HEALTHY. HAPPY. FOR REAL.

Experience Life

LIFE TIME®

March 2022

ALL EYES ON

EMDR

HOW THIS PROVEN TRAUMA TREATMENT WORKS

p. 64

The Mental Health Issue

Resilience & Fitness

WHY THEY GO HAND IN HAND

p. 52

Advocate **Nicole Phelps** on how strong support systems can make all the difference in navigating mental well-being. p. 16

Viva the Vagus!

DISCOVER THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF THIS GUT–BRAIN NERVE

p. 58

3 + Calming Yoga Poses

p. 32

March 2022 $6.95

03

0 73917 45965 0

EXPERIENCELIFE.COM

NO PAIN. NO GAIN. DOESN'T APPLY TO YOUR SLEEP.

Beautyrest BLACK®

Lack of sleep can lead to problems with concentration, weight gain, and even mood. Beautyrest mattresses are designed with our very own T3 Pocketed Coil® Technology, Beautyrest® Gel Memory Foam, and BlackICE™ 4.0 Cooling System. Reinvigorate your sleep tonight for an energized tomorrow.

LIFE TIME

Upgrade your night. Visit **shop.lifetime.life/sleep** to shop our Beautyrest promotion exclusively for Life Time members.

Purchase must be completed through Life Time Health Store. Offer only available for Life Time members and team members. This offer is only available for one product per order.

Contents

Experience Life

March 2022

THE MENTAL-HEALTH ISSUE

Features

52

RESILIENCE, REDISCOVERED

Recent research offers strategies to help you build a body and mind that roll with the punches — and come back stronger after stress. The key, say experts, is to get comfortable being uncomfortable.

By Andrew Heffernan, CSCS

58

WHAT HAPPENS IN THE VAGUS

Also known as the gut–brain axis, the vagus nerve plays a starring role in stress regulation. Understanding and caring for this interconnected conduit can support many bodily systems and enhance your overall health and well-being, too.

By Catherine Guthrie

64

ALL EYES ON EMDR

Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing has demonstrated a remarkable ability to bring relief to people who have experienced trauma of all sorts. Learn how it works — and whether it might be right for you.

By Quinton Skinner

In Every Issue

4 ***Experience Life*** **Digital**

7 **Editor's Note** by Jamie Martin

9 **Talk to Us**

10 **Well Informed**

Expert insights on the effects of loneliness and isolation; avoiding the downsides of decaf; the promise of psychedelics for mental-health care; and more.

16 **On the Cover**

In Her Own Lane

Nicole Phelps has emerged as a prominent ambassador for mental well-being.

By Jill Patton, FMCHC

20 **Learn This Skill**

How to Grow Sprouts

Honor the change of seasons by cultivating nutritious sprouts.

By Molly Tynjala

22 **My Turnaround**

Joyful Health

Relinquishing a numbers-based approach to weight loss helped one woman reconnect with her body and focus on its needs.

By Kaltun Karani

85 **Worthy Goods**

87 **Perspective** by Bahram Akradi

88 **Meditation**

Craving more healthy-living inspiration?
Sign up for *Experience Life*'s newsletters at
ELMAG.COM/NEWSLETTERS.

Departments

REAL FITNESS

26 The Workouts
Cardio: Reap What You Row
Three workouts for the humble rowing machine to propel your cardio fitness forward.
By Andrew Heffernan, CSCS

Mobility: Extend Yourself
You don't need to spend hours twisting yourself into knots to improve mobility. This routine stretches your muscles and mobilizes your joints, head to toe.
By Andrew Heffernan, CSCS

31 Break It Down
The Bear Crawl
Think crawling is just for babies? Master this functional full-body move to help strengthen the body and mind at any age.
By Maggie Fazeli Fard, RKC, MFT-1, Alpha

32 Up Your Game
Peaceful Practice
A restorative-yoga practice can bring you a renewed sense of calm.
By Nicole Radziszewski

35 Strong Body, Strong Mind
The Simple Beauty of Shoulder Rolls
A short stretching routine helps our fitness editor soothe her upper-body muscles and ease her mind.
By Maggie Fazeli Fard, RKC, MFT-1, Alpha

REAL FOOD

38 Nutrients
The Great Potato Comeback
Long maligned by various healthy-eating protocols, the beloved spud is back — and more nutritious than you might think.
By Elizabeth Millard

42 Foodstuff
Trauma-Informed Nutrition
Trauma can play a significant role in our relationship with food — which is why some nutritionists and dietitians are practicing a more holistic approach.
By Jessie Sholl

44 Confident Cook
Dinner in an Instant
Mix up your weeknight meal routine with these Instant Pot recipes from blogger and best-selling cookbook author Michelle Tam.

51 Ingredients
Cauliflower
Tips for making the most of this common cruciferous veggie.
By Blessing Kasongoma

REAL LIFE

72 Balance
Artistic Pursuits
Tips to unveil the creativity in all of us.
By Jon Spayde

75 Nourished Self
Real Happiness
Mindfulness pioneer Sharon Salzberg on healing ourselves and the world.
By Dara Moskowitz Grumdahl

77 Natural Mental Health
The Repeating Mind
Simple strategies to break the cycle of rumination.
By Henry Emmons, MD

78 Green Space
A Big Dam Problem
Deteriorating dams are expensive to maintain, and they harm ecosystems and contribute to global warming. Removing them is costly, too, but restoring our rivers could pay off in myriad ways.
By Michael Dregni

81 Greater Good
Grow Your Community
Discover the power of community gardens in building and sustaining healthy neighborhoods.
By Kara Douglass Thom

Experience Life

Digital

CONNECT WITH US!

Dollars and Sense

Rethink your approach to your pocketbook with tips from our mindful-money email series. Understanding your story, values, and budgeting goals can set you up for financial wellness. Learn more each week with expert advice delivered to your inbox.

Sign up to receive these emails at **ELMAG.COM/MINDFULMONEY.**

WIN THIS!

Instant Meals

Cook up dinner faster with the Instant Pot multicooker, which can be used as a pressure cooker, slow cooker, rice cooker, yogurt maker, and more. (Need a recipe? Check out chef Michelle Tam's ideas on page 44.) Sign up for your chance to win at **ELmag.com/marchgiveaway.**

RISE AND SHINE

The start of Daylight Saving Time this month can upset your circadian rhythms temporarily, so support your body's clock with a healthy morning routine. Find inspiration for ideas that'll work for you in this three-part series at **ELmag.com/morningroutine.**

UPLIFT AND LEARN

The pandemic has devastated many businesses and upended employees' lives; women, in particular, have left the workforce in droves. During Women's History Month, learn how you can support your colleagues in the workplace now and into the future. **ELmag.com/womenally**

HOOP IT UP

Whether you dream of playing ball during March Madness or just want to improve your pickup game, these basketball drills can boost your strength and skills. **ELmag.com/basketball.**

LET WELLNESS BLOOM

Spending time in nature has the power to increase our daily wellness. It helps relaxation, improves your mood, and helps you sleep like a baby. So we took all the same feeling of a hike or camping trip and packed it into one tasty, full-spectrum hemp extract gummy you take to experience the magic of nature.

THE WORLD'S MOST TRUSTED HEMP EXTRACT™.

CHARLOTTE'S WEB™
STANLEY BROTHERS

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

DAILY WELLNESS | CALM | SLEEP | RECOVERY | IMMUNITY

Experience Life

BY LIFE TIME

OUR MISSION:

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

OUR MANTRA:

HEALTHY. HAPPY. FOR REAL.

Founding Editor: Pilar Gerasimo

EXPERIENCE LIFE MAGAZINE

EDITOR IN CHIEF **Jamie Martin**

DEPUTY EDITORS **Craig Cox, Michael Dregni**

MANAGING EDITOR **Courtney Lewis Opdahl**

FEATURES EDITOR **Courtney Helgoe**

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

COPY CHIEF **Lisa Leonard**

ASSISTANT EDITOR/FACT CHECKER **Molly Tynjala**

EDITORIAL INTERN **Marco Dregni**

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

EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR **Lydia Anderson**

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR **Jane Meronuck**

ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR **Jennifer Jacobson**

DIGITAL DIRECTOR **Anjula Razdan**

AUDIENCE-DEVELOPMENT MANAGER–MARKETING **Laura Fogelberg**

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

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

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS **Henry Emmons, Dara Moskowitz Grumdahl, Kaltun Karani, Blessing Kasongoma, Elizabeth Millard, Jill Patton, Nicole Radziszewski, Quinton Skinner, Alexandra Smith, Kara Douglass Thom**

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

LIFE TIME

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

PRESIDENT, MEDIA **Kimo Seymour**

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

PICTURE CREDITS

Cover, p. 2 (far right), and **p. 16–17** (left): Jeff Lipski for foureleven agency (photographer), Barbara Farman (hair/makeup), Keylee Sanders (wardrobe styling). Wardrobe: sweater (cover) by Vince, sweater (Contents) by Sanctuary, and shirt (On the Cover) by Treasure & Bond.

Page 7: Sara Rubinstein; **p. 26:** Chad Holder; **p. 75:** (Salzberg head shot) Tawni Bannister; **p. 77:** (bottom) Vik Orenstein.

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

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

Alliance for Audited Media

EXPERIENCE LIFE Magazine (ISSN 1537-6656) is published monthly except for January/February and July/August by LIFE TIME, 2902 Corporate Place, Chanhassen, MN 55317. SUBSCRIPTION RATE: One year (10 issues) $27.95; Two years (20 issues) $44.95. LIFE TIME MEMBERS: For member questions, cancellations, or change of address call Member Relations at 888-430-6432 or email subs@experiencelife.com. NON–LIFE TIME MEMBERS: For non-member questions, cancellations, or change of address call 800-897-4056 or email ELFcustserv@cdsfulfillment.com. Periodicals postage paid at Chanhassen, MN 55317 and additional mailing offices. ISSUE DATE: March 2022. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Carrie Stafford, EXPERIENCE LIFE Magazine, 2145 Ford Parkway, Suite 302, St. Paul, MN 55116.

Copyright 2022 by LIFE TIME. All rights reserved. Printed in USA. Reproduction of this magazine, in whole, or in part, is prohibited unless authorized by the Publisher or its advertisers. The advertising space provided in EXPERIENCE LIFE is purchased and paid for by the advertiser. None of the products or services is necessarily endorsed by LIFE TIME.

LIFE TIME®
HEALTHY WAY OF LIFE

FSC www.fsc.org MIX Paper from responsible sources FSC® C084269

The paper used in this publication is Forest Stewardship Council® certified. Please recycle this magazine.

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

Piece by Piece

A thousand puzzle pieces are strewn across a table — where to begin?

I always start by assembling the border and the easier, more obvious parts of the image. As a picture starts to form, I move on to more difficult sections, depending on what's coming together. Admittedly, I tend to get distracted in this phase of puzzling, bouncing from an area over *here* when I stumble upon a piece that fits over *there*.

The subtler, more obscure pieces? I avoid those until they're absolutely necessary to finish.

As my family and I worked on a challenging puzzle recently, I found myself reflecting on this process — and noticing parallels with how I deal with certain aspects of life.

Movement and fitness? Nutrition? Sleep? As with the border and easier portions of a puzzle, I've been prioritizing these things consistently for long enough that I take care of them straightaway most days.

Stress management, social connections, supplementation — those are the areas where I get distracted. I'll focus on them for a while, taper off and shift my attention to something else, then circle back again. Over any given period, this cycle repeats itself in various aspects of my well-being.

The area that I consistently put off addressing, often until it's absolutely necessary? Mental health. Not because it's not important — it's essential — but because it's the one that's visible to me and me alone. I set it aside while I address the other things that I perceive as being easier to deal with. And if I'm being honest, I've been avoiding acknowledging feelings of anxiety and possibly even depression for a while now.

If these last two years have taught us anything, it's that what's unseen and bubbling under the surface can have an oversize impact on our lives. Unaddressed, our mental-health challenges can prevent us not only from functioning well in the day to day but also from following our passions, making meaningful connections, and wholly experiencing all that's available to us in this "one wild and precious life," as poet Mary Oliver so beautifully described the human experience.

That's why we've devoted this entire issue of *Experience Life* to mental health: Because as we mark the second anniversary of the pandemic, we know that so many people are struggling with their mental well-being. In December 2020, research by the U.S. Census Bureau found that 42.4 percent of Americans reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorders — up from 10.8 percent in 2019, largely as a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

Although that number began to decline in early 2021, likely because of the availability of vaccinations and other signs of hope, it has remained steady at around 30 percent since late April (as of December 2021). That's nearly one in three of us who say we're experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression, two of the most common mental-health challenges. And that's a big deal: Some have described this as a public-health emergency in its own right.

As I recently reviewed the articles in this edition, I found myself reckoning with my own mental-health issues. I realized, with many other parts of the picture securely in place, it's time to pick up that more obscure piece and — with support, patience, and self-compassion — give it the attention it deserves.

If you're struggling with your mental health, know you're not alone. We can help each other put together this part of our puzzle in due time. I hope the information and insights throughout this issue inspire you to focus on it, too.

"I realized, with many other parts of the picture securely in place, it's time to pick up that more obscure piece and — with support, patience, and self-compassion — give it the attention it deserves."

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.

CLEAN. HEALTHY. HYDRATION.

BioSteel's Sports Hydration Mix has been designed in the most natural way possible to keep you hydrated throughout the day. Simply pour into your water for **Clean. Healthy. Hydration.**

- ZERO SUGAR
- NO ARTIFICIAL FLAVORS/COLORS
- NO PRESERVATIVES
- ESSENTIAL ELECTROLYTES

MIXED BERRY

BLUE RASPBERRY

SCAN FOR YOUR

FREE BIOSTEEL

Talk to Us

GIFT INSPIRATION

Such a great read ("The Six Best Gifts You Can Give Your Partner," December 2021)! I get nervous when it's time to give space because sometimes you think maybe a person doesn't like you, but reading this makes me feel better. Very well written!
J.J.

This is a really terrific article ("The Gift of Giving," December 2019)! I loved all the ideas.
Glynnis L.

LESS IS MORE

[On "The Liberation of Less," November 2021]
I practice the "need, use, love" philosophy when purchasing goods. It's refreshing to know others do, too. This approach keeps life simple. Thanks to Christine Platt for sharing her beliefs.
Debra K.

Great article! I am working on decluttering and changing over summer and winter clothes.
Lynn R.

Excellent and interesting article! I loved the story, philosophy, and advice. It's helpful to consider the criteria: need, use, love. Letting go. Thanks!
Barbara B.

SIGNING OFF

Having an adult diagnosis of ADHD, plus lived experiences of it without knowing about it, has led me to reconsider my use of Facebook and other social-media platforms. So, I appreciated Jamie Martin's beautiful Editor's Note sharing how social media grabbed her and how her wellness habits had gone by the wayside ("Consider the Context," November 2021). She logged off of Facebook, which generated a brilliant idea for the part of me that felt like it was losing a huge chunk of history.

Calm and patience are returning to me, and my brain can now concentrate on more than a 15-second video stream. Thanks, Jamie, for validating, affirming, and promoting making changes in our lives that support our fullness.
Diana R.

WORKING THROUGH REJECTION

Mo Perry's article came at just the right time for me ("Embracing Rejection," October 2021). It gave me some strength to soothe myself after the most recent in a long line of rejections. I guess I need to do some work on myself.
Claire R.

A HOPEFUL GESTURE

I read the September 2021 *Experience Life* issue cover to cover and was most excited by the last page. Life Time CEO Bahram Akradi's message that plastic water bottles will be eliminated from LifeCafes gave me great hope ("Plastics: The Beginning of the End"). Thank you for this initiative and for your commitment to promoting planetary wellness as a key element of health and well-being.
Bridget M.

RECOVERY REQUIRES GOOD NUTRITION

The "food" most hospitals serve during recovery from intensive-care treatment is horrible — often not a single fresh ingredient in sight ("Eating Well During Cancer Care," November 2021). They think easy prep 'n' serve, packaged, processed foods rich in GMO corn syrup or laden with GMO sugar are posttreatment nutrition. For them, it's all about reducing cost. They don't care at all about quality. No, pesticide-rich sliced apples processed in China don't count as healthy. It should be one of the top questions people ask when choosing a provider and a hospital: "Can you please tell me about the menu during recovery?"
Bruno P.

WORTH A TRY

I had a serious depression in the early 1970s, well before [SSRI] antidepressants were developed. The only therapy I could find was indeed B vitamins ("B Well," December 2021). Four or so months later the depression lifted. I still look over my shoulder for the depression to return, but I also still take B vitamins!
Richard C.

I have used this treatment for about three years now when my throat is starting to get a knot or a scratchy feeling — like I am getting a cold ("Does Oregano Oil Work to Fight Colds?," May 2019). It works miracles for me.
Andre W.

I have been dealing with the aftermath of black-mold exposure for years and have used this article on several occasions to share with health professionals, family, and friends who don't understand the extent of my situation ("It Could Be Mold," May 2016). It's a great reader-friendly resource that lays out the facts without jargon or pseudoscience. This will continue to be important understanding and work as our planet faces more destructive storms and flooding. We need to understand how to protect our homes from moisture and how to properly handle it when it occurs.
Jennifer B.

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

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

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

The Health Effects of Loneliness and Isolation

A year before COVID-19 struck, a third of Americans over 45 reported feeling lonely, and nearly a quarter of those over 65 felt they were socially isolated. Both of these numbers have only climbed during the pandemic.

Loneliness and isolation are "serious yet underappreciated public-health risks," according to a 2020 report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM): They increase a person's risk of premature death from any cause — as much as (or more than) smoking or a sedentary lifestyle.

Loneliness and isolation are also two separate conditions. Loneliness is a "subjective feeling of being isolated," the report explains. People with plenty of friends and social contacts can still feel lonely. Practitioners often use the UCLA Loneliness Scale to assess the condition, asking questions such as "Do you feel left out?" and "Are people around you but not with you?"

Social isolation means a person has few social relationships or infrequent social contact. Again, people can live in a community but still feel isolated.

"While all ages may experience social isolation and loneliness, older adults are at increased risk because they are more likely to face predisposing factors, such as living alone, the loss of family or friends, chronic illness, and sensory impairments," the authors note.

The two conditions often, but not always, manifest together. Women are at more risk of loneliness; men are more apt to be socially isolated.

Immigrant, lesbian, gay, and bisexual populations experience loneliness more often than others, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "because of stigma, discrimination, and barriers to care."

"While all ages may experience social isolation and loneliness, **older adults are at increased risk because they are more likely to face predisposing factors,** such as living alone, the loss of family or friends, chronic illness, and sensory impairments."

First-generation immigrants may face more social isolation because of language barriers, differences in community, family dynamics, and new relationships that lack depth or history.

Unmarried, widowed, or divorced people are also more likely to develop both conditions, as are those with low income and less education.

The health effects of loneliness and isolation can be tough to measure precisely. Various studies suggest that, in addition to the risk of premature death and a heightened risk of heart disease and stroke, social isolation increases the chances of developing dementia by 50 percent, and loneliness correlates with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide.

How the conditions are related to these effects is still unknown. Loneliness may increase stress and inflammation, impair sleep, and drive behaviors such as drinking and smoking, says the National Institute on Aging's Lis Nielsen, PhD. Isolation may make it harder to access nutritious foods, exercise, or medical care.

Because most everyone over 50 interacts to some degree with the healthcare system, the NASEM report states, "healthcare providers may be in the best position to identify older individuals who are at highest risk."

Among the resources the CDC recommends are AARP, Area Agencies on Aging and Eldercare Locator, the National Council on Aging, and the National Institute on Aging.

For more on dealing with loneliness, see ELmag.com/loneliness and ELmag.com/lonelinesstrap. For more on isolation, see ELmag.com/community and ELmag.com/stayconnected.

— MICHAEL DREGNI

COUNTING Steps

How many steps do we really need to take each day?

The Yamasa Clock and Instrument Company in 1965 introduced a pedometer called Manpo-kei, which in Japanese means "10,000 steps meter," and thus was born the notion that we should each be taking that many steps daily to maintain good health. At least, that's the way I-Min Lee, MBBS, MPH, ScD, puts it in a 2019 study published in *JAMA Internal Medicine*.

Lee, who is an associate epidemiologist at Brigham and Women's Hospital, and her research team set out to discover whether that 10,000-step goal is truly the gold standard.

Tracking the movements of nearly 17,000 women with a mean age of 72, Lee's team found that as few as 4,400 steps per day corresponded with significantly reduced mortality rates over a four-year period when compared with those who took about 2,700 steps.

Those mortality rates continued to decline as participants added to their daily walking, but they leveled off at around 7,500 steps.

Participants were generally healthier than average, and though the results held after the team adjusted for BMI, hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, and step intensity, Lee notes the study was observational and doesn't prove causation. Still, she argues that it may help many folks get off the couch.

"These findings," she concludes, "may serve as encouragement to the many sedentary individuals for whom 10,000 steps per day pose an unattainable goal."

— CRAIG COX

What's in Your Decaf?

Decaf coffee has something of a bad reputation. "Death Before Decaf" shirts and stickers have long been popular with coffee enthusiasts, and there's a widely held belief that decaf can never taste as good as the "real" stuff. Still, many people drink it regularly, whether for medical reasons, because they are pregnant, or simply to avoid the caffeine jitters.

A recent report, however, raises new concerns about decaf. The nonprofit watchdog group Clean Label Project (CLP) released a white paper in 2020 suggesting that the decaffeination process itself may pose a health hazard.

Methylene chloride, or dichloromethane, is a chemical solvent used to remove caffeine from coffee beans. Exposure to the substance at certain levels has been linked to liver problems and an increased risk of cancer; the CLP points to the Environmental Protection Agency's banning of methylene chloride from paint removers in 2019 as a reason it could be dangerous in coffee as well.

CLP researchers tested 25 decaf coffees and found 10 containing trace amounts of methylene chloride. The amounts detected were well below the safety threshold set by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), so although the finding might seem worrying, more research into the impacts of low concentrations of the chemical are probably necessary before any definite conclusions can be drawn.

Yet CLP executive director Jaclyn Bowen believes that decaf brands' labels should disclose the presence of methylene chloride, regardless of how much is present. "Consumers have a right to know what they're purchasing and ingesting and be able to trust claims made on product packaging."

The good news is that if you're looking to reduce your caffeine intake without the risks that methylene chloride may pose, there are other options:

- **COFFEE DECAFFEINATED WITH ETHYL ACETATE,** which naturally occurs as a byproduct of fermented sugars and is "generally recognized as safe" by the FDA, is widely available and features a distinctive fruity flavor. On the shelf, it is often labeled "ethyl acetate," "E.A.," or "sugarcane" decaf.
- **WATER-PROCESSED DECAFS** eschew chemical solvents. This process is more costly than other forms of decaffeination, but these beans are readily available from many coffee roasters at a small premium. This coffee is usually labeled "Swiss Water Process" or "Mountain Water Process"; the names differ, but the process is generally the same.
- **NATURALLY LOW-CAFFEINE COFFEE VARIETIES** may be worth trying. Unlike decaffeinated coffees, which are processed to be almost entirely free of caffeine, the Laurina and Aramosa varieties contain less than 50 percent of the caffeine of typical coffee. These niche varieties require extra effort to grow, so they are often more expensive than traditional decaf.

They are, however, a great choice for those who don't enjoy the flavor of decaf coffee but still want to reduce their caffeine intake.

— MARCO DREGNI

POUR ANOTHER

For more on decaf options — and how to best enjoy them — see **ELmag.com/decafcoffee.**

NEW FDA RULING:
Less Salt in Foods

Warning that Americans consume too much salt, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in October 2021 issued new guidelines calling for reduced sodium in processed and restaurant foods. The rules come after years of delay and, critics say, don't go far enough: Compliance is purely voluntary.

Salt is key to many biological processes, including muscle contraction, nerve function, blood-pressure and blood-volume regulation, and absorption of nutrients, such as vitamin C. But too much salt can be dangerous; it's associated with high blood pressure and heart disease.

The average American eats 3,400 mg of salt daily — nearly 50 percent more than the recommended 2,300 mg limit, according to the FDA. But the new rules note that it's not the salt in the shakers on our kitchen tables that's the issue: "More than 70 percent of total sodium intake is from sodium added during food manufacturing and commercial food preparation."

By encouraging Big Food, restaurants, and food-service companies to scale back on salt, the guidelines seek to reduce average daily intake to 3,000 mg over two and a half years. This is still higher than the recommended amount, critics note — and, in any case, the guidelines remain only a recommendation.

— MICHAEL DREGNI

Another COVID Consequence:
Lost Sleep

If the pandemic has messed with your sleep cycle, you have plenty of company. A survey conducted by the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) in the summer of 2020 found that nearly one in five respondents struggled with "COVID-somnia."

And it's only becoming more common. Repeating the survey with the same number of participants in 2021, the organization reported that the number had risen to almost one in two. "A lot of people thought that our sleep should be getting better because we can see the light at the end of the tunnel — but it's worse now than it was," AASM spokesperson Fariha Abbasi-Feinberg, MD, tells the *New York Times*. "People are really struggling."

More than half of those surveyed report using some variety of sleep aid. But Abbasi-Feinberg suggests that chronic insomnia — sleep disruption lasting longer than three months — is best addressed with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). For short-term sufferers, she offers a dozen strategies to help you catch some better z's.

1. Create a quiet, relaxing atmosphere in your bedroom. Keep it at a cool, comfortable temperature.
2. Use your bed only for sleep and sex.
3. Establish a relaxing bedtime routine.
4. Limit your exposure to bright light in the evenings.
5. Avoid electronic devices at least 30 minutes before bedtime.
6. Don't eat a large meal before bedtime. The digestive cycle can make it hard to sleep.
7. Avoid consuming caffeine in the late afternoon or early evening.
8. Avoid alcohol for several hours before bedtime.
9. Keep a consistent sleep and wake schedule.
10. Go to bed early enough to ensure at least seven hours of sleep.
11. Don't go to bed unless you're tired.
12. If you're still awake after 20 minutes, get out of bed. Go back to bed when you're sleepy.

— CRAIG COX

The Promise of Psychedelics for Mental-Health Care

A growing body of research suggests that psychedelics — psychoactive substances that temporarily alter mood, cognition, and perception — hold enormous potential for mental-health care. Overcoming their controversial reputation, however, has been no easy feat.

A Long, Messy History

Psychedelics encompass a range of substances, some natural, some synthetic. Indigenous cultures throughout the Americas have used psilocybin mushrooms, ayahuasca, and peyote for millennia. But one of the most famous psychedelic substances, LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), was first synthesized in a lab less than a century ago.

Midway through the 20th century, Western researchers began exploring the potential for psychedelics to treat addiction and mental illness, publishing more than a thousand clinical papers on psychedelic-drug therapy between 1950 and the mid-1960s alone.

But users of these drugs are at risk of reckless or even deadly behavior. Famously, Harvard researcher Timothy Leary, PhD, advocated for psychedelics while largely abandoning clinical protocols in his research. Leary's actions, in part, spurred a backlash against psychedelics in the late 1960s and the wholesale ban on production, research, and personal use of the substances.

In the past two decades, the tide has shifted again. A landmark 2006 Johns Hopkins study demonstrated that psilocybin can generate positive changes in attitude and behavior lasting several months, reigniting interest in psychedelics as a psychiatric treatment. Subsequent studies affirmed and expanded on these findings, and in 2018 the FDA granted psilocybin "breakthrough therapy" status.

This speaks to the enormous promise psychedelic compounds hold for treating some of the most intractable mental-health conditions.

How Psychedelics Change the Brain

The brain is complex, and how neurological processes are affected by psychedelics is not entirely clear. But the secret seems to lie in a system called the default mode network (DMN).

The DMN switches on when the brain is not actively engaged in a task — for example, during cognitive processes such as daydreaming, rumination, or "mental time travel" (imagining the future or remembering the past).

Psychological changes can linger for months or even years, fostering longstanding **improvements across a range of mental-health disorders.**

Though adaptive in many situations, these functions can easily become problematic: Planning ahead turns into worry about what might go wrong; analyzing past mistakes can become a cycle of ruminating, which can veer into self-loathing. And because repeated patterns of thought tend to crystallize, over time these tendencies can lead to addiction, depression, anxiety, and other mental illnesses.

Psychedelics are believed to temporarily quiet the DMN and activate connections between other regions of the brain. Whereas the mind normally follows well-worn roads, psychedelics open alternative routes — some of which may offer profound new perspectives.

And because users remain conscious while under the influence, their travels can be recalled and integrated into real life long after the trip ends. Psychological changes can linger for months or even years, fostering longstanding improvements across a range of mental-health disorders.

DEPRESSION: A study of individuals diagnosed with major depressive disorder found that two sessions of psilocybin coupled with psychotherapy yields rapid, substantial, and sustained easing of symptoms.

SUBSTANCE USE: Eight in 10 cigarette smokers who received two or three sessions of psilocybin alongside traditional smoking-cessation treatment remained fully abstinent six months later. Another psychedelic, ibogaine, was found to reduce or eliminate opioid use after a single session.

PTSD: MDMA (methylenedioxymethamphetamine) diminished symptoms of PTSD so dramatically that after two sessions, 83 percent of study participants no longer met criteria for the disorder. A three-year follow-up found the effects had been sustained.

COPING WITH TERMINAL ILLNESS: Several studies have shown that cancer patients treated with LSD and other psychedelics experienced significantly lower anxiety and depression stemming from their diagnosis. Participants also reported less fear of death and "existential distress."

While psychedelics do not have the same addictive properties as other drugs, they must be handled with care and administered in a controlled setting by a trained professional. Additionally, they're not for everyone — individuals predisposed to certain mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia, may experience adverse reactions.

And, importantly, they're not a cure-all. Psychedelics work best in conjunction with, not as a replacement for, psychotherapy.

In other words, a psychedelic experience can open doors, but it still takes time, effort, and support to walk through them.

— ALEXANDRA SMITH, MA, LPCC

@HOKA | HOKA.com

FOR THE LOVE OF THE RUN

CLIFTON 8

THE REMARKABLY SMOOTH
EVERYDAY TRAINER

HOKA

IN HER OWN LANE

Nicole Phelps has emerged as an influential mental-health advocate through lessons learned while supporting her husband, Olympian Michael Phelps, through troubled times.

BY **JILL PATTON, FMCHC**

It was October 2014, during family week at the Meadows, a residential treatment center in the Arizona desert, that Nicole Phelps saw her future coming into focus.

She was there to support her then-boyfriend, Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps, whose highly publicized DUI the previous month had exposed his debilitating depression. The couple, who had dated on and off since 2007, had recently reestablished their relationship, and Nicole realized that a life with Michael would include standing by him through ongoing struggles with his mental health. "I recognized that there were things that I needed to accept and understand better in order for us to move forward together," she recalls.

> **"I RECOGNIZED THAT THERE WERE THINGS THAT I NEEDED TO ACCEPT AND UNDERSTAND BETTER IN ORDER FOR US TO MOVE FORWARD TOGETHER."**

But it was when *Sports Illustrated* published a cover story in 2015 about Michael's troubles, including suicidal ideation, that she understood that mental health would be at the center of their public life as well. "That's when he opened up," she says. "That was our first forward motion toward changing the way people see mental health."

As Michael became more public about his challenges, Nicole stepped into the spotlight too, advocating for mental-health awareness on behalf of the Michael Phelps Foundation (MPF). In addition to focusing on swimming and water safety, MPF offers emotional well-being programming for youth through the Boys and Girls Clubs of America and Special Olympics and is developing further initiatives in partnership with other organizations.

"This is where we are going to make the biggest difference," she says. "I know that Michael's legacy, at the end of the day, is in the mental-health field."

Family is a top priority for Nicole and Michael Phelps. Nicole frequently shares glimpses into their lives — like those pictured here — on Instagram: @mrs.nicolephelps.

Q&A

WITH **NICOLE PHELPS**

EXPERIENCE LIFE **|** Prior to becoming Michael's partner and wife, did you have any experience with mental-health issues?

NICOLE PHELPS | I think I saw it at a very young age. There were struggles around me, but not diagnosed.

I know I experienced depression when I was in high school. I had a very good girlfriend who died in an automobile accident my junior year. After the funeral there was no support, none of that.

And my senior year, a girl who had the same first and last name as I did was also killed in an automobile accident. I went to her funeral and heard my name repeated over and over, which was very difficult to experience at 17. Again, no counseling or anything.

EL **|** You said you realized when Michael was in rehab that there were things you needed to understand in order to move forward together. What have you learned?

NP | I have learned that I can't take on anything that he's experiencing — I can't fix it. I can't change the way that he's thinking. Everything that he's feeling, whether or not I think it's right, is valid because that's what he's experiencing in that moment.

Previously I might have said, "What is wrong with you? Why can't you just turn it off? Why can't you just be happy?"

As a culture, I think, we have this idea that if you wake up and say, "I'm happy," you're going to be OK, and that's not true. It doesn't work like that.

Also, I've learned better how to listen. People carry a lens of whatever their experiences are, and they often look at what you're sharing with them through that lens. I think that's how I grew up, with a constant "You should" or "Why don't you" or "This would fix that."

But once you take away that lens you can say, "OK, I'm just going to listen to you and hear what you have to say." I do this with Michael a lot. I want to be sure I'm listening with the right ear. I have learned that listening will make you feel much more connected to that other person than trying to fix the situation.

EL **|** For Michael, decades of competition brought about an identity crisis. How have your own competition experiences in the Miss California and Miss USA pageants affected your sense of identity?

NP | There's a saying in the pageant world that you arrive in a limo and leave in a taxi. I competed in my first Miss California pageant in 2007. In 2010 I won Miss California, and when I went into the Miss USA 2010 pageant, I was told I was a favorite to win, but instead I placed in the top 10. It was like, *All right, the next girl is in. They don't care about you anymore*.

During that time, my mom lost her home because the person she was paying rent to wasn't paying his bills. So, after 14 days of competing in Miss USA, I came home to not having a home.

WE PUT SO MUCH EMPHASIS ON IDENTITY THAT WE'VE FORGOTTEN THE IMPORTANCE OF PURPOSE. PURPOSE IS MORE STABLE."

So, when you break identity down, I was a daughter. I was a pageant winner. Now I'm a wife. I'm a mom. OK, those are little pieces of my story, but they don't define who I am.

We put so much emphasis on identity that we've forgotten the importance of purpose. Purpose is more stable.

EL **|** Speaking of purpose, please tell us a little about your role at the Michael Phelps Foundation.

NP | I'm called the ambassador, but I wear as many hats as I possibly can. I worked with our director to build out the mental-health programming. I speak on behalf of the foundation. I'm with Michael day to day, constantly dreaming and conceptualizing different ways we can take the foundation.

As for my purpose, though, it's very important to me to teach kids that it's OK to have struggles. It's OK to cry. It's OK to be angry. When I look at the mental-health piece of the foundation, it's as big to me as water safety.

EL **|** A lot of your purpose now also centers on raising your three young children. What is something you have learned from motherhood?

NP | Michael has taught me a lot, and my boys have taught me even more, about not trying to fix. Oftentimes, if one of my boys is crying, I will sit there in silence for a while, and then I'll say, "Do you need a hug? Do you need to just sit here? You're having really big emotions. I'm not going anywhere."

What if instead I would try to distract him? What if I would say, "Hey, let's go look at those butterflies, they're so happy!" — then what have I done? I haven't allowed him to be part of his emotions and understand for himself how to work through them.

I also think it's important for kids to see our emotions. If we pretend in front of our kids, they know it. They sense it.

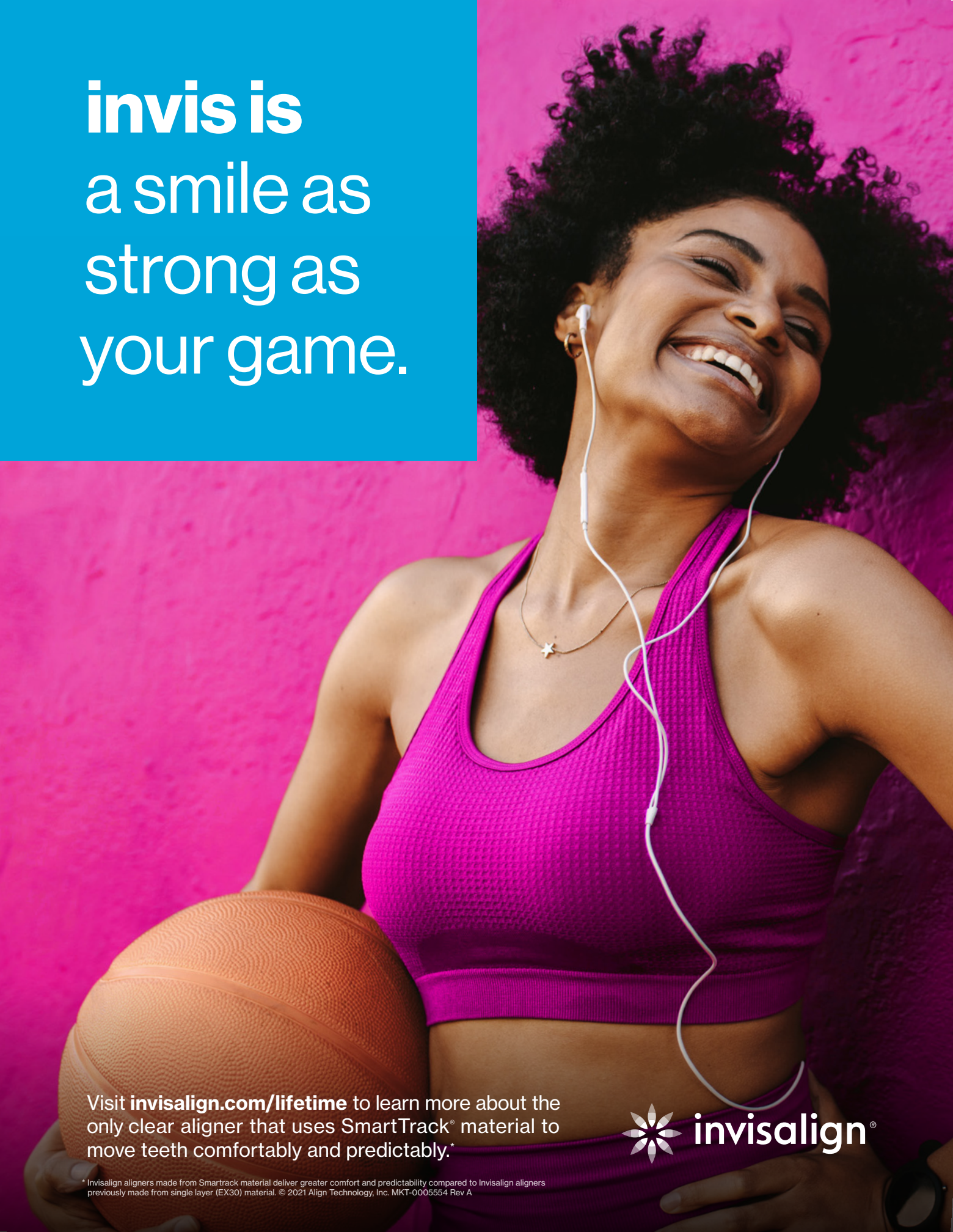
I had a meltdown the other day, and I just told the kids, "I'm very angry right now and I am going to take some deep breaths in the other room. I'll be back in a minute." This teaches them that they can take their space, too. They can take time to calm down and then we can talk about it.

EL **|** Between your family and MPF, you take care of a lot of people. How do you take care of yourself?

NP | One of my biggest tools is therapy. Having that support has helped me be stronger when Michael is having his own issues.

Routine is also important. There's so much to be said about the day-in, day-out predictability and safety that our family routine builds for all of us. If your brain is going crazy and you're having a high-anxiety day, just knowing what comes next in the day makes things easier.

JILL PATTON, FMCHC, is a health journalist and certified functional-medicine health coach based in Minneapolis.


invis is
a smile as
strong as
your game.
Visit invisalign.com/lifetime to learn more about the only clear aligner that uses SmartTrack® material to move teeth comfortably and predictably.*
invisalign®
* Invisalign aligners made from Smartrack material deliver greater comfort and predictability compared to Invisalign aligners previously made from single layer (EX30) material. © 2021 Align Technology, Inc. MKT-0005554 Rev A

How to Grow Sprouts

Celebrate the start of spring by cultivating some of these nutritionally dense plants in your kitchen.

BY **MOLLY TYNJALA**

As the days become longer, consider growing sprouts to honor the return of spring. This practice is a traditional part of Nowruz — an ancient holiday celebrating the Persian new year, on the vernal equinox — and symbolizes rebirth and rejuvenation.

Though celebrants of Nowruz (no-ROOZ) release grown sprouts into running water, it's worthwhile to save some for your kitchen, too. Nutritionally dense, sprouts are rich in folate, magnesium, and vitamin K, though the specific ratio depends on the type. They can be added raw to salads and sandwiches, and they make a great addition to soups, omelets, and smoothies.

Sprouts can be produced with any of a variety of plant foods, including seeds, beans, peas, vegetables, or nuts, as well as grains, such as brown rice; Nowruz sprouts are grown from wheat or lentils. (If using seeds, choose sprouting seeds rather than those intended for gardening.)

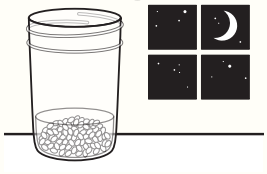
If you'd like to try growing sprouts for Nowruz, or just to have them on hand at any time of the year, follow these tips to get started.

SUPPLIES

- 1–2 tbs. seeds (or other starters)
- Wide-mouth jar
- Rubber band
- Cheesecloth
- Bowl with lid

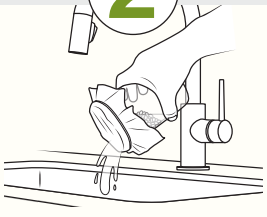
DIRECTIONS

1



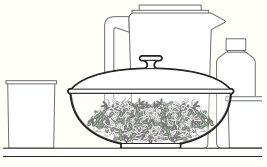
Place 1 to 2 tablespoons of the seeds or other starters you'd like to use in a clean jar. Cover them with water and leave them to soak overnight.

2



Use a rubber band to secure cheesecloth over the jar, then tip the jar to drain. Remove cheesecloth to add fresh water, and swirl the mixture around. Replace cheesecloth and tip the jar to drain again.

3



Repeat step 2 every day for three to seven days, until the sprouts are between 1 and 2 inches long. Refrigerate grown sprouts in a covered bowl for up to a week.

SPROUT SAFETY

Sprouts can be a breeding ground for salmonella, *E. coli*, and other bacteria. Growing your own can reduce the risk of food poisoning, especially if you follow these tips:

BUY certified-organic sprouting seeds or starters.

CLEAN all sprouting equipment — including your hands.

USE fresh, filtered water for soaking and for each rinse.

MAKE sure the sprouting container is free of standing water after the initial soaking.

RINSE raw sprouts, or cook thoroughly, before consuming.

ILLUSTRATIONS: COLIN HAYES

MOLLY TYNJALA is an *Experience Life* assistant editor.

Enjoy The World's Best-Tasting, Keto Certified, Non-GMO Project Verified, Plant-Based Sugar & Syrups Every Day at the LifeCafe® & Health Store!

LIFECAFE®

RxSugar®

There Is No Substitute.®

- Delicious & Sweet
- Keto, Paleo and Primal Friendly
- Non-GMO Project Verified
- Gluten/Grain Free and Vegan
- Zero Net Carbs, Zero Glycemic
- Blood-Sugar Friendly
- Suitable for People with Diabetes
- No Artificial Flavors or Colors
- No Preservatives
- Tastes Like Sugar, Zero Aftertaste
- Ideal for Coffee, Tea, Water, Shakes
- Perfect for Baking & Cooking
- Use on Cereal, Granola, Yogurt

The World's Best-Tasting, Keto Certified, Non-GMO Project Verified, Plant-Based Sugar & Syrup

Joyful Health

How relinquishing a numbers-focused approach to health and wellness helped one woman reconnect with her body and its needs.

From left: Kaltun Karani swimming with a friend (April 2018); enjoying a green smoothie (December 2017).

BY **KALTUN KARANI**

I elected to undergo gastric bypass surgery in 2007, when I was 25. I made the decision based on a doctor's recommendation, and I mistakenly believed it would end my ongoing battle with weight. It seemed to work: I quickly and easily lost 150 pounds without any health complications.

But 10 years later, in June 2017, I was sitting in my new doctor's office for my annual examination when red highlighting on her screen alerted her that I had gained nearly 40 pounds in less than a year. I'll never forget the gentle embrace she offered as tears of defeat ran down my cheeks.

I confessed, in a choked voice, that despite having worked so hard for my physical health, I felt like I was again at war with my body. I was overwhelmed with shame, guilt, and grief. Even after taking the most extreme measures, I was still struggling with weight issues.

Why?

Although the surgery helped me lose a lot of weight quickly, it did not help me create and maintain physical health. For me, gastric bypass put a bandage on my weight struggles without addressing the emotional wounds, unhealthy lifestyle, and yo-yo dieting that had contributed to my weight gain over the years.

Getting to the Root Cause

As painful as that moment in the doctor's office was, it pivoted me toward a journey of physical vitality. When this issue came up in 2017 with my current, holistic doctor, she referred me to a therapist to address my eating disorder.

I began therapy and started to learn things that were antithetical to what I knew about weight management.

In one of the sessions, my therapist told me to put away my scale. Freaked out, I asked her, "But how will I know how to eat?" That's when I realized how disconnected I was from my own intuition — when did the scale become the deciding factor in what and how I should eat?

I was able to accept what my therapist was teaching me because it was also being modeled to me by my then-4-year-old son. He knew when and how much to eat. He didn't need to have rules about sugar; having a piece or two of candy was enough for him — even if more was available.

While learning from my therapist and my son, I became curious about how I had become so disconnected from my inner wisdom. My focus changed from weight loss to healing from the trauma that was leading me to overeat.

As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, I hadn't realized that being at war with my body was a result of traumatic incidents I'd experienced 30 years earlier. I discovered in therapy that I had been subconsciously operating from the psyche of a wounded child — a child helplessly and angrily punishing herself for the harm that had been inflicted on her.

This awareness helped me shift the focus to healing that child. And in healing the child, Kaltun the woman would heal, too.

My therapist once asked me, "How are you nurturing yourself?" I was

silent for a long moment, contemplating the question. *Did I ever stop to think about nurturing myself? What would that even look like?* I felt suddenly overwhelmed by how much unlearning and relearning I needed to do.

In becoming more attentive, I found that I had been neglecting myself while caring for everyone else, and that I had developed a hardwired habit of quieting my emotional needs with food.

During the year in which I gained nearly 40 pounds, I was attending graduate school, running a small business, and leading community projects on the weekends. I did all that while being a wife and mom, trying to get pregnant, and caring for my own aging mother.

Though everything I was doing was genuinely meaningful, I was managing it all by sacrificing my own mental and physical needs. As a result, I was anxious and stressed, which led to poor food choices.

I embraced the idea of self-parenting and decided to give myself the nurturing I had needed as a child from a kind, attentive, and wise adult caregiver. I began praying and using affirmations to quiet the inner critic that leads me to feel scared and incapable. I learned to prioritize time to reflect on and discuss my thoughts and feelings, whether that be in therapy, a journal, or a meaningful conversation with a close friend.

Karani and her children, Imran, 7, and Maryam, 1.5, at her drive-through graduation in May 2020.

Finally, I started engaging in playful activities that had brought me joy in childhood — swimming, being in nature, and dancing.

Intuitive Eating

About two years later, in October 2019, I sought out counseling with a dietitian. Earlier that year, I'd had a severe and rare postpartum psychosis shortly after delivering a lovely baby girl. My treatment included psychiatric medications that caused me to gain weight again despite eating for weight loss. Once more, I found myself consumed by weight-loss tools and strategies.

All I wanted was a sustainable and pleasurable way of eating that would free me from the hamster wheel of deprivation and overindulgence. I wanted a middle path that felt authentic.

This time, I felt emotionally well — not stressed — and my work as a school counselor involved a lot of walking and going up and down the stairs of large school buildings. But I decided to work with a dietitian because I realized that, having been immersed in diet culture since I was 12 years old, I'd lost all sense of what and how to eat.

My mind was exhausted by the continuous search for a new way, book, or system that would offer magical weight loss. All I wanted was a sustainable and pleasurable way of eating that would free me from the hamster wheel of deprivation and overindulgence. I wanted a middle path that felt authentic.

That's when I came across intuitive eating. In one-on-one counseling with a compassionate and skilled dietitian, I learned and reflected on the principles of intuitive eating and what it looks like to eat to live, not eat to diet. Many of the principles resonated with me, and they became instrumental in changing my relationship with food and my body.

One of those principles was respecting and loving my body. I cried at the realization that instead of gratitude for my body that was free of illness and fully functioning, I was constantly and harshly criticizing its size. I slowly started to focus my energy not on my body's size but on its strength and capabilities. For example, one goal became reducing the time it took me to complete a four-mile walk around my favorite lake in the city.

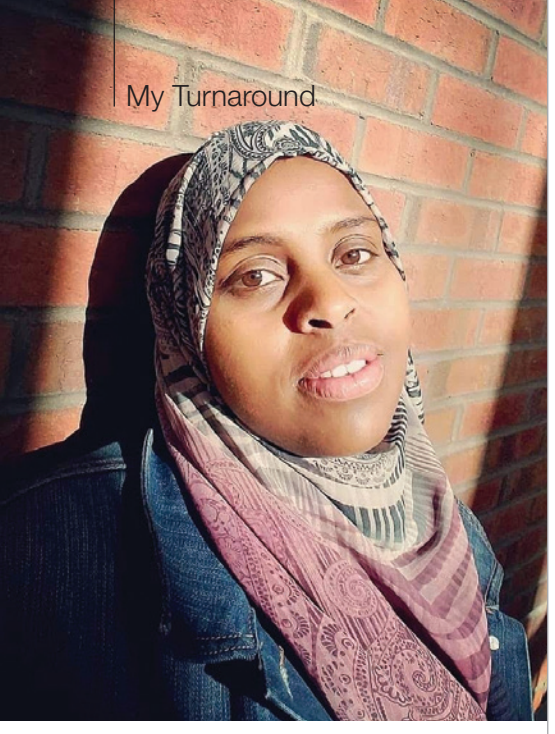
Another principle I found easy to accept was rejecting diet culture. The reality is that we all go on a diet with the belief that it is temporary. And we often feel like a failure as we measure our success with an external scoreboard. I now understand that no single diet offers long-term success unless I'm willing to stay on it for the rest of my life.

While intuitive eating is a lifelong commitment as well, it's one that helped me find harmony between my personal and spiritual values and the choices I make to care for my body.

On the other hand, a principle I struggled to fully embrace — despite agreeing with it — was making peace with food and not demonizing any food group. Even now, I continue to grow in allowing myself to enjoy cravings while maintaining consistency in honoring my nutritional needs.

As a bariatric patient, I found it helpful to focus on foods that make me feel energized and full for longer periods of time — foods that also offer nutritional value and flavor.

I used to see healthy meals as a punishment, and because I wasn't a creative cook, I'd eat out frequently in search of flavor. Thankfully, I now get excited about my nutrient-dense green smoothie and multicolored meals cooked with a variety of spices. I even



find myself craving my own cooking more than eating out.

For a long time, I also struggled with identifying my hunger cues. I grazed and ate in a disorderly manner that didn't feel right for my body. As a Muslim woman who fasts during Ramadan, I realized that fasting was easy for me and left me feeling energetic and productive. I leaned on the power of spiritual fasting as well as intermittent fasting to practice listening to my hunger cues and organize my eating.

Lifelong Healthy Living

My biggest success in this journey has been my ability to tune in to my mental and emotional needs instead of numbing them with food. Since embracing intuitive eating two years ago, I have lost weight, but more important, I've become able to simply maintain my weight over time. I consider that a major success, because I've broken free of the cycle of deprivation or overeating. I am no longer on the hamster wheel, and that is an answered prayer and something I am deeply grateful for.

Yet I would be lying if I said any of this is easy or that I have mastered it. This transformation required a great deal of courage. I had to confront the deeply rooted shame that left me feeling inadequate and incapable of taking ownership of my health. For years, this shame had been screaming at me that I was a failure and that I would continue to fail at caring for myself. I'm a spiritual woman with a strong sense of connection with God, and shame made me feel sinful and unworthy in the eyes of my creator.

What helped me overcome this was acknowledging that toxic shame and offering myself compassion. That's the moment when I breathed a sigh of relief. I felt shame being lifted off my shoulders as I forgave myself for not nourishing and loving the body I'd been gifted and entrusted with.

Fear and shame visit me at times and tell me that I will lose control of my health again. It is usually triggered by comparing my current body with pictures of my body in the past or when I give in to sugar cravings a little more than I would like. This is when I start to hear shame urge me to restrict eating so I can quickly reach a weight goal or control my sugar cravings.

My new physical-health priorities are to **nourish, strengthen, and care for my body.**

When that happens, I take a deep breath and recognize the cycle of an eating disorder. I remind myself that enjoying sugar does not equal failure at caring for myself and that my intuition is wise and can be trusted.

My new physical-health priorities are to nourish, strengthen, and care for my body, and I've adopted measures of success that are better at determining health and vitality. For example, I track four daily habits: going for a walk or pedaling my stationary bike, drinking a nutritious green smoothie, taking my vitamins, and drinking plenty of water. This helps me measure my commitment to my health and leaves me feeling content and accomplished.

Kaltun's Top 3 Success Strategies

1

SEEK EMOTIONAL HEALING AND NURTURING. Listen attentively to what your emotions are asking you, and nurture them, Kaltun advises. Engage in activities that increase your feelings of safety, calm, and confidence.

2

PRIORITIZE YOUR SELF-CARE. When setting up your schedule, start with blocking out the time you need for your holistic wellness, she says. "For me, that is spiritual, physical, and mental well-being activities."

3

EAT INTUITIVELY. Successful healthy living occurs when we are in touch with our body's inner wisdom about what and how to eat, she notes. The body will celebrate with energy when you nourish it, move it, and care for it. To start, reflect on and write your principles of eating that are aligned with your health values and beliefs.

TELL US YOUR STORY!

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

Real Fitness

“The relaxation response is a real physical response. When we access it, it’s a still, quiet practice without using any muscles or doing any work.”

— Gail Parker, PhD, yoga therapist

Page 32

Discover how a restorative-yoga practice can bring you a renewed sense of calm.

Reap What You ROW

These three indoor-rowing workouts promise to propel your cardio fitness forward, no matter your fitness level.

BY **ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS**

Indoor rowing is a full-body exercise that can be used to build strength, power, endurance, and cardio conditioning — all with minimal impact.

"There's almost no strain on your joints," says indoor-rowing champion and coach Kristina Duggan.

This makes rowing a great option if you have a history of strains and sprains or you want a low-impact option that still allows you to push your limits. (Duggan herself discovered indoor rowing after an ankle injury cut her running career short.)

The flywheel construction of the rower (also called an ergometer, or erg) means that the harder you row, the harder the movement becomes. So no matter your fitness level, rowing remains challenging.

Meanwhile, the digital screen keeps constant tabs on your exertions. "That monitor right in your face is a huge motivator," says Duggan. "You can row, but you can't hide."

Duggan shares three of her favorite erg workouts here: the Pyramid, the Detonator, and the Long Haul. Each includes options for novice, intermediate, and pro rowers.

The workouts are designed around strokes per minute (SPM), so make sure to find that metric on your monitor. As with any exercise program, listen to your body, and scale back the difficulty as needed.

Ready to get to work? Take a seat and choose your indoor-rowing adventure.

THE WORKOUTS

Warm up for five to 10 minutes with a combination of calisthenics, easy cardio, and at least a couple of minutes of easy rowing on the erg. (For ideas, visit ELmag.com/perfectwarmup.)

Perform each workout by itself, with no other forms of exercise (aside from a warm-up and cool-down) before or after.

When you're first starting out, perform intense rowing workouts no more than three times a week, on nonconsecutive days.

Adjust the speed and duration of each workout to match your fitness level.

The Pyramid

This workout accustoms you to rowing at different intensities, from low to high and back again.

NOVICE	INTERMEDIATE	PRO
4 minutes, 16 SPM	5 minutes, 18 SPM	6 minutes, 18 SPM
3 minutes, 18 SPM	4 minutes, 20 SPM	5 minutes, 20 SPM
2 minutes, 20 SPM	3 minutes, 22 SPM	4 minutes, 22 SPM
1 minute, 22 SPM	2 minutes, 24 SPM	3 minutes, 24 SPM
2 minutes, 20 SPM	1 minute, 26 SPM	2 minutes, 26 SPM
3 minutes, 18 SPM	2 minutes, 24 SPM	1 minute, 28 SPM
4 minutes, 16 SPM	3 minutes, 22 SPM	2 minutes, 26 SPM
	4 minutes, 20 SPM	3 minutes, 24 SPM
	5 minutes, 18 SPM	4 minutes, 22 SPM
		5 minutes, 20 SPM
		6 minutes, 18 SPM

The Detonator

Each work period in this interval workout is a relatively short three to four minutes. But you'll move at high speed and finish each one with a 30-second jump in speed before your one minute of rest — and you'll increase the stroke rate of your "fast" 30 seconds with each successive interval. So, if you hold 22 strokes per minute in the fast 30 seconds in your first interval, try to hold at least 23 strokes per minute for that 30-second jump in the second.

NOVICE	INTERMEDIATE	PRO
2½ minutes, 18 or 19 SPM	3 minutes, 20 or 21 SPM	3½ minutes, 21 or 22 SPM
30 seconds at a slightly faster pace	30 seconds at a slightly faster pace	30 seconds at a slightly faster pace
1 minute rest	1 minute rest	1 minute rest
Perform the cycle four to six times.	Perform the cycle five to seven times.	Perform the cycle six to eight times.

The Long Haul

After you have some experience under your belt, try this longer workout format. Like a boat race, this workout builds in intensity as it proceeds, forcing you to hold a progressively faster speed. "This isn't for beginners," says Duggan. Consider yourself warned.

NOVICE	INTERMEDIATE	PRO
8 minutes, 16 SPM	12 minutes, 17 SPM	16 minutes, 18 SPM
1 minute rest	1 minute rest	1 minute rest
6 minutes, 17 SPM	10 minutes, 18 SPM	12 minutes, 19 SPM
1 minute rest	1 minute rest	1 minute rest
5 minutes, 18 SPM	8 minutes, 19 SPM	10 minutes, 20 SPM
1 minute rest	1 minute rest	1 minute rest
4 minutes, 19 SPM	6 minutes, 20 SPM	8 minutes, 21 SPM
1 minute rest	1 minute rest	1 minute rest
3 minutes, 20 SPM	4 minutes, 21 SPM	6 minutes, 22 SPM

ERG ERGONOMICS

Just starting out on the rower? Spot-check your technique with these tips to get the most out of each workout:

FEET FIRST. Think of "erging" as a lower-body move in which your arms finish the motion. On each stroke, push with your feet first, then pull the handle toward your abdomen. You'll know when you've got it right because you won't have to raise and lower the handle to get around your knees.

BACK STRAIGHT. As you come forward on the seat, bend forward at the hip joint — don't round your back forward. Think "tall spine" the whole time.

HIPS BEHIND SHOULDERS. In the catch position — the beginning of the stroke — your hips should be behind your shoulders. (When you finish, you should be leaning back slightly.)

SHOULDERS AND ELBOWS DOWN. Keep your arms close to your torso and avoid overworking your upper body.

LEARN MORE

For a more detailed breakdown of proper rowing form, visit **ELmag.com/rowing.**

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

EXTEND Yourself

BY **ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS**

This head-to-toe routine will stretch your muscles, mobilize your joints, and leave you feeling fantastic in five minutes flat.

Instinctive as it may be to stretch, lengthening muscles and mobilizing joints is often an afterthought, even for regular exercisers.

But some form of stretching and mobility work is essential to good health. "You're putting a little WD-40 in your joints and moving them around," says New York City–based Sonja Herbert, founder of Black Girl Pilates. "You're increasing circulation and bringing life back into your whole body — your head, your shoulders, elbows, wrists, hips, knees, feet, toes."

A dedicated mobility practice can feel great while you're doing it and for some time afterward. In the long run, it can help preserve healthy ranges of motion for life. As Herbert puts it, "If you don't use it, you lose it."

Stretching is also an anywhere, anytime activity, requiring minimal equipment and no warm-up. You don't need a lot of space. It probably won't make you sweaty, and you can do it in tiny increments throughout your day. It may be the simplest, most accessible type of movement there is.

Herbert shares the following full-body mobility routine to help you stretch out and loosen up in as little as five minutes. Try it once a week or every day, as time allows.

The Listening Ear and the Soup Head

Sitting upright, slowly rotate your head to the left. Return to the starting position and rotate to the right. Do this five times per side. Then, drop your chin toward your chest. Imagine a spoon extending from your nose, and a cup of soup beneath it. Slowly stir the soup in one direction 10 times. Repeat in the opposite direction 10 times.

PHOTOS: KELLY LOVERUD; STYLING: PAM BRAND; FITNESS MODEL: BECCA RIGG

Kneeling Hip Hinge

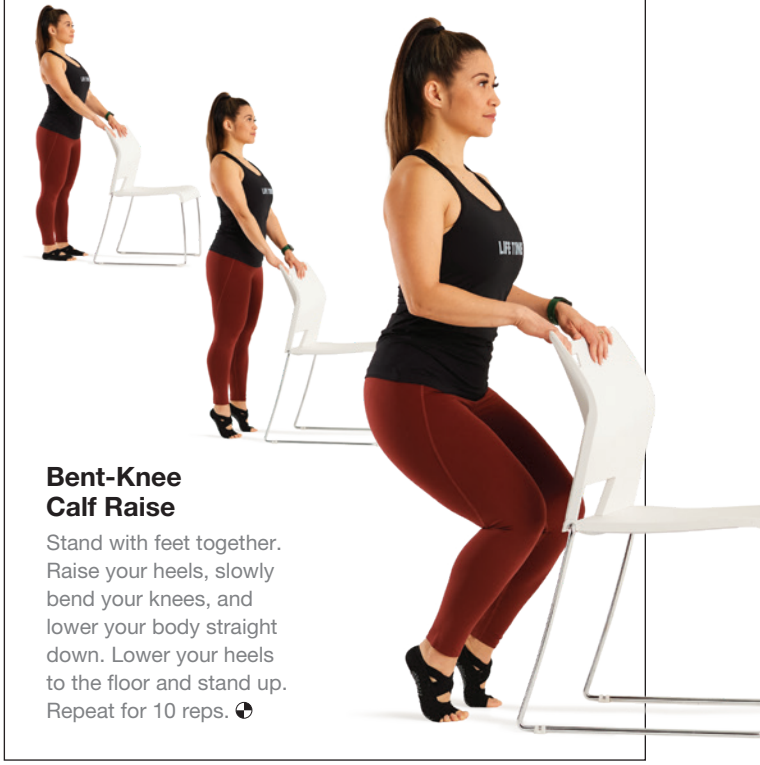
Kneel on the floor, then extend one leg in front of you. Shift your hips back, allowing your torso to fold forward. Then bend your front knee and shift your hips forward to come into a low lunge. Move back and forth to complete eight to 10 slow repetitions. Switch sides and repeat.

LEARN MORE

For detailed instructions and demos of these moves, visit **ELmag.com/mobilityworkout.**

The Saw

Sit on the floor with your back straight, legs extended, and feet flexed. Inhale as you raise your arms out to the sides, slightly in front of your shoulders. Exhale as you rotate your torso to the right, then dive forward to reach your left pinkie finger toward the pinkie edge of your right foot while reaching behind you with your right hand. Inhale as you return to the starting position, spine tall. Repeat on the other side. Perform a total of five slow reps per side.



Bent-Knee Calf Raise

Stand with feet together. Raise your heels, slowly bend your knees, and lower your body straight down. Lower your heels to the floor and stand up. Repeat for 10 reps.

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

HERE'S TO THE YEAR AHEAD

BOOMERANG
REAL. GOOD. ENERGY.

Available in the LifeCafe! LIFECAFE

The Bear Crawl

This functional full-body movement can help strengthen the body and mind at any age.

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

PHOTOS: KELLY LOVERUD; STYLING: PAM BRAND; FITNESS MODEL: JENNIFER BLAKE

We usually learn to crawl before we can walk. But once we do learn to walk — and run, skip, bike, and even sit still for long periods of time — many of us lose our ability to crawl comfortably and efficiently. This is a shame, because crawling is a functional full-body movement.

The bear crawl, also known as the foot-hand crawl, begins with the standard variation that most people master as babies. It then lifts the knees so the only points of contact with the floor or ground are the hands and the balls of the feet.

Taking steps from this lowered position strengthens the arms, legs, chest, abs, and back while stretching the hips, shoulders, wrists, and ankles. This is a contralateral movement pattern — one hand steps forward in conjunction with the opposite-side foot — which improves coordination. And it engages both sides of the brain, builds new neural pathways, and strengthens the mind–body connection. Balancing on opposite-side limbs, even if only for a moment, refines balance. And because our hands and feet are so sensitive to sensory input, crawling provides connection to (and information from) our environment.

In addition to these benefits, bear crawling efficiently is a practical skill, especially for people who enjoy adventuring outdoors. Practicing this move in the health club or gym, at home, or in your local park can help you safely and successfully scramble over some rocks or traverse a log.

Follow these tips for getting the most out of your crawling practice.

INSTRUCTIONS

1 Assume an all-fours position, with your wrists under your shoulders and your knees under your hips.

2 Tuck your toes, engage your core, and actively press through your hands and the balls of your feet to raise your knees off the floor.

3 Maintaining a neutral neck and spine, move your right foot and left hand forward about 6 to 8 inches. Next, move your left foot and right hand forward.

4 Repeat for the desired distance, time interval, or number of steps. You can mix it up by taking steps backward, too.

+ TRY THE VARIATIONS

For four ways to mix up your bear crawl, visit **ELmag.com/bearcrawl.**

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

Peaceful Practice

Restorative yoga can help you find a renewed sense of calm.

BY **NICOLE RADZISZEWSKI**

Taking time to deliberately rest our minds and bodies rarely makes it onto most people's to-do lists. And yet, when we consider the benefits of deep relaxation, most of us can't afford *not* to make it a priority.

Enter restorative yoga.

"Restorative yoga invites people to come into a place of stillness and quiet," says psychologist and yoga-therapist educator Gail Parker, PhD, author of *Restorative Yoga for Ethnic and Race-Based Stress and Trauma*. "You use props to support your body in holding postures for an extended period of time so you can come into a deep level of relaxation."

Those bolsters, blankets, blocks, and other supportive tools help minimize discomfort and resistance in poses, which are then often held for long periods of time — up to 20 minutes.

It's common to hear the terms "restorative" and "yin" used interchangeably, or for yin yoga to get tucked under a bigger "restorative" umbrella, but the two slow-paced styles are actually separate approaches. Yin yoga targets connective tissue to improve fascial health, while the goal of restorative yoga is relaxation.

"The relaxation response is a real physical response. When we access it, it's a still, quiet practice without using any muscles or doing any work," explains Parker. "You are stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system, and when that happens, blood pressure drops, heart rate slows, breathing becomes more efficient, and brain waves slow. That's where health resides, restoration occurs, and growth occurs."

Practicing restorative yoga is not just about the time you spend in a class; it's about finding calm in your everyday life, no matter your fitness level, age, or occupation. As Tory Schaefer, Life Time's national director of yoga operations, succinctly puts it: "Restorative yoga is really a self-love practice."

Here, our experts share their tips for getting the most out of a restorative practice.

"Take the Easy Way Out"

That's what Parker tells her students when they're setting up in her class. Unlike other yoga styles that require you to use minimal support to find a pose — leaning into resistance to build strength and flexibility — restorative yoga should feel comfy from the start.

"In restorative yoga, use as many props as possible to feel good," says Schaefer.

Focus on Your Breath

Once you get comfortable, says Schaefer, finding your breath will come naturally — and allow you to relax even further. Inhale and exhale fully and mindfully, through your nose, and note if your mind starts to become more active as your body settles down.

"When we slow down as much as we do in restorative yoga, it's common for our minds to ramp up," he explains. "I believe all yoga is here to help us become better partners with the reactions of our minds. Anytime you recognize your mind has gone somewhere, you can bring yourself back to your breath."

Expand Your Practice

With time, you may find that your practice begins to spill off the mat and shape your day-to-day mindset.

"Your mind is where you'll find growth in a practice like this," says Schaefer. You might notice that you're less reactive, calmer, more creative in your approaches to various tasks and responsibilities, and generally more content.

"Learning to experience safety in stillness is very powerful," says Parker.

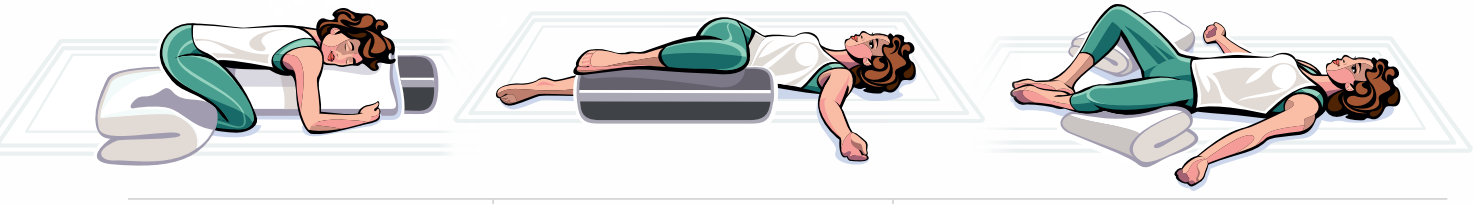
GET MORE POSES

For two more moves to round out the following restorative practice, visit **ELmag.com/restorativeyoga.**

3 Poses to Try

If you're new to restorative yoga, attend classes to get a feel for the poses, pacing, and mindset, Parker suggests. In time, you'll be able to cultivate a practice on your own.

Parker and Schaefer share their favorite at-home poses below. In addition to a yoga mat, you'll want two blankets and a bolster or firm cushion.



ILLUSTRATIONS: KVETA

SUPPORTED CHILD'S POSE (SUPTA BALASANA)

Place your bolster lengthwise on your mat, then fold or loosely roll a blanket to stack on top of the bolster. Kneel behind your bolster and place a folded blanket on top of your calves. (Add another blanket at your ankles for even more support.) With knees wide, fold forward to rest your torso and one cheek on the bolster. Relax your arms at your sides. After at least five minutes, turn your head to the other side and rest for the same period of time.

SUPPORTED SPINAL TWIST (SUPTA MATSYENDRASANA)

Place a bolster or firm cushion on the left side of your mat, and lie on your back. (For extra support, place a folded blanket under your head to serve as a pillow.) Keeping your upper body still and your shoulders on the floor, slowly cross your right leg over your body and rest it on the bolster. Relax into the gentle twist, with your right hand resting on the side of your body or at your side. After at least five minutes, switch sides and rest for the same period of time.

SUPPORTED RECLINED BUTTERFLY (SUPTA BADDHA KONASANA)

Place a folded blanket on each side of your mat near the bottom. Lie on your back and bring the soles of your feet together. Allow your knees to fall open to the sides, and adjust the blankets so that your legs rest comfortably on them. Rest your arms at your sides. Relax in this position for at least five minutes.

You can also try this pose with additional bolstering under your head and shoulders: Place a yoga block horizontally at the top edge of your mat and create a ramp with your bolster by placing one end on the block and the other end on your mat. Sit directly in front of the bolster and lie back before positioning your feet and legs.

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

PURE HYDRATION™

WHY O2?

Sugary sports drinks destroy gains and frazzle brains. Delicious, clean, and clear - O2 hydrates with **120% more electrolytes (550mg/12oz.) than leading brands** with only 1g sugar and 15 calories.

WHAT'S OXYGENATION?

O2 is oxygenated instead of carbonated for **quicker workout recovery without the bloat, muscle cramps, and headaches** from fizzy fillers.

WHERE'S YOUR PROOF?

O2 is a **Non-GMO Project Verified, 100% carbon-neutral sports drink alternative** with thousands of 5-star reviews for clean ingredients, amazing flavor, and proprietary electrolyte-forward hydration.

HOW DOES O2 HELP MY ROUTINE?

It's worry-free healthy hydration. **Find your fave flavor in the LifeCafe today** and feel the difference.

NON GMO Project VERIFIED

CLIMATE NEUTRAL CERTIFIED

The Simple Beauty of Shoulder Rolls

Our fitness editor shares her three-part, do-anywhere stretching routine for soothing her muscles and mind.

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

I often feel as though I'm destined for shoulder tension. Between sitting down most of my waking hours, having a larger chest, and having poor postural habits that I developed as a shy teen and am still working to undo, I experience neck and shoulder tension by the end of the day, every day.

I schedule breaks throughout to dance, do yoga, go for a walk, or lift weights. Still, it isn't quite enough to prevent or relieve the muscle tightness, which often results in headaches, heightened anxiety, and other symptoms.

What *does* help is something that seems almost too simple to make any difference: shoulder rolls and circles. They're so good at helping me feel better.

If you experience tightness or tension in your shoulders, I encourage you to try this less-than-five-minute routine that I love — I think you might enjoy it, too.

SHOULDER ROLLS

FIRST, sit or stand with your arms hanging loose at your sides. Try to find some length in your spine, and then roll your shoulders to the front, up to your ears, back, and down.

ELBOW CIRCLES

NEXT, bend your elbows and place your fingertips on your shoulders. Without arching your back, reach your elbows forward, up, back, and down, as if you were drawing circles.

ARM CIRCLES

THEN, straighten your arms and reach forward, up, back, and down. Again, maintain a neutral spine while drawing imaginary circles with your fingertips.

I like to repeat the above sequence a bunch of times, for as long as it feels good. Then I reverse the direction. (Try 10 reps per position, per direction, if you'd like a starting point.)

When I get my fill of symmetric shoulder stretches, I mix it up. I'll roll one side at a time, alternate sides, and even add side bends, knee bends, and forward and backward steps.

I'm amazed that such small, casual movements can snowball into an intuitive, dance-like routine that gives me not only physical relief but also a brief burst of joy. (Just try swinging your elbows around without cracking a smile.)

I've started doing this stretching series every time I take a break from my laptop, while resting between sets at the gym, and even while walking.

I know it won't magically fix my posture or take the weight of my chest (or the world) off my shoulders. But it does give me faith that even if I'm destined to experience some shoulder tension, I'm not destined to suffer for it.

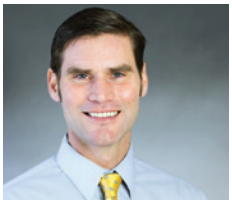
PHOTOS: KELLY LOVERUD; STYLING: PAM BRAND; FITNESS MODEL: MAGGIE FAZELI FARD

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

Your Sports Health Questions, *Answered*

Life Time has partnered with the sports health experts at NYU Langone Health to provide insights into the common health issues that have the potential to prevent you from moving freely and functioning at your best.

MEET THE EXPERT



Nathanael Horne, MD, NYU Langone Health

Q: What is exercise-induced bronchoconstriction (EIB), and how can I exercise safely if I suffer from this?

A: "Exercise-induced bronchoconstriction (EIB) is defined as a transient narrowing of the lower airway during and after exercise," says Nathanael Horne, MD, allergist ands sports health expert at NYU Langone. "It can occur with underlying asthma or alone."

Although the terms EIB and asthma are often used interchangeably, Dr. Horne explains that they are distinct conditions. "Exercise-induced asthma is when exercise is a trigger for underlying asthma — for which there may be other triggers such as an allergy exposure," he says. "EIB is a standalone syndrome that can affect recreational and competitive athletes alike."

Common symptoms include bronchospasm, or airway constriction, that result in coughing, wheezing, and chest tightness with exercise. Some people also experience fatigue, abdominal pain, and impaired performance, which can make the condition more difficult to evaluate. These symptoms usually occur during a strenuous workout and peak about five to 10 minutes after exercise. "If exercise is your only trigger of bronchospasms, then you most likely have EIB."

The exact cause of EIB is still unknown, though there are numerous factors that are being investigated, including environmental elements like air quality, sport-dependent conditions (swimmers and cold-weather athletes, for instance, have been found to be at a higher risk for EIB), and history of prolonged and intense physical exercise over many years. All of these can damage cells in the airway and over time, Dr. Horne says, "this environment can cause inflammation and constriction."

The condition affects up to 50 percent of endurance athletes, with prevalence appearing to be higher in elite athletes than in the general population. "It is unclear as to why this is — it may be that athletes are more likely to seek treatment and diagnosis, or perhaps the training itself is a factor," notes Dr. Horne.

If you suspect you might have EIB, consult with your healthcare provider to properly diagnosis and determine the appropriate protocols for your unique condition.

Meanwhile, Dr. Horne offers these three lifestyle habits that can make a difference in managing EIB, plus five training and performance tips.

LIFESTYLE HABITS

1. Consider anti-inflammatory supplements like omega-3s. "Research has not definitively shown benefit," Horne notes, "but omega-3s certainly wouldn't hurt."

2. Wear a face mask, especially when exercising in cold conditions. Masks promote humidification and reduce water loss, which may help prevent symptoms.

3. Enjoy some caffeine. Limited research has shown that it may help alleviate symptoms in some patients with EIB.

TRAINING AND PERFORMANCE TIPS

1. Warm up. Taking the time to ease into a workout can help prepare your airway for the work ahead. While it is not completely protective, Dr. Horne notes that taking the time to warm up has been shown to help about half of people with EIB.

2. In consultation with your healthcare provider, take prescribed medication such as beta agonists prior to prolonged competitions and hard workouts to reduce symptoms of EIB (medication is likely not necessary for lower intensity endurance workouts).

3. Exercise in warm environments. In general, exercising in cold, dry air is harder on your airways and can contribute to bronchoconstriction.

4. Seek out environments with less airborne irritants and allergens (e.g., poorly ventilated pools with high chlorine levels).

5. Avoid airborne allergens to the degree you can. For patients with pollen allergies, avoid exercise at the height of pollen season outdoors.

Presented by

LIFE TIME | NYU Langone Health

Official Health Care and Medical Provider of the Verizon NYC Triathlon

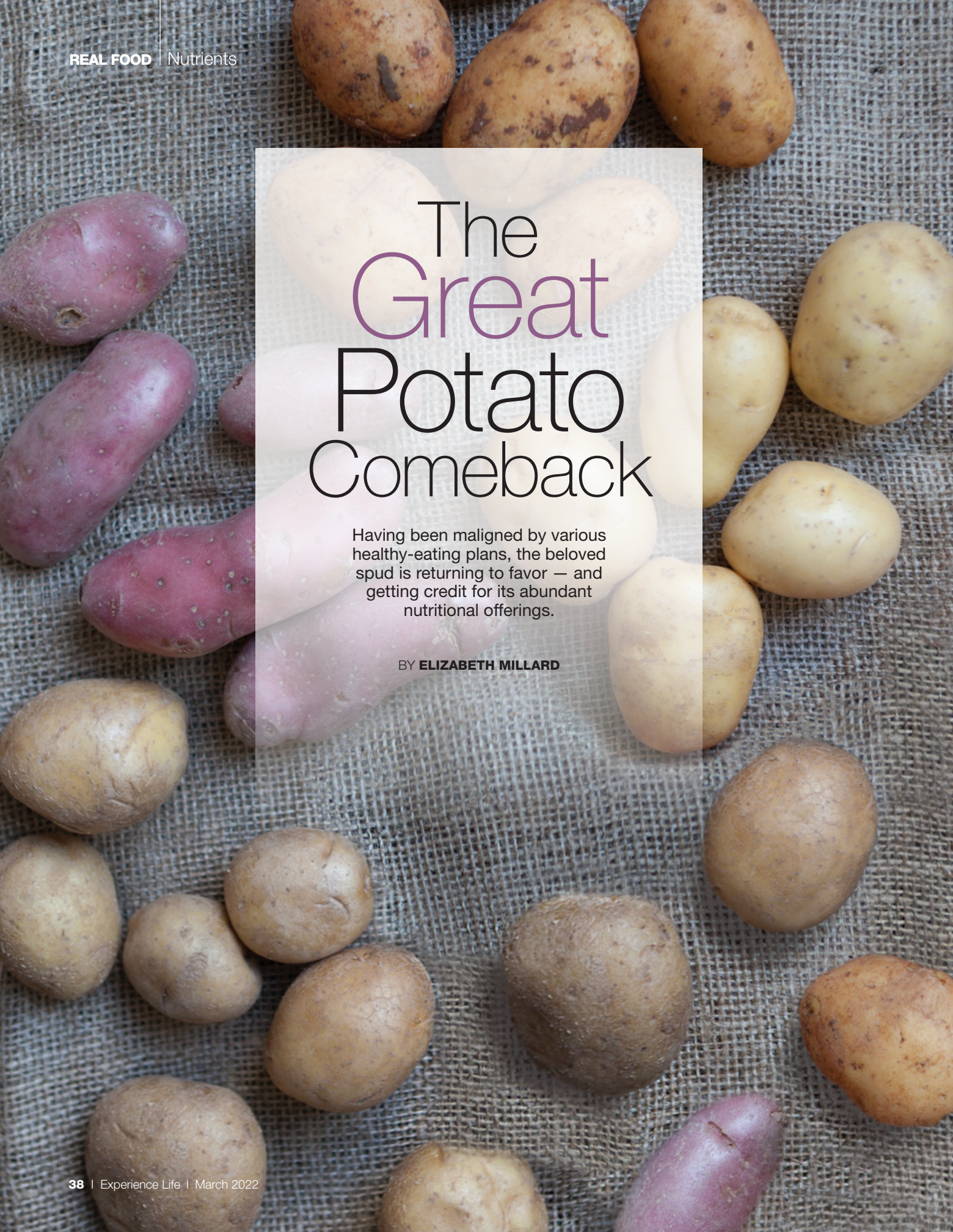
The Sports Health experts at NYU Langone have the multi-specialty expertise to provide coordinated, comprehensive care for all types of athletes. As an official healthcare partner, Life Time is able to offer its members exclusive concierge access to NYU Langone's world-class orthopedic specialists and performance experts, who can help you meet your fitness goals. To schedule an in-person appointment or video visit with a Sports Health expert, visit nyulangone.org/lifetime.

Real Food

Hungry for fresh weeknight-dinner ideas? Stir things up with savory recipes from best-selling author Michelle Tam's latest cookbook.

Page **44**

Find the recipe for Tam's Shrimp Simmered in Green Mole at ELmag.com/instantpotrecipes.



The Great Potato Comeback

Having been maligned by various healthy-eating plans, the beloved spud is returning to favor — and getting credit for its abundant nutritional offerings.

BY **ELIZABETH MILLARD**

Times have changed since Kathleen DesMaisons, PhD, author of the 1998 book *Potatoes Not Prozac*, first recommended the starchy tuber as a bedtime intervention for people struggling with addictions. That was before the carb phobia that turned potatoes into public enemy No. 1.

"I'm Irish, and potatoes weren't scary back then," she says. "They didn't have the negative connotation they have now. They were just cheap, available, comforting, familiar, and delicious. Thankfully, the pendulum is starting to swing back toward that recognition."

DesMaisons was running a treatment center at the time, and she hypothesized that eating a skin-on baked potato three hours after dinner could help enhance the production of the feel-good neurochemical serotonin — something that's commonly depleted in people who are in early recovery. Potatoes can help heal a sugar addiction as well, she argues, because they can help heal the brain's biochemistry.

"Many of us are feeling terrible these days — it's as if we're collectively suffering from cultural PTSD," she notes. "A simple timed snack like a potato helps rebuild the brain and restore serotonin levels."

More than just a mood-boosting comfort food, the potato is also a powerful, economical source of many key nutrients.

So how did it fall so far out of favor, especially considering that humans have been enjoying the tubers for the past 10,000 years, since they were first cultivated by the Inca in what became Peru? Shifting nutritional trends is the most likely explanation, says DesMaisons.

Advocates of low-carb strategies like the paleo diet, ketogenic diet, and the Whole30 plan have called potatoes' value into question — and even occasionally kicked them to the curb. The tuber's relatively high carbohydrate count and (potentially) high glycemic index is only part of the issue for some critics; another factor is that potatoes are part of the nightshade family of vegetables, which includes tomatoes and eggplant. Nightshades have been linked to leaky gut syndrome for some people.

Finally, the fact that potatoes are most often consumed as French fries and potato chips — by no fault of their own! — has also led to a bad reputation. These prepared and processed forms offer little nutritional value.

While these concerns are understandable, an all-or-nothing view of this vegetable overlooks a great deal: The humble spud deserves a place in a diverse diet of whole foods for a variety of reasons.

Potatoes are a low-cost way to get a range of vitamins and minerals in generous amounts, especially if you keep the peel on."

The Return of the Potato

Potatoes were originally nixed by the Whole30 plan because they're so often consumed as fries or chips. But the veggie's nutritional muscle eventually swayed the Whole30 team, and white potatoes are now allowed on the plan — just not in highly processed forms.

"Potatoes are a low-cost way to get a range of vitamins and minerals in generous amounts, especially if you keep the peel on," says Whole30 education manager Stephanie Greunke, MS, RD. "They're also a good source of fiber." This includes prebiotic fiber, she adds, which is necessary for feeding and sustaining the beneficial bacteria in the gut.

To get the most from potatoes, it's best to think beyond the fryer. Greunke recommends baking; boiling; and roasting, ideally in a fat with a high smoke point, such as ghee. "These are all better options than deep frying in vegetable oil," she notes.

Potassium is one of the most critical nutrients potatoes provide. While most of us understand our need for ample magnesium and calcium, we often overlook the importance of potassium, which supports a variety of vital physiological processes, says Shena Jaramillo, MS, RD, who specializes in plant-based nutrition.

"As an electrolyte, potassium regulates fluid shifts in and out of every cell in the body," she notes. "It's also a key ingredient in maintaining bone-mineral density. And potatoes are packed with potassium, as well as B and C vitamins. You've even got iron in there, so potatoes are truly a nutrient-dense food."

Again, preparation matters. To maximize potassium, use a dry-heat cooking method like roasting, suggests functional nutritionist Jesse Haas, CNS, LN.

If you're going to use a moist-heat cooking approach, like boiling or steaming, leaving the skin on will help retain water-soluble vitamins B and C.

Finally, it's especially important to choose organic whenever possible. Per the Environmental Working Group's 2021 *Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce*, conventional potatoes contain some of the highest pesticide levels of any vegetable or fruit — and these are concentrated in the skin, right alongside the nutrients and fiber.

The Carb Conundrum

Just as potatoes have come into question over the years, so have carbohydrates writ large. Yet most nutrition experts are quick to point out that not all carbohydrates are created equal. The type found in potatoes, for example, is a complex form called amylose, says functional-medicine-trained dietitian Heidi Moretti, MS, RD.

"This means that when you eat potatoes, they digest more slowly than sugar, which is a simple carb," she explains. "Because they have carbs, potatoes can increase blood-sugar levels, but the way they're prepared and what you eat them with can change this drastically."

For example, if you drizzle extra-virgin olive oil on a boiled potato and serve it with protein, she says, you will soften its effect on your blood sugar.

Different potatoes also have different starch levels. Waxy varieties, like fingerling or red potatoes, have lower starch. They have a milder blood-sugar impact than their starchier counterparts, like russets, which are most commonly used in fries and chips. (Avoid these preparations and you'll also avoid the trans fats that usually accompany them.)

Finally, as with most dense carbohydrate sources, moderation is important.

"If you eat a small amount of potatoes, like half a cup, your blood-glucose impact will be much less than if you eat a big serving," explains Moretti.

"Because they have carbs, potatoes can increase blood-sugar levels, **but the way they're prepared and what you eat them with can change this drastically."**

Foundational Fiber and Resistant Starch

If you want to prevent a blood-glucose spike when eating any potato, eat it cold. Cooking and then cooling potatoes boosts their level of resistant starch: The fibers become denser and harder to digest (that's where the "resistance" comes in). They then make their way into the colon, where they are fermented by the beneficial bacteria in your gut.

"All fibers feed this bacteria and yeast, but resistant starches fuel the production of a short-chain fatty acid called butyrate that has many health impacts, including maintenance of the mucosal membranes in the large intestine," Haas says.

Healthy GI mucosal membranes have been shown to lower the risk of colon cancer and inflammatory bowel disease. Plus, robust gut health is associated with a range of other benefits, such as streamlined digestion, a stronger immune system, lower risk of autoimmune diseases, and deeper sleep. It's even been found to ease depression and inspire a better overall mood.

All of this means that potatoes don't need to be saved for an occasional indulgence. They are a key part of a whole-foods diet when prepped right.

Hello, old friend. Welcome back.

ELIZABETH MILLARD is a writer and editor based in northern Minnesota.

What's in a Name?

SWEET POTATOES AND NEW POTATOES

Despite its name, the sweet potato is not closely related to the potato. They may look similar, and grow under the soil in the same way, but sweet potatoes aren't a nightshade; they're part of the morning-glory family.

Much like other potatoes, though, sweet potatoes are packed with nutrition, including fiber, B and C vitamins, iron, and calcium. They're low on the glycemic index, depending on cooking method, and are often considered a healthy carb, which is why they're favored in the paleo diet and on a Whole30 reset.

New potatoes, on the other hand, are actually potatoes — but they're not a variety. They're simply young potatoes that are harvested before they're fully grown. Despite this, they still offer plenty of nutrients. (Mature red potatoes are sometimes mistakenly called new potatoes simply because they're about the same size; real new potatoes have a very thin skin that scratches off easily.)

Keep in mind that new potatoes usually haven't been "cured," or subjected to a drying process that toughens their skin and allows them to be stored. So, use new potatoes sooner after buying than you might other varieties.

A Field Guide to Potatoes

Potatoes come in many forms. Functional nutritionist Jesse Haas, CNS, LN, notes that multiple varieties of potatoes were first harvested by the Inca in what became Peru, and present-day Peruvians have maintained that cultivation. "When I visited Peru, I was completely gobsmacked by how many varieties they use in the Andes: Potatoes come in all shapes, sizes, and colors," she explains.

"In the United States, we lack a lot of that biodiversity in our diets, and I think we'll learn more about how important diversity is for health in the years to come."

You can get that diversity now by bringing a Peruvian approach to your potato choices. The guide below shows starch levels for different varieties, with nutrition information for one 100-gram serving, or about 2/3 cup. (Net carbs are a food's nonfibrous carbohydrates; they have the greatest impact on blood sugar.)

FRENCH FINGERLINGS

These delicate, low-starch potatoes were developed in France in the 1950s.

CHARACTERISTICS: Pinkish or rosy-red skin; yellow flesh (sometimes with pink streaks); long and narrow shape.

FUN FACT: They were once widely called "nosebag potatoes," after a rumor that they were smuggled into the United States in the nosebag of a horse.

NUTRITION: 16 g net carbs, 2 g protein.

FLAVOR: Almost nutty, with a robust and earthy flavor.

TRY THEM: Roasted. Because they are smaller and keep their shape so well, and their thin skin softens easily, fingerlings make perfect oven fries. Cut larger ones in half and roast them in the oven with some butter or olive oil and whole garlic cloves. This may satisfy your fry cravings.

PERUVIAN PURPLES

Indigenous to the Peruvian Andes, these are another type of fingerling potato. Other non-Peruvian fingerlings include the Russian banana (developed in the Baltic region) and Swedish peanut.

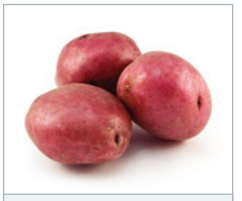
CHARACTERISTICS: Deep-purple skin; violet flesh that's occasionally marbled.

FUN FACT: That rich color, which comes from generations of breeding for deeper purples, means they're especially high in the phytochemical anthocyanin. Studies have found that this antioxidant, which also appears in blueberries, can help cool inflammation and reduce the risk of cancer and cardiovascular disease.

NUTRITION: 16 g net carbs, 2 g protein.

FLAVOR: Nutty and almost sweet.

TRY THEM: Mashed or in soup. They retain their color through cooking.



RED POTATOES

These low-starch potatoes originated in Peru. There's also a U.S. variety called Red Pontiac or Dakota Chief, which is still one of the most abundant red varieties.

CHARACTERISTICS: Pink or reddish skin; round shape; light-yellow or white flesh.

FUN FACT: The numerous red-potato varieties often have jaunty names, such as Red Sonia, Red Bliss, Lollipop, and Dakota Rose.

NUTRITION: 14 g net carbs, 2 g protein.

FLAVOR: Neutral and mild — even the skin. Because of that, they've been called the workhorse of the potato world.

TRY THEM: Skin on, in potato salad. Red potatoes are incredibly versatile, and they're the best choice for the cook-then-cool method used for a Nicoise or potato salad.

YUKON GOLDS

Developed in the 1960s and released in the 1980s in Canada, these medium-starch potatoes are actually a hybrid.

CHARACTERISTICS: Smooth and yellow-hued skin; oval shape; dense flesh.

FUN FACT: Agriculturists at Ontario's University of Guelph crossed a North American white potato with a yellow South American variety to create the Yukon Gold, with its light-yellow tone.

NUTRITION: 16 g net carbs, 2 g protein.

FLAVOR: Buttery and mild, almost neutral — that makes them a good base for seasonings and a strong all-around choice.

TRY THEM: Mashed. Unlike some potatoes that can get chunky or mealy when boiled and mashed, Yukons lean toward creaminess, and the slightly buttery flavor adds to the appeal.

RUSSETS OR IDAHO POTATOES

These high-starch potatoes were developed by American botanist Luther Burbank in the 1870s to be resistant to potato blight; he was responding to the Irish potato famine. This variety is still sometimes called the Burbank potato.

CHARACTERISTICS: Usually large; brown skin; dry, white flesh.

FUN FACT: Only potatoes grown in Idaho can be called Idaho potatoes; the ones grown elsewhere are called russets.

NUTRITION: 19 g net carbs, 3 g protein.

FLAVOR: Russets have an earthy flavor that pairs well with strongly flavored seasonings.

TRY THEM: Baked. These make superb classic baked potatoes — with some butter and sour cream to soften the glycemic impact.

Trauma-Informed Nutrition

Trauma can play a significant role in our relationship with food — which is why some nutritionists and dietitians are practicing a more holistic approach.

BY **JESSIE SHOLL**

Say you were raised by a quick-tempered parent, in a home that was rife with tense arguments. Or maybe you were bullied at school. You might have found security and consistency in sugary sweets. As an adult, you may find that those same treats call to you whenever you're looking for comfort, to the point where you feel out of control.

Or you could have endured other types of trauma — abuse, the death of a close relative, or living with a deeply depressed parent. These experiences could affect your relationship with food in myriad ways well into adulthood.

"Unresolved trauma is imprinted in our nervous system and leaves the body in survival mode," says registered nutritional therapist and Pilates instructor Kaysha Thomas. "When we're in survival mode for extended periods, we aren't able to connect to our need to nurture and properly care for ourselves."

That's because, she adds, "a traumatized brain downregulates the areas of the brain that are responsible for self-awareness. This means a person struggles to connect to internal body cues such as hunger, fullness, and satisfaction."

For these reasons and more, some people might benefit from a trauma-informed approach to nutrition.

Rather than a singular technique, this is a model guided by six principles: safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment, voice, and choice; and cultural, historical, and gender issues. Recognizing that trauma can affect our relationships with food, some providers are now incorporating that holistic approach into their nutrition practices.

Considering Trauma

"Trauma-informed nutrition looks beyond what we eat and helps a person understand why they eat, what they truly enjoy, and what has influenced their relationship with food and their body," explains Thomas. The intention is to repair that relationship rather than focus on weight or BMI.

Childhood trauma can be particularly detrimental to health outcomes later in life, which is why many clinicians use the adverse childhood experiences (ACE) score — the number, up to 10, of traumatic events experienced before turning 18 — to assess a person's risk factors.

Six in 10 people report they've endured at least one ACE, and one in six recall four or more. ACE exposure can drastically increase the risk of liver disease, severe obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, stroke, and cancer.

Maya Feller, MS, RD, CDN, a registered dietitian nutritionist and adjunct faculty member at New York University, believes that ACEs "absolutely have an impact in nutrition. But in my practice, while they always inform, it's also systems of oppression that create problems."

Trauma-informed nutrition takes into account accumulated microaggressions, structural racism, and poverty during childhood. "It can be growing up food insecure in a neighborhood where there's not a full-service grocery store," Feller says. "That is also a traumatic experience around food."

Care in Practice

Collaboration is key to Feller's trauma-informed practice. "If we're really talking about the patient understanding the nutrition prescription or us understanding what the patient needs, you have to listen," she says. "We have to listen, and then we have to check in that they understand what's happening and that it's truly collaborative care."

Nutritional psychiatrist Uma Naidoo, MD, author of *This Is Your Brain on Food*, also emphasizes the importance of collaborating with other healthcare professionals. "As a doctor, I always start with the diagnosis, or what happened to bring this person to my office. That might involve working with their primary-care physician, or getting some blood tests, but really working in collaboration with other treatment providers to make sure the patient receives the most comprehensive care."

That could mean enlisting someone like functional nutritionist Jesse Haas, CNS, LN. Haas incorporates mindfulness techniques into her practice, like recommending that her clients take three to five deep breaths before they eat, or to put their fork down between bites. "That helps them slow down and be present with it," she says.

This is designed to help people notice what they're doing, thinking, and feeling. "That brings objectivity," Haas explains. "It's not just about being mindful so that you eat a salad; it's being mindful so that you choose for yourself instead of just taking automatic actions." In other words, it's about empowerment, voice, and choice.

Some of those food choices can actually help the healing process, too. "The gut microbiome is really pivotal in informing our mental health," says Naidoo. "Individuals who may have had trauma could pay attention to things like eating prebiotic foods: oats, bananas, the allium family (garlic, leeks, onions) — simple foods that will nurture their gut."

She also suggests adding fermented foods to your diet, including kimchi, miso, and kombucha. (For more on the connection between gut health and brain health, see ELmag.com/healthygutbrain.)

Naidoo emphasizes that because trauma is multifactorial, diet alone is not a panacea — you may want to seek out therapy or other mental-health support.

Before embarking on a trauma-informed-nutrition approach, make sure you take the time to find a practitioner with whom you feel safe. "Trauma often comes with intense feelings of shame," says Thomas, "which makes it difficult for a person to be in a position where they feel vulnerable."

But, she adds, "a well-trained practitioner can create a space for the feelings and sensations that are in the room to do this work."

JESSIE SHOLL is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

EATING FOR TRAUMA RECOVERY

Chronic stress can lead to the breakdown of healthy tissues. Support your body with these tips, adapted with permission from registered nutritional therapist Kaysha Thomas.

MAINTAIN A ROUTINE. Irregular meals send the signal that food is scarce and disrupts blood-sugar levels. The body produces cortisol as a result, which stimulates the release of glucose from its energy stores.

EAT YOUR OMEGAS. Omega-3 fatty acids are anti-inflammatory and a structural part of brain-cell membranes. (For more on how to balance omegas, see ELmag.com/omegafattyacids.)

TASTE THE RAINBOW. Eating colorful vegetables and fruits ensures that you're consuming a good variety of antioxidants. They help defend the body against the damaging effects of oxidative stress, which is often present with anxiety.

CUT BACK ON CAFFEINE. Stimulants can disrupt your sleep function and increase the production of stress hormones. (Have questions about caffeine? Get answers at ELmag.com/caffeine.)

CONSIDER MAGNESIUM. Including magnesium-rich foods in your diet helps relax tight muscles. Magnesium is also a key component in insulin regulation and restful sleep. (For more on this critical mineral, see ELmag.com/magnesiummineral.)

MAINTAIN YOUR MACRONUTRIENTS. Protein is vital for the production of neurotransmitters, blood-sugar regulation, and tissue repair, and carbohydrates help maintain optimal energy and blood-sugar levels. Healthy fats support a range of metabolic functions.

HYDRATE. The human body is approximately 60 percent water, making hydration crucial for some of our most essential biological functions. It's especially important for digestive function and waste elimination.

Dinner in an Instant

Mix up your weeknight meal routine with these Instant Pot recipes from best-selling author Michelle Tam's latest cookbook.

While sheltering at home in the spring and summer of 2020, award-winning food blogger Michelle Tam and her husband and coauthor, Henry Fong, created most of the dishes in their latest cookbook, *Nom Nom Paleo: Let's Go!* The pandemic inspired the book's direction, Tam notes, prompting them to focus on "fast, easy, and comforting recipes to combat kitchen fatigue and uplift our spirits."

That's certainly the case with these recipes, which make use of an Instant Pot: One of Tam's favorite kitchen tools, it reduces cooking time and can even keep your food warm until you're ready to eat. Don't have one on hand? You can also make these dishes in a slow cooker or on your stovetop.

All the paleo-friendly recipes in the book are designed to be healthful, practical, and delicious. "This cookbook is a collection of dishes that — when life put our backs to the wall — I made with love for my family," Tam writes. "These recipes truly give me joy."

— KAELYN RILEY

Instant Pot Green Soup

Makes five servings
Prep time: 20 minutes
Cook time: 20 minutes

- 2 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 tsp. Diamond Crystal kosher salt or ¾ tsp. regular kosher salt, divided
- 3 garlic cloves, roughly chopped
- 1 tbs. chopped fresh ginger
- 1 medium head broccoli, roughly chopped
- 2 small zucchini, roughly chopped
- 4 scallions, trimmed and roughly chopped
- ½ cup peeled and diced apple
- 4 cups chicken broth or vegetable broth
- 5 cups baby spinach
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Switch on the sauté function on the Instant Pot. Once it's hot, swirl in the oil.

Toss in the onion and half the salt. Cook for two to three minutes, stirring frequently, until the onion is slightly softened. Turn off the sauté function.

Stir in the garlic and ginger and cook for about 30 seconds, until fragrant.

Add the broccoli, zucchini, scallions, and apple to the pot. Mix well. Pour in the broth and add the remaining salt.

Cover and cook for one minute under high pressure. Then turn off the pot and release the pressure manually.

Open the pot and add the baby spinach. Stir until the spinach is wilted.

Blend the soup in batches using a high-speed blender. Make sure to fill the blender no more than two-thirds full, remove the center of the lid, and cover the top with a towel. Alternatively, blend the soup in the pot using an immersion blender.

Taste for seasoning and adjust with salt and pepper. Serve topped with cashew cream.

NOTE: Because Diamond Crystal kosher salt flakes are large and hollow, a teaspoon of it contains less sodium than other brands. If you're using another type of kosher or sea salt, scale back the volume and salt to taste.

PHOTOS: HENRY FONG

To cook the soup on the stovetop, sauté the onion with garlic and ginger, then add the remaining ingredients (except the spinach) and simmer until the veggies are fork-tender. Finish as instructed.

Tangy Cashew Cream

Makes five servings
Prep time: 20 minutes

- 1 cup raw cashews, soaked in 1 cup boiling water for 15 minutes
- ½ cup water
- 2 tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tbs. lemon juice
- 2 small garlic cloves, peeled
- 1 tsp. Diamond Crystal kosher salt or ¾ tsp. regular kosher salt

Drain the soaked cashews and toss them in a blender with the remaining ingredients. Blitz the contents until smooth. Taste and adjust the seasoning with more salt or lemon juice if needed.

Instant Pot Pipián Pork

Makes six servings
Prep time: 10 minutes
Cook time: 45 minutes

- 3½ lb. boneless pork shoulder, cut into 1½-inch cubes
- 2 tsp. Diamond Crystal kosher salt or 1½ tsp. regular kosher salt
- 2 cups pipián verde (page 47), divided
- 2 tbs. raw pepitas
- 2 radishes, cut into thin matchsticks
- 2 tbs. fresh cilantro leaves

In a large bowl, toss the pork with the salt. Add the pork cubes and ½ cup pipián verde to an Instant Pot. Lock the lid on the pot. Cook under high pressure for 35 minutes.

While the pork is cooking, toast the pepitas in a large skillet over medium heat for three to five minutes or until fragrant. Transfer them to a plate to cool.

After 35 minutes, manually release the pressure and check that the pork is done. Pour the remaining pipián verde into the pot and turn on the sauté function.

Cook for five to 10 minutes or until the sauce thickens slightly. Serve garnished with the radishes, cilantro, and toasted pepitas, alongside the cauliflower rice (page 47).

No Instant Pot? No problem! Just cook the salted pork and all of the pipián verde on low in a slow cooker for eight to 10 hours or until tender.

ENJOY MORE

Use pipián verde to also make Tam's Shrimp Simmered in Green Mole at **ELmag.com/instantpotrecipes.**

Pipián Verde (Green Mole Sauce)

Makes six cups
Prep time: 15 minutes
Cook time: 35 minutes

- 1 cup raw pepitas
- 1 lb. tomatillos, husked
- 3 jalapeño chilies, roughly chopped
- 1 small onion, roughly chopped
- 3 garlic cloves
- 2 cups chicken broth, divided
- 4 oz. baby spinach
- 3 large romaine lettuce leaves, roughly chopped (about 2 cups)
- 1 cup packed coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
- 1 tbs. Diamond Crystal kosher salt or ¾ tbs. regular kosher salt
- 2 tbs. avocado oil

Heat a large skillet over medium heat. When it's hot, add the pepitas in a single layer. Toast the seeds, stirring occasionally, for three to five minutes or until they are fragrant and you can hear them popping. Transfer them to a plate to cool.

In a high-speed blender, combine the pepitas, tomatillos, jalapeños, onion, garlic, and ½ cup broth. Blend until smooth.

Add the spinach, lettuce, cilantro, and salt. If your blender's not big enough, add the greens in batches. Blitz until liquefied.

Heat a large saucepan on medium heat. Once it's hot, swirl in the oil.

Pour in the purée. It'll probably splatter, so have a lid or a towel ready! Bring the sauce to a simmer.

Decrease the heat to maintain a simmer. Cook, stirring occasionally, for eight to 10 minutes or until the sauce thickens. Keep the saucepan partially covered to reduce splattering.

Add in the remaining 1½ cups of broth. Increase the heat to bring the sauce back to a simmer for five more minutes.

The mole should have the texture of a creamy soup. If it's too chunky for your liking, just blend it some more. Taste and add more salt if needed. In a sealed container, this mole will keep for up to four days in the refrigerator and up to four months in the freezer.

Cauliflower Rice

Makes six servings • Prep time: 10 minutes • Cook time: 10 minutes

- 1 medium (1 lb.) cauliflower head, cut into uniform pieces
- 2 tbs. avocado oil
- Kosher salt to taste

In a food processor, pulse the cauliflower pieces until they're chopped to the size of rice grains.

In a large skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the cauliflower. Cook, stirring, for five to 10 minutes or until soft. Season with salt to taste.

Recipes excerpted from *Nom Nom Paleo: Let's Go!* Copyright January 2022 by Michelle Tam and Henry Fong. Published January 18, 2022, by Andrews McMeel Publishing. Reprinted with permission.

About the Author: Michelle Tam is the award-winning food blogger at NomNomPaleo.com. Her previous cookbooks, *Nom Nom Paleo: Food for Humans* and *Ready or Not!*, are both *New York Times* bestsellers.

BIO STEEL

CLEAN. HEALTHY. HYDRATION.

PATRICK MAHOMES
#TEAMBIOSTEEL

NOW AVAILABLE AT

LIFECAFE®

SPORTS HYDRATION

ZERO SUGAR

ESSENTIAL ELECTROLYTES

ECO-FRIENDLY PACKAGE

#DRINK BIOSTEEL NOT SUGAR

STAY HEALTHY AND HYDRATED OVER THE HOLIDAYS
WITH BIOSTEEL'S ZERO SUGAR SPORTS HYDRATION.
CHRISTEN
PRESS
#TEAMBIOSTEEL
LUKA
DONČIĆ
#TEAMBIOSTEEL
CONNOR
McDAVID
#TEAMBIOSTEEL
#ITSJUSTTHETRUTH!

The Gift of Health

ALL YEAR LONG

Discover gift-subscription options:
ExperienceLife.com/LTMemberGift

Experience Life

Cauliflower

This popular cruciferous veggie is nutritious and endlessly versatile.

BY **BLESSING KASONGOMA**

EAT THE RAINBOW

The most common cauliflower variety is white, but there are also purple, orange, and green cultivars, which are often available at farmers' markets. Each type offers fiber, B vitamins, and antioxidants. Purple cauliflower gets its hue from anthocyanins, an antioxidant also present in blueberries, eggplant, and purple potatoes. Orange cauliflower, like carrots, is high in beta carotene, while green "brocco-flower" (a broccoli-cauliflower hybrid) is high in vitamin C.

SHOP AND STORE

Choose cauliflower with densely packed florets and fresh, green leaves; avoid heads that have yellowing, wilted leaves or florets with brown spots. Purple, green, and orange cauliflower should be uniform in color. Many grocery stores sell heads of cauliflower that are tightly wrapped in cellophane; remove the packaging before storing, because it can trap moisture and promote rot. Store in a loosely sealed plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to a week.

SWAP IT IN

Cauliflower's mild flavor and versatile texture make it a star substitute for ingredients like rice and flour; because it's low in carbohydrates, it's a great option for people with certain dietary restrictions. Try our cauliflower pizza crust at ELmag.com/pizzaparty or check out Michelle Tam's recipe for cauliflower rice on page 47. Cauliflower is also delicious when treated like potatoes, as in our Cauliflower-Manchego Gratin at ELmag.com/cheesycauliflower.

LET IT SHINE

Cauliflower can do so much more than just stand in for other beloved foods. Our Creamy Cauliflower Soup recipe, at ELmag.com/cauliflowersoup, allows the veggie to take center stage. Like most crucifers, cauliflower also shines when simply roasted in a hot oven with olive oil, salt, and pepper, which gives it a slightly nutty, caramelized flavor. Want a spicier appetizer? Try our Korean-Style Cauliflower at ELmag.com/koreancauliflower.

ILLUSTRATIONS: JENNIFER JACOBSON

BLESSING KASONGOMA is an *Experience Life* contributing writer.

Resilience, Rediscovered

Learn how exercise can help build a body and mind that can roll with life's punches — and come back stronger after stress.

BY **ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS**

The most memorable moment of the Tokyo Olympics may have been a star athlete's decision to withdraw from competition. When Simone Biles then returned to win bronze on the beam, news coverage centered on one word: "resilience." "Simone Biles Gives Lesson in Resilience," proclaimed one headline. "Resilience Is the Most Important Trait of a Champion," read another.

Winning medals is well and good. But resilience? That's the hallmark of the grit, strength, and seriousness of purpose that transcend sport and time: Naomi Osaka returning to tennis after stepping away to prioritize her mental health. Michael Phelps and Kevin Love fighting their way back from depression. Billie Jean King standing up to unequal treatment of female athletes. Muhammad Ali rebounding after banishment from boxing. Tom Brady silencing the nay-sayers, again and again and again.

In these athletes' stories — and in the everyday efforts of people who overcome adversity — we see a trait to which we can all relate and aspire.

"Resilience is the ability to recover from stress quickly and efficiently, and secondly to have a higher threshold for stress so you can successfully deal with a lot more," says Jenny Evans, author of *The Resiliency rEvolution.*

Resilience isn't reserved for a select few who naturally adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or other significant sources of stress. Everyone can become more resilient to stress of all kinds.

Resilience is the ability to recover from stress quickly and efficiently, and secondly to have a higher threshold for stress so you can successfully deal with a lot more."

That's because this remarkable capacity is trainable: You can learn not only to survive and manage stress but also to grow and improve in response to it.

"It is not a personality flaw to feel really stressed or feel like you're not very resilient," says Evans. "That is not a personal shortcoming. That is 100 percent straight-up chemistry and biology, and that is what your brain and body are hardwired to do. In a way, if you're struggling with stress, good. It means your brain is actually doing its job. Now let's find a way for you to handle it before the physiological stress response gets triggered."

It's a common misconception that resilient people are unbreakable. In that regard, "Tupperware is resilient. Drop it on the floor, it's not going to break," says human-performance expert Mike T. Nelson, PhD. Human resilience, however, looks different. "Breaking" is inevitable, a guaranteed part of being alive. But the physical and psychological effects of acute and chronic stress don't have to mean indefinite suffering. "It's possible to get stronger, to learn, and to grow from the experience," says Nelson.

Evans, Nelson, and other experts agree that one of the best ways to build resilience in all its forms is through the body: It plays a key role in absorbing, processing, remembering,

holding, and releasing stress. If you've ever used a run, a yoga session, dancing, or even blowing raspberries with your mouth to shake off a tough day or stressful event, you've experienced how physical activity can reduce your stress level.

A longer-term example might involve following a strength-building routine. Stick with it and your muscles will strengthen; over time, this allows you to lift more weight without injury.

And successfully enduring one type of physical stress may make you better at enduring another, says Nelson. For example, he notes, "cold-water immersion may allow you to perform better with exhaustive exercise."

Physical training builds more than just physical resilience. Thanks to a phenomenon known as cross-adaptation, resilience in one context can transfer to another.

In the psychologist's model, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual resilience form overlapping circles in a four-way Venn diagram, each with the capacity to enhance — or undermine — another. Physical and psychological resilience are symbiotic: Increase your capacity to resist or recover from physical injury and you'll likely beef up some forms of psychological resilience as well.

So, what does training for resilience look like? In short, you need to get a little bit uncomfortable.

"Humans evolved in a high-contrast environment," says ancestral-health expert Frank Forencich, author of *Beware False Tigers* and *The Sapience Curriculum*. Early humans dealt with all sorts of hazards and threats. "Modern life is totally out of sync with these cycles," he explains. Instead of being adaptable, poised to thrive in a variety of environments, we've become overly adapted, capable of performing only a narrow set of tasks in specific and controlled settings.

This sameness may be harming us: Forencich and other ancestral researchers believe that the loss of variety in our lives has eroded our resilience, leaving us more vulnerable to disease, including depression and anxiety.

Part of the remedy, then, lies in increasing our exposure to a broader range of stimulation and temporary physical discomfort through intentional exercise and recovery habits.

"Our adaptability is a big part of what makes us human," says Forencich. "It's allowed us to survive and make good in all kinds of environments all around the world."

By embracing our adaptability and training for resilience, then, we are effectively training ourselves to be more robust and functional humans.

Resilience training is a big ask. It suggests pushing your physical limits, in some way, almost daily. You could sum it up in one phrase: "Do the stuff you don't feel like doing."

That probably doesn't sound like much fun — but that's exactly the point. If our attachment to creature comforts has done a number on our resilience, it makes sense that the way back is to occasionally detach deliberately from them.

The way out may not be easy, says Nelson, but in principle, it's fairly simple: "Practice doing hard stuff."

Ready to get uncomfortable? These ideas can help you get started.

Movement for Body and Mind

Exercise is probably the most widely practiced strategy for boosting physical resilience. When you work out, you subject your muscles to stress; work hard enough and some of the muscle fibers fray and break. In the hours and days after your workout, your body repairs those broken fibers, laying down extra reinforcement to protect your muscles against similar stress in the future.

Repeat the same exercise session a few days later, and continue that process for weeks or months, and you'll be measurably stronger, faster, and more muscular. Your muscles are now better able to handle challenging loads.

Your bones are stronger and less likely to break. Your body is better able to clear waste products from your muscles, so that burning feeling doesn't come on as quickly or acutely. Your heart pumps more blood more easily, so you don't get as winded. Your nervous system is more efficient, so the movement is smoother and easier.

That is resilience at work, and it's woven so completely into our physiology that it continues to function into old age. Research has shown that nonagenarians get predictably stronger and fitter from a consistent exercise routine.

"If there is a fountain of youth, it is regular exercise," says geriatrician Edmund Lew, MD. "It enhances the function of the cellular, metabolic, and organ systems of the body." This includes the immune, vascular, and nervous systems, translating into better movement, cognition, and emotional stability.

Find Your Strength

Lifting weights can be a powerful way to foster resilience because it involves believing in oneself, says clinical social worker and trauma specialist Mariah Rooney, MSW, LICSW, the cofounder of Trauma Informed Weight Lifting, a program that teaches fitness professionals how to use resistance exercise as a tool for overcoming mental-health challenges.

"For some folks who have experienced trauma, the body can be a scary place to be and connect with," she says. "Weightlifting can be one way of engaging our bodies that allows us to expand our window of tolerance and have powerful experiences of agency and strength when perhaps our bodies have been the holders of our painful experiences."

At the same time, the progress many lifters experience offers encouraging evidence that growth is possible and that effort yields results — in the gym as well as in other areas of life. "Weightlifting fosters self-trust," says Rooney. "Every time you approach the barbell, there's a question mark: *Can I do this? Will it feel good? Do I feel safe?* And every rep becomes an opportunity to learn to listen to and respond to ourselves in more attuned ways."

As we accrue more successful lifts, our capacity to grow from stress is reinforced.

Rooney has discovered that those little weightlifting triumphs can be an empowering metaphor for people struggling with psychological burdens. "The physical strength they build translates into a greater sense of efficacy in their relationships and other aspects of their lives," she says.

Building resilience in the weight room takes some finesse, however. The wrong workout — too much weight, too many reps — can break you down physically rather than build you up. Similarly, the wrong environment can stress you out rather than calm you down.

A key to training for resilience is to stay flexible and tuned in. "It can be helpful to adjust a routine — even throw it out altogether — when necessary," Rooney says, "particularly when our bodies are letting us know that we need something different." She suggests that people seeking resilience take one step beyond the fitness axiom "Listen to your body": "Pay attention to your emotional and psychological state, too."

(Learn more about trauma-informed movement at ELmag.com/movementtherapy.)

Find Your Breath

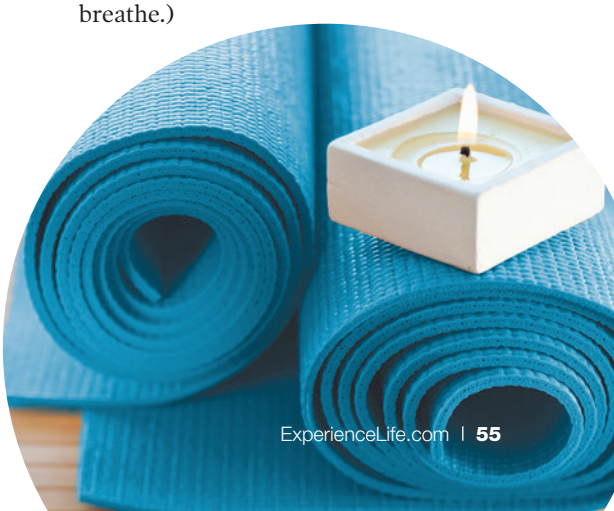
Resistance training isn't the only physical path to greater resilience. The "instructive discomfort" of an asana practice can also help you get there, says yoga and martial-arts instructor Stephen Schilling.

"You can confront that discomfort in one of two ways: Draw away from it, or breathe through it and accept it. That's what allows you to endure," Schilling explains. "The discomfort doesn't necessarily go away. But you learn that it won't break you. You discover you can live with it to a greater extent than you thought."

Contained within that simple process — breathing through discomfort — is a powerful life lesson: Practice yoga long enough and you can learn to manage your response to life's disappointments and worries. "Your time on the mat gives you a reference point," he says. "You can say, 'I got through my workout this morning; I can get through this.'"

Cardiovascular exercise can produce a similar effect: In addition to improving circulation and strengthening your heart and lungs, steady-state cardio — think jogging, cycling, vigorous hiking — encourages deep, steady breathing, which helps stimulate the stress-relieving, parasympathetic, rest-and-digest system.

(For six exercises backed by ancient wisdom and modern research to help you find your breath, visit ELmag.com/breathe.)



Find Your Intensity

High-intensity interval training (HIIT) is yet another potent physical approach to building resilience.

HIIT — which describes a style of exercise rather than a specific activity, sport, or movement style — can include strength and cardio moves. And by design, HIIT workouts are brief, making them accessible to those who are short on time or who lack the motivation for a longer session.

"It takes just 30 to 60 seconds of high-intensity physical activity to produce endorphins, so HIIT is your in-the-moment resiliency solution. Like, boom! You just hit the reset button," says Evans.

"Then, when you string together these short bursts of activity for 10 or 20 minutes, and over time string together these short workouts, you increase your level of fitness and raise your threshold for stress," she explains.

> "It takes just 30 to 60 seconds of high-intensity physical activity **to produce endorphins."**

Another advantage to HIIT: It's a key component in helping you develop what exercise physiologists call metabolic flexibility, which refers to the body's ability to burn both carbohydrates and fat as fuel, and to switch easily between them. Because HIIT depends primarily on carbohydrates for fuel, it greases the wheels of your carb-burning metabolism, so that your body can clear starches from your bloodstream quickly and easily.

A 2017 study showed that just six workouts — each consisting of four to six 30-second bike-sprint intervals separated by four minutes of recovery — over a two-week period improved glucose metabolism in diabetic and prediabetic men and women by 25 percent. That's a big result for such a small time investment.

Nelson recommends performing your HIIT workouts and strength-training workouts on alternating days, doing each about three times a week. This doesn't have to be complicated to be effective, he notes. "Get on a piece of cardio equipment and go more or less all-out for short periods."

If you prefer body-weight moves to traditional cardio, Evans suggests making a list of five to 10 exercises, grabbing a deck of cards, and pulling cards every round to dictate how many reps to perform. (Evans, who is also a certified personal trainer, has developed a training tool called Hit the Deck, a set of 35 exercise cards along with a programmable interval timer.)

"Whether it's cardio or strength — as long as it's making you uncomfortable, it's making you more resilient," Nelson says.

And if high-intensity work simply isn't for you, don't stress about it. The same 2017 study showed that steady-state training (longer workouts performed at lower intensity) could also improve glucose metabolism — suggesting that either approach is effective when your goal is tuning up your carb-burning engine.

(For a strength-based, low-impact HIIT workout, visit ELmag.com/lowimpacthiit.)

The Resilience Workout

Bad news first: You can't entirely prevent injuries. The inevitability of the odd ankle twist or lower-back torque when you're working out or just living life makes complete prevention a pipe dream.

What is possible, says strength coach Dan John, is to gain an edge over the slower forces that threaten to erode your resilience in the long term — things like muscle loss, joint instability, and weakness in the core. "Those are the things that get you down as you age," he says.

John designed the following four-week workout routine to help ward off the age-related decline and frailty that many consider inevitable. These five moves can help preserve — and even increase — muscle mass; teach you to stabilize your core, keeping your spine safe; and fire up your glutes, build grip strength, and address other neglected areas that directly affect longevity.

Commit to holding the line on those things, and you'll have a better chance of emerging unscathed from life's bigger mishaps.

GET THE DETAILS

For full exercise descriptions and demos, visit **ELmag.com/resilienceworkout.**

THE WORKOUT

Perform the workout up to four times a week on nonconsecutive days. Always choose a weight — or variation — that makes the move challenging on your final few reps. For example, you'll use more weight in week 2 when you're doing sets of five reps than you used in week 1 with sets of eight.

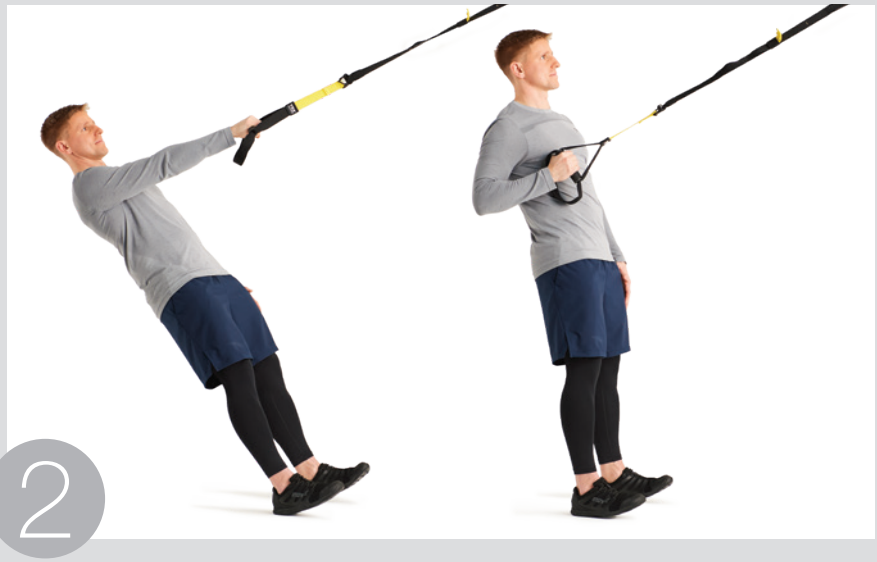
1

Half-Kneeling Press

Weeks 1 and 4: Three sets of eight reps/side.

Week 2: Five sets of five reps/side.

Week 3: 25 reps total per side, breaking up the reps into as many sets as you need.



2

Suspension-Trainer One-Arm Rows

Weeks 1 and 4: Three sets of eight reps/side.

Week 2: Five sets of five reps/side.

Week 3: 25 reps total per side, breaking up the reps into as many sets as you need.

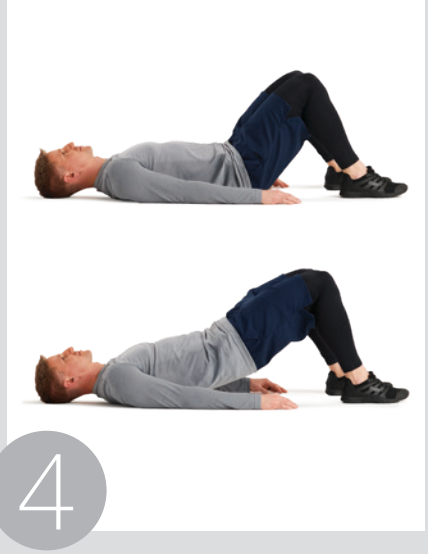
3

Goblet Squat

Weeks 1 and 4: Three sets of eight reps.

Week 2: Five sets of five reps.

Week 3: 25 reps total, breaking up the reps into as many sets as you need.



4

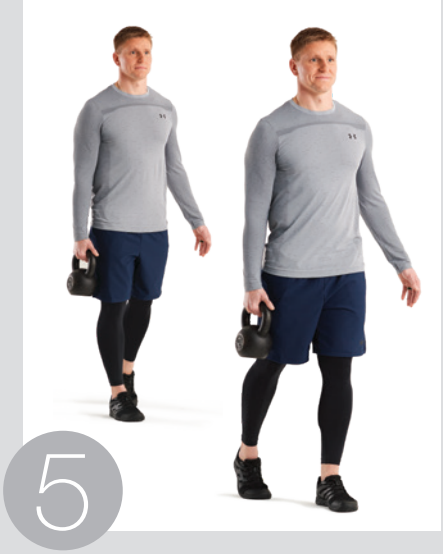
Glute Bridge

Week 1: Three sets of 10 reps.

Week 2: Three sets of 12 reps.

Week 3: Three sets of 15 reps.

Week 4: Four sets of 15 reps.



5

Suitcase Carry

Week 1: Three sets of 45 seconds/side.

Week 2: Two sets of 60 seconds/side.

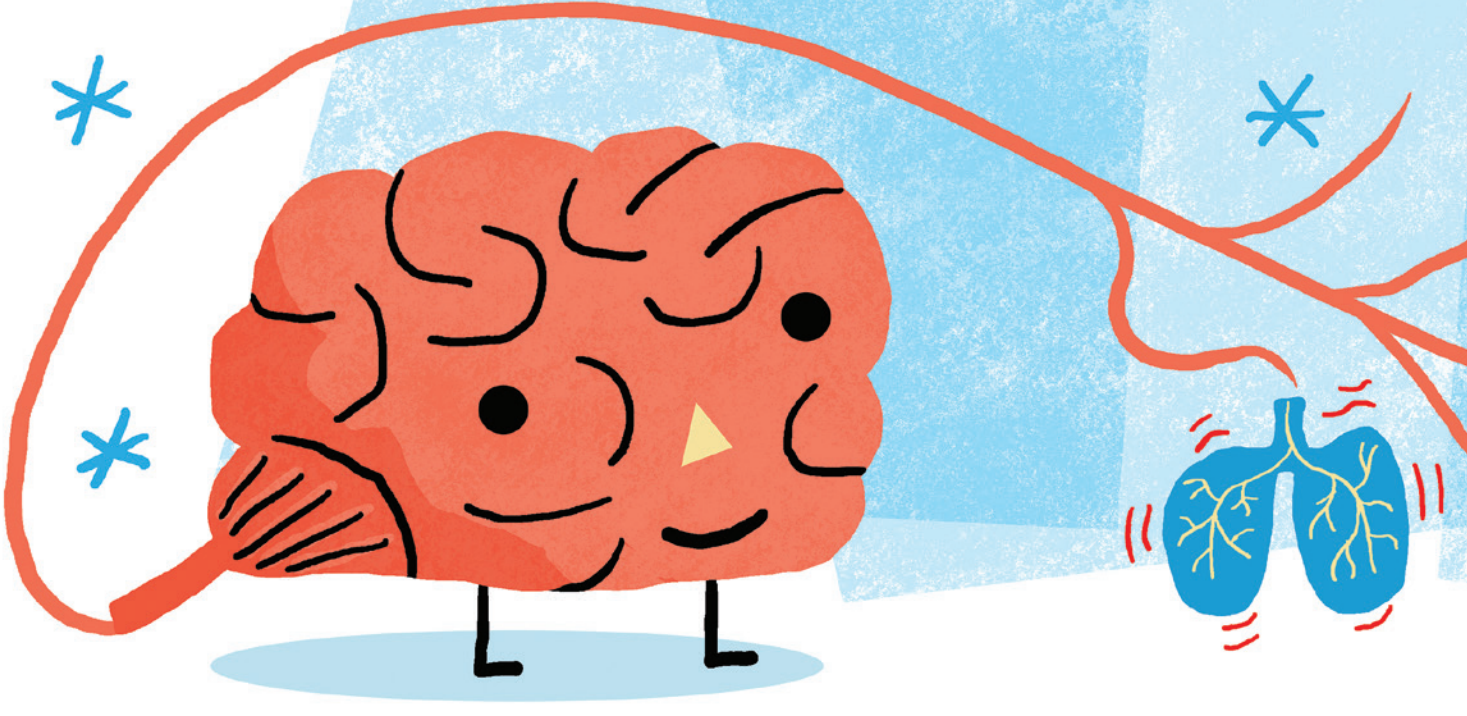
Week 3: Four sets of 20 seconds/side.

Week 4: Three sets of 15 seconds/side.

PHOTOS: KELLY LOVERUD; STYLING: PAM BRAND; FITNESS MODEL: DANNY KING

ANDREW HEFFERNAN, CSCS, is an *Experience Life* contributing editor. Additional reporting provided by **MAGGIE FAZELI FARD, RKC, MFT-1, ALPHA,** an *Experience Life* senior editor.

What HAPPENS IN THE Vagus



BY **CATHERINE GUTHRIE**

THE VAGUS NERVE, ALSO KNOWN AS THE GUT–BRAIN AXIS, IS A HEADLINER IN STRESS REGULATION AND OVERALL HEALTH. **SUPPORT YOURS WITH THESE STRATEGIES.**

ILLUSTRATIONS: JAMES YANG

Imagine your brain with a periscope-like appendage, one that tunnels deep into your body to see how all your organs are faring. Since you're using your imagination, make that appendage the world's fastest pneumatic tube. Watch messages zooming back and forth between your brain and your immune cells, endocrine system, and microbiome.

This sounds like sci-fi, yet we all have a version of that tool right now. It's called the vagus nerve, and it may be the most important body part you've never heard of.

"Just as you use your eyes to take in the world around you, your brain uses the vagus nerve to get a detailed sense of your body's inner experience," says integrative psychiatrist Drew Ramsey, MD. "The vagus nerve has its fingers in almost all of the bodily organs. It modulates hunger, manages stress, and regulates the immune response, including inflammation."

It also helps govern a range of bodily functions. "If you have ever swallowed, coughed, sneezed, pooped, or been nauseated, then you've experienced the vagus nerve in action," says functional-medicine practitioner Gregory Plotnikoff, MD.

The vagus is one of 12 pairs of cranial nerves that emerge from the brain, but it's the only one that extends down into the body. Like all nerves, the vagus is a bundle of fibers encased in connective tissue. The vagal bundle includes both sensory and motor nerves, meaning it can transmit sensations, like temperature and pain, as well as control motor impulses, such as heart rate, swallowing, and the gag reflex.

The word "vagus" means "wandering," apropos given that the nerve starts at the brainstem and meanders down into the torso, where it unfurls tendrils like a creeping vine. These extend into the heart and lungs, while the nerve's primary stalk extends through the abdominal cavity and reaches as far as the colon. It serves as a concrete connection between the brain and the gut — as well as other bodily systems.

Many people mistakenly believe their organs operate in isolation, says Plotnikoff. "They picture their intestines as isolated from their heart, their lungs isolated from the bladder, and so on." There's a conventional medical view of the body as a machine with parts that can be repaired without addressing the whole, he says. "But the vagus nerve disrupts all of that."

The vagus is the body's through line, a conduit of interconnectedness.

"Think of the vagus nerve like a switchboard operator," says Ramsey. "It passes all kinds of messages back and forth between the organs and the brain." And roughly 80 percent of those messages are carrying data about the state of the organs.

"Once you see how the vagus nerve connects every system in the human body," says Plotnikoff, "you must open your eyes to a new understanding of the human body."

VIVA THE VAGUS

The nervous system is a marvel of multitasking. In any given moment, our lungs take in and exhale air, our hearts pump blood, and our digestive systems extract energy from food. Countless such involuntary biological functions are orchestrated simultaneously by the autonomic nervous system (ANS), which frees up brain space for us to think, create, and engage with the world.

The first branch of the ANS is the sympathetic nervous system (SNS). It scans for danger and puts the body on alert. This fight-or-flight response often gets a bad rap for triggering stress hormones, like cortisol, but this state of alertness also enables athletes to score goals, lawyers to argue court cases, and pedestrians to navigate busy intersections.

The second branch is the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), responsible for the counterpoint to fight-or-flight: rest-and-digest. When the PNS takes over, it dials down blood pressure, deepens the breath, and directs blood toward digestive and reproductive organs. In short, it helps us chill out.

THE VAGUS NERVE DETERMINES HOW WELL WE'RE ABLE TO SHIFT BETWEEN THESE SYSTEMS. IT STAYS POISED, ACTING LIKE A BRAKE ON THE FIGHT-OR-FLIGHT RESPONSE.

"The feeling after lovemaking is as close to a complete parasympathetic mode as one can get," says physical therapist and craniosacral-therapy instructor Mariann Sisco, PT, CST-D. "You feel loved, safe, and deeply relaxed."

Ideally, we toggle between these modes many times a day. "We absolutely need both," Sisco says. "If I am going to cross a busy street, I want to be on high alert. But once I am on the other side, I want [the SNS to stand down] so I can go back to relaxing and enjoying my surroundings."

The vagus nerve determines how well we're able to shift between these systems. It stays poised, acting like a brake on the fight-or-flight response, says Sisco. "When it senses potential danger, it releases the brake, allowing the sympathetic nervous system to roll forward. When it perceives safety, it puts on the brake, which allows the parasympathetic to take over."

This process reminds us that both capacities — vigilance and relaxation — are critical to survival. "Early humans had to navigate a dangerous world so they could survive long enough to procreate," says neurologist and functional-medicine practitioner Kenneth Sharlin, MD, MPH.

He notes how a noxious smell can make you cough or how rancid food can induce a gag response. "Both of those involuntary reflexes are examples of the vagus nerve sensing danger and using its influence to protect the body."

"Just look at where the nerve is located," says chiropractor and functional-medicine practitioner Navaz Habib, DC. "From the brain, it enters the neck along with the jugular vein and the carotid artery, which are the two most important blood vessels for our overall function and life."

THE GUT–BRAIN AXIS

The third branch of the ANS is located in the gut: the enteric nervous system (ENS). The ENS is found in the millions of nerve cells lining the walls of the gastrointestinal (GI) tract, and it's so large and information-rich that it's sometimes called the second brain.

The idea of an axis connecting the gut to the brain sounds like a metaphor, but it's not, says Habib. This route communicates information about digestion, nutrient status, and the microbiome to the brain.

And because the vagus nerve controls peristalsis — the wavelike action of the GI tract that keeps things moving toward the exit — it's intimately involved in digestion and elimination.

When you feel nauseated during a dinnertime argument or become constipated from the stress of travel, that's a sign that the vagus nerve is refusing to switch gears because it still detects danger. "You can't activate a rest-and-digest process while in fight-or-flight," Habib explains.

The vagus nerve also moderates the immune system, 70 to 90 percent of which is housed in the gut. When the SNS releases the activating hormone adrenaline, the vagus signals the release of an inflammation-dousing neurochemical called acetylcholine. A potent anti-inflammatory, acetylcholine can calm an overactive immune response and reduce inflammation.

This balancing act is designed to prevent runaway inflammation, but everyday stressors can push it to the breaking point, which may help explain the rise of autoimmune disorders. (For more on autoimmune conditions, see ELmag.com/autoimmunity.)

TONE TELLS ALL

How well your vagus nerve is holding up can be measured by its tone. In general, the higher one's vagal tone, the better. "High vagal tone typically indicates that the autonomic nervous system is modulating the stress response appropriately," says Sisco.

WHEN YOU FEEL NAUSEATED DURING A DINNERTIME ARGUMENT OR BECOME CONSTIPATED FROM THE STRESS OF TRAVEL, THAT'S A SIGN THAT **THE VAGUS NERVE IS REFUSING TO SWITCH GEARS BECAUSE IT STILL DETECTS DANGER.**

Low vagal tone may signal that a person is stuck in the hypervigilance of the SNS. Signs include rapid resting heartbeat, clamminess, shallow breathing, and restlessness.

Most of us know how it feels to get stuck in this type of stress reaction, but it is also possible to have a dysregulated parasympathetic response. When we're overly isolated or facing ongoing trauma, a primitive part of the PNS triggers the dorsal vagal state, which causes us to freeze up, explains Sisco. This can leave us depressed, withdrawn, or emotionally numb. Over time we might begin to avoid people and places we once enjoyed.

Some experts believe that the most reliable measure of vagal tone is heart-rate variability (HRV). HRV — the variation in time between heartbeats — is partly regulated by the vagus nerve. Perhaps counterintuitively, the more variation, the better. It means the vagus is responding to external signals and isn't stuck in one mode or the other. (For more on HRV, see ELmag.com/hrv.)

Plenty of wearables track HRV. The wrist or finger devices may be the easiest to wear for longer periods of time and may help elucidate patterns. According to some experts, HRV monitors offer a rough sense of how well your vagus nerve recovers once a stressor has ended.

When the nervous system is in fight-or-flight, HRV is low. When the nervous system is relaxed, HRV is high. The healthiest nervous system moves fluidly between high and low without getting stuck.

"When our bodies go into fight-or-flight, the episode should have a beginning, middle, and end," says Sharlin. "We have to get through our days without being stymied. There will always be stressful events, but how well we navigate those stressors combined with our ability to recover is the definition of stress resilience." (For more on the stress cycle, see ELmag.com/stresscycle.)

"Have you ever been around someone who you find deeply annoying but someone else in the room tolerates fairly well?" asks Sisco. "For the person who easily stays calm in the face of an annoyance, the stress will have less wear and tear on their body."

HOW TO IMPROVE VAGAL TONE

One of the best ways to build more resilience is to deliberately stimulate your vagus nerve. Because the SNS is always monitoring our surroundings, while the PNS switches on and off intermittently, stimulating the vagus can make those periods of parasympathetic activity more frequent, says Sisco.

This stimulation has been clinically proven to help people who have life-threatening conditions, such as hard-to-treat epilepsy or treatment-resistant depression. In such cases, a medical device may be implanted near the vagus. Electrical signals from the device, similar to a pacemaker, prompt it to exert its influence.

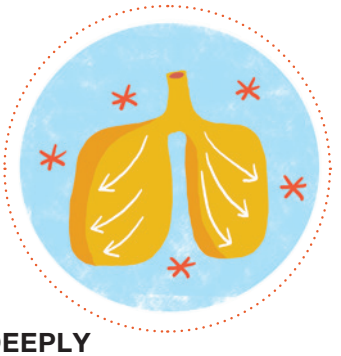
Other vagal-stimulation treatments are also in the works. An external device won Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval in 2017 for the treatment of cluster headache and acute migraine. More are in the pipeline.

"We are going to see more and more types of vagus-nerve stimulators for anxiety, depression, and eating disorders," predicts Plotnikoff. "People are already doing vagus-nerve blocks for PTSD-related concerns and getting fabulous results."

The vagus nerve is involved in the successful use of auricular acupuncture, which focuses strictly on ear points. A small branch of the nerve — the auricular branch — nears the surface of the skin on each ear. The auricular branch of the vagus is mostly sensory, meaning it senses touch, temperature, and moisture on the skin on the inside of the ear; it provides an easy access point for stimulation with acupuncture and acupressure.

Various traditional practices, such as massage, reflexology, craniosacral therapy, yoga, and tai chi, also activate the PNS, which improves vagal tone. "All of this research on the vagus nerve has reaffirmed traditional wisdom around ancient practices," says Plotnikoff.

The following exercises allow you to indirectly stimulate the vagus nerve on your own.



BREATHE DEEPLY

Deep breathing stimulates pressure receptors in the neck and heart that signal the brain that it's time to rest and digest. "Deep, calm, diaphragmatic breathing is the No. 1 way to send parasympathetic signals to all of the organs," says Habib. "Everything revolves around the breath."

For best results, sit up straight. Exhale completely. Put your right hand on your chest and your left hand on your belly. Breathe deeply through your nose for five to seven seconds, inflating just your belly. Hold the breath for two to three seconds. Exhale through your mouth for six to eight seconds, allowing the belly to fall. Hold the breath out for two to three seconds. Practice increasing your tolerance until you can do this exercise for five minutes per day.

GARGLE

Gargling stimulates the vagus nerve by activating the laryngeal and pharyngeal muscles at the back of the throat. Habib recommends keeping a cup beside the bathroom sink and using it to gargle water vigorously twice a day, ideally when you brush your teeth. "You know you are doing it properly if you gargle to the point of tearing up."

HUM OR CHANT

The vagus supplies motor signaling to the muscles of the larynx around the vocal cords. Humming and chanting activate the laryngeal muscles and the vocal cords, which then stimulate the motor fibers of the vagus nerve. Habib recommends making a habit of humming or chanting during your commute or while walking the dog. If you choose to chant, try using the word "om" or "amen" and holding the vibration for as long as you can while stretching out the exhale.

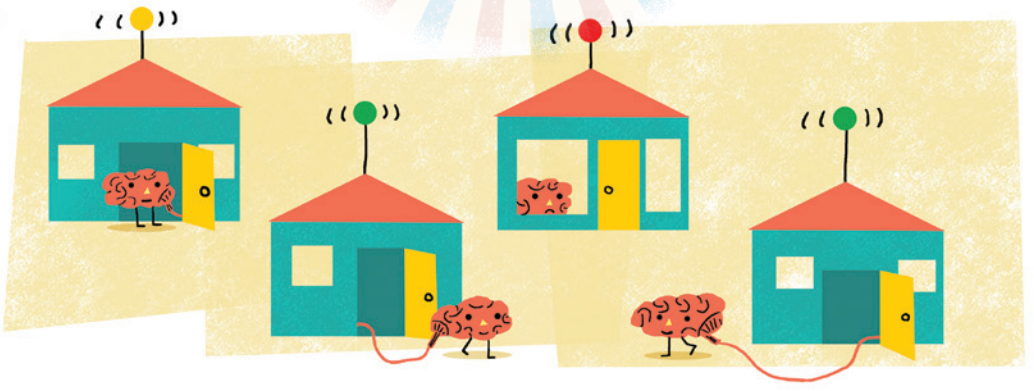
TAKE A COLD SHOWER

At the end of your normal shower, reduce the water temperature as much as you can bear and let the water wash over your head and the back of your neck. Begin with 30 seconds and gradually work your way up to a few minutes. While standing under the cold shower, work on controlling your breath by taking as many deep belly-breaths as possible, says Habib. "The cold acts like a 50-pound weight on your diaphragm. The end result is a strong vagus nerve and an optimally functioning parasympathetic nervous system."

We have more power to support our nervous systems than we realize. "Most people understand the concepts of fight-or-flight and rest-and-digest, but what they don't understand is that minute by minute their body is prioritizing one over the other," says Plotnikoff. "And you can choose to set the priority."

CATHERINE GUTHRIE is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

THIS IS YOUR *Vagus Nerve* ON LOCKDOWN



FOR MOST OF US, the vagus nerve has taken a beating during the pandemic. "We are social creatures," says chiropractor and functional-medicine practitioner Navaz Habib, DC, author of *Activate Your Vagus Nerve: Unleash Your Body's Natural Ability to Heal*. "The fact that we've been afraid to be around other people has been a major stressor."

Positive social interactions stimulate the vagus nerve, which connects to a network of cranial nerves. Some of those nerve branches are in the face. When you smile or laugh, the vagus gets goosed, which activates your parasympathetic nervous system.

Meanwhile, during the pandemic, many of us have gone days, weeks, and months with limited to no social interaction. "For that reason, the pandemic is being referred to as 'a collective trauma,'" says physical therapist Mariann Sisco, PT, CST-D.

During the pandemic-related lockdowns, Sisco, who lives alone, went out of her way to say hello to neighbors on the sidewalk or the grocery worker at the checkout line. "I took every opportunity to smile, make eye contact, use their name, and ask how their day was going; these small but intentional moments of making a meaningful social connection got me through."

Sisco notes how masks — while life-saving — have also made it difficult to recognize familiar safety cues. This can amplify our sense of alarm. "Not being able to see people's facial expressions, especially their mouths to see if they were smiling or not, [can be] intrinsically stressful for the nervous system."

Masks also require us to raise our voices to be heard, she adds. "For many people, the very act of talking loudly or even hearing a raised voice directed at them can be stressful."

And then there's the biggest stressor of them all: the fear of contagion and being contagious. Many of us have found that no matter how much we may have missed certain experiences (dinner parties, live music, going to the gym), when we finally do these things again, they trigger as much anxiety as delight. Habib emphasizes that this is a nervous-system response, and it can take time to retrain it.

There's also no point in comparing your timing with others'. Inevitably, some of us will bounce back faster. The capacity for recovery is a big part of stress resilience, and some of us have more or less of it.

"Trauma affects people differently," says neurologist and functional-medicine practitioner Kenneth Sharlin, MD, MPH. "Our bodies are vessels of information, which we acquire through our experiences in life, some of which comes by way of trauma. What we learn from that trauma and how we react to future situations that remind our brains of that trauma, either consciously or unconsciously, becomes a critical factor that determines how we navigate our world."

He notes that when the nervous system is deeply dysregulated, patients may present with conditions like postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (lightheadedness when rising from a reclining position), gastroparesis (partial paralysis of the stomach), and chronic fatigue syndrome. "I attribute it not to direct damage to the vagus nerve but adaptive damage."

According to Stephen Porges, PhD, a pioneer in studying the vagus, the nerve includes an ancient vestige of early humans called the dorsal vagal circuit, which stimulates the freeze response. When people get stuck in dorsal vagal activity, they can withdraw and shut down. Their heartbeat slows, their blood pressure drops, and they might feel dizzy or even faint (vasovagal syncope). Emotionally, they may experience apathy, hopelessness, and an inability to set goals or motivate.

The key to once again navigating social situations is to practice patience and compassion for ourselves and others, says Sisco. "We have to offer our vagus nerve opportunities to relearn what is safe and not safe." And that will be unique to each of us.

ALL EYES ON EMDR

This trauma treatment often produces results when nothing else will.

How does it work?

BY **QUINTON SKINNER**

Nancy knew there were things about her mental state that were unusual. On the surface, her adult life was ordinary: She was married with children, living in a small community in Nevada. Yet she could remember only small fragments of her childhood, and she had various inexplicable anxieties, such as a mysterious fear of the dentist and difficulty having her picture taken.

Although Nancy had more or less resigned herself to her fears and curious lack of memory, events in her life spurred a change. After a family member called to reveal having been molested by their grandfather — and coming to terms with this in therapy — Nancy was in shock. She began to wonder about her own experience, which prompted her to explore therapy for herself.

She learned about a treatment called eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), which seemed to promise great relief for people who had experienced extreme trauma. She decided to try it.

During therapy sessions, Nancy discovered and revisited serious abuse from her childhood. She learned that she had posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and had spent much of her life in a dissociative state in order to cope.

And she finally began to heal.

Nancy's story intersects with another that began decades earlier. In 1987, Francine Shapiro was a psychology student taking a walk through a park in Northern California, trying to come to terms with a disturbing memory. She spontaneously began to move her eyes back and forth rapidly. What happened next surprised her.

"The thoughts disappeared," Shapiro wrote later. "And when I brought them back to mind, their negative charge was greatly reduced."

Shapiro went on to pioneer EMDR treatment, experimenting on herself and others. She developed a protocol that asks subjects to track a therapist's finger back and forth with their eyes while calling to mind unpleasant and traumatic memories.

EMDR routinely spurred recovery, though in the beginning, theories and data to support the success stories were slim. That's no longer the case.

In 2017, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense named EMDR one of three therapies assigned the highest level of evidence in its clinical guidelines for management of posttraumatic stress.

> WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW YOUR BODY IS HOLDING TRAUMA, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THE REACTIONS YOU'RE HAVING TO OTHERWISE BENIGN STIMULI IN THE WORLD."

THE ROOTS OF TRAUMA

To understand how and why EMDR works, it helps to begin with what trauma is and what it does to the body and mind. "When a traumatic event occurs, the brain perceives it as life-threatening or dangerous," says Jane McCampbell Stuart, MA, LMFT, a St. Paul, Minn.–based EMDR therapist. "What happens next is one of three primal reactions: fight, flight, or freeze."

Such a potent experience of fear can scramble our cognitive coherence. "The more intense the visceral, sensory input from the emotional brain, the less capacity the rational brain has to put a damper on it," writes Boston University psychiatry professor Bessel van der Kolk, MD, in his renowned book *The Body Keeps the Score*.

A traumatic crisis activates the primal, survival-oriented parts of the brain, most notably the amygdala, which scans for danger and governs the fear response. This adaptive strategy is as old as our species, and it's a useful one. But when the reaction gets locked into place — as it does when we're unable to move forward after a traumatic experience — it can create lasting damage.

"Essentially this is the prolongation of responses that are meant to be life-saving," says James S. Gordon, MD, founder and executive director of the Center for Mind–Body Medicine and author of *Transforming Trauma: The Path to Hope and Healing*. "Long after the trauma is over, there is a continuing of these responses. It persists. We stay in the state we were in when the trauma happened."

These aftershocks can be as straightforward as remaining afraid of dogs after being bitten once. But often the effects are more complex and pervasive, such as the PTSD experienced by people who have endured sexual abuse, family violence, or the fallout from war.

"The signs and symptoms are extensive, and their range is incredibly broad," says psychologist Deborah Korn, PsyD, senior faculty member of the EMDR Institute and coauthor (with Michael Baldwin) of *Every Memory Deserves Respect*.

"Classic PTSD symptoms include intrusions: nightmares, flashbacks, and the experience of having the past continuing to intrude into the present. Also, people may have difficulty sleeping, a hypervigilant nervous system, or a tendency to live in a more constricted way, emotionally shutting down and avoiding situations that remind them of the trauma."

Present events can cause a person to reexperience even a seemingly unrelated trauma. Commonly known as triggers, these experiences can create emotional and cognitive dysregulation that may manifest in substance use, self-harm, relationship difficulties, or a pervasive sense of anxiety.

Research suggests that traumatic memories often produce psychological and physiological reactions that operate beneath our conscious reach. "When you don't know your body is holding trauma, you don't understand the reactions you're having to otherwise benign stimuli in the world," says Korn. "It's hard to make sense of why you're doing what you're doing, and this can sometimes lead to bad decisions."

This helps explain why unprocessed trauma can be so disruptive to an otherwise normal life. "Yes, you need to detect whether somebody is getting upset with you," explains van der Kolk, "but if your amygdala goes into overdrive, you may become chronically scared that people hate you, or you may feel like they are out to get you."

There are many approaches to healing trauma, including talk therapy, and the results are often mixed. A trauma may feel so deep, so chimeric, that understanding it intellectually simply doesn't move the needle. This is where EMDR can make a difference.

INTEGRATING THE EXPERIENCE

"Basically, EMDR is a memory-focused psychotherapy," says Korn. "Because traumatic memory works differently, we don't want to keep cutting the weeds and having them grow back."

In *Every Memory Deserves Respect*, Korn's coauthor, Baldwin — a trauma survivor and EMDR client (not Korn's) — describes his phobias, his difficulty forming romantic relationships, and his reliance on status and workaholism as reactions to his core experiences of childhood trauma. Like many, Baldwin went through much of his adult life without considering that trauma had actually shaped his personality.

This is a common blind spot, stemming from the idea that if one's own trauma doesn't seem to measure up to that of others, it must have had no impact. "We need to demystify trauma," Gordon argues. "Trauma comes to all of us, and not because we are singularly cursed. Trauma is part of being human. Indigenous people [who will often use rituals, such as talking circles, to acknowledge harm] have always understood this. It happens to all of us."

Trauma-related experiences can affect the formulation of our personalities in many ways. If we experience abuse from a caregiver during childhood, for example, this trauma may "lock in" to our nervous system, shaping how we relate with others. EMDR seems to offer hope for unlocking these modes of behavior.

"EMDR purposely tries to examine what memories are being triggered in [someone's] current life," explains Korn. "Exploring back from current symptoms, we identify and ask the person to focus on the traumatic memory, and then ask a series of questions meant to fully activate the memory: What image represents the worst part of it? What negative belief are you having about yourself? What feelings are coming up? Where are you feeling this in your body?"

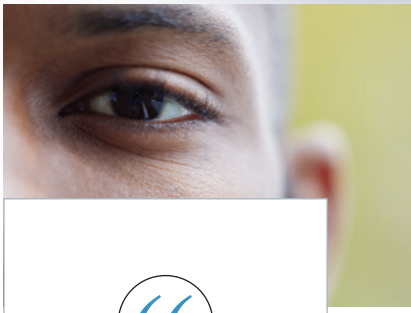
There's no hierarchy of better or worse memories to investigate; all that's required is the client's willingness to explore backward into a memory that feels troublesome. Although many traumatic memories are buried beneath conscious reach, more accessible memories can often reveal paths to their hidden counterparts during therapy.

EMDR treatment also relies on a physical practice called bilateral stimulation, explains Korn. This may include clients moving their eyes back and forth, following a light or the therapist's fingers; listening to tones that alternate between ears; or having their therapist tap their hands, alternating side to side. Sometimes clients cross their arms and tap their own chest or shoulders in an alternating right–left pattern.

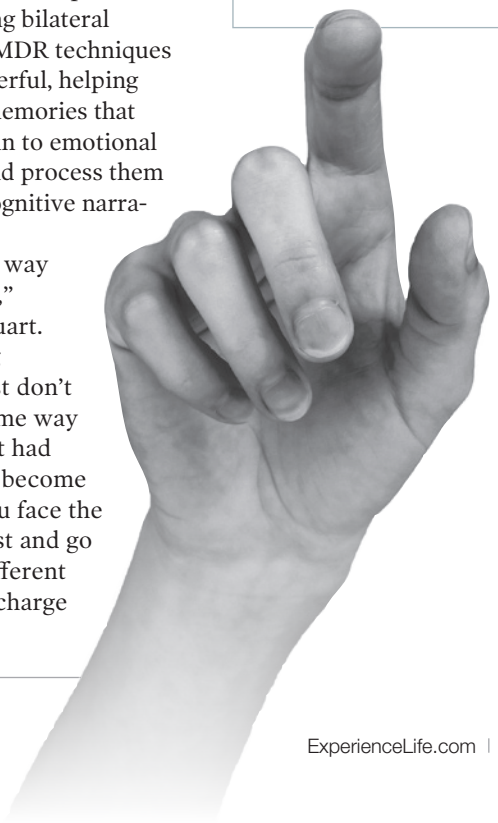
Korn explains: "This bilateral stimulation seems to jump-start the brain's information-processing system, which became dysregulated at the time of the trauma because of too much overwhelm."

Examining symptoms, exploring memory, and using bilateral stimulation: These EMDR techniques are practical yet powerful, helping patients to retrieve memories that have become locked in to emotional and physical loops and process them peacefully into the cognitive narratives of their lives.

"It's this beautiful way of rewiring the brain," says McCampbell Stuart. "Things we had a big reaction to in the past don't really register the same way anymore. Things that had us on the ceiling can become minor irritations. You face the encounters in the past and go through them in a different way. The emotional charge is gone."



> "TRAUMA COMES TO ALL OF US, AND NOT BECAUSE WE ARE SINGULARLY CURSED. TRAUMA IS PART OF BEING HUMAN."



> EVERYONE ALSO OUGHT TO HAVE THE BASIC TECHNIQUES OF SELF-CARE AND MUTUAL SUPPORT, AND THEN BUILD ON THOSE FOUNDATIONS WITH APPROACHES SUCH AS EMDR."

HOW EMDR WORKS

A wide range of meta-analyses have found concrete beneficial effects from EMDR. One that was published by the *Permanente Journal* cited a range of positive results, with most studies reporting better and faster outcomes than talk therapy alone.

Randomized clinical trials also support EMDR's efficacy, with the most measurable results appearing to be in treating PTSD. In one study of refugees diagnosed with PTSD, researchers found that at a follow-up assessment conducted five weeks after finishing treatment, 49 percent of participants no longer qualified for the diagnosis.

Other positive results have come in treating populations — including children — who have experienced natural disasters, and individuals enduring trauma from acute sickness as well as chronic disease.

So, what exactly enables people to reprocess traumatic memory and integrate it into a healthier psyche? No one is sure. There are three working theories, each of which is the subject of research:

THE RAPID-EYE-MOVEMENT (REM) SLEEP MODEL

This first theory proposes that rapid bilateral eye movements create a brain state similar to REM sleep. "The brain has a natural information-processing system," explains McCampbell Stuart. "You have sights, sounds, smells, and information that we place around them. Then it's like you have a librarian who figures out how to catalog it all — that happens during REM sleep. The librarian comes in and decides what to keep and where it belongs, so you can check out the book if you want to but don't have to keep reading it if you don't."

Trauma prevents those memories from making it into the information-processing system, she adds. They're like overdue books sitting at the bottom of one's psychic closet.

The REM model suggests that EMDR's bilateral eye movements enable the librarian to process the memory like a book that's finally been returned. It's placed back on the shelf and "integrated" with the rest of the collection.

THE ORIENTING-RESPONSE MODEL

Korn explains the second theory this way: "The act of orienting to a moving target forces the brain to constantly shift its attention, from one side to the other and then back again." This activity appears to downregulate the threat response, allowing the rest-and-digest system to take over. This enables the brain to perform certain tasks or process information more readily.

THE WORKING-MEMORY MODEL

More than 40 studies support this third theory. Its central tenet is as follows: "Working memory" allows us to hold a memory in mind while doing something else. Korn cites the example of remembering a recipe while cooking.

But working memory has its limits, so when we focus on a traumatic memory while performing bilateral stimulation — using both types of recall at once — it reduces the reaction. Korn explains: "Trying to do both at the same time overtaxes the system, leading to a reduction in the vividness and emotionality of the traumatic memory."

For the moment, none of these theories fully accounts for EMDR's

efficacy. Hard data may eventually emerge that connects dreams, EMDR, and waking experience in a thoroughly explanatory way. But for now, researchers have found an effective if inscrutable tool for integrating the memories that dog us. For many trauma sufferers, that's enough.

STEPS TO HEALING

EMDR is effective, but there is no magic cure for trauma's aftereffects. Mindful self-care is crucial regardless of the treatment strategy one chooses.

"I've seen EMDR make a very important difference," says Gordon. "My own feeling is that everyone also ought to have the basic techniques of self-care and mutual support, and then build on those foundations with approaches such as EMDR."

McCampbell Stuart suggests that anyone dealing with trauma make a point of reconnecting with their body, possibly with practices such as yoga and Pilates. "So many of us walk around in a completely dissociated state, out of our bodies, so it's good to feel your physical core," she says.

When it comes to taking steps to find a therapist, Korn has a simple message: "Don't wait."

"Anyone who is suffering, anyone who is having trouble putting the pieces of their life together in a way that is meaningful, should look for help," she says. "You don't have to figure it all out before you come to EMDR therapy."

For her part, Nancy still attends EMDR sessions regularly. (For some, the therapy can be short-term and specific. For others, it can be more open-ended.) She has processed some of her most profoundly disturbing memories, but she's also made sense of the story of her life and come to understand her emotions more fully.

She's overcome her fear of dentists and has been able to place some necessary distance between herself and some hurtful family relationships.

Most important, she has found meaning in her experience. "I've come out on the other side and feel like the person I was meant to be," she says. "I really believe that somehow my brain protected me; I needed to be in the right place and it needed to be the right time for me to be able to deal with this — to break the silence and finally say that I'm not going to live like this anymore. My life has forever changed."

FINDING AN EMDR PRACTITIONER

Therapists who are fully licensed in their mental-health field and take specific training in EMDR theories and techniques can become certified to practice EMDR through the EMDR International Association (EMDRIA). EMDRIA maintains a directory of certified practitioners on its website. It's searchable both by location and by name of therapist.

Additionally, EMDR Institute, Inc., maintains an online database geared toward finding a certified clinician. The websites for both organizations are also good places for a general audience to find resources such as studies and answers to common questions.

"Find someone who is EMDRIA-certified or an Approved Consultant," says EMDR therapist Jane McCampbell Stuart, MA, LMFT. "And also trust your gut. If someone doesn't 'get you,' don't keep going. Find the right person for you."

QUINTON SKINNER is a Minneapolis-based journalist and author.

BUILD. PERFORM. RECOVER.*

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

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

shop.lifetime.life/npd

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

©2021 LIFE TIME, INC. All rights reserved. npmg21385615

LIFE TIME®

Real Life

“Community gardening gives you a chance to get to know your neighbors as equals. Mother Nature does not see skin color, language barriers, education level, or where we come from. There is always a friend in the garden.”

— Cathy Walker, president, American Community Gardening Association

Page 81

Learn how you can join the community-gardening movement to build and sustain a healthy neighborhood.

Artistic Pursuits

Creative activities are more than just a form of self-expression — they can also be a health-supporting addition to a balanced life.

BY **JON SPAYDE**

In 1996, my wife, Laurie Phillips, was a public artist creating big outdoor projects. But she'd lost touch with the intimate side of art: brush, pen, paper. So, we invented Bad Art Night.

We simply invited some friends to do small-scale art with us around a table. A few attendees self-identified as artists, but most didn't. "Bad" was there for fun and reassurance: If we deliberately set out to make bad art, skill and quality didn't matter. The point was process, not product. (Besides, it was a hoot to wreck a piece that was starting to look, you know, too good.)

We got the idea from *Life, Paint, and Passion: Reclaiming the Magic of Spontaneous Expression*, by Michele Cassou and Stewart Cubley. In their book, they write, "It is the process itself — in the creative energy it releases, in the new perceptions it brings, and in the deepened connection with oneself it fosters — that is at the heart of the desire to paint."

In the years since, Bad Art Night has assumed many forms. It has inspired people in several cities across the country to set up their own groups. The original is a Zoom gathering these days, and we're still championing process. Don't get me wrong — it's great to aim to make good art, but good or bad, it's the making that matters.

And experts agree with us: The creative process — whether it involves painting or writing poetry, playing guitar or gardening, cooking or creating collages, woodworking or building wire sculptures — has demonstrable benefits for mind, body, and spirit.

Your Brain on Creativity

Research has found that creative pursuits relieve tension by lowering levels of cortisol, a hormone that helps the body respond to stress. Experiments have shown, too, that art-making activates the reward pathway in the brain, and that, in turn, makes us feel good.

These effects, delightful in themselves, are part of a broader experience of alert absorption that psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, PhD, dubbed "flow" in his 1990 book of that title. Flow, he explains, is "being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one. . . . Your whole being is involved, and you're using your skills to the utmost." (For more on the

mind–body benefits of flow, see ELmag.com/flow.)

Girija Kaimal, EdD, an associate professor in the Drexel University College of Nursing and Health Professions and a leading creativity researcher, suggests that flow offers even more profound rewards. Creative flow, she notes, helps us experience the present moment in a rich way and deal with the future — because when we create, we're both immersed in process and making decisions about what to do next.

"At first," she says, "you need to be able to create without fear and judgment. Then, you need to step back and edit." This dance between letting go and evaluating what you've done exercises one of the mind's most important functions: preparation for what's coming next, in art or life.

The Art of Connection

But what about those of us who feel we're not creative? Nonsense, says Christianne Strang, PhD, a board-certified art therapist and assistant professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

"We've got cave paintings from 60,000 years ago," Strang says. "People have always created. It seems an inherent part of being human. But in our society, we can run out of time and space to create, so we decide that we aren't creative or can't be."

The biggest payoff in the creative process is connection, she adds. Artwork that expresses something of who we are allows us to share that something with others.

And creating shoulder to shoulder with your peers is a more meaningful encounter than, say, making small talk at a party. Laurie and I learned so many wonderful wordless things about our friends by sharing the Bad Art Night table with them.

Most of all, when we create, we meet ourselves more deeply. "The process allows us to connect to a piece of ourselves that's able to play," says Strang. "As I create, I accept that playful, open, experimental quality as a part of who I am." ◔

JON SPAYDE is an *Experience Life* contributing editor.

HOW TO JUMP-START YOUR CREATIVITY

For all its joy and its many benefits, a creative activity can be hard to start. There's not only the problem of finding the time, but also the questions of where to begin; what to do with your fear that what you make will be pointless, silly, or just plain bad; and, of course, how to keep going. These tips and tricks can help you get beyond the barriers and into the flow.

STARE AT THE CLOUDS. Because we are all innately creative, we can spark the process by very simple, even totally passive, means, says creativity researcher Girija Kaimal, EdD. "Remember when we used to just look at clouds in the sky and imagine shapes and faces in them?" she asks. "Start there. Wander out in nature and say what you see in the light and shadows. What do different colors represent to you and remind you of?"

DO FIVE MINUTES. There's a 12-step program for nearly every problem, and the one for blocked creative people is called ARTS Anonymous. The organization's prime tool is "5 Alive": a commitment to practice some form of creativity for at least five minutes every day. Even staring at the canvas or the blank paper or the woodworking project counts, and you are allowed to stop after five minutes. But often, that's enough to get you going, and you might go for 20 minutes — or two hours.

MAKE SOMETHING CONSCIOUSLY BAD. That's the delightful practice enshrined in Laurie Phillips's and my Bad Art Nights. A big, ugly, clunky human figure! A nasty scribble! A clay bird that looks like a potato with a beak! For total defiance of the inner critic, take a reasonably "nice" thing you've created and ruin it. This kind of rule-breaking fun can take the pressure off the creative process. (Learn more about the Bad Art Night movement at www.badartnight.com.)

MEDITATE. Bay Area–based author and meditation teacher Hugh Delehanty offers guided-meditation workshops aimed at freeing up creativity. Meditation is about silencing the chatter in your head and, as he puts it, "becoming really intentional about listening to that thing inside of you that wants to create something original and genuine." Ten minutes (or more) of silent meditation before you begin can clear the mental slate just enough to get you started.

DO MORNING PAGES. Julia Cameron popularized this practice in her 1992 bestseller *The Artist's Way: A Spiritual Path to Higher Creativity*. Fill three notebook pages daily with gripes, fears, worries — all the mental noise that stands between you and the flow state. Morning pages, she writes, can help you get beyond such mental blocks.

GET SUPPORT. You don't have to create alone — and the shared energy of a group setting may help you find your flow state. Team up with a friend to work on creative projects for half an hour, or join a group that meets regularly to create together. Whether you invite comment on the works in progress is entirely up to you and your friends — but remember that the point is mutual support, not critique.

©2021 LIFE TIME, INC. All rights reserved. LSMG21372948

Real Happiness

Renowned mindfulness teacher Sharon Salzberg on healing ourselves — and the world.

BY **DARA MOSKOWITZ GRUMDAHL**

Sharon Salzberg is one of the handful of people central to the mindfulness revolution in America. It's hard to remember, in a world where it's now the norm for first graders to practice deep breathing and for Fortune 500 companies to offer mindfulness trainings, but meditation was largely unknown in the United States 60 years ago. That's when young Sharon sat in her grandmother's Manhattan apartment, bereft.

Her mother died when she was 9 and her father, who suffered from mental-health issues, was largely absent, so Salzberg ended up living with her grandmother. Together, they muddled along. "Her English wasn't great; I didn't speak Polish," she recalls. "I was isolated, depressed. But there was just something in me that felt there was another way of being, that happiness *was* possible."

She enrolled in college at 16 and discovered a whole new world when she joined an independent-study program in India her junior year. "It was the era of hippie buses going from Europe to India, and I thought: *I want to learn to meditate*. It was the era of the Beatles and Ram Dass, so I wasn't the only Westerner by far, but because it was before the internet or cellphones, everything was word of mouth and therefore sort of magical."

Salzberg returned home in 1974, and, in 1976, with Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield, opened the Insight Meditation Society, which became one of the wellsprings of American mindfulness. Eleven books later, including the latest, *Real Change*, she has had a quiet-yet-powerful impact on changing the world.

How does she live now? More convinced than ever that happiness is possible, because she's experienced it in her own heart.

DARA MOSKOWITZ GRUMDAHL is an award-winning writer based in Minneapolis.

ZOOM — THE BLESSING, THE CURSE

"I was constantly teaching before the pandemic, flying around the country. Since then, I've been busier than ever, staying home. I teach on Zoom, and it's provided such a profound connection to people. But it also saddens me: I see what people are going through, and my ability to connect with them is both constant and never enough. The anxiety, grief, and anger — they really get you. And then the class ends, and it feels like you didn't do enough. At the same time, I have some regular Zoom meetings with friends, and I'm seeing them more than I have in years."

ALL THINGS MUST PASS

"A lot of the people I met in India in the 1970s are still a huge part of my life. One thing having such long friendships makes you realize — when certain events unfold [and there are different points of view] — is, *Ah, this too shall pass.* So, let's look at what we can do and grow from, and what we can contribute because I've seen us get through a lot."

FEELING BETTER *IS* POSSIBLE

"After all these years, I think that insight when I was a teenager [about happiness being possible] was right: There is a way to feel better. My teacher Dipa Ma said to me, 'You really understand suffering: That's why you should teach.' All these years later, I think we can say she was right!"

REFLECTION OF THE MOMENT

"It's such a cultural premise: If we acquire more, have more, experience more, read more, we'll be better off. Is it really true? I'm thinking about that."

Stay Connected. Stay Inspired. Stay Real.

Experience Life

Facebook.com/ExperienceLifeMag

Instagram.com/ExperienceLifeMag

Pinterest.com/ExpLifeMag

Flipboard.com/@ExperienceLife

Follow us for up-to-date
health-and-wellness information that can

encourage,
enlighten,
and bring a little joy to your life.

The Repeating Mind

How to free yourself from the cycle of rumination.

BY **HENRY EMMONS, MD**

Sometimes an unpleasant thought takes hold and won't let go. No matter what you do to shake it, the same thought keeps clamoring for your attention.

Say hello to rumination.

Unlike worry, which typically involves an endless stream of new concerns, rumination presents nothing new. Like animals that chew their cud, we chew on the same few thoughts when we ruminate, as if doing so might help us digest them.

It's easy to think of rumination as a 3 a.m. problem — and it does often interfere with sleep. But it can also cause trouble for overall mental health. In my practice, I've seen rumination play a big role in perpetuating shame, remorse, and judgment. It's often present in people struggling with addiction issues. And sometimes these obsessive thoughts join forces with repetitive behaviors, which become compulsions.

Once we understand how we become trapped in this cycle, however, we can set ourselves free.

This Is Your Brain on Repeat

Rumination may be anchored in the limbic area, what we often call the "emotional brain." Located between the executive frontal lobe and the lower, "reactive" brain, this area serves as a relay station between thoughts and reactions. It helps us focus, retain memories, and connect with others.

But too much energy in the limbic area can cause the mind to loop like a scratched record, obsessively revisiting the same thoughts. Focus becomes fixation, and fixation becomes rumination.

If the limbic brain gets locked on, it's usually because it's hosting too much activity. This often happens when we're overtired, overworked, and overcaffeinated. In these conditions, the mind runs in circles because its chemical braking system isn't working, and it's been flooded by the brain chemicals that trigger acceleration.

And as with any habit, once the brain gets used to ruminating, it can be difficult to quit. To free ourselves, we need to bring the system of acceleration and braking into balance.

Rumination Relief

Some personality types — especially those with a tendency to work hard and be a little competitive — are more vulnerable to repeating mind. In Ayurvedic philosophy, this is known as the pitta constitution: These types are known for their fiery personalities and extreme discipline.

Whenever focus goes overboard and sets off obsessive rumination, our goal is to cool down the body and the mind. These strategies can help.

NOURISH YOUR BRAIN. To rebalance an overstimulated brain, it helps to boost calming neurotransmitters, like serotonin and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), and tame stimulating chemicals, like glutamate and norepinephrine. I recommend some combination of the following supplements: magnesium, l-theanine, taurine, inositol, N-acetyl cysteine (NAC), omega-3 fatty acids, and lithium orotate (a microdose form of lithium available as a supplement).

FEED YOUR BODY. Too much animal protein may lead to a buildup of heat in the brain. A lower-protein diet with plenty of whole-food carbohydrates and brain-healthy fats, including brightly colored produce and nuts and seeds, can be good for cooling the repeating mind.

BREATHE. It may sound strange, but a practice that involves breathing out of just the left nostril can help soothe agitation. Close your right nostril with your right thumb, keeping the fingers straight and pointed upward. Breathe gently in and out of your left nostril for one to three minutes.

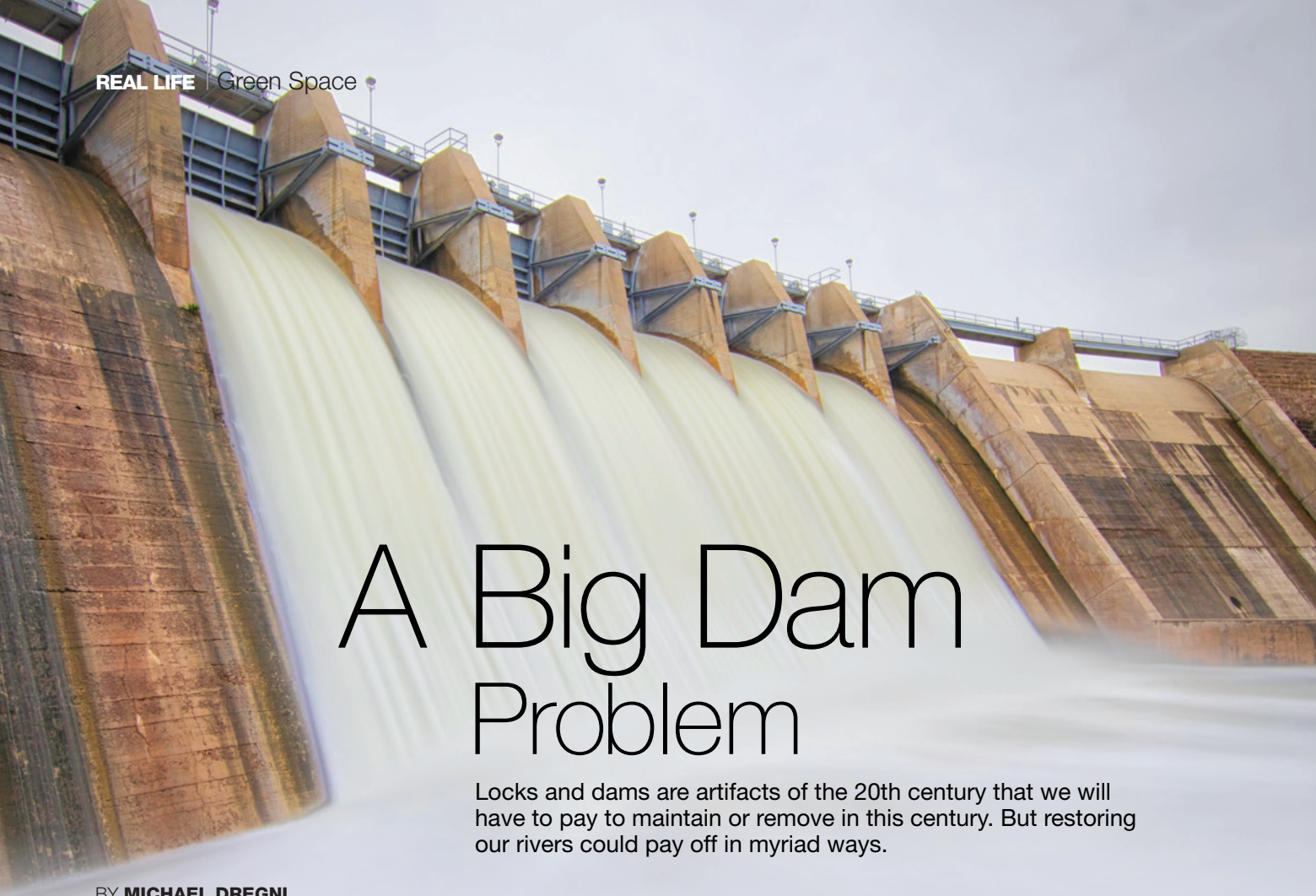
MEDITATE. Meditation is a great way to steady the mind, but traditional meditation can be difficult for ruminators, whose thinking is resistant to silencing. I recommend walking meditation, tai chi, or qigong instead. These practices can offer the same benefits but provide a bit more to focus on.

MOVE. Any type of steady, rhythmic movement — like swimming, yoga, or paddling a kayak — helps settle the mind. Fun games are good, too, but stick to noncompetitive sports.

SLEEP. Too little rest can trigger rumination. Try to maintain a regular sleep routine, with plenty of time to wind down at the end of the day.

ACCEPT MINDFULLY. The disciplined types most vulnerable to rumination are likely to become the most irritated with its interruption to their schedules. So remember this about repeating mind: You cannot will it away. Better just to notice and tell yourself, *Ah, I'm ruminating again. I know it will run its course and stop eventually, and this will be over sooner if I don't add more fuel to the fire.*

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



A Big Dam Problem

Locks and dams are artifacts of the 20th century that we will have to pay to maintain or remove in this century. But restoring our rivers could pay off in myriad ways.

BY **MICHAEL DREGNI**

There's a special grace in paddling a river. The waters carry you along as if you're nothing — a fallen leaf floating on the fast-moving surface. Land is left swiftly behind. The multihued stones of the riverbed spin away below the surface like a kaleidoscope. At times, the current rests; at other times, it's relentless. The river shepherds you downstream with immense natural power.

We're kayaking the Kinnickinnic in west-central Wisconsin, a jewel of a river largely hidden away from civilization within forested gorges in the midst of farming country. It's a glorious hot summer day: Kingfishers swoop after minnows, herons wade on stilt-like legs, trout knife through the shadows. The river and its clean, clear, cool waters wash away all concerns.

Rivers run through much of our lands — but we like to dam them up, harnessing their power and controlling their flow. Over the past century, the United States has led the world in dam building: We've been as busy as beavers building more than 90,000 dams, according to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' National Inventory of Dams. And there are tens of thousands of uncataloged small dams on creeks and streams.

We erected all those structures to power flour mills, run machinery, produce electricity, provide irrigation for agriculture, control flooding, create jobs during the Great Depression, and form lakes for our recreation. Hydropower was hailed as clean energy — but "clean" is a relative term, often dependent on who uses it.

Today, there's a growing consensus that dams are far from eco-friendly. And as the old technology ages, maintenance costs rise — even if the dams are no longer productive and we're just trying to keep them from collapsing.

A nationwide movement has coalesced around the goal of returning rivers to their natural state. And though removing a dam is costly and time-consuming, it can also restore and heal the environment.

Dam-age

The "Kinni" is a river of whitewater. The innumerable sets of rapids range from small, unclassified rocky ripples to true Class II whitewater. And oftentimes they follow almost on top of each other, leaving us with aching arms as we strive to steer our kayaks safely through.

If you read the river, it tells you how to navigate its labyrinth of rapids. Rocks leave a wake: That wake points back at the paddler like an arrow, issuing a warning. The chute between rocks points downstream, offering a direction to follow.

On a larger scale, if you read a river, it also tells you if it's healthy.

Dams block rivers, interrupting fish migration. Dams slow rivers, resulting in stagnant backwaters, which can lead to algal pollution, decreased water-oxygen levels, and increased water temperature. And dams capture tons of muck, sediment, and silt behind them. Research has found that rotting vegetation and algae associated with dams' warm, still reservoirs create 1 billion tons of greenhouse gases each year.

Advances in technology and industry have rendered most dams useless. Only 3 percent of them still churn out hydropower — and they supply about 7 percent of the U.S. power demand.

Our dams are also aging. Concrete crumbles, metal rusts — and someday it may all come tumbling down. The Association of State Dam Safety Officials reports that, as of 2019, some 15,600 dams were considered "high hazard" and their failure could be catastrophic. Some 70 percent of them will be more than a half-century old by 2025, built with now-outdated engineering, according to a 2017 American Society of Civil Engineers survey.

In May 2020, the earthen Edenville Dam near Midland, Mich., collapsed after a torrential rainfall. It was one of the largest dam failures in the United States: The resulting crest was 35 feet high, and the surge of water overflowed another dam downstream, forcing 10,000 people to evacuate their homes.

More failures like this are possible because of a combination of aging infrastructure and the frequent, heavy rains that climate change is likely to generate. This has created a "perfect storm" for such catastrophes, Kent State University hydrologist Anne Jefferson, PhD, told *National Geographic*.

Fifty-six percent of our dams are privately owned — a unique situation in U.S. infrastructure. Still, the cost to rehabilitate current dams exceeds $65 billion, according to official estimates, and we'll all be paying that bill.

Yet even though public costs for maintaining dams and hydropower facilities is at a historic peak, the Association of State Dam Safety Officials says maintenance, safety, and oversight are underbudgeted.

"The dawning reality is that the dam, levee, and other infrastructure failures will be more likely to occur as global warming intensifies," Shana Udvardy, MS, a climate-resilience analyst with the Union of Concerned Scientists, told *National Geographic*. "It's not whether they're going to fail; it's a matter of *when* they're going to fail."

It's not whether they're going to fail; **it's a matter of *when* they're going to fail."**

River Restoration

The Kinni is a mere 22 miles long, yet two concrete dams block it — a testimony to our love of harnessing rivers. Built in the city of River Falls, Wis., to power milling and produce electricity, both dams are still in operation today and require ongoing repair and maintenance. In 2018, the city council voted to remove the first dam by 2026; the other will follow. It's all part of a farsighted plan to restore the Kinni to its natural state.

Across the United States, some 900 dams were removed between 1990 and 2015. Since then, about 50 to 75 more have been removed annually. Other locks and dams have been retired from service, although they still require upkeep.

A dam can't simply be dynamited; the wall of water behind it would engulf everything downstream. Instead, it must be deconstructed slowly — and expensively — as the water is drawn down. Preparations for the largest dam-removal project in history are set to begin in early 2023: demolishing four dams on Northern California's Klamath River totaling 411 vertical feet holding back a 72 million-cubic-meter wall of water. The cost? $434 million.

After dams are removed, rivers recover quickly. The buildup of silt is soon washed through or absorbed: The sediment from Wisconsin's Milwaukee River following the Woolen Mills Dam removal was flushed away in just six months. Fish quickly return: Spawning fish were back in Maine's Souadabscook Stream only months after a dam was demolished. Floodplains, wetlands, and subsidiary rivers can be restored to provide natural flood protection. The environment — and people — gain resilience to climate change.

For the little Kinni, expectations are high. The River Falls plan notes that the stagnant reservoirs raise summer water temperatures by 4 to 5 degrees F; removal of the dams will lower them, leading to improved trout habitat and migration. Clearing out sediment will result in cleaner water throughout the region's lake and river watershed, enhancing stormwater management to boot. The long-lost waterfall that the city is named for will be restored. And all this will improve habitat for other wildlife, as well as people.

My family has paddled and fly-fished on the Kinni my whole life. It's been a refuge from the urban hustle and bustle surrounding it. To see the river restored brings great hope — and we plan to be there, paddles in hand.

MICHAEL DREGNI is an *Experience Life* deputy editor.

INSTANTLY DRY FOR A CLEANER FEEL

THE PERFECT GYM BAG ACCESSORY FOR EVERYONE

TRY ANTIPERSPIRANT THAT GOES ON DRY AND *STAYS* DRY

Unilever

©2021 Unilever

Grow Your Community

Community gardens produce a wide array of benefits, from beautifying the landscape to fighting food insecurity.

BY **KARA DOUGLASS THOM**

One evening last summer I walked to a neighbor's house to deliver a bag of beautifully ripe pears, which another neighbor had picked from her tree the day before. I had just finished dinner, which included sweet corn from another neighbor's garden, along with a salad made with vegetables from my own. I was also the beneficiary of fresh eggs from the same pear-providing neighbor, plus peonies from a friend who grows more than 200 varieties in her suburban yard.

I swelled with pride for this little co-op we had going. I loved being on the receiving end, but I felt just as good about sharing the abundance from my own garden.

An enthusiastic exerciser, I recognized the feeling, which was akin to an endorphin high. Among its many health benefits, gardening strengthens your body and lifts your mood.

That's motivation enough to get my hands in the dirt, but the connection with my neighbors seemed to amplify those rewards. It's like how I feel after a group run: The workout itself is good for me, but I get a little something extra when I'm joined by friends.

Coming Together

Although I hadn't considered my backyard a "community garden," the fact that my neighbors and I were connecting over the fruits of our labor made it so.

"All community gardens are sharing gardening," says Cathy Walker, president of the American Community Gardening Association. "They come together to provide food for their families, neighborhoods, and others."

The more traditional community garden generally refers to a parcel that's subdivided into small plots where people can cultivate vegetables and flowers for their personal use with permission from city officials or property owners. This shared space unites neighbors with a common goal.

Other examples include school gardens, which serve as educational tools, and healing gardens, which are often cultivated near healthcare facilities to provide therapeutic green space for patients, families, and staff. There are even "guerrilla gardening" projects — where gardeners descend on a dilapidated public space to turn it into something vibrant and gorgeous.

"Community gardening is more than planting a seed and watching it grow," Walker explains. Rather, it offers a place where people can come together to improve their quality of life. Community gardens, she says, grow people.

Good Moods in Bloom

It's a concept with deep historical roots. "Most people do not realize that community gardens were established in the 1800s in the United States," Walker notes, adding that Americans have long used gardening as a tool for unification and problem-solving.

Perhaps the most well known of these projects are the World War II victory gardens, planted to support the war effort by supplementing food rations. Many of them are still thriving.

And while community gardening provides myriad benefits — offering a local food source, reducing food insecurity, promoting nutrition education, encouraging physical activity, and more — experts believe the reason for their enduring popularity is much simpler: It just feels good.

"Gardening is good for the soul," says Jim Guckert, founder and executive director of Guerrilla Gardeners of Washington, D.C. "It's meditative and contemplative. Nothing grounds a person like getting your hands dirty."

In the words of writer Anne Lamott, "Air and light heal." The very things that are good for gardens are also good for people. During the coronavirus pandemic, community gardening has offered space to receive both and still practice social distancing.

Feed the Need

Gardens have also become integral to racial-justice protests and memorial sites. At George Floyd Square in Minneapolis, volunteers constructed a greenhouse and raised vegetable beds along the sidewalks. Flowers planted at the center of the intersection encircle a sculpture of a raised fist.

The garden honors the space as well as the people afflicted by the collective trauma. And the healing extends to better nutrition for the community.

The Chicago-based Urban Growers Collective, a BIPOC women–led organization, operates eight urban farms on 11 acres of land predominantly located on the city's South Side. They provide employment for youth, better access to fresh food, and market opportunities for farmers. These farms also support health, economic development, and education efforts in communities of color.

"Urban Growers Collective's COVID-19 emergency-food-response efforts include working with our squad of BIPOC-led partner organizations to distribute produce boxes and prepared meals to community members in need," says cofounder Laurell Sims. "Not only does our squad meet the immediate needs of communities, it directly supports BIPOC businesses by allowing them to safely grow, process, prepare, and distribute high-quality, nutritious meals and produce boxes."

Between January and August of 2021, Urban Growers Collective's Fresh Moves Mobile Market distributed free-produce vouchers worth a total of $100,460 to community members affected by the pandemic, as well as 3,635 boxes of produce and some 4,000 hot meals.

"We know that healing cannot happen when basic needs are not met," Sims says. "And our first line of defense to help promote healing is nutritious food in historically divested communities."

Seeds of Change

People join community gardens for a variety of reasons, Walker explains: to combat loneliness, to improve health, to network and socialize, to gain gardening skills, or just because.

Guckert started guerrilla gardening 18 years ago, tending a small, neglected park across the street from his home, which happened to be adjacent to the first U.S. Marine Corps post. Although he considers himself a "lone ranger," Guckert has mobilized some 125 like-minded gardeners in the D.C. area. In 2020, volunteers logged more than 1,500 hours of service. In 2021, they had accumulated 1,400 by August.

"Capitol Hill is a generally upscale neighborhood with pockets of underserved populations," he notes. "We focus on the green spaces most in need of beautification."

Although these Guerrilla Gardeners don't seek permission to transform and maintain these spaces, public officials praise their work, and city agencies now collaborate with them to sustain the results. "I feel rejuvenated in the spring when I see bulbs I planted break through the soil — and sometimes the snow," Guckert says.

Doing good begets feeling good. And positive action in your community offers innumerable benefits beyond the boundaries of the garden.

Chief among them is human connection. "Community gardening gives you a chance to get to know your neighbors as equals," Walker says. "Mother Nature does not see skin color, language barriers, education level, or where we come from. There is always a friend in the garden."

KARA DOUGLASS THOM is a Minneapolis-based writer.

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Want to participate in community gardening but don't know where to start? These ideas can help you get going.

SHARE THE BOUNTY from your own garden — whether it's a sprawling backyard plot or a few pots on your balcony — with your friends, neighbors, or local food shelf.

LOOK FOR EXISTING gardens that need volunteers. Some schools, hospitals, and places of worship grow vegetable gardens that require helping hands.

CHECK WITH YOUR CITY to see if it offers plots to rent in a locally sponsored community garden.

BE ON THE LOOKOUT for neglected parcels of land that need beautification. Consider adopting the credo of the Guerrilla Gardeners of Washington, D.C.: "We don't ask, we act!" In 15 years of guerrilla gardening, founder Jim Guckert reports, never once have they been asked to stop.

START YOUR OWN community garden by following the steps outlined by the American Community Gardening Association at www.communitygarden.org/resources.

PLAY FEARLESS

JUST HIT THE BALL.
CLASH V2 WILL TAKE
CARE OF THE REST.

CALM ONLY NATURE CAN CREATE

Spending time in nature has the power to lower stress. So we packed the power of nature into one little gummy. Made with whole plant hemp extract and lemon balm, our gummies help you stay calm and focused in the face of everyday stress.

THE WORLD'S MOST TRUSTED HEMP EXTRACT™.

CHARLOTTE'S WEB™
STANLEY BROTHERS

CALM | SLEEP | RECOVERY | IMMUNITY | DAILY WELLNESS

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

Easy Does It

Comforting goodies that can help soothe jangled nerves.

BEADS FOR CHANGE

These raktu-seed and turquoise mala prayer beads are ethically sourced from artisans in Nepal. $29 at **www.dharmashop.com.**

GOOD SCENTS

Shower steam and hot water help release the aromatic essential oils in these shower steamers from Musee, turning an ordinary rinse into a spa treatment. $22 for a four-pack at **www.museebath.com.**

WRAP STAR

Each stone bracelet from Tiny Rituals has a different energetic story to tell, and the company turns some of those positive vibes into financial support for malnutrition initiatives in India. From $16 at **www.tinyrituals.co.**

SETTLING STONES

Tiny Rituals makes its worry stones from semiprecious gems with purported calming properties. They're also just the right size and shape for nervous fingers. From $22 at **www.tinyrituals.co.**

SALT SOOTHER

Herbivore's lightly fragrant bath salts are scented with only essential oils and are free of synthetic ingredients. Ideal for a long, grounding soak. $18 at **www.herbivorebotanicals.com.**

PHOTO: TERRY BRENNAN

NO EXCUSES.
NO SHORTCUTS.
NO GIMMICKS.
NO TOMORROWS.
NOBULL
NOBULLPROJECT.COM/LIFETIME

Decisions Define Us

Our day-to-day choices create the stories of our lives, so knowing who we are and what matters is essential for experiencing life to its fullest potential.

BY **BAHRAM AKRADI**

Many of us are keenly aware that life is precious, and it goes by fast. That's why it's so important to pay attention to how we're spending our time: What are we putting our energy into? What's in our heads? What's in our homes?

Day in and day out, we make decisions about what's important and what's not, and our reality is the outcome of these choices.

The irony is that we receive little or no instruction on how to make decisions. This is unfortunate because even the smallest ones affect and shape our future.

Engineers see the world in systems, and decision-making is systematic. This approach starts with understanding the circumstances and determining the kinds of decisions they require: Are you solving equations to get exact answers, or are you making quicker decisions that allow for rapid corrections until the answer is right enough?

When NASA wants to put a rocket into orbit, for instance, lives are at stake and billions of dollars and years of effort are on the line.

Aerospace engineers test for every conceivable outcome, working every problem from every angle. There's a risk of catastrophe and no chance for a do-over, so accuracy is essential.

This is a moonshot situation that demands smart, informed, exact decisions. A tremendous amount of time, thought, and courage is needed by those involved.

Thankfully, most of the situations we face don't have life-or-death consequences, so our decisions about them don't have to be precise. We just have to be willing to make them with the knowledge and experience we have, and be ready to course correct.

> How we spend
> our days is, of course,
> how we
> spend our lives.
>
> — Annie Dillard

Imagine going to an archery range with 100 arrows. You wouldn't take the first arrow, measure its weight, calculate the distance to the target, consider the thrust of the bow, factor in the wind, and so forth. You'd likely just take a shot and see where it lands. Miss on the first try, correct your aim, and shoot again.

Yet many of us get mired in the logistics and make things more complicated than they need to be. With so much data and so many insights and options available (not to mention other peoples' opinions on what we *should* do and how we *should* do it), situations that could be resolved more rapidly get slowed down. Or stopped altogether.

We're more likely to make progress in the day-to-day, though, when we make decisions confidently and quickly. We can do that by being clear about who we are and what's important to us, and trusting what we know. This is essential; it helps us eliminate what doesn't matter, so we can more quickly assess the situation and choices in front of us.

Because it's not exact, there will be trial and error in this approach — though there is really no such thing as failing. Each wrong decision offers its own education, plus the added value of experience, heightened instincts, and confidence that shows up as reduced hesitation the next time we have a choice in front of us.

Decisions are what keep us moving through our lives, and having a systematic approach to making them can empower us to move and respond more quickly and confidently. In the process, we can create a full, meaningful life we love living.

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

Please recycle this magazine.

The greatest gift you ever give is your honest self.

— FRED ROGERS

RxSugar®

There Is No Substitute.®

The World's Best-Tasting, Keto Certified, Non-GMO Project Verified, Plant-Based, Zero-Calorie Sugar & Syrup

NON GMO Project VERIFIED nongmoproject.org · GRAIN FREE GLUTEN FREE · KETO CERTIFIED · ZERO NET CARBS · VEGAN · K

Ideal for Baking, Cooking, Mixed Drinks & Smoothies

Use on Cereal, Granola, Yogurt • Add to Coffee & Tea

Delicious • No Preservatives • No Junk

Blood-Sugar Friendly • Suitable for People With Diabetes

Discover Delicious Recipes at RxSugar.com

BE RxTRAORDINARY AND FOLLOW US! Tag us @RXSUGAR #SUGARREIMAGINED

Available Every Day at the LifeCafe® & Health Store!

LIFECAFE®

NEVER SNACK DOWN™

- 10+ GRAMS OF PROTEIN
- LOW CARB
- LOW SUGAR

Available at LIFECAFE®