinary mushroom. Hobbs recommends 1 to 3 grams of heat-treated and powdered turkey tail daily for general health support. A therapeutic dose is 5 to 6 grams a day.

MAITAKE
(*Grifola frondosa*)

PRIMARY BENEFITS: Supports immunity, fights cancer, and regulates blood sugar.

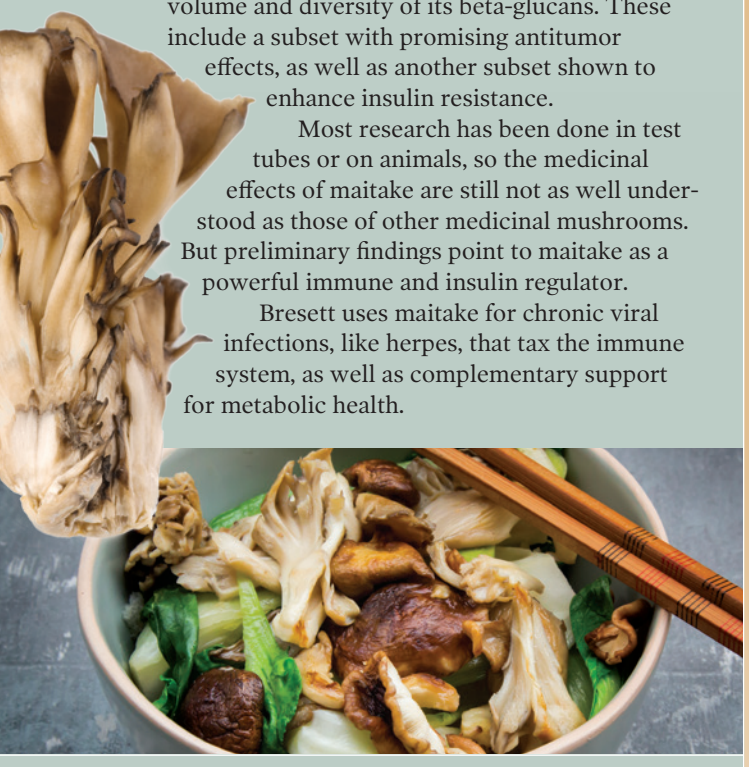
In Japanese, "maitake" means "dancing mushroom." Some say this is because people danced with joy when they found it. In North America, maitake is also known as hen of the woods.

Like lion's mane, maitake is both medicinal and culinary. While it's not uncommon to find maitake growing in the wild, it is one of the most frequently farmed fungi, much like button, shiitake, and oyster mushrooms.

Maitake's medicinal heft comes from the volume and diversity of its beta-glucans. These include a subset with promising antitumor effects, as well as another subset shown to enhance insulin resistance.

Most research has been done in test tubes or on animals, so the medicinal effects of maitake are still not as well understood as those of other medicinal mushrooms. But preliminary findings point to maitake as a powerful immune and insulin regulator.

Bresett uses maitake for chronic viral infections, like herpes, that tax the immune system, as well as complementary support for metabolic health.



HOW TO USE: As a supplement, experts generally recommend 1 to 6 grams of dried powder daily, or two to three dropperfuls of tincture once or twice a day.

Fresh maitake plays well in soups and stir-fries. Bresett likes it in pasta dishes as well as on its own, sautéed with butter and finished with a dash of vinegar.

CATHERINE GUTHRIE
is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

DELVE DEEPER

For a tasty recipe using medicinal mushrooms, see **ELmag.com/broth.**

A BUYER'S GUIDE TO MUSHROOM SUPPLEMENTS

The way mushrooms are cultivated affects their quality, so finding good mushroom supplements can be a challenge. Keep these five things in mind when you're shopping.

1. Know the parts of a mushroom. What we often think of as a mushroom is actually the fruiting body of the fungus, which grows from the mycelium, the rootlike system that develops within wood, soil, or other materials. Picture the mycelium as a giant, far-reaching underground tree and mushrooms as the fruit. Fruiting bodies and mycelium both offer plenty of health benefits, says mycologist Christopher Hobbs — but in some cases, the fruiting body will contain less starch and provide more medicinal benefits.

2. Check how it's grown. In the wild, mushrooms grow on a variety of materials, including wood, duff, and soil. Yet most large-scale commercial growers grow mushrooms on sterile grain, which is cheaper and faster. If the harvest happens before fruiting bodies appear, the grain becomes a significant part of the product.

"You've got to take the extra time to ensure the final product is majority mushroom, not grain," Hobbs says. (He recommends the brands Real Mushrooms and Mushroom Harvest.)

Others believe grain doesn't belong in mushroom supplements, period, and that only mushrooms cultivated on wood are worthwhile. "People who are investing their money in supplements want mushrooms, not grain," says integrative cancer-care expert Nalini Chilkov, LAc, OMD. She recommends Mushroom Science and Natura Health — specifically, a Natura Health product called Mushroom Synergy.

3. Look for "extracted" or "heat treated." A mushroom's medicinal compounds must be extracted in some way before they become bioavailable. For instance, heat can release beta-glucans — so a quick sauté of that lion's mane is the way to go.

Other mushrooms, like reishi, contain alcohol-soluble compounds, such as phenolics and terpenes: These require an alcohol-based extraction process. If a mushroom product has been extracted with alcohol, it will be noted on the ingredient panel.

4. Buy organic. Mushrooms have permeable flesh, similar to strawberries. This makes them sensitive to pesticides, herbicides, heavy metals, and other contaminants.

"As nature's decomposers, mushrooms will bioaccumulate chemicals in their environment," says Shawn Dunn, cofounder of Shroomworks, a California-based mushroom company. Look for organic and third-party-tested products. These labels mean the supplement went through an additional layer of testing for purity and accuracy.

5. Go local. Countries have different production and labeling standards, so mushroom supplements made overseas may be more likely to be contaminated with chemicals or heavy metals. To increase the odds that you're getting a mushroom supplement that's accurately labeled, safe, and effective, Hobbs recommends choosing products made from mushrooms grown in the United States.

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LIFE TIME®

Sheet Pan Egg-in-a-Hole

BY **KAELYN RILEY**

Makes two servings
Prep time: two minutes
Cook time: 12 minutes

Avocado oil or ghee, for the pan

2 slices bread of choice

2 large organic, pasture-raised eggs

Sea salt, to taste

Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

1 tbs. minced chives (optional)

AN *EGG*-CELLENT MORNING

The sheet-pan method accommodates multiple servings at once. Double or triple the recipe so everyone in your household can start their day with high-quality protein and omega-3 fats.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Line a sheet pan with aluminum foil and generously grease the foil with the avocado oil or ghee.

Use a biscuit cutter or the rim of a glass to cut a hole in the center of both slices of bread. Place bread slices and circles on the prepared pan.

Crack an egg into each hole and sprinkle with the salt and black pepper. Carefully place the sheet pan in the oven and cook for about nine minutes for runny yolks, or up to 12 minutes for fully set yolks.

Garnish the eggs with the chives and serve with the toasted circles alongside.

MAKE IT YOUR WAY: Swap the minced chives for a few dollops of pesto, a drizzle of chili crisp, a sprinkle of Parmesan cheese, or a bit of whatever condiment you love most.

KAELYN RILEY is an *Experience Life* senior editor.

Meal Prep for Minimalists

Bring more convenience, ease, and variety to mealtime with this batch-cooking method favored among foodies.

BY **CAMILLE BERRY**

THERE'S A REASON why meal prep has taken off over the last decade: It's a convenient way for many folks to plan and execute recipes. With just one day of cooking, you can have a whole week's worth of nourishing, ready-to-reheat dishes at arm's reach.

But this method isn't without its drawbacks. Though plenty of people love the ease of cooking only once a week, just as many battle boredom from eating the same meals day in and day out, especially because preprepped dishes tend to lose their freshness and vibrancy over time.

Fortunately, there's a solution for all the home cooks out there who want to take a more minimalist approach to meal prep: component cooking, which is the practice of preparing separate ingredients in advance so they're at the ready in your fridge or freezer. It's like having a handful of shortcuts to a variety of flavorful dishes — a real boon for healthy eating when hunger closes in, explains Michelle Tam, best-selling author of *Nom Nom Paleo: Let's Go!*

"Component cooking is good for anyone who wants to save time, money, and energy in the kitchen while still enjoying delicious and nutritious home-cooked meals," she says.

Like meal prep, this clever approach can help you stick to your grocery budget, reduce food waste, and cut back on your time in the kitchen. It's a satisfying solution for those looking to combine convenience and wholesome meals without sacrificing culinary creativity.

"You focus on tasks like roasting multiple chickens or a big batch of vegetables, browning a large batch of ground beef, and preparing precut vegetables and sauces," explains Danielle Walker, best-selling author of *Healthy in a Hurry*. "This allows for greater versatility in meal creation throughout the week." There's less risk of palate burnout and no limit to what you can create.

Component cooking still involves planning, but it's not as rigid as meal prep and offers more flexibility across different lifestyles and taste preferences.

Because you can assemble various dishes using the prepped components, Walker says, "it's like having a culinary toolbox with versatile ingredients, making it easier to adapt to changing tastes or dietary needs. It also doesn't take as much time as preparing full meals." And, she adds, the meals taste fresher.

HOW TO START COMPONENT COOKING

Have some of each of the following elements ready to go so you can dive into recipes as needed. For those just starting out, Walker recommends preparing "something like 50 percent vegetables, 25 percent protein, and 25 percent starches or gluten-free grains as a guideline. But remember, these ratios can be adjusted to suit your personal preferences and dietary requirements."

Fresh Produce

Vegetables are the cornerstone of component cooking, and stocking your fridge with chopped raw broccoli, squash, carrots, bell peppers, or whatever is in season provides you with a wealth of nutritious ingredients to choose from come mealtime. "Some of my go-to components include prepped vegetables," says Walker. "These can be used as building blocks for countless dishes, from salads to hearty bowls, stir-fries, and more."

She also advocates thinking about fruit as a prep component. "I slice and store them in containers for easy snacking or adding to meals. Berries are great for breakfast bowls, while apple slices can be paired with almond butter as a healthy snack or thrown into a salad." Squeeze a bit of lemon juice over sliced apples to prevent oxidization, and store prerinsed berries in a container lined with paper towels to absorb excess moisture.

Like a musician improvising a solo, pick and choose the elements to create your culinary masterpiece. Use veggies to make a stir-fry (try our recipe at ELmag.com/stirfry), or toss them in a chopped salad (like this one at ELmag.com/choppedsalad). Feeling fruitier? Check out our smoothie bowl recipes at ELmag.com/smoothiebowls.

Cooked Grains and Legumes

Grains and legumes offer a kaleidoscope of vital nutrients, including fiber and plant-based protein. Plus, they can open the door for you to experiment with an array of international cuisines. Red lentils are the backbone of our spicy dal at ELmag.com/dal. Use cooked chickpeas to make homemade hummus with our recipes at ELmag.com/hummus.

Cooked grains and legumes are also storage superstars: They keep up to four days in the fridge and can be frozen for up to six months. Rice is a great option, especially for gluten-free folks: Use it as the base for a rice bowl, like in our recipe at ELmag.com/ricebowl.

There's also a wide world of whole grains beyond rice, including nutrient-dense quinoa, farro, and more. Learn about 11 ancient grains worth trying at ELmag.com/ancientgrains, and then use your favorite to build your best grain bowl with our template at ELmag.com/grainbowl.

Roasted Vegetables

The smoky flavor of roasted veggies instantly brings a new dimension to a recipe; having a selection available in your fridge can be a real timesaver.

"I love roasting heartier veggies, like broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts, kabocha squash, and fingerling potatoes," says Tam. "I normally toss them in olive oil or avocado oil and sprinkle on my favorite seasoning salt before roasting them on a sheet pan in a hot oven. I really love having ready-to-eat veggies available in the fridge."

Most vegetables take well to roasting. Once cooled, they can be stored in the fridge for three to four days. Add them to grain bowls, pasta, quiches, and more — or use your favorite roasted veggies as a shortcut for our Creamy Vegetable Soup recipe at ELmag.com/vegetablesoup.

Boiled Eggs

Whether chopped into a Niçoise salad or layered with smoked salmon between thick slices of whole-grain sourdough, the humble boiled egg is a component-cooking champion. "Hard-boiled eggs are definitely a staple in my component cooking," says Walker. "I use them in salads, as a protein-packed topping for a roasted sweet potato, or as a quick snack for the kids with a turkey jerky stick."

Boiled eggs stay fresh for up to seven days when refrigerated, but they're so versatile you'll easily use them up before the week's out. (Try our simple, four-step method for perfect boiled eggs at ELmag.com/boiledeggs.)

Cooked Chicken

Baked, boiled, grilled, or poached, chicken is a stellar protein for component cooking. "I often roast two chickens for the week, shred the meat, and use the bones for bone broth," Walker explains. "We can do a taco bowl one night, roast some potatoes with seasoning the next night, and add a little barbecue sauce to make chicken sandwiches or a quick salad the next night."

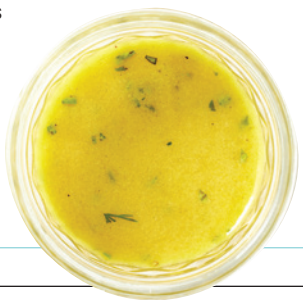
Refrigerated cooked chicken should keep three to four days when stowed in a sealed container. Get cooking with our Classic Roast Chicken recipe at ELmag.com/roastchicken, or use cooked chicken for the base of your own taco night with our advice at ELmag.com/taconight.

Prepared Condiments

Sauces and dressings are the quickest way to liven up your component meals and introduce new flavors, so you'll always want to have a few tucked away in your fridge. "I always make a few sauces at the beginning of the week and store them in the fridge so I have instant flavor boosters on hand," Tam explains. "Just combine veggies, protein, and a sauce, and you've got a healthy and amazing meal in minutes."

Many sauces, dressings, and condiments take minimal effort to prepare and have a shelf life of a week or so. They're typically healthier than their store-bought counterparts, and you might find they taste better too. (Find a collection of our favorite homemade condiment recipes at ELmag.com/condiments.)

In a similar vein, a dollop of a fermented condiment — think kimchi or sauerkraut — can be mixed into a salad or a sandwich filling, added to the side of a grain bowl, or used as a topper for virtually any protein. (For a delicious way to get more probiotics into your diet, try our favorite sauerkraut recipe at ELmag.com/sauerkraut.)



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

A Fresh Take on PICNIC SALADS

Made with good-for-you ingredients and full of flavor, these dishes are perfect to pack for your next alfresco affair.

BY **MADDIE AUGUSTIN**

PICNICS, backyard barbecues, and lakeside lunches are upon us. If you're anything like me, you'll use every excuse to spend time outside, shaking off the dark winter and slushy spring. Enjoying my meals alfresco is one way that I love to take advantage of the fleeting summer, and relying on super-simple, make-ahead recipes like these picnic salads gives me even more time to soak up the sun.

Although picnic salads are notoriously heavy on mayonnaise and light on nutrients, we're challenging that reputation with herbaceous dressings, crisp and crunchy veggies, and a couple plant-powered protein sources. Each of these recipes is nourishing, mayo-free, and ready to pack up for a solo adventure or anytime you need a dish to pass. Try any of them on a bed of lettuce, in a whole-grain wrap, on sprouted-grain toast, or even as a dip for crackers.

Herby Chicken Salad

Makes about 6 cups
Prep time: 15 minutes

FOR THE DRESSING:

- ½ cup plain, full-fat Greek yogurt
- ¼ cup chopped chives
- ¼ cup loosely packed fresh basil leaves
- 2 tbs. chopped fresh dill
- 2 tbs. lemon juice
- 1 tsp. lemon zest
- 1 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp. sea salt
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

FOR THE SALAD:

- 3 cups cubed or shredded cooked chicken breast
- 2 celery ribs, finely chopped
- ½ cup red grapes, halved
- ½ cup chopped walnuts

To make the dressing, combine all the dressing ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth.

To make the salad, place the salad ingredients in a large bowl. Pour in the dressing and mix until everything is coated. Taste and add more salt, pepper, or lemon juice as needed.

Refrigerate for about an hour, then enjoy within four days.

Smoked Salmon Salad

Makes about 4½ cups
Prep time: 10 minutes

- 12 oz. hot-smoked salmon
- ¼ cup diced fennel
- 2 tbs. minced red onion
- 2 tbs. minced fresh dill
- 2 tbs. lemon juice
- 2 tsp. capers
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

In a mixing bowl, use a fork to break the salmon into small pieces. Add the remaining ingredients and mix until well combined. Taste and adjust seasoning as needed, then enjoy within two days.

Tofu "Egg" Salad

Makes about 4½ cups
Prep time: 10 minutes

- 14 oz. firm tofu
- ½ tsp. sea salt, divided
- 1 ripe avocado, halved and pitted
- ¼ cup chopped red onion
- 2 tbs. lemon juice
- 1 tsp. Dijon mustard
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ½ cup diced green bell pepper

Remove the tofu from the packaging and place on a clean kitchen towel. Sprinkle with half of the salt and allow to sit for five minutes to release additional moisture. Pat dry.

Add the avocado flesh, red onion, lemon juice, mustard, remaining salt, and black pepper to a food processor, and blend until smooth. Transfer to a mixing bowl.

Roughly crumble the tofu into the mixing bowl and fold it into the avocado mixture. Stir in the diced bell pepper. Taste and add more salt, pepper, or lemon juice as needed, then enjoy within two days.

Buffalo Chickpea Salad

Makes about 4 cups
Prep time: 10 minutes

- 1 15-oz. can chickpeas, drained and rinsed
- ¼ cup hot sauce
- 2 tbs. plain, full-fat Greek yogurt
- ¼ tsp. sea salt
- 1 celery rib, finely chopped
- 1 medium carrot, finely chopped
- ¼ cup diced red onion
- 2 tbs. minced fresh dill
- ¼ cup crumbled blue cheese

Add the chickpeas to a large mixing bowl and roughly mash with a fork. In a small bowl, whisk together the hot sauce, Greek yogurt, and sea salt.

Combine the chickpeas and yogurt mixture, then add the celery, carrot, red onion, and dill, and stir to mix. Fold in the crumbled blue cheese. Taste and add more salt or hot sauce as needed, then enjoy within four days.

MADDIE AUGUSTIN is a Minneapolis-based recipe developer.

ENJOY MORE!

To find our recipe for Gluten-Free Pasta Salad, visit **ELmag.com/picnicsalads.**

FEED YOUR MUSCLES

You need protein and more to get and stay strong. Learn what to eat to support your muscles now and for the long haul.

BY **LAUREN BEDOSKY**

LISTEN UP: YOUR MUSCLES ARE HUNGRY!

They work for you day and night, and they need to be fed. Proper nutrition helps your body's 600-plus muscles perform their essential functions; with it, you can progress in your workouts, avoid atrophy as you get older, and more.

"Everyone should care about feeding their muscles," says Sarah Koszyk, MA, RDN, a registered dietitian and sports nutritionist in San Francisco. "Muscles help with movement, posture, joint stability, and even heat production, which are important whoever you are."

Most conversations about muscles and diet typically focus on protein because it stimulates growth. But building muscle mass is only part of the picture. Healthy, functional muscles require a well-rounded nutritional regimen that includes macronutrients, micronutrients, amino acids, and probiotics and prebiotics, among others.

These are some of the key nutrients your muscles need for performance, recovery, and growth.

PROTEIN

Every cell in the body contains protein. The macronutrient is composed of amino acids and plays many roles, from providing tissue structure to supporting metabolism. In your muscles, in particular, protein primarily repairs cells and creates new ones, which are vital for maintaining and building muscle tissue.

The proteins inside your muscle cells are in constant flux. Activities like resistance training damage the cells, which then gobble up protein. With your muscle protein stores ebbing, your body must synthesize more — a process known as muscle protein synthesis. Eating enough protein ensures you have a steady supply of this nutrient ready when you need it.

Things get tricky when you're considering how much protein to include in your diet. Many sports nutrition and aging experts believe the current recommended daily allowance (RDA) of 0.36 grams per pound of body weight per day is the bare minimum — and that it's too low for active people, as well as middle-aged and older adults.

"As we get older, we actually need more protein than people think and more than we may have needed when we were younger," says sports nutritionist and strength coach Steph Gaudreau, CISSN, NASM-CPT. This is because age-related changes make our muscles more resistant to growth, so that extra protein is necessary to spur muscle protein synthesis.

Your exact protein needs may vary, but the International Society of Sports Nutrition and National Academy of Sports Medicine recommend 0.6 to 0.9 grams of protein per pound of body weight per day — 96 to 144 grams of protein daily for a 160-pound person — to support muscle growth at any age. For older people in particular, some research suggests that sufficient protein intake may also prevent sarcopenia, the loss of muscle associated with aging.

(Learn more about the power of protein at ELmag.com/proteinfaq.)

EAT UP!

- Animal proteins, like poultry, beef, dairy, eggs, and fish and seafood, offer more bang for your buck than plant-based sources: You don't have to eat as much to get the protein you need, Koszyk says.
- Plant-based foods — think soy, lentils, quinoa, beans, nuts and seeds, leafy greens, broccoli, and potatoes — also provide protein. Vegans and vegetarians must be more intentional about eating a variety of foods to ensure they're getting enough. (Learn how to get enough protein from a plant-based diet at ELmag.com/plantprotein.)
- Supplements can help you reach your daily protein goal, especially if — as with active people and elderly adults — your needs are higher and you struggle to get enough from your diet. Supplements made of whey, a milk byproduct, are a great option because they offer an amino acid composition similar to that of muscles.
- People who are lactose intolerant or follow a vegan diet may opt for supplements that contain multiple sources of protein, including peas, seeds, and rice. (For tips on incorporating protein powder into your diet beyond shakes and smoothies, visit ELmag.com/proteinpowder.)

CARBOHYDRATES

Carbs may not get as much credit as protein, but this macronutrient is also crucial for muscle health. Carbohydrates are stored in your muscles and liver as glycogen, which is used as energy to spark muscle contractions.

"I think of protein as a macronutrient of building and repair, and carbohydrates as a macronutrient of energy," Gaudreau explains.

Getting enough carbs is critical, especially if you're active. "If we have adequately stocked up our glycogen stores, we're going to have enough energy to get through our workouts and push our strength training a bit harder to see better results," she says. And that can mean more significant muscle maintenance and muscle building.

Stocking plenty of glycogen in your muscles and liver is also essential to stop your body from dipping into your protein reserves for energy. "If we don't have adequate glycogen stores to keep our bodies going, what you see — especially in the context of low calorie and low carb intake — is the body can turn to other substances," she notes.

If your body is forced to break down protein for energy, you may not have enough left for muscle maintenance and repair, leading your muscles to shrink and weaken over time.

Carb needs vary depending on your sex, age, body weight, and activity level, so it may take some experimenting to find the amount that works for you. Gaudreau suggests getting at least 40 percent of your daily calories from carbohydrates and gradually increasing that amount if needed. If you do a lot of endurance training, you may need to go as high as 60 percent.

EAT UP!

- Steel-cut oats, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, spaghetti squash, brown rice, black beans, quinoa, and lentils are great sources of complex carbohydrates that offer plenty of fiber. (Learn more about the importance of eating fiber-rich foods at ELmag.com/fiber.)

CALCIUM & VITAMIN D

You've probably heard that this mineral and vitamin combine to promote bone strength. Vitamin D helps your body absorb the calcium it needs to keep your bones and teeth strong and dense. But these micronutrients are also important for muscle function.

Your muscles rely on calcium for sparking the contractions that make them move. (Learn more about calcium at ELmag.com/calcium.)

Vitamin D helps regulate muscle contractions, Koszyk explains. The sunshine vitamin — so called because sun exposure can trigger the body to produce it — also helps muscle recovery. And studies have shown that vitamin D can increase your antioxidant capacity, support the health of your mitochondria (the power generators of your cells), and boost muscle regeneration.

EAT UP!

- Dairy products, including milk, yogurt, and cheese, are some of the best natural sources of calcium.
- Canned sardines, salmon, kale, broccoli, and bok choy are good nondairy sources of calcium.
- Calcium supplements can be helpful for people who have trouble getting enough from their diet, including those who are postmenopausal and those who don't eat dairy. It's recommended that adults get 1,000 to 1,200 mg of calcium daily.
- Fatty fish such as trout, salmon, tuna, and mackerel are ideal food sources of vitamin D.
- Beef liver, egg yolks, and cheese contain small amounts of vitamin D.
- Vitamin D supplements can compensate for shortages in your diet and of sun exposure. "The majority of the people I work with need vitamin D supplementation because it's challenging to get enough through food alone," Koszyk notes. (Find out more about maximizing your vitamin D at ELmag.com/vitamind.)

IRON

This mineral is an essential component of red blood cells, which carry oxygen throughout the body. Iron is also integral to myoglobin, a protein that supplies oxygen to your muscles. As such, iron helps your muscles make and use energy for both everyday functions and exercise.

The RDA for iron is 8 mg for adult men and postmenopausal women and 18 mg for adult premenopausal women, though individual needs may vary. If you are pregnant or experience a heavy menstrual flow, consult with your healthcare provider to determine whether you need iron supplements. (Learn more about your iron needs at ELmag.com/iron.)

EAT UP!

- Lean meat and seafood are rich sources of iron.
- Nuts, beans, and vegetables are great plant-based sources. Your body doesn't absorb iron from plant foods as well as it does from animal sources, so you'll want to pay attention to your intake if you're vegan or vegetarian.
- Supplements can boost your iron stores if they are depleted. (Menstruation, for instance, can result in an iron deficiency.) Before beginning a supplement regimen, it's important to have a blood test. If your ferritin levels aren't low, stick with whole-food sources of iron. If the test reveals low ferritin levels, supplement with the supervision of a medical practitioner. High-dose supplements can cause gastrointestinal problems, and excessive supplementation can lead to serious health issues.

MAGNESIUM

The mineral magnesium is an electrolyte, meaning it carries an electric charge. It helps ferry calcium and potassium into your muscle cells so that these minerals can support muscle contraction. Magnesium — 60 percent of which is stored in the bones — is a critical component of energy production in the body, and it plays a role in various processes, including muscle protein synthesis.

It's recommended that adult men get 400 to 420 mg of magnesium daily; for adult women, the RDA is 310 to 320 mg, though needs increase to 350 to 360 mg during pregnancy. Because so much of the body's magnesium is stored in the bones, there's no reliable test to determine whether you're deficient. (Learn more about magnesium at ELmag.com/magnesium.)

EAT UP!

- Legumes, nuts, seeds, whole grains, and green leafy vegetables are great sources of magnesium. In general, most fiber-rich foods contain this mineral. Refined grains and other processed foods lose magnesium during the manufacturing process.
- Dairy products, like milk, yogurt, and cheese, are also good sources.
- Supplements containing chelated magnesium glycinate support your muscles, but they can produce a laxative effect. Start with the lowest recommended dose and gradually increase it until you find your body's threshold.

POTASSIUM

Another electrolyte that helps with muscle contraction, potassium is a key mineral for maintaining a healthy balance of fluids inside every cell in our bodies — including muscle cells. It also helps transmit nerve signals, which lead to muscle contractions. In fact, most of your body's potassium resides in your muscles.

The RDA is 3,400 mg for adult men and 2,600 mg for adult women, though needs increase during pregnancy and while breastfeeding. But most U.S. adults don't get enough, which concerns public health officials.

The U.S. Departments of Agriculture and Health and Human Services primarily recommend increasing potassium intake through whole-food sources rather than through supplements, which contain paltry amounts of potassium compared with food.

Moreover, it's nearly impossible for someone with healthy kidney function to ingest too much potassium through its myriad food sources. (Learn more about potassium at ELmag.com/5essentialminerals.)

EAT UP!

- Many vegetables and fruits are excellent sources of potassium, including bananas, spinach, tomatoes, broccoli, acorn squash, and potatoes (white, gold, red, and purple).
- Meat, poultry, fish, yogurt, milk, and nuts all contain potassium.

PROBIOTICS & PREBIOTICS

Probiotics are living microorganisms that support a diverse gut microbiome. They can be found in fermented foods, such as yogurt, kefir, kimchi, and sauerkraut.

They are also available in supplement form. There are many types of probiotics, and each supports different functions, such as digesting food, producing vitamins, or fighting disease.

Prebiotics, meanwhile, are sources of dietary fiber — found in such foods as bananas and potatoes — that feed probiotic microorganisms.

It's important, for the sake of your muscles and overall health, to sustain a balanced and diverse community of bacteria. "A lack of diversity can actually disrupt the maintenance of lean muscle mass," Koszyk explains. "When we have a healthy gut microbiota with more diverse microorganisms, they can communicate better to support the quality and functionality of the muscles."

Insufficient diversity can also throw off your ability to digest certain nutrients, including protein and carbs. "Instead of 'You are what you eat,' you are what you're able to digest," says Ivy Carson, NP-BC, IFMCP, a board-certified adult gerontology nurse practitioner and functional-medicine practitioner based in Troy, Mich., who works with Parsley Health. If you can't digest protein, carbs, or other nutrients, those nutrients can't do their jobs to keep your muscles healthy. (Learn more about how your gut microbiome affects athletic performance at ELmag.com/microbiomefitness.)

Many foods naturally contain probiotics and prebiotics, Carson notes. If you have a significant imbalance, you might consider adding a supplement; digestive issues are usually a red flag, she adds.

EAT UP!

- Fermented foods like yogurt, kefir, kimchi, sauerkraut, tempeh, and aged cheeses are natural sources of probiotics. (For tips on making your own at home, visit ELmag.com/fermentedfoods.)
- Bananas, onions, garlic, soybeans, and Jerusalem artichokes are good sources of prebiotics.
- Supplements can help people with an imbalanced gut microbiome. The Cleveland Clinic generally recommends choosing a product with at least 1 billion colony-forming units and containing the well-researched probiotics *Lactobacillus, Bifidobacterium, Bacillus*, or *Saccharomyces boulardii*. Still, because there are so many types of probiotics, you might want to consult a registered dietitian or functional-medicine practitioner to help you choose which strain would be most beneficial to you. Stool tests may also help determine whether there are specific imbalances to address.

ESSENTIAL AMINO ACIDS

Amino acids are the building blocks of proteins, and as a result, these organic chains play critical roles in muscle growth and function, says Anika Christ, RD, a Life Time registered dietitian, sports nutritionist, and personal trainer. Of the 20 amino acids crucial for building protein — and, by extension, muscle — nine of them are considered essential amino acids (EAAs), meaning your body can't produce them on its own and must get them through food. "When protein is consumed, it's broken down into individual amino acids, which then work to synthesize new proteins, or muscle," Christ explains.

Each of these EAAs plays a unique role relating to muscle synthesis, growth, and repair. But not all protein sources contain all the EAAs. In other words, even if you hit your protein goals each day, you may not be ingesting all or enough of the amino acids needed to support your muscles.

Animal sources are considered complete proteins because they contain all the EAAs. There are a few plant-based sources of complete proteins, but these may not contain as much protein per serving as animal sources; vegans and vegetarians should aim to consume a variety of plant-based proteins or consider adding a supplement to ensure they get the right amount of EAAs.

One subgroup of EAAs, known as branched-chain amino acids (BCAAs), is particularly popular as a supplement and stands out for its muscle-building properties. The BCAAs are leucine, which stimulates muscle protein synthesis; isoleucine, which boosts energy; and valine, which promotes muscle growth and tissue repair. BCAAs are commonly taken as a workout supplement, before or after exercise.

EAT UP!

- Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and dairy are complete proteins.
- Quinoa, buckwheat, soy, and hempseed are also complete proteins, though they may not offer as much protein as animal foods.
- Many plant-based protein sources, including nuts, seeds, legumes, and vegetables, are incomplete proteins, which means they contain some but not all of the EAAs. While this doesn't mean you should avoid them, be sure to eat a combination of them over 24 to 36 hours to get your complete fill of amino acids.
- BCAA and EAA supplements can be wise additions to your diet if you follow a vegan or vegetarian diet, or if you otherwise struggle to get enough amino acids. (For more on amino acid supplements, visit ELmag.com/aminoacids.)

CREATINE

Creatine is another amino acid notable for its muscle-supporting benefits. Unlike EAAs, creatine is not considered essential — your body produces it on its own. Specifically, creatine is created primarily in the kidneys and completed in the liver, then stored in the muscle as phosphocreatine, which is used as energy during intense exercise.

So, you might be wondering: *What's the big deal about creatine if the body can just make it?*

Well, the body naturally makes about 1 gram of creatine per day. While this may be sufficient for some people, the amount falls short of the 3 to 5 grams that studies suggest are necessary to maintain adequate muscle stores, among other benefits. The nutrient has been shown to support athletic performance, particularly during activities that require rapid recovery, as well as muscle recovery and growth. It can also help counteract age-related declines in muscle mass and bone density.

As an amino acid, creatine can be found in protein-rich foods — but not in all protein sources or in sufficient amounts. It's only found naturally in animal sources of protein, and in relatively small quantities. (For instance, a pound of uncooked beef contains about 1 gram of creatine.) Going the whole-foods route for creatine raises financial, environmental, and palatability concerns.

That's where supplementation can be useful: Creatine monohydrate is considered one of the lowest-risk supplements with the highest rewards, says Christ. One scoop of the dissolvable powder can deliver 5 grams of creatine, depending on the brand.

You could benefit most from supplementation if you are actively trying to build muscle; if you're vegan or vegetarian, or you don't eat much animal protein; or if you are postmenopausal. (For more on creatine, check out "Curious About Creatine?" on page 32.)

EAT UP!

- Seafood and red meat are good food sources of creatine, but they still fall short of providing enough for you to obtain many of the benefits, notes Christ.
- Supplements are a safe way to support your creatine intake and enjoy its muscle-building benefits, she adds. Look for creatine monohydrate, one of the most popular and well-studied sports supplements available, and aim for 5 grams daily.

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

DIG IN

This functional-medicine framework can help simplify the process of diagnosing and treating complex digestive disorders.

BY **MO PERRY**

JOHN MINOT was out of options. At 30 years old, he had suffered from recurrent diarrhea, urgency, and intermittent rectal bleeding since his sophomore year of college. A 2008 colonoscopy revealed he had ulcerative colitis.

During the intervening years, Minot treated his symptoms with nearly every conventional medicine option. Steroids helped at first but required progressively stronger doses with diminishing effects. Other, more potent medications either didn't work or came with debilitating side effects, including flu-like symptoms and malaise.

So Minot, feeling disappointed in the care he had received, halted all his meds. And his suffering persisted.

Not usually one to pursue alternative treatments, Minot felt he had no other choice. So, in 2015, he went to see Robert Rountree, MD, an integrative-medicine practitioner based in Boulder, Colo.

Luckily, Rountree — who shared Minot's case study in a presentation at the 2023 Integrative Healthcare Symposium — had a tool many conventional practitioners didn't: an interest in the root cause of Minot's chronic gastrointestinal (GI) distress. He suspected it went beyond ulcerative colitis.

To create the best treatment protocol for Minot (a pseudonym used to protect his privacy), Rountree used a diagnostic framework with the acronym DIGIN. It stands for digestion, intestinal permeability, gut microbiota, inflammation/immunity, and the nervous system.

Functional-medicine providers like Rountree believe the cause of almost every GI disturbance can be traced to one or more of these areas. And once the origin of someone's symptoms has been identified — even symptoms as complicated as Minot's — sustained relief becomes possible, even if it doesn't happen overnight.

GI TROUBLE

According to the most recent information from the National Institutes of Health, 60 to 70 million Americans have some type of digestive disorder — around one in five of us. Among the most common are irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), chronic constipation, diarrhea, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), gallbladder problems, ulcers, diverticulitis, hemorrhoids, and inflammatory bowel diseases (IBD) such as Crohn's and ulcerative colitis.

This doesn't even include other chronic conditions that often have digestive components, such as autoimmune diseases, migraine, and skin problems.

One look at this diverse list and it's clear why cookie-cutter approaches to gut health often fall short. Digestion involves and affects many different body parts and processes. "Two people with the same diagnosis may need completely different therapies," notes integrative nutritionist Liz Lipski, PhD, CNS, author of *Digestive Wellness*. "And two people with completely dissimilar diagnoses may benefit from the same therapy."

For instance, conditions as varied as IBS, migraine, and fibromyalgia may share an underlying cause of food intolerances. And three people with IBS may have different triggers, such as small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO), food sensitivities, or stress.

Lipski created the DIGIN protocol with other functional-medicine practitioners to help them address the unique causes of GI issues, not just their symptoms. This is how it works.

ILLUSTRATIONS: MIKE MULLAN

INADEQUATE CHEWING, rushed eating, gastric-acid insufficiency, enzyme insufficiency, lack of fiber, and poor hydration can all lead to poor digestive function. This is how many GI issues start.

"Most of us eat quickly, without paying much attention," Lipski says. "Chewing is the beginning of the digestive process. The function of the teeth is to masticate the food so the rest of the digestive system doesn't have to work so hard to digest it."

Saliva also contains enzymes that begin breaking food down. Rushing through this phase can create problems farther down the digestive tract.

Once food reaches the stomach, hydrochloric acid (HCl) and digestive enzymes begin their work, breaking up large protein molecules. This allows them to be more easily dismantled by digestive enzymes in the small intestine. HCl helps protect us against parasites, viruses, and bacteria while also facilitating the absorption of minerals, such as iron, calcium, copper, and magnesium.

Low HCl can hamper all these digestive functions and lead to nutrient malabsorption. Signs of low stomach acid include frequent bouts of food poisoning, belching and burping, or a diagnosis of SIBO.

Causes of low HCl can include chronic stomach inflammation, bacterial infection, or acid-reducing medications such as proton pump inhibitors. If you suspect you're low, try digestive bitters; they can be a safe tool to help stimulate the body's production of HCl.

Acid-blocking drugs are among the most commonly used class of drugs in America, notes functional-medicine doctor Mark Hyman, MD, on his podcast, *The Doctor's Farmacy* — and this has drawbacks for digestion.

"They change the pH in the stomach, so while you may not have heartburn, you [could] end up getting IBS." (For more on antacids, visit ELmag.com/antacids.)

Digestive enzymes are another critical factor in digestion. The most important enzymes are produced by the pancreas to break down fats, carbs, and proteins. The small intestine generates enzymes to process sucrose and lactose.

Many people with GI issues suffer enzyme deficiencies, leaving them unable to digest certain foods. This often shows up as an intolerance of lactose, gluten, fructose, or sucrose.

Many people with GI issues suffer enzyme deficiencies, leaving them unable to digest certain foods. This often shows up as an intolerance of lactose, gluten, fructose, or sucrose.

When Minot first came to Rountree, he was already limiting processed foods and sweets. Rountree urged him to make a few more changes, including cutting out gluten and dairy — two foods with the potential to provoke an inflammatory response from the immune system when the body can't assimilate their proteins.

"It's surprising how many people don't have enough enzymes to fully break down their food," Lipski says. "That's kind of an easy fix, because people can take digestive enzymes supplementally."

Multiple studies worldwide have reported improvements in IBS symptoms with multienzyme preparations. If you suspect a digestive-enzyme deficiency, ask your physician to do a screening. (For more on digestive enzymes, see ELmag.com/digestiveenzymes.)

Insufficient dietary fiber is another common digestive hurdle. The soluble fiber found in fruit, beans, and flaxseed helps keep our intestinal pH in balance, and the insoluble fiber found in bran, vegetables, and whole grains helps keep us regular. Fiber is also crucial for feeding beneficial microbes in the gut.

Most of us don't get nearly enough fiber. According to the Mayo Clinic, women should aim to consume 21 or 25 grams of fiber each day; men should shoot for 30 or 38. (The lower numbers are for older adults; we need less fiber as we age.) Most Americans average about 15 grams per day. (For more on fiber, visit ELmag.com/fiber.)

INTESTINAL PERMEABILITY

A CONDITION called leaky gut often contributes to chronic GI issues, so the next stage in a DIGIN approach is ensuring the integrity of the gut lining.

The gut is lined with a thin layer of cells tasked with letting nutrients pass into the bloodstream while containing larger particles of food waste. The intestinal lining — just one-cell thick — is all that's keeping the immune system from creating havoc in and around the gut.

Meanwhile, modern life subjects our digestive tracts to an onslaught of offenses, including chronic stress, antibiotics, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), processed foods, alcohol, and environmental toxins. This can lead to gaps between the cells of the intestinal lining.

"Then bigger molecules are able to cross through," Lipski explains. "Those may be food molecules that can set off food sensitivities, or they could be bacteria, fungi, parasites, pesticides, or herbicides. The bloodstream doesn't have a good way of dealing with any of that other than [by] creating an immune reaction."

This reaction can spark irritation and inflammation well beyond the digestive system, leading to conditions as diverse as migraine, skin reactions, and joint pain. Within the digestive tract, symptoms of leaky gut might include bloating, gas, or cramps.

Fortunately, the intestinal lining renews itself every few days. Unfortunately, Lipski says, the body defers that repair and maintenance when we're under chronic stress.

Identifying and treating leaky gut can often relieve chronic gut discomfort, and it's not complicated. Most functional practitioners recommend the following 5R protocol:

- **Remove** sources of gut-lining irritation, such as processed foods, parasites, and chemicals.
- **Replace** missing enzymes, HCl, and bile salts with supplements and lifestyle changes.
- **Reinoculate** with healthy microflora by consuming prebiotic and probiotic foods and supplements.
- **Repair** the gut lining with antidotes like bone broth, collagen powder, and L-glutamine.
- **Rebalance** by reducing stress and calming the nervous system with meditation, social connections, joyful pursuits, and exercise.

To help Minot repair his leaky gut, Rountree recommended he supplement with L-glutamine, a primary fuel source for cells in the intestinal lining; with zinc, a mineral shown to help restore intestinal integrity; and with curcumin, an anti-inflammatory compound in turmeric.

(For more on healing a leaky gut, visit ELmag.com/leakygut.)

Modern life subjects our digestive tracts to an onslaught of offenses, including chronic stress, antibiotics, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), processed foods, alcohol, and environmental toxins.

GUT MICROBIOME

RESEARCH ON THE GUT

microbiome — the trillions of microbes that occupy our digestive tracts — has exploded in recent years. These studies have yielded several key insights that can help people get to the bottom of their digestive woes.

We now understand that our microbes play an enormous role in our physical and mental health. We also know that greater microbial diversity corresponds to greater health resilience.

The same things that trigger leaky gut — processed foods, lack of fiber, chronic stress, antibiotics, poor sleep, and environmental chemicals — are also doing a number on the diversity of the average American's microbiome. This, in turn, is depleting our health.

Take Minot. His consultation with Rountree suggested an imbalanced microbiome was the likeliest culprit for his ongoing gut troubles. Among his risk factors: He had been born by Cesarean section, depriving him of the healthy dose of microbes from a vaginal birth. His parents favored antimicrobial cleaning products, further reducing his exposure to routine microflora as a kid. He suffered recurring respiratory infections in high school and was routinely treated with antibiotics, which kill the good bugs along with the bad. And he had gum disease, which is associated with a disrupted oral microbiome.

Stool tests soon revealed Minot was indeed low in several beneficial bacterial species, including *Faecalibacterium prausnitzii* and *Akkermansia muciniphila*. These tend to be depleted in people with IBD, potentially contributing to both leaky gut and inflammatory immune responses.

There's no single model for the perfect community of gut bacteria. Some people can have a presence or absence of certain bugs and feel perfectly well. But Minot's symptoms indicated that his microbial balance was out of whack. And when it comes to the microbiome, function is what counts.

"When it's functioning well, digestion works so well that we don't even notice it," Lipski says.

But when microbial balance is disrupted, issues like gas, bloating, eczema, psoriasis, arthritis, and headaches can rear their heads. "Imbalances in the microbiome have been associated with conditions [including] glaucoma, kidney disease, diabetes, cancers, and fatty liver," she adds.

The microbiome is exquisitely sensitive to inputs, responding to food, medication, sleep, exercise, stress — often within 24 to 48 hours. While this means it's easily disrupted, it also means we have multiple opportunities to make choices that support our microbiome each day. These may include eating more fiber, consuming more fermented foods, working with a provider to select helpful herbs or supplements, and incorporating healthy movement.

In Minot's case, Rountree recommended a multistrain probiotic, along with an herbal antimicrobial mouthwash to eliminate the harmful bacteria in his mouth.

Because diets high in fat and sugar have been shown to promote dysbiosis in people with IBD, he also recommended that Minot cut out refined carbohydrates and minimize red meat.

On top of these changes, Minot started making his own kombucha and getting his hands dirty in his garden. Both efforts brought him in contact with more healthy bacteria.

Within four months of his initial visit to Rountree, he reported that he was feeling "kick ass" and experiencing far fewer symptoms — just from supporting his microbiome.

IMMUNITY & INFLAMMATION

THOUGH immunity and inflammation might seem irrelevant to gut healing, that's not the case: Roughly 70 percent of the immune system is found in the gut. This is partly why gut dysregulation can lead to system-wide issues with immune activation and inflammation, including autoimmunity, psoriasis, and allergies.

Several immune-system biomarkers can signal inflammation in the gut. Patients with IBD, for instance, often show elevated levels of immunoglobulin A, which is associated with a simmering immune response. Other markers, such as ferritin, albumin, and calprotectin, can point to various issues with inflammation and autoimmunity.

It's possible to have problematic inflammation at pretty much every point along the digestive tract, notes Lipski, even for those without IBD.

And what happens in the GI tract rarely stays there. Inflammation of the esophagus may lead to painful heartburn and an elevated risk of esophageal cancer.

Stomach inflammation can yield ulcers, while inflammation in the small intestine can show up as leaky gut, gas, bloating, diarrhea, constipation, or autoimmunity. In the colon, inflammation can be related to IBD and diverticulitis.

What's behind all this inflammation in our guts?

Mostly food. Fried food, sodas, and other ultraprocessed fare will do it, as well as any foods that we're allergic or sensitive to. "Eating is the most potentially inflammatory thing we do in our lives — because we eat a few pounds of food every day, and if it's not helpful food that our bodies can use, we end up inflamed," Lipski says.

It's possible to have problematic inflammation at pretty much every point along the digestive tract, even for those without IBD.

Simmering infections, chronic stress, and environmental toxins can also trigger GI inflammation.

Temporary elimination diets, probiotics and prebiotics, quality sleep and relaxation, and regular exercise may all help reduce inflammation. Certain supplements may also be helpful, including L-glutamine, omega-3 fatty acids, N-acetylglucosamine, and anti-inflammatory herbs and nutraceuticals.

Minot had high levels of calprotectin, an inflammation marker strongly associated with IBD. As he supplemented his vitamin deficiencies, repaired his gut lining, and rebalanced his microbiome, he managed to dramatically reduce his gut inflammation and his calprotectin levels, Rountree reported.

NERVOUS SYSTEM

THE BRAIN and the gut are connected by a long, branching nerve called the vagus — a key part of what's known as the gut–brain axis. "The vagus nerve is continuously sending information back and forth between the brain and the gut," Lipski explains.

The parasympathetic nervous system helps us rest and digest, while the sympathetic nervous system activates the fight-or-flight response — which effectively shuts digestion down. To function properly, Lipski says, the digestive system needs our fight-or-flight system to turn off and the relaxation response to take over.

The gut–brain connection helps explain why dysbiosis and GI inflammation often correspond to cognitive issues, she notes. "When the digestive system is off, it sends messages to the brain saying, 'Hey, I'm not OK.'"

More than 90 percent of the mood-regulating neurotransmitter serotonin is made in the gut. Mood disorders, ADHD, brain fog, and anxiety may all have gut dysregulation as a root cause.

"I've worked with patients who suffered from depression or anxiety, and when we do an elimination diet, all of a sudden they feel completely different emotionally," Lipski adds. (Find the functional-medicine elimination diet at ELmag.com/eliminationdiet.)

Here's the good news: Activities that stimulate the vagus nerve and the parasympathetic nervous system can support your mood and your gut. "Things like meditation, singing, going for walks, dancing, and spending time laughing with friends — all these things help regulate vagal tone so the gut–brain can work," she explains. (For more on the vagus nerve, visit ELmag.com/vagusnerve.)

Simply pausing for a moment of silence and taking three deep breaths before a meal can help the body relax and start the digestive process. Sometimes one deep breath is all it takes.

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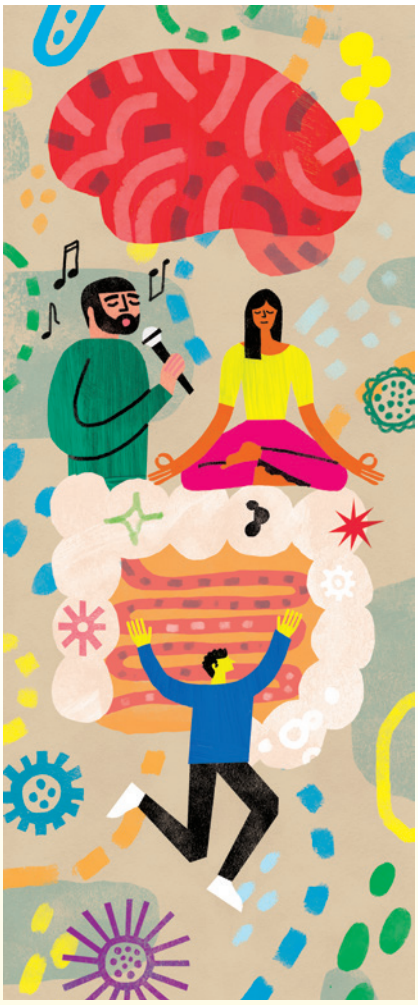

TWO AND A HALF YEARS after his first visit to Rountree, Minot competed in a triathlon — something that would have been unthinkable in his previous condition. He still takes a prescription medication for ulcerative colitis, as well as a regimen of supplements and probiotics. These have helped him achieve a new baseline of healthy digestive function.

From Rountree's perspective, medications for someone like Minot are sometimes necessary, but they are just the beginning of the solution, not the end.

"I'm doing very well — probably the best I've been in many years," Minot told Rountree. Gone are the days of constant bathroom urgency and unhealthy stools. He will likely always have to carefully tend to his digestive health, but he now has the agency and tools to do so.

That's the beauty of the DIGIN model. It allows each person with GI issues to identify where to focus their healing efforts first while acknowledging that all aspects of gut health work together — and not just for optimal digestion, but for overall health and well-being.

"Digestion is the river of life. If it breaks down, we're not going to feel well," Lipski says. "If you're not feeling well, always start by looking at gut function first."

MO PERRY is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

Time to Rest

Why we need more than just sleep to restore ourselves.

BY **JESSIE SHOLL**

IT'S COMMON for Americans to wear busyness as a badge of honor. Maybe staying occupied allows us to avoid emotions we would rather not face. Or we're trying to cope with very real economic pressures. Possibly we've been stereotyped as lazy and feel driven to work twice as hard as everyone else to avoid those judgments.

Whatever the reason, many of us can't remember the last time we truly rested. And if we can, we might be afraid to tell anyone. Resting seems so . . . indulgent.

All this fear and avoidance of rest may be a genuine threat to our health. Amelia Nagoski, DMA, coauthor with her twin sister, Emily, of *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle*, knows firsthand what a lack of rest can do to the body. Her breakneck schedule as a doctoral student and musical conductor — as she put it, her "immersion in the misogynist culture of classical music and academia" — sent her to the hospital with severe abdominal pain. Twice.

When doctors told her the pain was stress-related, she felt both dismissed and confused — at least until Emily, a health-behavior researcher, explained how the effects of stress and burnout on the body were as real as any other threats to her health.

After that, Nagoski made rest her mission.

"You can't have health unless you are well-rested," she says. "Basically, it's like, *Get rest or the rest is going to get you*. If your body has to make you feel like garbage in order to force you to rest, it's going to do that."

Yet, beyond going to bed earlier, many of us have no idea how to rest — or what feels most restorative to us. But rest is a skill we can learn.

REST AS MEDICINE

Far from being a waste of time, rest is free preventive healthcare. According to the National Institutes of Health, lack of sleep (one type of rest) can lead to a range of problems, including heart disease, kidney disease, high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, stroke, and depression.

Exhaustion also appears to wreak havoc on digestion. A recent study found that sleep disturbance is linked to irritable bowel syndrome; researchers suspect this is because poor sleep can exacerbate hypersensitivity in the gut.

Yet the belief that we don't deserve rest can be hard to shake.

"We're under the influence of our extractive, overworked culture, so when we pause to rest, it often feels like we're being disobedient," says breathwork expert Ashley Neese, author of *Permission to Rest*. "We have internalized so much of these frameworks that we feel wrong or worthless when we slow down."

Rest also leaves room for uncomfortable emotions to surface. "It often takes us right into painful feelings of grief, shame, and rage," she notes.

This happened to Neese. After years of recommending that her breathwork clients get more rest, she finally realized that she didn't know how to do it herself. "I came to rest as many people do — depleted and exhausted — but I couldn't find access points to it."

Over time, Neese began to better understand her difficulties. "Because of trauma that I had experienced, it didn't feel safe to rest. It didn't feel safe to slow down."

Neese needed professional therapeutic help before she could relax enough to rest. She then developed a practice to help herself feel what she'd been avoiding. "Until we can meet ourselves in the discomfort that surfaces when we rest, we will continue resisting the medicine we desperately need," she explains.

7 Types of Rest

SLEEP ISN'T THE ONLY TYPE of rest we need — other parts of us crave some downtime too. Saundra Dalton-Smith, MD, explores seven types of rest in her book *Sacred Rest: Recover Your Life, Renew Your Energy, Restore Your Sanity*. Understanding that there are different categories of rest helped Dalton-Smith, a physician and parent, recover from a period of profound exhaustion in her own life. She also learned she could be deficient in one type of rest while being fine in others. (Identify your own rest deficits with the quiz at bit.ly/423Dmvu.)

These are the seven types of rest.

1. PHYSICAL REST

This is the type of rest most of us can identify, even if we don't always practice it.

"If you use your physical body throughout the day, you need physical rest," writes Dalton-Smith in *Sacred Rest*. Athletes in training typically schedule rest days for certain muscle groups, but being on your feet for work, wrangling toddlers, and doing house- and yardwork are also physical labor — and rest is required to recover from those, too.

According to Dalton-Smith, these are signs of a physical-rest deficit:

- You lack the necessary energy to complete the physical tasks on your to-do list.
- Your immune system is lackluster, and you catch frequent colds and illnesses.
- You rely on substances such as alcohol or comfort foods to help you slow down.

Naps are an excellent source of physical rest when you're short on sleep, as well as a powerful way to reclaim your own time. Tricia Hersey, author of *Rest Is Resistance: A Manifesto* and *The Nap Ministry's Rest Deck: 50 Practices to Resist Grind Culture,* founded her organization, The Nap Ministry, after years of feeling ground down by work and school.

Hersey's rest practice began with 15-minute catnaps on campus while she was attending seminary. "I implemented sky-gazing moments in between classes that involved sitting down outside and staring at the sky. To be in nature, breathing slowly, while I was sometimes navigating my day on four hours of sleep from the night before was life-shifting."

2. MENTAL REST

Our minds need rest as much as our bodies. When we're exhausted, "our mental background noise is often infused with negativity," explains Dalton-Smith. This ambient negativity can be deeply draining.

These are signs of a mental-rest deficit:

- You avoid certain activities because you fear you will make an error.
- You feel like you're in a mental fog.
- You're irritable and snappish.

If you're in need of mental rest, Nagoski says, "do something that switches gears." Say you're doing computer work that involves high-level cognitive processing. Your brain will get tired — all that thinking uses a lot of energy. She suggests going outside for a walk or a run or doing some yoga. "Something that uses your body, but not your brain quite as much."

Understanding that there are different categories of rest helped Dalton-Smith, a physician and parent, recover from a period of profound exhaustion in her own life.

3. EMOTIONAL REST

Nagoski explains how "human-giver syndrome" can run down our emotional batteries. If you're someone who never says no, who shows up for everyone, and who rarely considers your own needs before jumping in to help, you probably have it — and you likely need an emotional break.

Here are some signs you might be suffering from an emotional-rest deficit:

- You beat yourself up about the slightest mistake.
- You feel depressed or angry when you think about your life.
- You worry excessively.

Neese recommends using "the one-minute rest" when you feel yourself reacting emotionally to a situation — which is usually what we do when we forget to observe boundaries.

"Take one minute, seated or standing, to bring awareness to where you are," she says. Notice the colors, textures, shapes, and sounds around you. This helps bring you back to the present moment, where it's easier to have boundaries and say no if you need to.

To get some deeper emotional rest, Dalton-Smith recommends, evaluate your relationships and spend less time with people who leave you feeling drained. She also suggests noticing and releasing the habit of comparing yourself with others.

4. SOCIAL REST

Despite how it sounds, the need for social rest doesn't necessarily mean solitude. It's about taking a break from people who wear you out — and spending more time with people who lift your spirits.

"Social rest is about making space for those relationships that revive you," explains Dalton-Smith. "When you are with a friend . . . who makes you feel as if you could tell them anything, you're experiencing social rest."

She suggests you may be deficient in social rest if you are experiencing any of these:

- You feel alone in the world.
- You feel detached from family and friends.
- You are attracted to dismissive or abusive people.
- You prefer online relationships over face-to-face contact.

To make space for social rest, identify the people who make you feel good, energized, and inspired. It may be a friend who always makes you laugh but also listens thoughtfully when you're going through a hard time; or it might be a group of like-minded folks who champion a cause you believe in. You'll know who they are by how you feel after you see them.

5. SENSORY REST

Our senses are bombarded every day — the coworker who wears a lot of perfume, bright white office lights, endless computer screens. "When you overload the senses, you overload the mind," explains Dalton-Smith. "Your body and emotions will respond adversely."

These are some signs of sensory overstimulation:

- You're jarred by loud sounds.
- You dislike being hugged or touched.
- Big, sensory events like concerts or fireworks are a misery.

To rest your senses, Dalton-Smith suggests taking the inputs one at a time. Start by considering something you do or encounter daily, like dealing with loud noise from street construction or staring at a computer screen for hours. Then identify "restful alternatives to undo the effect of that specific constant stimulation." This could be as simple as giving your eyes a break by looking out a window or taking a walk to escape the sound of construction.

You can also build some more deliberate sensory rest into your daily routine. Commit to avoiding screens for the first and last hour of each day. Get some noise-canceling headphones to wear at the office. Take a daily or weekly walk in nature and listen to the birds.

6. CREATIVE REST

This may sound like you're going to take an art or music class, but Dalton-Smith notes that those are examples of creative *work*. Creative *rest* involves giving your mind a deliberate break to allow your creativity to regenerate. Anyone whose daily tasks involve "thinking outside the box," she explains, will be subject to this type of burnout.

You might need creative rest if you're experiencing these signs:

- You regularly talk yourself out of self-care.
- You feel selfish when you think about doing something for yourself.
- You question the value of your work and feel underappreciated for your contributions.

Creative rest opportunities are all around us. Dalton-Smith suggests building small sabbaticals — even as brief as a half-hour — into your daily life. During these little windows of freedom, you can do whatever you like: Sip coffee in a new café and stare out the window, spend an afternoon in a museum, go people-watching in a park. Think of it as letting your mind wander off leash for a while. It can get ideas flowing again.

Meanwhile, if you're midproject and starting to flag, she recommends a creative rest practice called "flow-break rhythm." "Our bodies and minds have a natural rhythm for optimal performance," she explains. "For most, those rhythms are in 90-minute to two-hour increments."

Dalton-Smith suggests "flowing" daily activities in these time blocks, followed by 20 minutes of a scheduled rest break. Keep practicing until you get in the habit of flow-break-repeat.

7. SPIRITUAL REST

Rest is powerful, even subversive. This is especially true, Hersey advises, if you belong to a marginalized group that has traditionally been expected to work harder and feel less pain. These unspoken expectations can lead to a feeling of alienation from your own body, such that you might not even know you need rest. Or if you do, you don't want to admit it.

"When we do listen to our bodies and take rest, many feel extreme guilt and shame," Hersey notes. Still, she says, identifying that the very idea of laziness was born of a damaged and damaging system can make it easier to reject — and in turn, easier to embrace your own sacred nature.

According to Dalton-Smith, these are signs of a spiritual-rest deficit:

- You feel a decreased sense of accomplishment.
- You feel helpless.
- You feel numb and apathetic.

Spiritual rest offers a way to calm your body and mind by connecting to a higher power. For Dalton-Smith, that power is God. Prayer or meditation can be excellent forms of spiritual rest if you have a religious background.

Others might find spiritual rest by connecting to another kind of higher power, such as nature. "Nature bathing is a practice you can do in any natural environment that feels restorative to you," says Neese. This could be a 20-minute stroll through a botanical garden or a long hike somewhere farther afield.

Spiritual rest is anything that reminds you that you are part of the world, and that the world is a part of you. This helps you accept that you are an important and inextricable element of the universe — but that you are not responsible for everything. You can take a break.

JESSIE SHOLL is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

Remind Yourself to Rest

We can take deliberate steps to build an environment that supports both focus and downtime.

"One way to give ourselves a fighting chance against the ever-present ecosystem of interruption in our lives is to use . . . decision architecture," writes breathwork expert and author Ashley Neese in her book *Permission to Rest*. Often used by web designers, decision architecture considers the environment and context in which users make decisions.

This includes the decision to rest. "We can create the conditions for rest in our environments by setting them up to remind us of our deeper intentions," explains Neese. This makes us less dependent on willpower, which is a limited resource. "Intention alone is always going to fall flat because you're relying on willpower alone."

To build a supportive environment for rest in her own home, Neese does things like leaving her cork blocks out on her studio floor. This cues her brain to practice breathwork and restoration each day. You could try leaving a meditation pillow out in plain view, charging your phone in a corner of the kitchen after dinner (and leaving it there until morning), or keeping a pair of walking shoes in your car to remind yourself to stop at the park or nature preserve and take a stroll.

"We can create the conditions for rest in our environments by setting them up to remind us of our deeper intentions."


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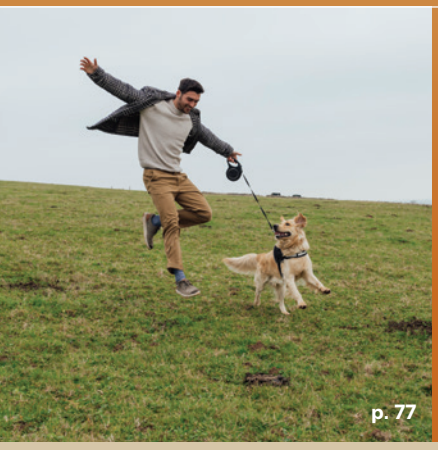

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SITTING DOWN TO REGULAR DINNERS TOGETHER is a challenge for many families — but gathering for a meal doesn't have to be an all-or-nothing affair. The expert-sourced insights on page 78 offer some refreshing ideas for setting aside expectations and making the most of the opportunities you do have to dine in each other's company.

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Optimize Your Pantry

Make the best use of your space with these expert organizational tips.

BY **KATHERINE REYNOLDS LEWIS**

IF YOU'RE A PARENT, you've probably heard the complaint that there's "nothing to eat" — only to open the pantry yourself and find that it's actually plenty full. Perhaps the real problem here is that the delicious and nutritious foods your family loves are hidden in the chaos of a disorganized storage space.

You may be holding on to expired foodstuffs, duplicate items, or even gifted products that you'll never use. If your dry-goods storage is overflowing and you can't find the cornstarch when you really need it, you are missing out on the joys of a well-ordered space.

The pantry is a like a command center, and a thoughtfully designed one can turn your kitchen into a functional space that serves the whole family. "A well-organized pantry makes life easier and saves time and money," says Danielle Walker, best-selling author of *Healthy in a Hurry*. "I can quickly grab what I need for my meals, which gives me more time to cook and enjoy my family with less stress. Plus, I'm not wasting food, and I can see what's running low, so I know when to restock."

Ideally, your organized pantry will give you a clear view of what you have — including the foods you keep on hand, the ingredients you use most often, and the snacks that you grab to go. This allows you to easily remove and replace items, all while serving the unique needs of your family.

Though it may seem daunting to go from chaos to order, the pantry is actually one of the most straightforward areas of your home to declutter and reorganize.

"I love organizing pantries and kitchens, because it's the easiest space to purge," says Naeemah Ford Goldson, an organizing and design expert in Atlanta. "You can start small, organizing for no more than 30 minutes, and make a lot of progress."

Try these tips to make your pantry work for you.

DECLUTTER FIRST

Start by getting rid of the products you don't need. Pull out all the items in your pantry and toss those whose expiration dates have passed. Anything that hasn't expired can be donated to a food pantry in your area. Bonus: Doing good for someone else can turn the chore into a positive moment in your day.

If this feels overwhelming, you can declutter shelf by shelf or one category at a time. Perhaps one day you pull out all the canned goods to decide what to keep and what to donate. Next, sort through pastas and grains. Then, organize your bottles and condiments. The more you streamline the items that you keep on hand, the easier it is to find everything.

ILLUSTRATIONS: LUCY ROSE

CONSIDER YOUR NEEDS

The next step is to assess the best storage system for the foods your family uses most regularly. Evaluate your space to decide what will fit where, with an eye to ease of access.

A common obstacle at this stage is not quite knowing what to do with the space you have, Walker notes, adding that plenty of people don't have a true pantry at home. "It might be a cupboard that's meant for dishes, but you're using it for food, or maybe it's a random little coat closet that you've transitioned into a pantry."

Create zones for different categories, such as baking supplies, canned products, spices, oils and vinegars, and grains.

If your pantry is small, make use of vertical space and stackable containers. If the space features plenty of shelving, put like items together and use adjustable shelves to store the items you usually stock. A few roll-out shelves might add versatility, and a door rack can create extra space.

If someone in your family has an allergy or special dietary needs, that will influence your organizational structure too. Put items for young children lower down, where they can easily grab them — and keep any allergens or special-occasion items out of reach on higher shelves.

MAKE IT YOURS

Now's the time to consider how to make the space your own. If you're a visual person, you might benefit from clear containers for grains, beans, and other dry items. Or perhaps decorative baskets with labels are more your style.

"It can actually be kind of fun, when you feel overwhelmed about it, to look at it as like a little Tetris puzzle," Walker says. "Get a couple of tools that help make it a little more organized."

Do you want to get risers to elevate cans and boxes in the back of your pantry so they're easier to see? Or perhaps you would be better off with a bin that you can pull out and slide back in when you've retrieved what you need.

You don't need to buy lots of new storage products, but you might invest in an item or two that would make a difference for your space. Consider, too, that you may be able to repurpose household items to help corral certain foodstuffs: Laundry baskets, shoe boxes, and old office storage containers can all be useful organizational tools.

Use color if that's your thing, or monochrome if you prefer. "Whatever you do, whatever theme you decide on, stick with that," Ford Goldson says, "so there's not a hodgepodge of different types of organizing products in the pantry."

Walker stores snacks in a rotating tray with clear drawers so her children can spin around to the foods they want. "It's like the wheel of snacks," she says.

Keep baskets of fruit and wholesome snacks front and center in the pantry to encourage healthy eating.

KEEP IT UP

Once you've decided on an organizational strategy, create routines to maintain your streamlined pantry. Make sure everyone knows where things go and what to do when items run low — whether that's adding to a shopping list on the fridge or using a shared grocery app.

Dedicate time to keeping your system maintained. Perhaps every Sunday night is your pantry reset, when you bring home groceries and restock your containers. Dump the existing, older beans or grains into a bowl, decant the new supplies into the bottom of the container, where they'll be consumed last, and add the older beans and grains to the top.

Similarly, put the newest cans and boxes in the back of your pantry and bring old ones to the front so they can be eaten before they expire.

"Get in the habit of doing it," says Ford Goldson. "It takes a little bit more time. But once all the groceries are put away, you're good."

If you use bins, be sure to adjust labels as you add new items or change their contents. Ford Goldson likes bin clip labels, which are easy to replace as needed. Including expiration dates on the label can help you quickly see which products need to get used up.

Walker's pantry system also helps her plan out family meals. "Pantry organizing goes hand in hand with meal planning," she explains. "Having some canned and jarred items available is a nice fallback." Consider stocking an array of favorite ingredients that you can easily whip up into a meal — a concept Walker calls "back-pocket dinners."

Another tip: Snap a few photos of your pantry before you go to the grocery store. Then you can easily refer to the photo to check your supply and avoid buying duplicates.

As you live with your newly organized pantry, you may adjust and customize further based on your needs. Just stick to some core principles: good visibility, ease of access, and a system that naturally prompts you to eat older items first and stock newer food where it can be used last.

Above all, remember the organizing mantra: a place for everything, and everything in its place. You may be surprised by how much it changes your life.

"Organizing your pantry can make your life simpler," Walker says, "and help you maintain your healthy eating habits without the frustration and waste." ◔

KATHERINE REYNOLDS LEWIS is a journalist and author based in the Washington, D.C., area.

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Hit Play

How a more playful attitude can improve our mental health.

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

PLAY MIGHT SEEM like a pretty lightweight topic for mental health. Yet play is an active form of fun, and fun is an essential element of joy. Joy, in turn, helps fuel our inner lives.

Nobody can function well without adequate fuel — we all need good food, clean water, fresh air. Similarly, our inner selves require joy to thrive, and play is a direct route to that state.

Of course, there are obstacles: You feel too busy, too burdened, too preoccupied with seemingly more important things. Most of us can talk ourselves out of play pretty fast.

By the time I (Henry) was 16, I felt and acted a lot like a 50-year-old man. I was laser-focused on academic success, so I learned to set fun and play aside — to delay gratification.

On the positive side, delaying gratification later helped me survive my medical training. But it also turned me into a workaholic who was ready to defer joy indefinitely.

We think workaholism is best described as an amnesia where one completely forgets how to play. But I found my way back to it, and so can you.

REDISCOVERING PLAY

After years of all work and no play, I discovered mindfulness practices. These gave me enough self-awareness to become a witness to my own life. I saw how avoiding play had kept me from being "in flow" and able to enjoy myself. I could tell something inside me was stuck.

We all know this feeling: It's like a blockage. Every time we refuse to loosen up, when we cling to our seriousness and urgency, we're reinforcing that block and refusing to let it go.

When we play, we stop clinging to these obstacles. We make room for the feeling of joy — and this frees us.

By "free," we don't mean free to do whatever we want. We mean free to be our true selves.

We're convinced one of the most profound aspects of play is its relationship with authenticity. The more playful we are, the better we feel in our own skin, and the more easily we can let go of pressures to perform.

This allows us to show up as we really are. As monk and theologian Thomas Merton wrote, "Finally I am coming to the conclusion that my highest ambition is to be what I already am."

This is how play helps us become more fully ourselves. We are all more than the roles we play in our professions and families, and play helps us remember who we are and what brings us joy.

FINDING YOUR PLAYFUL NATURE

A Morning Meditation From Aimee Prasek, PhD

Close your eyes. Gradually turn your attention inward. Become aware of your breathing and the sensations of your body. Allow any tension you're holding to leave your body.

Now think of a time you felt playful.

It may be an activity you enjoyed as a kid or a game you played recently with your children or pets. If you don't have specific memories, try to recall the last time you laughed really hard.

Go over all the details in your mind. What did it feel like to be playful? Who were you with? What were you doing?

Now think about the day ahead and allow this playful feeling to emerge. If you allowed yourself to be a little more playful, how would the day unfold? What would you do differently? How would you feel?

Imagine yourself maintaining this playful feeling throughout your day. Do you have more energy? How do your interactions feel? How would you respond to a stressful surprise?

Set an intention to become more playful, exuberant, loving, joyful, spontaneous, humorous. Take time to absorb any feelings or images you experience.

When you're ready, open your eyes. Sit quietly for a few moments and enjoy the feeling. Maybe you feel more peaceful, less anxious. Take that sense of play into the rest of your day. Let it make your life a little lighter.

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.

Recipe for a Successful Family Meal

For hectic families, enjoying a meal together may feel like a luxury. These tips can help make the dream a reality.

BY **JON SPAYDE**

SITTING DOWN for a meal together is an ideal that many families hold dear — and for good reason. Research has shown that it provides prime opportunities for connecting and promoting healthy eating habits. But it can be challenging to balance family meals with different schedules, competing food preferences, and other contemporary distractions and disruptions.

Anne Fishel, PhD, suggests jettisoning the Norman Rockwell image of family meals with everyone seated at a big table for an hour and Mom serving perfect home-cooked dishes she's been working on all afternoon. Fishel, cofounder of The Family Dinner Project and director of the Family and Couples Therapy Program at Massachusetts General Hospital, says that the point of family meals is "the quality of connection when you gather." Everything else is negotiable.

STRESS SOURCES

Finding a time when everyone can sit down together. "The No. 1 problem I hear is 'We don't have enough time' or 'Our schedules don't mesh,'" Fishel says. "'How can we possibly pull this off?'"

Deciding how often to do it. Does a commitment to eating together mean that families have to do so every night? Every night except weekends? Are families somehow cheating if they can only manage it on a couple of weeknights?

Kids' resistance. Fishel says that many of the parents she talks with worry that younger kids would be too fidgety and that teens would prefer to eat in front of screens or with peers.

Finding the time and energy to make a family meal. Cooking takes a lot of awareness and a lot of work — especially when you're cooking healthy meals. Even the prospect of undergoing all that effort on a regular basis can be dispiriting.

Cooking for picky family members or for kids who don't want to eat. Picky kids can be a problem, Fishel notes, but so can a picky partner. And trying to cajole or persuade someone to eat who just doesn't want to can cause all kinds of conflict at the table.

"You can naturally think, *What's the point of going to all the trouble cooking when not everybody's going to eat what I've made?*" she says. "And it's difficult to see a child not eat — you worry if he or she is getting enough nutrition."

Feeling guilty when it doesn't work the way you'd hoped. Family meals carry expectations. When a real meal fails to live up to these ideals, you can feel that you've let down the family and yourself.

SUCCESS STRATEGIES

Don't worry about frequency. "I would much rather put the emphasis on the quality of the atmosphere at the dinner table, the feeling of connection and looking forward to gathering with your family, [and] having a chance to talk and feel that somebody's listening to you," Fishel says. "Maybe that only happens once a week, but the secret sauce is really what happens once the family gathers."

A once-a-week get-together that produces that connection might encourage everyone to commit to eating together more often, too, she adds.

Know that it doesn't have to be dinner. Given scheduling, it's often not feasible for lunch to be a family gathering — but breakfast can work. Fishel acknowledges that there's usually less time at breakfast and that conversations will be more about anticipating, rather than reviewing, the day. "But it's easier to gather the family in the morning, and breakfast foods tend to be simpler."

Realize that it doesn't have to be everybody, or everybody at once. Although it's great to corral the whole family, that isn't always realistic, Fishel says. "If two people in the family are eating together, that constitutes a family dinner. One big family we worked with has a rule: No one eats alone. They make sure that the family eats in groups of two or three over the course of the evening. There's a buffet meal laid out, and family members come in different configurations when they can."

Simplify the cooking process. "I have several meals in my head that I can make in 10 minutes, and I make sure I always have those ingredients on hand," Fishel says. "You might make a big batch of a stew or soup on the weekend and then freeze it. And you can take shortcuts, like buying a rotisserie chicken — who says everything has to be made from scratch? — and serving it with salad and precut vegetables."

You can make breakfast for dinner, too, she suggests. "It's a much lighter lift to make scrambled eggs or serve yogurt and fruit and some avocado toast."

Realize that most teens actually like to connect with their parents over a meal. "When they're asked, 'What's the most reliable time of the day to talk to your parents?' dinner is No. 1," says Fishel. And though it may come as a surprise, "about 80 percent of teens say they'd rather eat with their parents than with peers or alone."

Don't stress about kids' eating. Fishel advises parents not to worry too much about a kid's reaction to any particular meal; consider instead their nourishment over the course of a week.

"It's best not to say, 'Please just take one more bite,'" she says. "Those kinds of comments bring a lot of tension to the table." If a child really doesn't like the food, it's OK for them to have a yogurt or make themselves a peanut butter and jelly sandwich this time.

Gently introduce new foods and make the meals customizable. Another way to accommodate picky eaters is to introduce a new food alongside a familiar one — Brussels sprouts with mac and cheese, for example. Then you can serve Brussels sprouts on a regular basis until they, too, become familiar.

"If it keeps showing up, they might think, *How bad could it be?*" says Fishel. "Or you can serve one simple central dish, like a chicken rice soup, and then each person can customize it with mushrooms, garlic, red pepper, or whatever."

Have fun! Fishel highly recommends using food-related fun as a motivator for getting buy-in from family members, and as a way to increase feelings of closeness — "playing with food" is totally OK by her.

"You could make a meal all of one color, or make rainbow meals, prompting kids to think about the different colors they want to have on the plate," she says. "You can put salad ingredients out and have each family member pick what they want and make a little artwork out of the ingredients — then eat the art. You can have a picnic in the middle of the winter on the living-room floor, or just sit in seats that aren't your customary seats."

Let go of expectations. "A family dinner doesn't have to be perfect," Fishel adds. "It doesn't have to plumb the meaning of life. It's enough to sit together for a few minutes, enjoy each other's company, and talk, with everybody feeling that what they have to say is worth listening to."

The Family Dinner Project website (thefamilydinnerproject.org) has a wealth of suggestions on all these topics and more, including recipes and ideas for food-related family fun.

JON SPAYDE is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

Native Awakening

Inside one Indigenous woman's journey to decolonize her plate.

BY **KATE NELSON**

ALTHOUGH I grew up surrounded by fields of food in Midwestern farm country, I've had a dysfunctional relationship with food my entire life.

In hindsight, my '90s upbringing — sans high-speed internet, smartphones, and social media — seems relatively simple compared with what today's kids face. Even so, as an Alaska Native (Tlingit) coming of age in rural Minnesota, I still felt immense pressure to conform to impossible beauty ideals.

With my chubby cheeks, olive skin, and deep brown eyes, I just didn't fit in — not among my blond-haired, blue-eyed classmates; not into the popular midriff-baring fashions du jour; not with the cookie-cutter criteria for how American girls are "supposed to" look.

It would take me decades to understand that the era's skewed health ideals were designed to make us all feel inadequate. But BIPOC, in particular, have been set up for failure with this absurd ultimatum: Assume as much whiteness as possible or be rendered utterly invisible. It's the enduring effect of decades' worth of whitewashed, one-size-fits-all health culture that pervades much of society.

As a teen, I desperately tried to keep up with what was "right" and "wrong," subsisting on a contrasting blend of packaged "healthy" fare — think SnackWell's and Lean Pockets — and produce from our family garden.

In college, I rebounded from the freshman 15 with restrictive eating and excessive exercising. Slimming down to my smallest size, I received praise for my jutting cheekbones and protruding clavicle. But then I was slapped with a diagnosis of "eating disorder not otherwise specified" (EDNOS), a now-outdated term that fell out of fashion due to its broad nature.

ILLUSTRATIONS: ELOY BIDA

I wondered, *How could the way I treated my body be so wrong if society was telling me it was so right?*

Upon entering adulthood, I became even more confused by the constant onslaught of conflicting advice from the so-called wellness industry, which had cleverly swapped places with its canceled twin, the diet industry. I pretended to feel satiated by the kale salads, bone broths, and collagen drinks it touted.

In short, for decades I have battled my own body and fought my food instincts, riddled with endless guilt.

That food shame is very common among BIPOC, who rarely see themselves or their foods reflected in health recommendations, explains Kera Nyemb-Diop, PhD, who created the popular Instagram account Black Nutritionist.

A prime example? The body mass index (BMI), developed in the 1830s by Belgian statistician Adolphe Quetelet, who was obsessed with defining the "average man" by collecting data mainly from white European men. Known as the Quetelet Index until 1972, this height-to-weight ratio went on to become a gold standard health indicator, but it has recently been dethroned due to what the American Medical Association describes as its "historical harm" and "racist exclusion."

"For too long, being healthy has meant being closer to white aesthetics," Nyemb-Diop says. "So much of the public-health narrative is rooted in white supremacy. It places the blame on marginalized communities for higher rates of conditions like diabetes by saying they're not eating well or exercising enough, instead of talking about the socioeconomic inequities at play."

Native American nutrition educator Valerie Segrest (Muckleshoot) seconds that. "Before European contact, there wasn't a word for 'diabetes' in any Indigenous community," she says. "It wasn't as if we suddenly decided to stop eating our traditional foods. Indigenous people were forcibly removed from our foodways, followed by the systematic interruption of knowledge transfer to the next generation by sending our children off to boarding schools, erasing their identities, and feeding them rations that altered their food preferences. Never before in human history have we been so disconnected from where our food comes from, and that has great impacts on our health."

Like so many Native Americans who have been displaced and disconnected from their cultural traditions, I recently embarked on a personal journey to embrace my Tlingit heritage and tap into the ancient wisdom of my ancestors. This quest would require decolonizing not only my mind but also my plate.

But what exactly does that mean?

"I strongly believe that the healthiest way for us to live is to eat locally and Indigenously, and now we have evidence to support that."

THE WEB OF COLONIALISM

For Oglala Lakota chef Sean Sherman — whose acclaimed Minneapolis restaurant, Owamni, represents one of the most prominent examples of decolonized cuisine today — plate decolonization translates to delectable dishes free of Eurocentric ingredients like beef, chicken, pork, dairy, wheat flour, and cane sugar. Instead, he focuses on local, seasonal fare such as venison, walleye, and wild rice sourced from Indigenous producers.

And that's precisely where Sherman suggested I start — by identifying and appreciating the abundant food around me. After all, there are countless edible plants that we often overlook, like dandelion greens and stinging nettle, quite literally in our own backyards.

Relishing regional bounty was the impetus behind the Decolonizing Diet Project, led by Northern Michigan University Native American studies professor Martin Reinhardt, PhD (Anishinaabe Ojibway). Study participants — both non-Native and Native, including Reinhardt himself — spent a year eating primarily Great Lakes Indigenous foods, such as bison, turkey, beaver, corn, beans, maple, and berries.

The result? They recorded statistically significant improvements in weight, BMI, and girth, as well as noteworthy or significant reductions in cholesterol, blood pressure, and blood-glucose levels.

"I strongly believe that the healthiest way for us to live is to eat locally and Indigenously, and now we have evidence to support that," says Reinhardt, who during the project procured his food through hunting, fishing, gathering, gardening, and trading — much like tribal communities did precontact.

"For Anishinaabe and other Indigenous cultures, we have a covenant with plants and animals as relatives. In that way, our food relationship is not a matter of producers and consumers; it's about respecting our relatives in order to be in balance with the world around us."

Unsurprisingly, many Decolonizing Diet Project participants shopped for ingredients at grocery stores and encountered issues like high prices and low availability. The meals were work-intensive and required more prep time than ones made with modern convenience foods.

Tribal treaty rights also played a factor for those who did hunt and gather, dictating when, where, and how they could harvest wild bounty. But all study participants walked away with a deeper knowledge of Native American foodways that will likely inform their eating choices for life.

Indigenous culinary anthropologist Claudia Serrato, PhD, went on a soul-searching quest similar to mine in an effort to connect via food to her P'urhépecha, Huasteca, and Zacateco roots. Through her work, she has realized that decolonizing one's plate

is an extremely personal experience, without the one-size-fits-all approach we've been taught to expect.

"What it means to decolonize the diet is all situational," she explains. "For me, it started with eliminating foods that were introduced as a result of Spanish colonialism. But for a friend with Chinese heritage, it meant avoiding tomatoes and other ingredients that were introduced to her family from Mesoamerica.

"To get started, I encourage people to think about how their grandmother or their great-grandmother ate. It's all about reestablishing those cultural connections that bring us back to our origins."

In other words, decolonizing work isn't just for Indigenous peoples: We can all benefit from untangling ourselves from the web of colonialism.

A GREATER ECOSYSTEM

Much like the pervasive health ideals I've wrestled with throughout my lifetime, colonial constructs have created a panopticon effect, in which we're all subconsciously self-policing in a bid for social and political capital. But the positive effects of decolonizing our plates go far beyond personal well-being. This act is also inherently linked to the climate crisis, the Land Back movement, and Indigenous sovereignty.

"We should be asking ourselves how our food choices can concurrently heal the landscape," says Serrato. "With Indigenous knowledge, we understand that we are connected to the land, the plants, and the animals. When we do decolonizing work, we slowly begin to repair not just our bodies but also the landscape and our ecological relationships, which have been completely severed as a result of food politics."

"We're just one small part of a greater ecosystem, and we need to start seeing health as part of that larger system."

Indeed, Indigenous farmers have long focused on cultivating regional ingredients, as opposed to the big three monocrops — corn, soy, and wheat — that make up much of the typical American diet. Supporting Native producers supports not only their self-determination but also the earth, thanks to the traditional ecological knowledge that tribal communities have practiced since time immemorial. In fact, while Indigenous peoples make up just 5 percent of the world's population, they protect around 85 percent of global biodiversity.

In contrast, our modern Western approach falsely puts humans at the center of the universe, asserts Nicole Redvers, ND, MPH (Deninu K'ue First Nation), director of Indigenous planetary health at Western University's Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry.

"The problem with the social determinants of health — our socioeconomic status, our intersectionality, our geography — is that they still place humans in the context of human needs and are not inclusive of planetary health," she says. "If the water is not healthy, we're not healthy. If the soil is not healthy, the food is not healthy. We're just one small part of a greater ecosystem, and we need to start seeing health as part of that larger system."

I found myself fascinated with Redvers's book, *The Science of the Sacred*, which highlights countless studies about epigenetics and quantum physics to deftly bridge the gap between traditional and modern medicine. Her extensive research has also helped me understand the strong connection between personal and planetary health and why a reframing of our relationship with the earth is so necessary.

As it turns out, my mission to heal my relationship with food goes far beyond just my plate. It's really about living in harmony with not only my body's landscape, as Serrato puts it, but also the landscape around me.

With this more global perspective, I've come to realize that I'm not going to find some magic bullet.

Instead of seeking quick fixes and external gratification, I'm endeavoring to become more in sync with myself, the seasons, and the earth, as my ancestors once were. I'm relearning to trust my body, mind, and spirit to guide me toward what's right or wrong for me, which is highly personal.

And I'm giving myself grace because, as all these experts emphasize, decolonizing your plate isn't an overnight transformation: It's a lifelong journey.

Food — especially traditional BIPOC food — has been vilified and weaponized for far too long. It's high time we change that. For my part, I'm nurturing a relationship with food that lets it restore my body, repair past traumas, and revive Indigenous wisdom for future generations.

"In our traditional ways, our foods are our teachers," Segrest gently reminds me. "They teach us how to live on the land and how to be better humans. They are our gifts." ◔

KATE NELSON (Tlingit) is a Minneapolis-based writer and editor.


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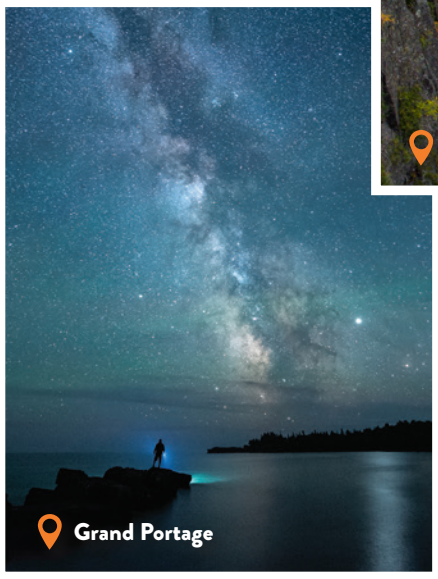

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In Harmony With Food

BY **BAHRAM AKRADI**

WE ALL KNOW that eating is essential, a vital act that sustains life, with effects that extend beyond survival to physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being.

Food is the primary source of essential nutrients that fortify and fuel our bodies and minds so they function efficiently; these nutrients help prevent chronic conditions, promote optimal physical and mental development, and support overall health.

Food connects us to each other, strengthening social bonds as we share meals and experiences. It serves an important role in cultural rituals and religious traditions. It affects our economy, as it is produced and distributed worldwide.

Because of its expansive impacts, we need to acknowledge the integral role food plays in our lives, as well as understand that making informed decisions about it is a cornerstone to leading a healthy, happy life. By being intentional about our food choices, we're investing in our individual health and well-being, as well as that of our communities and planet.

That being said, there are many barriers to healthy eating in our society. And there's plenty of advice about the approaches and protocols that are "best" for us — we could poke holes in all of them. But one thing I can comfortably recommend when it comes to food is to be alert to and thoughtful about your unique needs.

It starts with knowing your body: What does it need? What makes you feel better? What makes you feel worse?

Pay attention. If something doesn't work for you, avoid or eliminate it. Approach food with curiosity, experimenting and refining your choices as you develop a greater awareness of your needs.

From there, you can put a few practices in place:

Get educated. Learn as much as you can about nutrition's role in your health; understand its many effects on metabolism, hormones, blood sugar, stress management, and more.

Meal plan and prep. Plan and shop ahead so you can eat healthy all week long. If you don't know how to cook, start with the basics; maybe just "assemble" something and see how that satisfies you.

Embrace seasonal rhythms. When you understand what's in season, you can focus on consuming fresh produce. Think about the taste of a juicy red tomato, ripened on the vine in late August, picked and consumed in its prime — the pale, mealy options shipped thousands of miles across the country simply don't compare.

Know your producers. Make it a habit to regularly stop at your local market or co-op. Befriend the farmers, the growers, the makers, the butchers. Purchase your food from sources who can answer your questions about it. Food creates community.

Reach for fresh, whole foods — and beware of long ingredient lists on labels. (What's in an apple? An apple!) Look for trusted certifications like Non-GMO, USDA Organic, or Fair Trade Certified.

Create your own garden. Plants can grow in the slightest patches of ground and in pots or window boxes. Plant something and see what happens.

We're focused on many of these things in the LifeCafes at Life Time too. Truth be told, we've struggled a bit to find our unique place in the food-service space. Yet our commitment to "if it's here, it's healthy" is always top of mind, and we know that the same habits and practices we suggest for you are also good for us.

In recent months, we've made some shifts that encourage more freedom and creativity in our LifeCafes. We're bringing on culinary chefs who are sourcing local, organic ingredients from their regions. They're experimenting with menu options and serving food that's not only healthy but also delicious and convenient.

They're building relationships with farmers in their communities and changing the menu in harmony with the seasons. We hope you've started to see (and taste) the changes in your local LifeCafe.

As you think about your own food choices, consider what you can eat seasonally and source locally. Think about what your body, mind, and the planet need to function at their best. When you can, avoid food that's been packaged or ultraprocessed. Most of the time, opt for what is whole and healthy for you.

When we're mindful about what food is available, where it comes from, and how it affects us, we can truly understand just how foundational food is to good health — our health, and the health of our communities and planet too.

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

“Food has a culture.
It has a history. It has a story.
It has relationships.”

— Winona LaDuke

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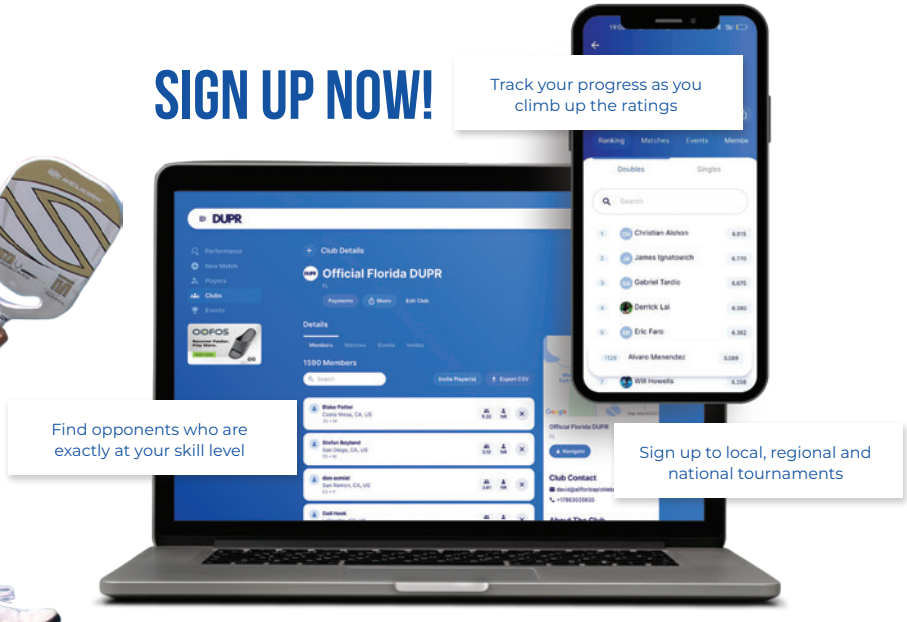

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